


# 'We' and 'They': Cross-Cultural Conversations on Identity

with Anindita N. Balslev, "'We' and 'They': Why Must We Engage in Cross-Cultural Conversation?"; Carolyn J. Love, "Complex Identity: Genes to God"; Andrew B. Newberg, "Identity and the Brain: The Biological Basis of Our Self"; and John Calvin Chatlos, "Adolescent Identity Formation versus Spiritual Transformation."

## ADOLESCENT IDENTITY FORMATION VERSUS SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

by John Calvin Chatlos 

*Abstract.* Since 1950, Erik Erikson's emphasis on ego-identity formation as the crucial task of adolescence has been the framework for almost all subsequent research and programming to empower positive adolescent development. Chatlos has recently described a "Framework of Spirituality" and contends that identity formation significantly interferes with and should occur after a spiritual transformational process for optimal and more meaningful adolescent development. This article reviews the current status of research in identity formation, including religious and spiritual identity formation contributing to his conclusion, and describes the spiritual transformational process that is proposed to be central to positive adolescent development. A possible link between systemic focus on identity formation and current social upheaval is also identified.

*Keywords:* adolescence; dignity; dualism; Erikson; identity formation; Piaget; spirituality; transformational; worth

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The promotion of identity formation in adolescence fosters a fundamental experiential separateness of "me" and "other." This article proposes that this promotion at a critical period of development has set the stage for later personal, social, and political polarization as is dividing the world today. An alternative approach to adolescent development that promotes a spiritual transformation process that is inclusive of the "other" is described with a recommendation for a redirection of adolescent research and youth development programming.

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Ever since Erik Erikson's *Childhood and Society* (1950), there are few articles or books about adolescence that do not emphasize identity development and few articles or books on identity development that do not focus on adolescence. To provide some background, a recent review of the past decade of research on adolescent identity development (Branje et al. 2021) begins with "One of the key developmental tasks in adolescence and young adulthood is to develop a coherent sense of self and identity." It continues with "Personal identity refers to one's sense of the person one genuinely is, including a subjective feeling of self-sameness and continuity over contexts and time." This summarizes the overall focus of identity research.

The importance of identity in adolescent research relates to the role of stable and strong identity commitments, referred to as "Identity Achievement," which correlates with higher psychosocial adjustment outcomes when compared to adolescents with ongoing identity uncertainty (Hatano et al. 2017). Ultimately, this research is done with a goal of intervening in identity formation processes to promote adolescents' well-being. An excellent example of the conceptual model and application was demonstrated in the Identity Project (Umana-Taylor et al. 2018a). This project provided a weekly eight-session intervention to ninth grade students of a mixed ethnic identity (Black or African American 24%, Latino 30%, White 37%, Native American 6%). The program focused on ethnic-racial identity exploration including education about stereotypes, discrimination, and group marginalization with activities to explore their own personal and family ethnic-racial backgrounds. Compared to a similar group that received 8 weeks instruction in skills to succeed in high school and opportunities after high school, the Identity focused students showed increased identity resolution, higher global identity cohesion, lower depressive symptoms, higher self-esteem, and better grades one year later (Umana-Taylor et al. 2018b). Of particular note related to this article, the study did not show an increase in "other group" orientation referring to which "individuals feel positively about and interact with ethnic groups other than their own."

In contrast, Chatlos (2021) has identified a "Framework of Spirituality" (FOS) focused on empowering self-worth and dignity (that have both been specifically operationalized) that identifies "identity" as a major block to openness to spirituality and spiritual experience. This work further claims that this spirituality "is healing and is a source of human happiness." If what is described is accurate, how can it be reconciled that our extreme focus on "identity achievement" to promote adolescents' well-being, may, in fact, provide a block to spiritual experience that is a source of human happiness? What is the relationship of spirituality to identity development in adolescence? Results of this review conclude that our almost universal focus on adolescent identity formation may be inadvertently harmful to

society and that a radical shift in our focus of research and adolescent development is required.

This article will briefly review general identity research to describe the overall context and understanding of adolescent identity development, then review the less developed area of religious and spiritual identity research, summarize the way in which identity may block spirituality and spiritual experience as described by Chatlos, and then propose a solution to reconcile this contrast. This review is meant to be illustrative and not exhaustive in its limited review of current research. Critical concepts in this solution are designated with *italics* throughout this article.

### GENERAL IDENTITY RESEARCH

Branje's (2021) review of the past decade of research in identity development in adolescence provides a good overall perspective of the current field of adolescent identity research. She begins with describing identity as it "refers to one's sense of the person one genuinely is, including a subjective feeling of self-sameness and continuity over contexts and time." She describes the basic *processes* of identity development to include exploration, commitment, and reconsideration. *Identity formation* occurs as adolescents explore various identity alternatives until they form identity commitments. Then *identity maintenance* involves strengthening these commitments in continued and dynamic exploration that may lead to a *reconsideration* with subsequent changes in their identity formation and commitments.

Furthermore, this identity development occurs across multiple *domains* or aspects of life. These domains in research have included personal identity of race, gender, ethnic, educational/vocational, relationship, and disability and social identity of family, religious, cultural/SES, national, and political domains. As part of identity development, an overall *self-concept* develops and a *global personal identity* reflects integration of one's self-concept across these domains. It is noted that an individual adolescent will have various levels of development and commitment across different domains at any given time. Finally, it is recognized that identity development goes beyond adolescence and continues into young adulthood and in some instances may continue well into adulthood.

Branje continues the review with many details of research into various other aspects of identity development and states that "the most advanced identity status, identity achievement, increases from early-to-late adolescence." Though this is not explained in their article, it refers to work done earlier (Marcia 1966) that is derived from Erikson's (1950) description of the "crisis" of adolescence as "Identity vs Role Confusion." Marcia developed the Ego Identity Process Questionnaire and distinguished four

<p><b>IDENTITY ACHIEVEMENT</b></p> <p>High Exploration High Commitment</p>	<p><b>IDENTITY MORATORIUM</b></p> <p>High Exploration Low Commitment</p>
<p><b>IDENTITY FORECLOSURE</b></p> <p>Low Exploration High Commitment</p>	<p><b>IDENTITY DIFFUSION</b></p> <p>Low Exploration Low Commitment</p>

**Figure 1.** Identity processes and outcomes.

identity *statuses* that can be outcomes of adolescent identity development: Diffused (Role Confusion), Foreclosed, Moratorium, and Achieved.

