

# ADOLESCENT PERFECTION DRIVEN DISTRESS

## Cultivating Social & Emotional Competency

By Treisha Peterson, M.S. and Catherine Dutton, Ph.D.

### INTRODUCTION

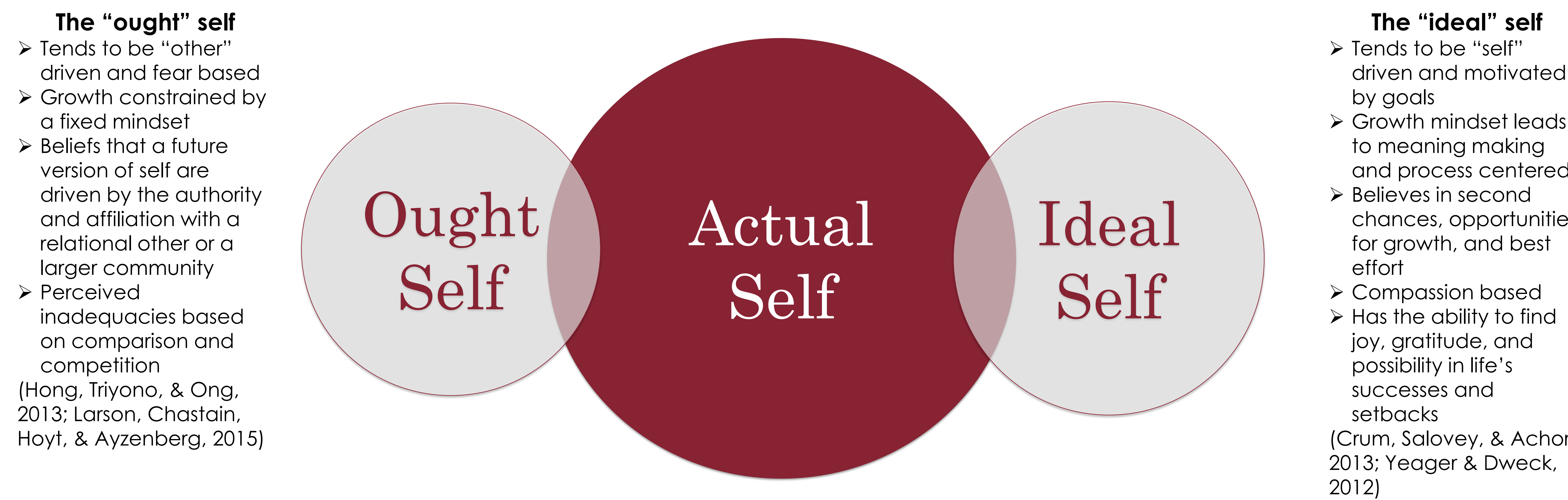
Adolescent well-being throughout the identity formative years is a critical topic in today's society, where many youth feel the pressure of high expectations and social and emotional disconnection; where many adolescents feel as if they, simply, cannot measure up to a perceived sense of self (Mascheroni, Vincent, & Jimenez, 2015; Pantic, 2014). Rising rates of identity discrepancy are often driven by factors of a perceived sense of extrinsic pressure and expectations that lead the identity seeking adolescent to experience feelings of inadequacy, isolation, and hopelessness (Van Dyke & Elias, 2007).

There is a growing and urgent need for an awareness of the rising rates of adolescent perfection driven distress in young individuals and the impact this has on negative well-being outcomes for families, schools, and communities. Coordinated efforts will be necessary among parents, educators, coaches, religious leaders, and help professionals to bridge the gap between where we are and where we want to be in the pursuit of healthy striving and positive well-being outcomes for adolescents and their families.

During this time, connection to parents, peers, relational others, and religious practices may decrease as the identity seeking adolescent explores self-discovery and independence from the values, beliefs, and traditions of their childhood (Petts, 2014). During this developmental period, peer and other relationships are critical as the adolescent becomes more self and other aware; where fear of rejection often dictates social persona. Marked by a deep desire for social acceptance, many transitioning teens mask their preferences and sense of self-identity in order to avoid negative peer evaluation, rejection, and social exclusion (Flett & Hewitt, 2014).

