The Developing Self

All I can do is be me—whoever that is.

—Bob Dylan (1965)

Developing self-knowledge is or should be a prime purpose of education.

Formation and Development

Know thyself. These words were inscribed in the Temple of Apollo at Delphi in ancient Greece. Nobel laureate Bob Dylan mused: "All I can do is be me—whoever that is."[1] Self-knowledge isn't the easiest thing to come by. It's a lot of work.

Developing self-knowledge is or should be a prime purpose of education. In northern Europe, it's called *Bildung*.[2] The German word *Bildung* is a cognate with the English word *building*. A good education gives students the tools that they need to *build up* their own identities. Only in this way, the tradition of *Bildung* tells us, can people break free from the constraints of custom and social conformity. Wilhelm von Humboldt, founder of the University of Berlin and a champion of *Bildung*, wrote that the point of *Bildung* was to "*build yourself*, and influence others through who you are."[3] *Bildung* is about human development across the life span. It is a necessary complement to academic learning.

At Boston College, the purpose of human development is understood in terms of a related idea: *formative education*. This is a central part of the ethos, curriculum, and pedagogy of the whole institution, which sees itself not just as qualifying graduates but as developing or forming whole human beings in and for society. In *formative education*, students are pushed to develop their skills of critical reflection by probing life's most important challenges. This begins with an orientation lecture where three questions are presented:

1. *What gives you joy?*

2. *Are you good at it now, or could you get good at it?*

3. *Does the world need it?*

Throughout their undergraduate education, Boston College students are given opportunities to attend seminars, go on off-campus retreats, and participate in service-learning trips in which they reflect on these three questions. Faculty and other staff are invited to pursue these activities, too. Every person is encouraged to undertake their own quest to give their lives meaning and purpose, by following their own conscience, and by clarifying their aspirations about what is most important to them, and why.

The quest for meaning and identity commences very early in life. In Ireland, developing identity is one of the four foundations of the early childhood curriculum.[4] Educators in the francophone

(French-language) schools in Ontario have worked on Franco-Ontarian identity issues for years to make sure that their minority culture is protected and preserved, even as the school's population becomes increasingly globalized.

Programs such as these are grounded in the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Ratified in 1989, this affirmed "that all children have the right to an education that lays a foundation for the rest of their lives, maximizes their ability, *and respects their family, cultural and other identities and languages*" (our emphasis).[5] In the UNCRC, identity formation is *a fundamental human right for all children in all countries.* The UNCRC sets out the rights that all children have, to help fulfill their potential. These include rights relating to health and education, leisure and play, fair and equal treatment, protection from exploitation, and, not least, *the right to be heard.*

Every country around the world except one has ratified the UNCRC. Scotland has gone further by enshrining the convention into law as far as the wider parameters of the United Kingdom's Westminster government permit. In 2021, the Scottish Parliament unanimously passed the "United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill."[6] The United States, on the other hand, has still not even signed the UNCRC. This is because 29 U.S. states have laws that violate the convention's Article 37, which prohibits life imprisonment without parole for crimes committed by those under 18 years old.[7]

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), meanwhile, has moved beyond its focus on international test results to develop global competencies that promote those aspects of a "quality education" that are contained in the 17 sustainable development goals of the UN. According to the OECD, "the first domain of knowledge for global competence relates to the manifold expressions of culture and intercultural relations," which can "*help young people to become more aware of their own cultural identity*" (our emphasis) and "avoid categorizing people through single markers of identity."[8] Global competence, according to the OECD, should enable young people "to retain their cultural identity" while respecting "the cultural values and beliefs of people around them."[9]

Through models of human formation, government policies, and the advocacy of organizations like the UN and the OECD, identity is an

increasingly prominent issue for schools and school systems around the world.