*Diffused*—are uncommitted in important life directions and are not currently engaged in a process leading to commitment.

*Foreclosed*—has high levels of committed beliefs but has not considered alternatives to these beliefs. Usually, they have adopted directions laid down for them by parents or other early authority figures.

*Moratorium*—continued exploration of alternatives without commitment, often done in a setting such as college, or the military.

*Achieved*—has undergone a process of exploration and has committed to a set of beliefs, values and goals.

Marcia (Marcia et al. 1993) later described how the two processes of exploration and commitment relate to the four status outcomes (Figure 1).

This work (Marcia 1967) recognized the “identity achievement” as more mature. This has been followed in subsequent research and repeatedly been demonstrated to be associated with better outcomes in terms of aggressive behavior, delinquent behavior, anxiety, loneliness, depressive symptoms, self-esteem, academic engagement, life-satisfaction, and experience of meaning in life (Branje et al. 2021). There has been much subsequent research on identity formation and identity status that will not be reviewed here as it is beyond what is necessary to our general understanding of identity research.

#### RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL IDENTITY RESEARCH

Following the introduction of research of identity status, there was limited research of the social domain of religious identity despite Erikson’s

emphasis on the importance of religion to identity formation (Erikson 1968). Fulton (1997) looked at identity status, religious orientation, and prejudice using a religious orientation paradigm from the work of Gordon Allport in the field of psychology of religion (Kirkpatrick and Hood 1990). Allport's Religious Orientation Scale (Allport and Ross 1967) specifically focused on "religion" with its beliefs, practices such as religious attendance and prayer, values, and institutional and social context. Additionally, it divided religious orientation into intrinsic and extrinsic. *Intrinsically religious* persons have internalized their religion as an end in itself and *extrinsically religious* persons used religion in the service of other social or personal ends. Of note for our later discussion, the study demonstrated how the Foreclosure Status was correlated with prejudice measures while the other statuses were not.

The early part of this century opened to a greater perspective of looking at adolescent identity and religion, and now included spirituality (King 2003). *Spirituality* was initially defined as "concerned with transcendent, addressing ultimate questions of life's meaning, with the assumption that there is more to life than what we can see or fully understand," emphasizing an expanded awareness of self in relation to others. Furthermore, *connectedness* to both divine and other were noted and spirituality included "the awareness of the fundamental unity of all being and of our connectedness to one another and the universe." This was associated with a sense of *belonging* that linked spirituality in its possible relationship to a faith/religious community. This framework suggested that religion could potentially offer an environment "that can foster values, meaning, identity, and sense of belonging and connectedness beyond themselves." However, remarkably prescient was the recognition that:

Forms of religion that do not connect youth with a social group or a spiritual experience of other may not promote a self-concept that fully integrates a moral, civic, and spiritual identity. However, taken to the extreme, forms of religion and spirituality that exalt the individual over a greater good can promote a sense of narcissism, entitlement, and lack of connectedness and contribution to society. (King 2003)

Recommendations were for the inclusion of measures such as the Spiritual Transcendence Index (Seidnitz et al., and Deberstein 2002) with questions regarding spirituality (rather than religion), relationship, presence and communion with God, and purpose. However, a subsequent volume of research dedicated to defining the future of the field of adolescent spiritual and religious development, failed to include any study connecting their constructs specifically with identity formation or identity status (King and Boyatzis 2004).

Simultaneously, a field of positive youth development (PYD) research (Lerner et al. 2005) was shifting research from simply describing

adolescent development including processes, domains and identity status to identifying aspects of adolescent development that actively promote positive and desired outcomes. This research confirmed empirical evidence of the Five C's: *competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring* with a further focus on the sixth C of "*contribution*" as part of community engagement and began to connect the personal domains with the social domains of identity development toward positive outcomes.

An expansion of PYD included the connection between religious and spiritual identity with further clarification (Templeton and Eccles 2006). A *religious identity* is a *collective identity* that included identifying with or being a member of a religious group. A *spiritual identity* is a *personal identity* that "is grounded in one's personal beliefs, behaviors, and values concerning the transcendent" with *transcendent* being "embedded in something greater than the self." A collective identity is "shared by a group of people with some characteristic(s) in common, for example, native language, country of origin, or religion." It includes category membership, shared beliefs, practices such as meeting attendance, and a perceived closeness to other members of the group. Personal identity "are those identity components or characteristics people believe are more unique to themselves rather than shared with a group." Examples are given of how a particular identity could be either religious or spiritual or both.

In understanding the development specifically of spiritual identity, they suggest that it may have connection with developmental changes described originally by Piaget (Piaget and Inhelder 1969) and attachment (Bowlby 1969) and belonging needs (Maslow 1954). Piaget described developmental distinctions in the construction of reality including changes in understanding relationships, beliefs about causality related to purposefulness, distinctions between real events and mental images, and progression to abstract thinking. Bowlby described the role of the mother-infant attachment system and Maslow identified love and belonging as fundamental needs. Despite their laying of a good foundation for distinctions of religious/collective identity and spiritual/personal identity, Templeton and Eccles' (2006) more detailed description of the development of spiritual identity in youth continued with unclarity as to their separation of religious and spiritual identity using their own definitions.

The PYD research (Lerner et al. 2008a) focused on the "sixth C" of contribution suggesting that contribution was part of a *generosity* related to transcendence beyond their self-identity and was the essence of spirituality. They borrowed from Kalton (2000) the concept of *horizontal transcendence* as a "radically non-anthropomorphic spirituality...a form of transcendence that is characteristic of degrees of abstraction rather than a movement towards some kind of Absolute metaphysical dimension." This was contrasted to *vertical transcendence* as "a metaphysical structure grounding the contingent in the Absolute" referring to the "infinite, eternal, personal

creator by whose will we may live.” The vertical transcendence is associated with institutions as religious identity or as religiosity/religiousness and the horizontal transcendence is personal as in spirituality or spiritual identity—both of which may emerge through adolescence.