Feeling a strong sense of connection with family and friends can be critical to a healthy adolescent adjustment. High rates of positive wellbeing and connectedness are reported among those transitioning teens who feel supported and encouraged by parents, peers, and relational others (Chadwick & Top, 1993; Petts, 2014). In contrast, those youth who experience excessive fear, doubt, shame, and rumination often experience increased distress in the form of loneliness, anxiety, and depression (Peterman, LaBelle, & Steinberg, 2014; Petts, 2014). Negative emotional states are often associated with internalized shortcomings and helplessness, often leading to increased levels of substance abuse, eating disorders, and psychosomatic illness (Oliva, Parra, Reina, 2014; Flett & Hewitt, 2014).

## SELF-DISCREPANCY THEORY



### PERFECTION DRIVEN TRAITS

#### MALADAPTIVE TRAITS of Pursuing Perfect

- Disconnection
- Rumination
- Doubt
- Fear
- Shame

#### ADAPTIVE TRAITS of Pursuing Process

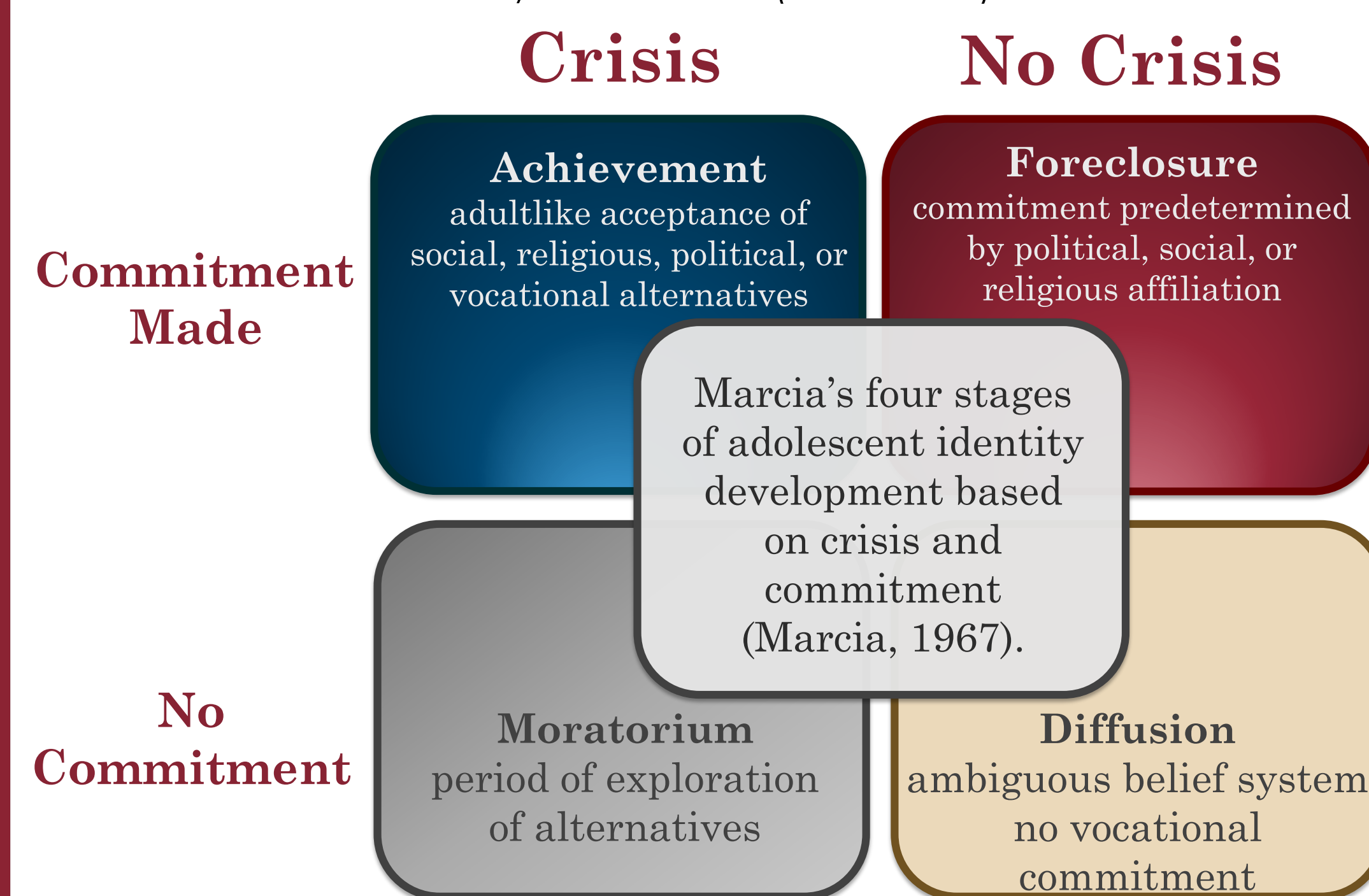
- Connection
- Reflection
- Vulnerability
- Courage
- Guilt
- Well-being