How people develop their identities is not a new question. Many of the world's great sagas and legends describe the inner struggles that people feel when one set of loyalties conflicts with another. Fables and folk tales like Cinderella, Beauty and the Beast, and the movie *Frozen* are about losses of innocence, encounters with evil, and transitions into adulthood, with a few archetypal aspects of romance thrown in along the way.

For almost 100 years, social scientists have explained more fully how human identities evolve and develop over time through *psychological development*, *life passages*, and *generational shifts*. These are the three aspects of identity development we address next.

Psychological Development

In his 1950 Pulitzer Prize–winning book, *Childhood and Society*, Harvard University psychologist Erik Erikson described eight major identity transitions or crises that all people negotiate as they go through life.[10] For Erikson, a crisis was "a turning point, a crucial period of increased vulnerability and heightened potential."[11] Erikson's theories of identity crises were insightful and reassuring for those who wondered why young people seemed to be so conflicted at the time. Since then, his theories of identity crises, and their corresponding stages, have been taught in psychology classes all over the world. Figure 2.1 details these eight stages.

Erikson's stages have become widespread parts of common sense. We all know about the "terrible twos" of the second stage, about teenagers' desperate desire to be included in the most popular peer groups, and about people's longing for intimacy and commitment in their 20s and 30s, for example. Almost every stage involves struggling with negative emotions and personal setbacks and trying to tip the scales toward growth and renewal.

As we were writing this book, one of Andy's grandsons, Jackson, was approaching his 10th birthday. "Well, then," he announced abruptly, "only a few days left being a child!" It was as if he had read Erikson's model and decided to implement it. Jackson was moving through Erikson's industry versus inferiority stage. No longer a dependent

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Figure 2.1   Erik Erikson's Eight Stages of Psychological Development

1. *Birth to roughly 18 months:*

   Infants seek *trust* and attachment to their caregivers. If nurturance and safety are continuously provided, they learn to overcome the threat of *mistrust*, and the path is cleared for further healthy development.

2. *18 months to 3 years:*

   The child strives to develop an *autonomous will* so that it learns it is safe and proper to "be oneself" in a world made up of other people.[12] This sense of independence is critical to healthy development. Without it, a child experiences *doubt* and *shame*.

3. *3 to 6 years:*

   The child aspires to exercise *initiative* and undertake freely chosen projects through increasingly elaborate forms of play. If adults thwart the child's natural desire to explore their environments, feelings of *guilt* will ensue, experienced as "a new and powerful estrangement."[13]

4. *6 to 11 years:*

   There is an expansion of children's social world. Through their *industry*, children develop a sense of mastery over their environment. If this sense of accomplishment is stunted, they experience a "sense of *inferiority*" that holds back their maturation.[14]

5. *11 to 18 years:*

   Adolescents struggle between *identity consolidation* and *role confusion*. They "temporarily over-identify" with a chosen peer group and "perversely test each other's capacity to pledge fidelity."[15] Bullying can increase, not only to intimidate victims but also to impress peers.