The PYD volume of collected works (Lerner et al. 2008b) expands on this in many areas. Of particular importance for this discussion (Roeser et al. 2008), spiritual identities are *transpersonal*—“developing understanding of what are really shared aspects of human experience across lines of creed, class, caste, race, and religion—the desire for happiness, questions about the meaning of life and human purpose, the existence of suffering, and the problem of death as the shared fate of all human beings.” In addition, *worldview beliefs* about “ultimate concerns” is part of this focus of identity. This may include “beliefs about the nature of God, human nature, the creation of the universe, time, death, truth and the possibility of spiritual salvation.” This worldview may become part of a personal spiritual identity or a religious identity that may or may not be associated with a religious tradition or institution.

Another important work in this volume (Juang and Syed 2008) highlights the importance to consider that religious/spiritual identity is inextricably associated with multiple other identities that are explored and formed during adolescence. Negotiating their religious/spiritual identity may be either supported or come in conflict with other developing identities such as sexual, gender, ethnic, and cultural. This work ends with a theoretical model that bridges the relationship of religiosity or religious identity with spirituality or spiritual identity and civic engagement (Sherrod and Spiewak 2008). A Venn diagram of partially overlapping circles of religiosity, spirituality, and civic engagement is illustrated with each circle practically associated, respectively, with head (beliefs), heart (affective), and hands (behaviors). All circles commonly intersect with experiences of transcendence/faith, connectedness, and activism respectively as part of PYD. This added activity component is described in further detail and provides insight for future research that is described later in this article.

A key paper to bridge these understandings specifically explored spirituality and identity status in adolescence (Goldstein 2010). It included the specific measure of the Ego Identity Process Questionnaire (EIPQ; Balistreri et al. 1995), the Human Spirituality Scale (HSS; Wheat 1991), and a semistructured interview exploring spirituality with focus on ideas, feelings, exploration, past experiences, and current beliefs. It also provided clear working definitions for future research.

*Spirituality*—“meaning making, feelings of connectedness to others, self, and/or a higher power, and the openness to and search for self-

Framework of Spirituality			
Domain of Being	Experience of Self-Worth	Expression of Dignity	Creative Forces / Creative Openings
Think	Self-confidence	Choice / <b>Reason</b> / Wisdom	TRUTH
Feel	Self-esteem	Empathy/ <b>Compassion</b> /Caring (Justice)	LOVE
Do	Self-competence / Self-efficacy	Honesty / <b>Courage</b> / Giving (Generosity)	FAITH

**Figure 2.** Each of the elements of this framework is described in the text. This illustrates the full FOS including the expansion of the expression of dignity socially as wisdom, justice, and generosity. The expansion to the Creative Forces/Creative Openings occurs as the spiritual core is opened.

transcendence.” “Spirituality is a personal inner state of being that can be found within or outside the context of religion.”

*Religiosity*—acceptance of beliefs and practices within the context of a religious framework.

Important findings included:

- (1) Spirituality (HSS) was independent of identity status, age, grade, ethnicity, importance of being religious, and description of self as religious and/or spiritual.
- (2) Gender (female) was the strongest predictor of spirituality.
- (3) Subjects had a lack of reflection and insight into their spiritual experiences (majority of subjects were aged 15–17).

This short review of identity formation and specific focus on spirituality and spiritual identity provides the background for an alternative approach presented below.

#### IDENTITY FORMATION VERSUS SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

The “Framework of Spirituality” (Chatlos 2021) was originally developed in clinical work with adolescents with addiction (Chatlos 1989), and later expanded with adults (Chatlos 1999) in personal development, community and religious settings, and adapted to clinical settings in treating adults with addiction and mental health problems. It was developed on the foundation of cognitive behavioral theory (CBT) as a science-based model for exploring and understanding spirituality and spiritual experience (Figure 2).

Of importance, practical application of these CBT concepts to explore the experience of spirituality and faith, *spontaneously* led to revealing a comprehensive and integrated understanding of spirituality with

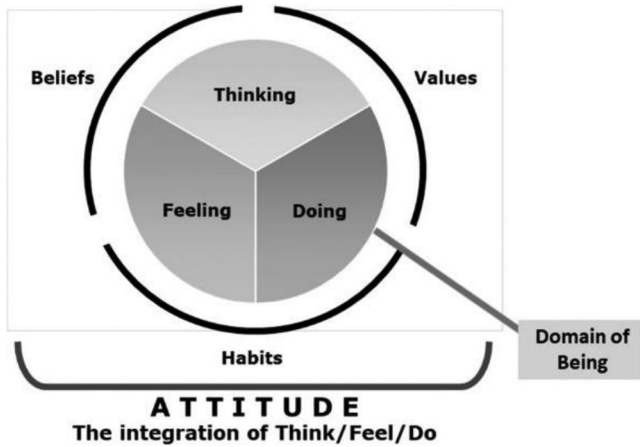


spontaneous emergence in this framework of many of the concepts identified in the review above—self-worth, competence, confidence, self-esteem, empathy and compassion, connectedness, relationship, beliefs, values, behaviors, identity, wholeness, meaning and purpose, love, faith, truth, and transcendence. This emergence even included the necessary activity components of being open-minded, open-hearted, and open-handed as recommended by Sherrod and Spiewak (2008).

It is noteworthy that this exploration was guided by the work of William James ([1902] 1970) as he describes the life of religion “consists of the belief that there is an *unseen order*, and that our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves thereto. This belief and this adjustment are the religious *attitude* in the soul.” James uses “religious” as roughly equivalent to our use of the word “spiritual,” and he specifically connects this unseen order with our “supreme good.” “Unseen order” in this regard is likened to the situation within the history of science, whereby the laws of motion and gravity were present, but not “seen” or identified until Isaac Newton identified their order. Newton pursued this unseen order within the objective world as this work identifies a previously unseen order in the subjective world of experience. It is proposed that this unseen order is the description of a spiritual core that is present in all people that is opened by this process.

To date, no other theory has identified such an integrated and comprehensive framework of spiritual experience. It highlights the value of using a CBT approach in future research on spirituality and spiritual experience, bringing research of spirituality into a direct science-based foundation.

