

**DISSERTATION PROPOSAL ASSESSMENT FORM**

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**TH7179: Thinking Theologically: An Introduction to Theology and its  
Methodologies**

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**Please fill out each numbered section of this form in compliance with the assessment question and submit it via the stated turnitin link on the module portal page.**

**1. Proposed Title:**

Christian Occupational Identity Formation: The role of Christianity in formation of occupational identity in relation to James Marcia's four identity development statuses.

**2. Brief introduction to the key issue(s) being explored:**

Identity formation is one of the most important and influential processes we as human being go through. A well-developed identity gives us a sense of our strengths and weaknesses; our individual uniqueness and can contribute towards higher self-esteem, lower levels of anxiety, advanced moral reasoning and increased critical thinking. But what role does Christian faith play in reaching this "identity achievement"?

Focusing on occupational identity; how does Christianity help transition us through the other status' of "identity diffusion, foreclosure, and moratorium"? What elements of Christian practice, or theology support this transition? How can the church better support adolescence in transition through this crucial stage of development?

**3. Critical outline of the existing literature on the proposed field of research:**

There are two well-established theories of identity formation. Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development and, building upon that, is James Marcia's identity status theory outlined in his book "Ego Identity: A Handbook for Psychosocial Research". This paper will build upon Marcia's theory identifying the role Christianity plays in the broader formation of identity as people transition out of the different status' before ending in identity achievement.

Marcia recognises the role of religion in the formation of a religious identity but research is lacking in understanding the role of Christianity (or any other religion) in the formation of identity as a whole, across the different life domains identified (politics, occupation, religion, intimate relationships, friendships, and gender roles).

The "Handbook of Identity Theory and Research" edited by Seth J. Schwartz, Koen Luyckx, Vivian L. Vignoles contains a number of papers on Marcia's theory; the process of how identity is formed; a section on moral and spiritual domains and finally a paper by Vladimir B. Skorikov and Fred W. Vondracek on occupational identity. Again, these are separated by domain, separating the role of religion from occupation.

Pamela Estyne King of Fuller Theological Seminary has authored a number of papers on topics around the area of identity formation and the role of religion within it; focusing both on youth people and adolescents. King co-authored "The Reciprocating Self: Human Development in Theological Perspective" and in 2017 authored a paper looking at the role

of religious service in the formation of emerging adults. In King's paper "Religion and Identity", a positive relationship between religion and identity formation is discussed.

Eddy van der Borgh edits volume 16 of the Studies in Reformed Theology focused on Christian Identity. This study looks at identity from multiple angles including the theological basis for Christian identity and Christian identity in the public square.

Philip Francis Esler, Aaron Kuecker and Judith Lieu authored books on the area of Christian identity within scripture (Romans and Luke-Acts) and comment on how that relates to the context of the time Jesus was living.

Tim Keller examines the meaning of work in his book "Every Good Endeavour". Keller focuses on the vision of work laid out in the bible; it's purpose and more importantly for this area of research, our purpose in relation to work.

"Kielhofner's Model of Human Occupation: Theory and Application" edited by Renee Taylor and authored by Gary Kielhofner outlines Kielhofner's Model of Human Occupation. This examines the many factors that contribute towards the formation of occupational identity including, but not examined in specific detail, environmental factors such as faith or religion.

#### **4. Rationale and aims of the project:**

Known as a "generation with an identity crisis"; the desire to know and understand who we are has become the question of a generation. The formation of identity, and how we go about understanding who we are. When I was working with young people before university, and then with students at university, I often heard the phrase "I don't know what I want to do" or "I don't know what to be". Even with university students studying a specific discipline; the general questions of identity, and also the individual sense of professional identity, haunted them.

What role does our Christianity, our relationship with our very creator play in this formation? What do churches need to be doing to support adolescents in transitioning between the different identity status'? Marcia, for example, describes the importance of wrestling with inherited beliefs to transition to identity achievement – how can churches facilitate the examination of the claims of Christianity? Does a church provide a culture where doubt is permissible, or where strict beliefs are set out? Which of these approaches is the most helpful in the formation of identity? How does this contribute towards a firmer understanding of an individual's occupational identity?