6. *19 to 40 years:*

   In young adulthood, people either establish *intimacy* with partners or experience *isolation* and loneliness. A lasting sense of stability is or is not established. This has profound consequences for the last two stages.
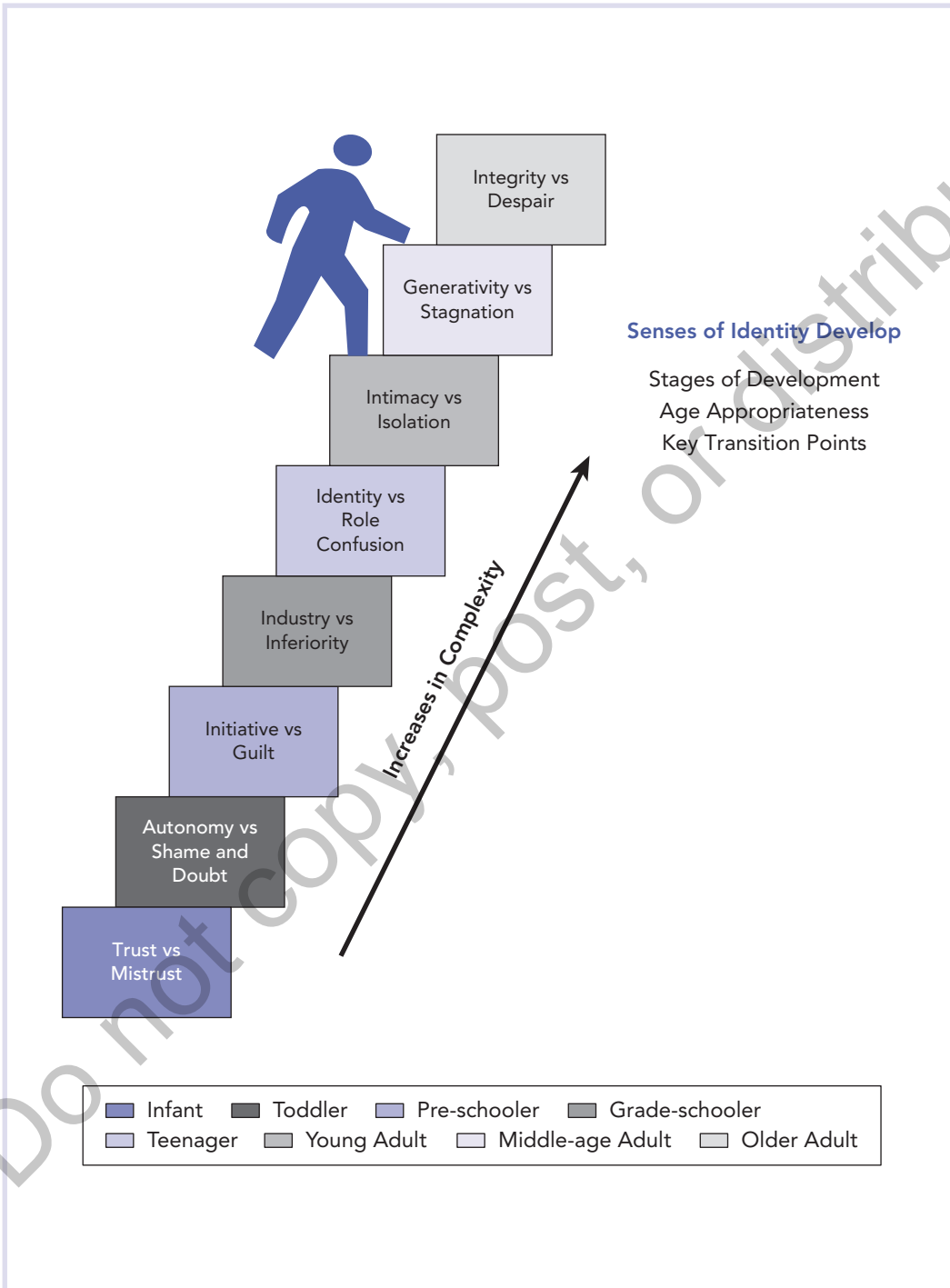
7. *41 to 65 years:*

   Adults struggle to attain *generativity*, "the concern for establishing and guiding the next generation."[16] The alternative is a "pervading sense of *stagnation*" marked by "personal impoverishment" and a sense of bitterness at missed opportunities and squandered talent.[17]

8. *66 years until death:*

   This can be a time when people "gradually ripen the fruit of the seven stages" into a fully formed sense of personal *integrity*.[18] Failure to achieve this results in *despair*, which "expresses the feeling that time is too short for the attempt to start another life and to try out alternate roads to integrity."[19]

Figure 2.1   Erik Erikson's Eight Stages of Psychological Development (Continued)

Integrity vs Despair

Generativity vs Stagnation

Senses of Identity Develop

Stages of Development
Age Appropriateness
Key Transition Points

Intimacy vs Isolation

Identity vs Role Confusion

Industry vs Inferiority

Initiative vs Guilt

Increases in Complexity

Autonomy vs Shame and Doubt

Trust vs Mistrust

■ Infant ■ Toddler ■ Pre-schooler ■ Grade-schooler
■ Teenager ■ Young Adult ■ Middle-age Adult ■ Older Adult

Source: Erikson, 1968

child, he was accepting—even welcoming—the moment when work, action, and affecting things around him would enable him to assert his autonomy.