This “Framework” is being presented here because of its identification of the *harmful* role that identity may play in blocking spiritual awareness and spiritual development. To some degree, this thesis directly challenges over 50 years of research and programs promoting the positive goals of identity development and achievement. In looking closer, it suggests that the pervasiveness of the current almost universal approach to promoting “identity achievement” is harmful in the manner in which it is currently conceived, and may account for adult society’s current extreme polarization and division into a “we” versus “they” battleground. Research and programs have presented no effective solution for what to do when two people with a strong identity expression come into opposition. The current societal solution appears to be a battleground where “power” is the answer. The severity of these consequences demands an immediate evaluation of these claims and a redirection of our approach to adolescence and identity development until this is resolved. This review proposes that spirituality or a spiritual process is the best solution to move from power to “empowerment” and can provide a framework for future research and youth development efforts.



**Figure 3.** The integration of thinking, feeling, and doing (the domain of being) opens awareness of the experience of “being,” which is captured by the focus on “attitude.” See text for discussion of limitations of beliefs, values and habits in discussions of spirituality.

### Cognitive Behavioral Theory Foundation

This process begins with the CBT elements of thoughts, feelings, and actions/behaviors as the fundamental descriptors of subjective experience (Figure 3).

Religious experience becomes included when these descriptors are incorporated into concepts of beliefs, values, and habits. These are all part of the exploration phase in identity development with adolescents. Over time, beliefs, values, and habits are to become solidified developmentally into the commitment to a religious identity. This may take the form of identification, attachment, or engagement with a specific religion or religious tradition. Adolescents and young adults may progress to the various religious identity statuses:

- foreclosure (with little exploration, and strong commitment to an adopted religious tradition);
- moratorium (with continued exploration without a commitment to a specific religious tradition);
- diffusion (with exploration of various beliefs, values, and habits in experiences that may either be in conflict with one another or with other identity domains, or just do not become integrated into a commitment possibly due to limited guidance, poor modeling or inadequate opportunity for civic engagement);

- achievement (with exploration leading to a positive/healthy integration often resulting from empowering guidance, attuned modeling, and/or positive religion/civic engagement).

Part of the difficulty adolescents may have with successful integration is related to a complexity of the terms beliefs, values and habits. In general usage, each of these terms may only include two of the three elements of thoughts, feelings and actions. As a result, these terms may include both explicit and implicit components. For instance, *beliefs* may focus on emotionally laden thoughts often disconnected from action, as seen in hypocrisy. For example, someone with an explicitly stated belief in the equality of all people (“All God’s children are good”) may act in an implicit manner that shows inequality, discrimination, or outright prejudice and racism. *Values* are thoughtful behaviors generally with neutral emotional experience because they are ego-syntonic, until they are challenged, at which time they become very emotional. A person may explicitly value taking care of others before themselves—until it is pointed out how this has led to financial or emotional losses, and implicit anger and sorrow arise. *Habits* are explicit emotionally driven behaviors that due to our brain function with short-term rewarded repetition may become implicitly disconnected from thought, especially seen with harmful habits, such as in addictions and self-destructive behaviors.

This description demonstrates how there is an inadequacy to capture full experience with these words, which is accounted for by the recognition of *explicit cognition* described as reflective, deliberative, time consuming, conscious, and articulate and *implicit cognition* described as intuitive, automatic, instantaneous, unconscious, and nonlinguistic. As illustrated, the disconnection in some experiences of beliefs, values, and habits can be accounted for by lack of integration between the explicit and implicit part of beliefs, values, and habits, which may even be contradictory as identified in the Cognitive Science of Religion (McCauley 2020). As with the examples in the previous paragraph, an explicit “belief” in the equality of all people may have implicit “actions” showing inequality or discrimination. An explicitly stated “value” of taking care of others before themselves may have implicit resentments or regrets emotionally. Explicit “habits” are often associated with an implicit disconnection from thoughts. This incomplete integration of experience in our language and awareness is often what leads discussions of religion, spirituality, and identity formation that focus on beliefs, values, and habits to be interminable, with often contradictory and fruitless endings. Even in research literature, the use of these terms is unintegrated or noninclusive of the possibility of this lack of integration. However, if belief is expanded to conviction, it may now be integrated and capture action/behaviors to include all three elements. If value is expanded to commitment, it may now include the implicit

element of emotions. If habit is expanded to practice, there is usually a more thoughtful element involved.

### Importance of Attitude

Integration of these three elements of thoughts, feelings, and actions into an *attitude* moves our awareness from individual elements of experience (which always occur simultaneously) into the integrated experience of “being.” An attitude is an integrated experience of thoughts, feelings, and actions. An attitude of pessimism may include a thought of “life never works out,” a feeling of discouragement or hopelessness, and an action of withdrawal or avoidance. A “know it all” attitude may occur with a thought of “I know all of this,” a feeling of disappointment, possibly mixed with feeling superior, and an action of dismissal or withdrawal. An attitude is the orientation, direction, or relationship that our whole “being” has in relation to the world—including toward objects, self, and other. In boating, attitude is the relationship of the bow and stern angle to the water. In flying, attitude is based on the relationship of the nose and tail to the natural horizon. Webster (Neufeldt 1997) defines attitude as “a manner of acting, feeling, or thinking that shows one’s disposition”—integration of feeling, thought, and behavior.

Attitude is a neglected and often absent part in discussions regarding adolescent development and identity as it is a poorly understood concept and is often misused. It is rarely mentioned in research of identity development and even in PYD. Attitude is critical to the maturation of adolescents as a basic orientation even to these simple fundamental elements of experience, as most adolescents fundamentally develop a specific attitude about these three simple elements of experience. Our culture supports an attitude that we are what we feel, or we are what we think, or even we are what we do, rather than the healthy attitude that we have thoughts, we have feelings, and we have actions/behaviors...and... we have the capacity to make a *choice* as to which of these we empower. This major lesson of mature development has been sorely neglected in our literature and research efforts.

Early adolescent attitudes already encompass the childhood experiences of individual elements of being (thoughts, feelings, and actions) with already incorporated beliefs, values and habits/practices that immediately promote, or inhibit exploration in the religious or spiritual domain. These early attitudes toward religion and spirituality may—without any exploration—immediately direct a teen toward religion or not, toward spirituality or not, and even opposed to religion, spirituality, both or neither! As will be shown, these attitudes may dramatically and harmfully affect any future identity development in all domains.

Attitudes specifically toward religion may determine whether or not a teen engages in, or responds to, the guidance, modeling and civic engagement influence of any religious community. Attitudes specifically toward spirituality may determine whether or not a teen engages, responds to, or even explores any aspects of spiritual development. A critical question that adults in a community must address that can dramatically influence healthy adolescent development is “What attitude does a specific religious community have toward spirituality?” and “What attitude does a spiritual community have toward religion and religious expressions?” We have already reviewed how a religious community may or may not promote spirituality and a spiritual community may or may not promote religion or religious expression.