I aim, through this dissertation, to contribute towards the wider discussion of "who we are" and the role our faith plays in helping us discover that.

#### **5. Methodology and likely analytical tools:**

A thematic literature review examining within the context of James Marcia's four statuses of adolescent identity; the development of identity within Christians. Specifically looking at how Christianity as a faith; and the practice associated with Christianity supports the broader development of an individual's occupational identity. This will be developed within the context of Kielhofner's Model of Human Occupation.

This will be demonstrated firstly through the analysis of various sources across psychology, sociology and theology, including Kielhofner's model, and relating the established research to each of Marcia's four status'. Secondly, by identifying elements of church practice or biblical theology that contribute towards the transition from each status. Finally, this study will aim to show how Christianity supports adolescents in transition through the different status' to further develop their identity. The conclusion will summarise recommendations to churches of practices they can adopt to support people in developing their identity, in line with what God intends and says about them.

## **6. Proposed structure with numbered breakdown of sections/chapters:**

The structure will be focused around the four-identity status' defining what each is, the key issues(s) that need to be resolved, and then the scriptural and practical support for addressing those issues within Christian practice.

1. Introduction
2. Overview of Erikson & Marcia's Theory
3. Overview of Kielhofner's Model
4. Occupational identity
  - 4.1. Identity Achievement
    - 4.1.1. What the ideal Christian view of this looks like
  - 4.2. Identity Diffusion
    - 4.2.1. Support Christianity offers
  - 4.3. Identity Foreclosure
    - 4.3.1. Support Christianity offers
  - 4.4. Identity Moratorium
    - 4.4.1. Support Christianity offers
5. Conclusion and Recommendations

## **7. Statement concerning whether ethical approval is required:**

No. Ethical approval is not required as the dissertation will be entirely literature based and will leverage previously completed studies and research; rather than conducting new studies.

## **8. Initial bibliography of no more than 12 relevant references (in the usual Turabian 8 Chicago style format):**

- Balswick, Jack O., Pamela Ebstye King, and Kevin S. Reimer. *The Reciprocating Self: Human Development in Theological Perspective*, n.d.
- van der Borgh, Eddy. *Christian Identity*. Vol. 16. Studies in Reformed Theology. Leiden: Brill, 2008.
- Esler, Philip Francis. *Conflict and Identity in Romans: The Social Setting of Paul's Letter*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004.
- Keller, Timothy. *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work*. Reprint. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2014.

- Kielhofner, Gary. *Kielhofner's Model of Human Occupation: Theory and Application*. Edited by Renee Taylor. 5th ed. Philadelphia: Lippincott Williams and Wilkins, 2017.
- King, Pamela Ebstyn. "Religion and Identity: The Role of Ideological, Social, and Spiritual Contexts." *Applied Developmental Science* 7, no. 3 (2003): 172–180.
- Kuecker, Aaron. *The Spirit and the "Other": Social Identity, Ethnicity and Intergroup Reconciliation in Luke-Acts*. The Library of New Testament Studies. London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013.
- Leak, Gary K. "An Assessment of the Relationship between Identity Development, Faith Development, and Religious Commitment." *Identity* 9, no. 3 (2009): 201–218.
- Lieu, Judith. *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World*. Oxford: OUP Oxford, 2004.
- Marcia, James E. *Ego Identity: A Handbook for Psychosocial Research*. New York: Springer-Verlag, 1993.
- McLean, Kate C., and Moin Syed, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Identity Development*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Schwartz, Seth J., Koen Luyckx, and Vivian L. Vignoles, eds. *Handbook of Identity Theory and Research (Volume 1 and Volume 2) (2 Vol Set)*. 2011 Edition. Vol. 2. New York: Springer, 2013.