Then, as if he was deliberately putting this self-revelation into action, a couple of days later, Jackson invited his granddad out on his paddleboard. Andy sat on the back of the board while Jackson confidently steered them out into the lake (Figure 2.2) and around to a couple of his secret coves. This was the first time Jackson had ever taken the leading role with Andy on any outdoor activity or adventure. It was a wonderful moment. It was also a poignant one.

We are on Erikson's staircase of identity development too. Almost at the very top, in fact. Jackson is taking his granddad out on his paddleboard now. In 10 or 15 years, he may be driving him to the mall. The stages are connected to each other. Eager and fit as we feel to keep pushing ahead, we also find ourselves paying more and more attention to people behind us on the staircase, to help them find a good path and enable *their* development as part of our own generativity.

For now, if we take care of the likes of Jackson, then hopefully they will, in turn, start to take us with them on their metaphorical paddleboards.

Figure 2.2   Jackson and Andy on Their Paddleboard Adventure

Like rising stars performing alongside distinguished older actors whose brief cameos dignify the rest of the cast's work, our professional grandchildren will hopefully show us off to their students and colleagues, filling our twilight years with warmth. It's up to us and those we teach, mentor, and support whether life will turn out to be more like Led Zeppelin's "Stairway to Heaven" or AC/DC's "Highway to Hell."
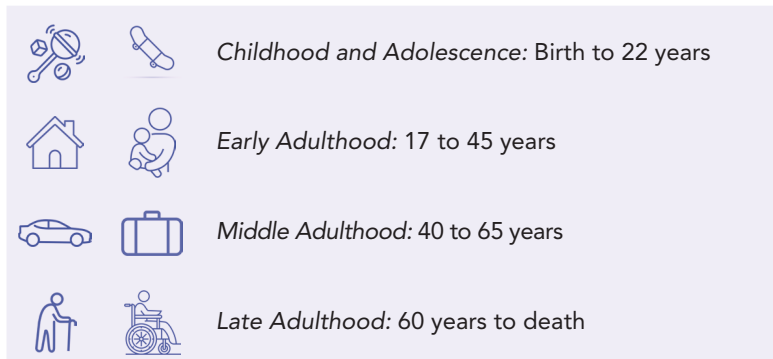
Although Erikson's ideas have everyday acceptance now, they were highly controversial at first. One of Erikson's mentors when he was at Yale University in the 1930s had been the legendary anthropologist Margaret Mead. Her groundbreaking book, *Coming of Age in Samoa*, captivated readers with its analysis of how very different cultures dealt with people's life stages and transitions.[20] Beneath and across all the cultural differences, Mead inspired Erikson to observe recognizable patterns in ritual celebrations of childbirth, naming ceremonies, the end of childhood, marriage, or a death in the family, for example.

How people deal with coming of age is not the same in all cultures, of course. The universal nature of these life transitions is sometimes overemphasized. So, too, is the rigidity of the stages. "It is utterly false and cruelly arbitrary to put all the play into childhood, all the work into middle age, and all the regrets into old age," Mead said.[21] Erickson's staircase is a vertical pathway that people can go up and down, and get on and off, at any time. It's not an escalator that traps them on an inexorable journey at a predetermined pace, the moment they step onto it.