A critical difference that we have already noted, is that spirituality promotes universality emphasizing connectedness and belonging which avoids the dangers of identity with separateness and “me versus other.” The importance of this is seen when it is recognized that *spirituality is an attitude of our being in the world*. Spirituality is about a specific relationship of our awareness and *connection to the self, others, and to the world*. In the Framework of Spirituality, spirituality is functionally defined as a “quality of our relationship to whatever or whomever is most important (*supreme*) in life” (Bjorklund 1983, italics added). Any religion that promotes this universality, connectedness and belonging is generally also considered spiritual and avoids the noted dangers of religious identity. The true combination of both religion and spiritual may be what promotes optimal development in other domains. This highlights the importance and necessity of identifying and addressing *early* adolescent attitudes to both religion and spirituality as these have dramatic impact on all later identity development in other domains.

For example, a specific religious community may promote religious identity development with nonintegrated implicit biases toward specific others (Blacks, Whites, gays, non-Christians, non-religious/atheists, non-Americans, and so on) that thwarts any further exploration of identity development in multiple domains (race, gender, religious, ethnic, and so on). This leads to systemic adoption of prejudices and biases attached to a very powerful religious identity. A different religious community may promote religious identity development with an integration of all elements and an attitude of universal acceptance that empowers adolescent’s integrated development in all of these domains. This integrated religious identity may or may not also open the development into the experience of spirituality as will be described further.

### Process of Making Distinctions

This definition of spirituality above defined as a “quality” explains the *ineffability* of spirituality—unable to be described in words. A quality, such as soft, is real, and is a distinction of experience. Its ineffability can be experienced as we try to describe soft, using words. The use of the word *distinction* comes from Jean Piaget (1969), who described the innate developmental process of making distinctions—developing a schema (mental representation) that undergoes assimilation (incorporation of experience into a schema) and accommodation (changing of schema to represent experience)—as we make distinctions of characteristics of objects, and then progresses to distinctions of relationships between objects, distinctions of relationships between people, and then moral distinctions involving relationships of ideas/abstract concepts.

Since spirituality is an integrated experience of being, and not just an experience of individual elements of thoughts, feelings and actions, the process of making *distinctions of being* is necessary. A distinction of being is different than our usual thought/cognitive identifications of “red,” or our feeling/emotional identifications of “anger,” or our identification of specific action/behaviors such as “eating.” A distinction of being requires the integrated presence or occurrence of thoughts, feelings and actions simultaneously. A good example of a distinction of being and its development is “balance.” Learning balance is a process that is only achieved when it becomes, for instance, a thought of “I’m not falling,” a feeling of usually exhilaration and fear, and the actual action of “balancing.” All of us can probably remember our being aware of and practicing to achieve this final integration, which culminates in a distinction of being called balance. Remarkably, once a person has made a distinction of being, it is embedded in an integrated experiential memory that can be called upon years later, even without continued repetition, as may occur when a person tries to ride a bicycle 20 years after having done so previously.

### Distinctions of Worth and Dignity

Our work has identified that there are two important distinctions related to spiritual development—the distinctions of worth and dignity. The promotion of this spiritual attitude occurs when a person makes a meaningful commitment to the worth and dignity of every person (including their self). This begins and guides the adolescent journey into the spiritual and mystical (see later explanation of mystical) experiences of connectedness with self, others and the world.

Familiar in western civilization, Christian spirituality and spiritual experience highlight when “the soul felt its worth” as noted in the popular song “O Holy Night.” This connection between spirituality, soul, and worth is in many religious and spiritual traditions. It may include traditions in

which the word soul may be associated with an entity (God, Allah) or used to represent a certain depth of experience, awareness or connectedness (Atman in Hinduism and Buddhism).

In this framework of spirituality, worth (as self-worth) and dignity (as operationalized below) are critical experiences related to openness to spiritual experience. Understanding this requires a closer look at the meanings of “worth” that often lead to confusion. There is the “worth of being” and the “worth as an experience of being.” Worth (of Being) can be expressed with the phrase “All people are *worthy* of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” This is an unprovable axiom that occurs from having been created as a person. The question of “Would humans have worth if we were not human?” has an answer as enigmatic as “What is the sound of one hand clapping?” Just as clapping of one hand cannot be understood since the definition of clapping includes at least two hands, human worth cannot be understood outside of the experience of being human.

Distinguishing worth as an experience of Being is experienced as self-worth, and begins with the definition:

Worth = that *quality* of a person or thing that lends importance and value that is measurable by the esteem in which the person or thing is held (Neufeldt 1997, emphasis added).

Again, note the definition identifies worth as a quality, contributing to the ineffability of spiritual experience. Operationalizing this within our CBT framework:

<u>Domain of Being</u>	<u>Self-Worth</u>
Thoughts	self-confidence
Feelings	self-esteem
Actions	self-competence/self-efficacy

Self-worth is the integrated experience of self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-competence or self-efficacy. Each of these has been defined and measured in the social psychological sciences, including self-worth (Bracken 1996). Research shows that there is a developmental progression from self-competence/efficacy (age 1–2 years), progressing to self-esteem (3–4 years), self-confidence (5–8 years), and becoming integrated as self-worth (8–10 years) (Harter 1990). Additionally, this process reveals that *shame* is not just an emotion but an ontological reaction (affects all of being) to injury of self-worth resulting in being “unworthy,” which is what makes shame have such a profound impact on all of “being.”

From this perspective, empowered self-worth is a positive and important goal for the latency years. This would ideally prepare children for the upcoming almost magical transformation of adolescence with puberty, involving unprecedented hormonal and body changes, architectural

overhaul of brain pruning and reconstruction, intense emotions and expansive cognitive abilities, with novel social opportunities. This is an opportunity to engage young adolescents into being aware of and taking advantage of the upcoming transformation metaphorically similar to the caterpillar (pre-adolescent) entering the chrysalis of adolescence and emerging as a butterfly!

True spiritual experience as the mystical and seemingly magical transformation can make this happen. A key to the spiritual development and transformational experience of adolescence is the foundation of empowered self-worth expanding into the distinction of dignity.