Life Passages

By the 1960s, Erikson had left Yale and moved on to Harvard University, where one of his associates was another psychologist, Daniel Levinson. Greatly influenced by Erikson, Levinson undertook a biographical interview study of 40 men in midlife to understand the stages and transitions that they went through as they progressed through their life cycle. He popularized the idea of midlife crisis. Levinson was an early advocate of positive psychological development. People didn't have to atrophy after adolescence was over, he believed. Rather, all the way through life and into old age, their identities evolved in ways that presented challenging but nonetheless achievable transitions. They did so in four overlapping "eras each lasting roughly twenty-five years" (see Figure 2.3).[22]

Levinson produced two key works. The first, in 1978, was *The Seasons of a Man's Life.*[23] After he was criticized for neglecting women's development, Levinson undertook a second series of interviews to check whether his four overlapping eras were as applicable to women as to

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Figure 2.3　Evolving Identities Over Time

Childhood and Adolescence: Birth to 22 years

Early Adulthood: 17 to 45 years

Middle Adulthood: 40 to 65 years

Late Adulthood: 60 years to death

Source: Rattle icon by iStock.com/Priyanka gupta; skateboard icon by iStock.com/ Oksana Sazhnieva; house icon by iStock.com/rambo182; parent and child icon by iStock.com/appleuzr; car icon by iStock.com/Maksym Rudoi; briefcase icon by iStock.com/Stakes; person with cane icon by iStock.com/surfupvector; person in wheelchair icon by iStock.com/Miray Celebi Kaba.

men. In 1996, two years after his death, *The Seasons of a Woman's Life* was published by his wife, Judy.[24]

"The life structure develops through a relatively orderly sequence of age-linked periods during the adult years," Levinson argued.[25] Each stage had qualities that have to do with the character of living at a particular time and with a culturally defined set of challenges. For example, he claimed, the midlife crisis seemed to be pronounced among his interviewees regardless of whether they were male or female, professional or working-class. Although there were some minor areas of gender differences, Levinson still found striking similarities in the life cycle, regardless of gender.

The research on adult life development has had an enormous influence on the study of teachers' and leaders' lives and career stages in education. Educators have identity issues too. They also go through life stages and transitions. The most systematic work on how life and career stages impact teachers and their effectiveness has been carried out in the United Kingdom and Europe.[26] Here, we learn that if teachers persist and remain after the first few years, they are likely to be most effective between 8 and 23 years on the job: typically, between about 30 years old and their mid- to late 40s. It's after this point, in Levinson's final stage and Erickson's last two stages, that teachers are most vulnerable to losing commitment and effectiveness.

Leaders can make a big difference here. Do they let teachers carry on doing the same thing, year after year, until they get bored and weary,

or do they challenge them to teach new topics or different classes, to lead innovation teams, or to mentor new members into the profession? In other words, do leaders help teachers experience generativity rather than the much-criticized blight of late-career stagnation? Levinson's and Erickson's stages of life and psychological development present the struggles and the challenges. But it's our workplaces and our leaders who have a huge impact on which paths we and our colleagues take.

Although it is primarily concerned with adult development, Levinson's framework indicates that difficulties in managing life's transitions aren't because of people's individual shortcomings. They are inevitable aspects of healthy human development. Moreover, the stages through which young people pass in the development of their selves and identities are closely related to the stages through which their parents, grandparents, and teachers at school are passing too. As we shall see shortly, the development of young people's identities is an intergenerational phenomenon, as well as a purely psychological one.

Both Erikson's and Levinson's work have had immense influence on people's thinking about life and human development, inside schools and in the wider world. But both men had a significant Achilles' heel: *women*—or their failure to address women's identities properly. Erikson called his framework *Eight Stages of Man*. Levinson's early work was exclusively focused on men's development. Even his later attempts to address differences in girls' and women's development explained them away as deviations from the supposedly normal male path to independence and autonomy.

Also working in the mid-1970s, journalist Gail Sheehy published a *New York Times* bestseller: *Passages: Predictable Crises of Adult Life*.[27] Sheehy's interest in life transitions was partly inspired by time she spent as a graduate student working under Margaret Mead, who was then in her eighth decade. Sheehy conducted 115 interviews with men and women from 18 to 65 years old. Finding that many of them seemed unsettled, she turned to various intellectual sources of influence that included Erickson, Levinson, and the Canadian psychoanalyst Elliott Jaques, who invented but had not popularized the concept of midlife crisis.

Sheehy's distinctive contribution was to take the stages of girls' and women's maturation and development seriously from the start. While women, like men, struggled to balance intimacy and isolation in middle age, for example, she found that women's socialization prepared them to be caregivers as mothers and wives, so their challenges had to do not so much with asserting autonomy as with the quality of their relationships. Likewise, the dichotomy that men faced in late middle age between stagnation and generativity in their careers was experienced differently

by women, whose supportive roles in their families often entailed putting others first, which led them to neglect their own flourishing. While women, like men, could overcome these difficulties in what Sheehy later termed a "second adulthood" that followed the midlife crisis, this was in no way guaranteed, especially if there was a failure to understand how power and gender roles shape life histories.[28]

There were bitter rivalries between Levinson and Sheehy of the kind that sometimes accompany writers who are aware of each other's work, but where one publishes a book and gets public acclaim before the other. Sheehy was influenced by Levinson, but she still released her book first, in 1976—two years before Levinson published his own. Sheehy acknowledged Levinson's influence, but on seeing Sheehy—the journalist—bring out her bestseller first, Levinson didn't return the favor when he eventually went to press in 1978.

What united Mead, Erikson, Levinson, and Sheehy was the conviction that people around the world go through recognizable stages of development that have their own identifiable challenges. All of them, however, became targets for critics who charged them with neglecting what makes cultures historically and geographically distinct, compared to what they have in common. Adolescence, some say, didn't really become established as a separate phase of development between childhood and adulthood, even in Western societies, until after the Second World War.[29] Young people's development in many East and South Asian cultures that emphasize social and family harmony is in some ways profoundly different from the West with its greater emphases on independence and individualism.[30] In Italy, which ranks at the top of the world in well-being on the Bloomberg Global Health Index, men stay at home with their parents well into their 30s or until they get married—longer than men in almost every other modern society.[31] Women's family and work roles, and women's ability to control their own fertility and life choices, underwent profound transformations in the 20th century. Not surprisingly, given the times of these books' publication, gay and lesbian relationships and identities do not appear in any of these authors' works at all, even though there has been informed conjecture that Mead herself may have been in a long-term lesbian relationship in her later years.[32] Growing up is not the same for everyone, nor are the ways in which cultures manage adulthood.

Yet, the phases and stages through which children and young people move matter everywhere. The responsibility of educators is to be sensitive to local cultures that affect their classes and to different groups of students within those classes. This can help them guide their students through each stage of development, so they come out all the better

for the experience on the other side. Differences, diversities, and what we will later recognize as forms of intersectionality are all important, but, in *the Age of Identity*, the universal tasks of human development and formation in modern society matter everywhere too. It is essential that teachers are ready, willing, and eager to assume their responsibility for human formation so they can help every student learn how to be, and how to be better, within their own cultures, at every stage of their development.

Generational Shifts

Developing an identity over time isn't a process that is simply biological, or a function of age or chronology. Nor is identity development a universal or timeless process that can be easily compared across groups or epochs. Although developing a sense of self and building an identity over time happens within all cultures and societies, it is not as if cultures and societies are static, while individuals are not. The individual *and* the group are both engaged in dynamic processes of development.

Teachers hitting middle age and later life know all too well that every year they get older, their students seem to stay pretty much the same. But they don't always grasp that adolescence isn't the same as when *they* were teenagers several decades ago. School leaders may not see that new teacher recruits aren't simple rewinds of their younger professional selves, either. We need to understand that what adolescence looks like is not just a result of it being a period between childhood and adulthood. It is also a feature of the generation into which young people are born that in many ways comes to shape their entire lives.