Distinguishing and operationalizing dignity (Figure 2) in this framework requires that the word dignity is not used as a noun, as something we have, but as an “expression of being.” This is very different than almost all other uses of the word dignity (Pellegrino 2008; Rosen 2012; Hicks 2018), which are usually not clearly separated from the concept of worth. This distinction requires integration of all three domains beginning with the definition:

Dignity: the *quality* of being worthy of esteem or honor (Neufeldt 1997, emphasis added).

Again, note that dignity is also a quality of “being” and the critical characteristic distinguishing it is *honor*. The inclusion of worthy in this definition demonstrates the close relationship of distinctions of dignity developing on an empowered foundation of the experience and distinction of self-worth.

Historically, philosophers (Descartes [1637] 2004) and scientists have exclusively identified the specific characteristic that we honor most in humans in the domain of thinking as *reason*, beginning with our ability as humans to make conscious choices. Reflect back to the previous description of a necessity for adolescents to make a choice to move beyond the early adolescent attitude of being solely their feelings, thoughts, or actions. This “choice” is the first, critical step in adolescent progression to a spiritual attitude by opening the awareness of a new level of agency and self-control, and the opening to explore their thoughts, feelings and actions with a new level of awareness. Notice in the Framework of Spirituality that dignity includes three aspects in each domain—a defining characteristic (i.e., reason), its initial expression (i.e., choice), and its expansion to social expression (i.e., wisdom)—since dignity has both personal and social connectedness.

In the domain of feeling, what we honor most about being human is *compassion* (Dalai Lama 2011, 45), beginning initially with our incredible capacity for empathy due to language and mirror neuron functionality, and expanding to caring with its social expression of *justice*.

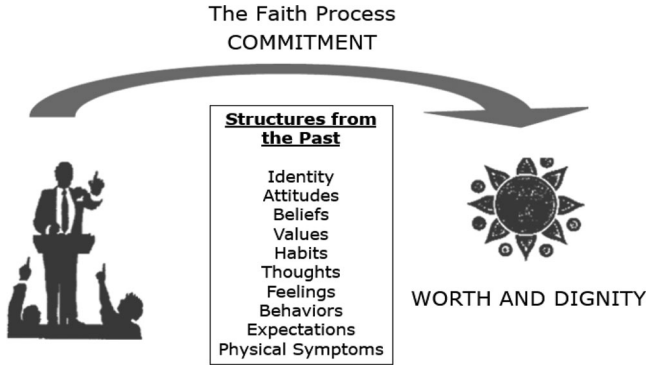


In the domain of doing, what we honor most about being human is *courage* (Tillich 1952), beginning initially with the courage of honesty with ourselves and with others which determines the basis of social reality. This expands in its social expression beyond courage needed for survival, to the actions of giving and *generosity* that honor human flourishing. Additionally, this process reveals that *guilt* is also not just an emotion but is an ontological reaction to injury of dignity that is related to a disempowering, or powerlessness of self-expression in each of its domains. For instance, guilt results from a disempowering insult or injury to dignity associated with the judgments related to each domain—"I should have made a choice with better reason," or "I should have been more empathic and compassionate," or "I should have been more honest and courageous to do what needed to be done."

This powerful source of adolescent transformation comes from the recognition that empowering a person's experience of self-worth and dignity leads to a spontaneous opening into a new awareness of true spiritual experience. This new awareness is described by phenomenology (Winnicott 1953; Bauer 2018) and thousands of years of Eastern religious traditions (Kaza 2018). This awareness results in opening to true spiritual experience with characteristics of *immanence* (connection within oneself) and *transcendence* (connection outside of oneself) as it occurs within a social setting. In working with this definition of spirituality, the qualities (not exclusive or exhaustive) that this framework heuristically associates with spirituality are:

- (1) **Connectedness/Unity:** An experience of connection with something beyond our usual awareness of self or beyond our usual awareness of other. This connection may have characteristics of immanence or transcendence.
- (2) **Aliveness/Vitality:** An energy and alertness that was not present before the experience.
- (3) **Wholeness/Integrity:** A sense of wholeness that may be with the world and with ourselves, including experiences in our present and acceptance of experiences in our past.
- (4) **Peacefulness/Serenity/Joy/Awe:** An emotional response that may include peace or serenity, but it may include joy, or awe or other strong emotions depending on the situation.
- (5) **Meaning/Purpose:** A result of this new experience is a new perception of meaning or purpose within life.

Opening to this awareness can be mild and gradual (i.e., an insight) or dramatic (i.e., a conversion experience) (James [1902] 1970; AA 2001),



**Figure 4.** Making a commitment to the worth and dignity of every person creates increased awareness of blocks (aspects of past personal experiences) that prevent individuals from keeping this commitment. Processing these blocks increases a person’s self-worth and dignity as it opens the spiritual core.

often depending on the nature of a person’s attitude to spirituality and personal experiences of self-worth and dignity.

In summary, the empowering of an adolescent’s self-worth and dignity leads to an opening to a new awareness of spiritual experience and spirituality as part of a developing spiritual identity. As shown previously by Goldstein (2010), this developing spiritual identity is a process independent of and can be incorporated with other personal and social identities such as gender identity, ethnic identity, educational/ vocational identity, relationship identity, dis-ability identity, religious identity, family identity, cultural identity/SES, national identity, and even political identity.

### Blocks to Spiritual Identity

This approach to spirituality becomes part of the exploration process of identity formation during adolescence. An aid in this exploration and spiritual processing is illustrated as the “Faith Process” that reveals relationships between spirituality and faith (Figure 4).

The use of the word *faith* in this context does not refer to faith in terms of a specific belief or with a specific object or attachment. An example of faith as an everyday experience occurs when we go to sleep at night having “faith” that we will wake up in the morning. Our brains are designed to rely on this automatic “belief” that is necessary to manage the multitude of repetitive actions as part of daily function. The specific use of the term in this “Faith Process” is described by Dewey ([1934] 1980, 23): “For all endeavors for the better is moved by faith in what is possible, not by adherence to the actual.” A further understanding of the role of faith in this process will be described in the section on Creative Forces.

The faith process engages what is identified as a *spiritual attitude* in the world by making a commitment to empowering the worth and dignity of everyone including the self. Making and keeping a commitment to empower all persons' worth and dignity is largely a possibility and only with discipline becomes an actuality. As persons make and practice personal commitment to the worth and dignity of every person (including themselves), spiritual opening continues and is limited by specific blocks related to their past. These blocks, referred to as "Structures from the Past," are organized by complexity and include identity, attitudes, beliefs, values, habits, thoughts, feelings, behaviors, expectations, and physical symptoms, which all require processing. This processing may be done in a therapeutic setting (e.g., mental health or psychiatry), a religious setting (Hindu, Buddhist, Taoist, or Christian), a growth setting (self-development programs, Alcoholics Anonymous, SMART Recovery), or a learning setting (through work, school, academics, community education). As this occurs, there becomes a greater faith in self, others, and the world as the spiritual core opens further.

Processing these blocks to keep one's commitment to the self-worth and dignity of every person and maintain a spiritual attitude and develop spiritual identity requires personal transformation. As this process occurs in the exploration of relationship with others, blocks to keeping this commitment may occur with many other aspects of identity development and social interaction related to gender, ethnic, race, educational/ vocational, relationship, dis-ability, religious, family, cultural/SES, national, and even political identifications.

How does a teen with developing Christian *religious identity* keep their commitment to empower the self-worth and dignity of a Muslim, or an atheist, when they disagree with them fundamentally?

How does a teen developing a gay or lesbian gender identity empower the self-worth and dignity of a person with an *attitude* that transgender is a perversion or a sin and should be treated or punished?

How does a teen developing their Black/African American racial identity keep their commitment to the self-worth and dignity of a person with a *belief* that white people are superior, that *value* the genetic priority of the Caucasian race, that *habitually* and automatically dismiss any need expressed by a Black person?

The key question of processing then becomes "How do I disagree with this person and still empower their self-worth and dignity?" This is where this process differs from the promotion of identity development. Identity formation often promotes stronger identification and assertive expression of a teen's identity which as noted before can lead to conflict. The difficulty in answering this question is subtle because in most situations, disagreement is not just disagreement. Disagreement is also usually expressed with a disempowering by dismissing, discounting, discrediting,

disparaging, or disrespecting among other “disses.” The nature of identity development focused on “me” or “my identity” promotes the distinction of “other” that is usually associated with judgment that includes these “disses.” These “disses” become the “implicit” part of nonintegrated beliefs, values and habits. Disempowerment lacks empathy/ compassion, may lack true reason or rationality, undermines courage, and usually harms self-esteem, self-confidence, or self-competence depending on the action. To keep the stated commitment requires personal *transformation* of attitudes, thoughts, feelings, and/or beliefs, which leads to expansion of empathy/compassion, reason/wisdom, and further honesty and courage. Identity formation involves adoption and assertion of “my identity” and emphasizes self, whereas spiritual transformation always includes the other! This transformation of spirituality empowers self-esteem and general self-worth and dignity of both the person with the commitment and often contributes to transformation of the other person.

A wonderful example of this is found in the movie “Gandhi” (1982), in which a Hindu man who tries to keep this commitment approaches Mahatma Gandhi. To paraphrase, he says “Bapu (an Indian word of respect literally meaning “father”), how do I make amends for killing this Muslim boy’s father as he is now an orphan?” Gandhi’s thoughtful reply was “Take this child and raise him in your family as if he were your own child...and be sure to raise him as a Muslim.” This solution clearly requires a transformation of his personal and religious identity as a Hindu as well as requiring an expansion of empathy/compassion, self-honesty and courage, and personal choices with reason. This transformation necessary to keep his commitment to the worth and dignity of every person would contribute to both his and the child’s enhanced self-worth and dignity.

An example of a block in developing adolescent identity may be as simple as a student that values academics may harbor judgment of a student that values vocational or artistic achievements. Processing of past events that contributed to development of this reaction will require transformation of attitudes, beliefs, values, habits, and so on in order to see and keep the commitment to the self-worth and dignity of the other person.

Specific attitudes that block this commitment may include attitudes related to authority, self-righteousness, powerlessness, self-pity, and others. These attitudes, as well as beliefs, values, and habits that block this commitment are usually remnants brought into adolescence from past religious/spiritual, personal, or social experiences.

### Keys to Spiritual Transformation Process

Three keys of practice (praxis) have been identified that facilitate opening to spirituality, one in each domain. In the domain of feeling, the key is *open-heartedness*: open to all feelings

without judgment. In the domain of thinking, the key is *open-mindedness*: open to all thoughts and hypotheses without judgment. Without this key, people that demand “I can’t understand this, so it is not true” or “I don’t trust what I don’t understand” will get stuck. They are unable to experience an openness to this spiritual core. The question that is posed is “What if there is knowledge that cannot be understood until it is experienced?” Reason and judgment must be suspended, and by intuition, one must open themselves to the mystical part of this process where *intuition* is defined as “the direct knowing or learning of something without the conscious use of reasoning” (Neufeldt 1997) and *mystical* is defined as “attaining knowledge of spiritual truths through intuition, without the use of conscious reasoning” (Neufeldt 1997). In the domain of doing, the key is *open-handedness*: open to reaching out to get or give support without judgment of consequence. The illustration above about Gandhi demonstrates how open-mindedness, open-heartedness, and open-handedness were necessary for the transformation of the Hindu man.

Blocks to each of these openings come from life experiences of being open-hearted, open-minded, and open-handed, and being rejected, ignored, abandoned, humiliated, and generally hurt. Past hurts have one become protective and guarded against opening these “keys.” Trauma, including adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), which are reported to be experienced by 40% of the population, damages worth and dignity (Felitti et al. 1998). For example, if a child is sexually assaulted, they may respond with the experience of shame, guilt and failure, or even being broken where experiences of self-worth (self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-competence), and experiences of dignity (making choices from reason, compassion for self and others, and courage) are severely damaged.