When we were working on the final sections of this book, we sat down with an undergraduate class Dennis was teaching called *The Educational Conversation*. Our topic was COVID-19 and its impact on young people. One young woman, who was studying neuroscience, drew affirmation when she pointed out that as we were all coming out of the pandemic, people ahead of them in age and career terms were starting to revert to something like the life they had before. They had a point of reference to return to, as they had already been able to develop a generational identity.

She and her peers, she pointed out, had no such prior point of reference. Her brain was still developing, she said, and COVID-19 was part of that process, shaping how she would be, and what she would become, for the rest of her life. The experiences in particular places and times that teenagers have as their brains are still forming influence them forever. This is what generations are about.

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The idea of generations was invented in 1928, by Karl Mannheim, a Hungarian-German sociologist who fled to the United Kingdom before the commencement of World War II. Mannheim explained generations in sociological terms as age cohorts whose shared experiences in youth were subsequently carried through the ensuing decades of their lives. He was especially interested in what he called "crystallizing agents" or defining events that were distinctive to a rising generation.[33] These influenced how each generational cohort understood itself, and then shaped the wider society as it aged and as members of each generational cohort moved into positions of leadership.

In 1997, William Strauss and Neil Howe developed Mannheim's insights into a fully fledged theory of generational changes. In *The Fourth Turning*, they argued that generations typically span about 20 years.[34] Like Mannheim, they said that each rising youth cohort experiences a "Great Event" that gives it its unique "generational persona."[35] In modern U.S. terms, they identified four generations spanning the 1950s to the 2000s.

FOUR GENERATIONS SPANNING THE 1950s–2000s

1. The *Silent Generation* of the 1950s built a period of economic and organizational stability after World War II.

2. The *Baby Boom Generation* in the 1960s and 1970s saw revolutions in gender equity, youth rebellion, and civil rights.

3. *Generation X* in the 1980s and 1990s grew up amidst a great economic unraveling, and became individualistic, market-oriented, and calculative as a result.

4. The *Millennial Generation* or *Generation Y* in the 2000s faced mounting crises of growing social inequality, climate change, and massive global movements of refugees.

In *Millennials Rising*, published in 2000, Strauss and Howe predicted that this new generation would "manifest a wide array of positive social habits that older Americans no longer associate with youth, including a new focus on teamwork, achievement, modesty, and good conduct."[36]

Will the optimistic predictions of Strauss and Howe come true with the passage of time? Millennials, and Generation Z that followed them, have shown in their online and in-person lives that they can be fully engaged with the world around them. In the wake of Brexit, for example, there has been a surge in applications to study political science

at U.K. universities.[37] It is the young who have led the global climate strike called *Fridays for Future* that has pushed leaders and members of the public around the world to act.[38] Fully 70% of all U.S. youth responded to one survey indicating that they had participated in Black Lives Matter protests or deliberations after the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor in 2020.[39] Anticipating these high levels of civic engagement, Strauss and Howe described Millennials as "the next Great Generation" that would be keen to take on the mantle of leadership and to tackle the challenges confronting all of us.

Not everyone is this optimistic. Psychologists like Jean Twenge, who wrote *iGen*: *Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood—and What That Means for the Rest of Us*, are concerned about increases in technological addictiveness, egocentricity, and narcissism among the young.[40] Strauss and Howe did not foresee a world in which teenagers would have ubiquitous access to smartphones and social media platforms like Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp, and TikTok, which they use for hours at a time every day. Nor did they anticipate a world in which online anxiety, cyberbullying, and digital distraction would become ever-present dangers.

Are we entering a world of increased social engagement, more technological addiction and distraction, or some combination of the two? We don't completely know yet how these two battling forces will resolve themselves, but the most important insight is that teenagers are not just younger than their teachers, and new generations aren't just defective versions of older ones. Generations in general, and each generation in particular, matter in their own terms.

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In *Generational Identity, Educational Change, and School Leadership*, State University of New York at Buffalo professor Corrie Stone-Johnson describes how Generation X teachers she studied didn't mind the standardization and testing that their Baby Boomer peers despised.[41] They appreciated frameworks and guidelines that meant they didn't have to make up the curriculum all by themselves. Compared to their Baby Boomer colleagues who exhausted themselves by sacrificing evenings, holidays, and weekends for the sake of their mission to transform young people's lives, Generation X teachers valued a more balanced life. They performed their jobs professionally, but protected their personal time by pursuing other interests, too.

Generational consultants Jennifer Abrams and Valerie von Frank argue that people need coaching on how to talk and act cross-generationally.[42] Teachers who are also parents and who are assertive about which

after-school meetings they will and will not attend, so as not to encroach on family time, are not simply slackers, but professionals who want their leaders to consider their own needs for a balanced life. Generation X teachers may not devote endless extra hours discussing and reflecting on their mission and their practice, but if they are given a purposeful task to complete as a team, they will dispatch it with awesome efficiency.

Today's students do not need to be harangued by older generations about their digital devices being instruments of the devil. They do not want to hear that sexual health is only about safety, and never about pleasure. Grit and sacrifice will not engage them. Endless examinations and tests may simply drive them to "escape from learning," in the words of Japanese professor Manabu Sato.[43]

Will today's rising generations step up to engage with the world? Will this be a significant part of their identity? In the United States, election turnout in 2022 among 18- to 29-year-olds was the second highest it has been in 30 years.[44] One global survey after another is showing how young people aged between the late teens and mid-30s are worried about climate change, anxious about war, outraged by violence, and fearful about the future. [45] They want to stop the world, not to get off but to put it back on its axis. Young people's evolving identities today aren't just about maturation and growth. They are bound up with young people wanting to be agents of their time. The development of student identity is a *social*, *cultural*, and *historical* question, not just an inner *psychological* one.

> The development of student identity, in other words, is a *social, cultural,* and *historical* question, not just an inner *psychological* one.

IDENTITIES OVER TIME

Taken together, theories of psychological development, life passages, and generational identities give educators powerful new ways to see their students and themselves. A rebellious early adolescent might not be challenging your authority just for the fun of it; instead, they might be trying to establish a new identity in which prestige among peers takes precedence over everything else. Students scrolling through their screens during class might be checking out Instagram friends, but they might also be checking up on you to see if what you have been teaching them is true!

It's also wise to explore where you are in your own life's passages. Being hard on yourself or on colleagues who lose energy in managing the transition from the boundless enthusiasm of the unencumbered beginning teacher to the midcareer professional with a family to raise,

a mortgage to pay, and aging parents to care for is not only damaging to well-being; it also fails to acknowledge the role that life passages play in shaping your own and your colleagues' development. Likewise, reflecting on when you were born, and on what critical issues your generation has confronted, can help all of us to rethink our relationships with members of other generations and the kinds of conversations we have with them.

These theories of identity all portray it as something that emerges, unfolds, and develops over time. It moves forward across the life cycle, whether it ends up bitter and twisted or harmonious and integrated. Yet we now know that identity is even more complicated and contradictory than this. We behave differently online than offline. We are perceived differently by our family than our work associates. Sometimes, young people these days aren't even sure what their identity is. Some identities are things we can celebrate and show off to others—the top of the class, the tech guru, the homecoming queen. Other identities are ones we sometimes feel pressed to hide—the poverty of our family, our struggles with mental health, or being LGBTQ+. Our identities can be sources of pride or shame. They are complex and complicated, and increasingly, they are also controversial. These aspects of identity are the subject of our next chapters.

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