#### Solution: Spiritual Process versus Spiritual Identity

This inclusion and understanding of the keys necessary for success in this spiritual identity processing support the model by Sherrod and Spiewak (2008) requiring an active engagement of head, heart, and hands. They suggested that “one who fully integrates each branch would probably garner wide recognition for his or her spiritual mastery” and “framing spirituality and its development into the three interconnected spheres of heart, hands and head insightfully addresses the definitional issues while also offering guidance for articulating research questions.” In fact, even more profound, this necessary activity component suggests that research pursuing an end point such as spiritual identity may not be an appropriate pursuit at all. Spiritual identity, as with any other identity, denotes something that one “has” or as a goal one has reached such as identity achievement. Instead, theory and research should drop the conceptual idea of spiritual

identity and realize that successful/positive adolescent youth development is better understood and studied as requiring success and mastery in a *spiritual process*. The practice and mastery of this spiritual process in the exploration and commitment stages of any adolescent identity development previously discussed, creates this as an entirely new goal of adolescence beyond “identity achievement.”

In fact, mastering of this spiritual process would likely replace the outcome described whereby aspects of identity block spiritual growth. This could be explained if the blocks of identity development are occurring due to nonintegrated identity formation and commitment. For example, return to the earlier person with a stated belief in the equality of all people (“All God’s children are good”) that acts in a way that shows inequality, discrimination, or outright prejudice and racism to a teen. Open-mindedness will allow the receiving teen to see this discrepancy and with reason/honesty can guide them to note this discrepancy to the other person, using empathy/compassion for understanding. Learning from personal experiences that have undergone spiritual processing, the receiving teen can act to empower the actor’s self-worth and dignity—with courage to tell the actor that their actions are hurtful. Further sharing with empathy about similar situations in their own life coming from their own ego-identity judgment and hurt can demonstrate compassion that the receiving teen may have been given in their life that led to their own spiritual growth, and lead to expressing concern, caring and eventually a loving support for the prejudiced actor. Behind the actor’s prejudiced actions is the spiritual core of a teen “yearning” for integrated fulfillment and empowering of their own self-worth and dignity.

This spiritual process can lead to integration of the explicit with the implicit aspects into an experienced *wholeness* or *integrity*. Wholeness and integrity are defining parts of spirituality. For truly successful adolescent and young adult development, understanding and demonstration of this process leads to the relatively radical conclusion that PYD and identity formation should include three processes—exploration, spiritual processing, and commitment!

This work suggests that “spiritual identity” is a misnomer and is a concept that should be dropped from future research and move toward including research of “spiritual process.” This approach could still be fully consistent with development of religious identity occurring with the guidance and engagement of specific religious traditions or institutions; could promote PYD in adolescents with no religious affiliations or attachments; and could promote expanded exploration of various religious traditions. This exploration of other religious traditions may lead to adoption of meaningful social, ethical and moral principles that could be expressed as religiousness or religiosity without requiring commitment to a religion or specific religious tradition. *All* of these outcomes would contribute to ex-

panded experience of spirituality and spiritual empowerment. Beginning adolescence with this spiritual processing could promote fuller integration of various identities (race, ethnic, gender, and so on) in all domains. The always present inclusion of the “other” in this identity expression avoids the separateness and competition of usual identity formation contributing to polarization. This processing could then fulfill the transformational task of adolescence during which each aspect of identity in all social dimensions would become the beautiful “butterfly” with a commitment to fully empower the other. The outcome—a Black, transgendered, foreign, Muslim adolescent or young adult fully expresses their self-worth and dignity through these identities in a cooperatively empowering relationship with the White, straight, American, Christian adolescent or young adult. This would be a transformed world resulting from spiritually transformed adolescent development.

### Opening to Creative Forces for Global Worldview

Following this process promotes further new transformational experiences of adolescence. Practicing the keys of open-heartedness, open-mindedness, and open-handedness expands the openness to a deeper spirituality and further opens experiences of what we call Creative Forces/Creative Openings, as indicated in Figure 2. These experiences are described as “openings” as there is an increased opening of awareness and are described as “forces” because the experience of them is forceful. When *Love* as a Creative Force (in the domain of feeling) appears in a group, or even in an individual, it has been described as being like the Holy Spirit descending as noted in Christian writings and conversion experiences by William James (1902 [1970]). This is not love as a feeling, or love as a commitment like “I love you,” but it is like the Greek “agape,” the love of god, the divine, life, or love of a higher *Self*. *Truth*, as a Creative Force (in the domain of thinking) does not refer to an absolute or dualistic truth like right/wrong, or good/bad, but like Gandhi’s Satyagraha, the Truth Force (Erikson 1989), as the visceral recognition when worth and dignity are damaged. This is the foundation of Gandhi’s movement for nonviolence and the fundamental source of our common human morality. This psycho-neurobiological recognition within us becomes forcefully activated in situations as we have recently seen in the United States with acts of violence involving social injustice and racism. Finally, the Creative Force of *Faith* (in the domain of doing), as an action, not a belief—is to take that leap across a chasm of unknown, without proof, which results in an intense and sometimes thrilling and even ecstatic spiritual opening. Opening adolescents to these Creative Forces is likely to have a dramatic impact on mental illness, violence, social injustice, criminal behaviors and overall well-being and happiness. These experiences when

expanded with civic engagement to a stewardship of all life and ecological interdependence will provide our youth with what is necessary to meet the global challenges in this millennium. This new way of thinking provides a realistic and achievable response to a well-known Einstein quote:

“We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.”

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, our empowerment of identity achievement as a goal of adolescence has resulted from our Western materialistic and dualistic (me versus other—my identity versus other) focus on achieving and having things (identity as a thing or an end goal to have). Elevating identity achievement to such a priority goal is a subtle example of how our dualistic ego-identity thinking has actually led to its own narcissistic grandiose conclusion that ego and ego-identity achievement is the ultimate goal and value of adolescence. In contrast, spiritual processing promotes a nondualistic universally inclusive focus on “being” a person in empowering relationship to others. This facilitates a relational transformation from I-It to I-Thou as promoted by Martin Buber (1958) as an essence of spiritual relationship. When culturally and properly promoted, this I-Thou relationship expands beyond the self and other persons to create a transformational relationship to promote an entire socio-economic-political eco-spirituality.

This spiritual processing empowers the fullest expression of being human—dignity—with empowering the capacities of what we honor most about being human—making choices from reason, empathy and compassion for self and all others, and courage with honesty to self and others (honesty being the necessary foundation of all social reality). Progression of the spiritual commitment and conviction to empower the self-worth and dignity of all people becomes the goal not only of adolescence but of their lifetime. Mastery of this spiritual process as a lifelong endeavor can truly promote the positive vision of adolescent metamorphosis (transformation) as our adolescent butterflies use this power for personal and world transformation.

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