### ADOLESCENT IDENTITY FORMATION

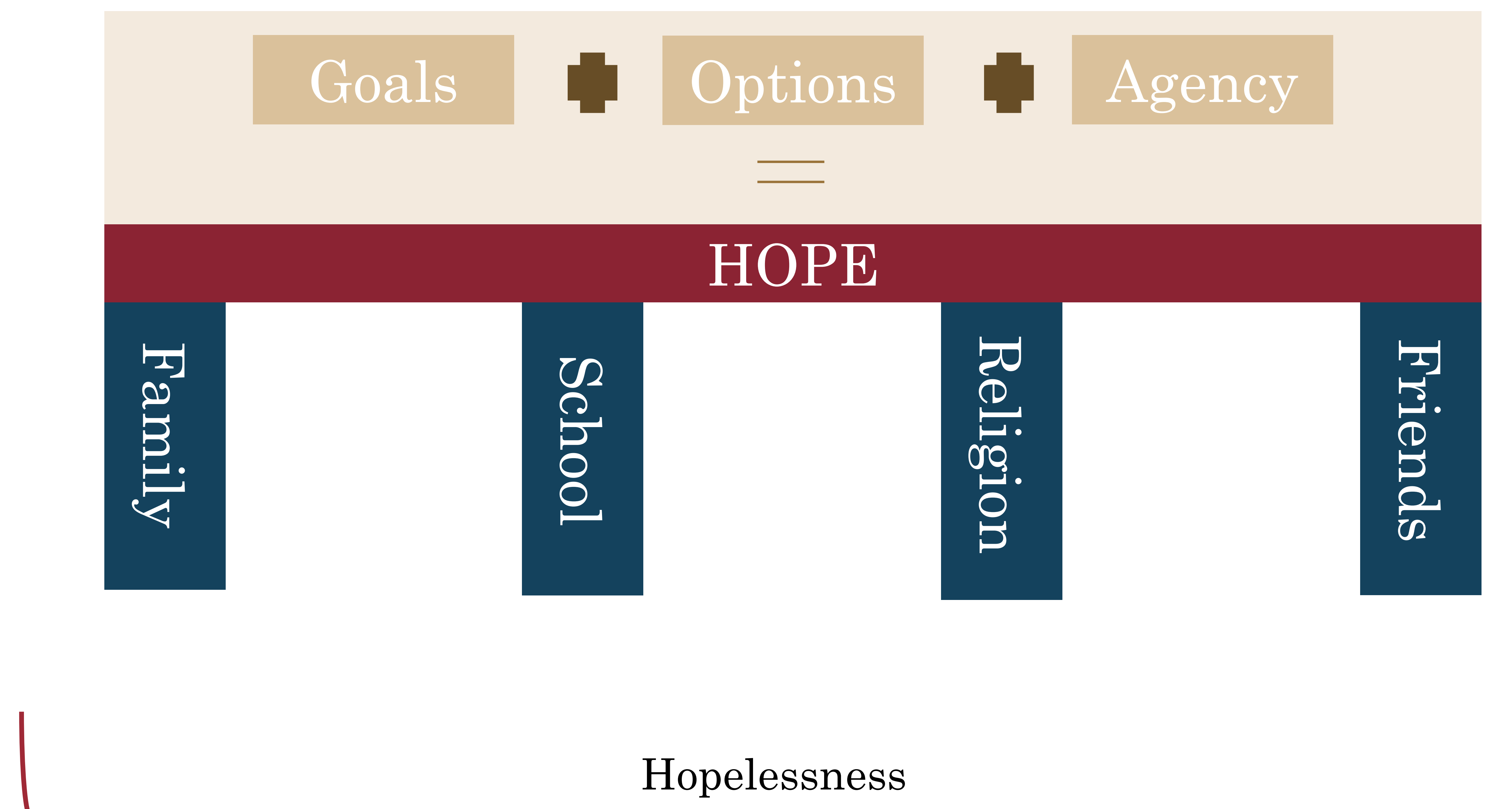
Adolescence is a developmental period identified by significant change, transition, and exploration; where an individual will select their own unique set of goals, values, and beliefs based on a wide range of crises and commitments (Blsker & Marcia, 1991). Between the ages of 11-22+, the adolescent will sort through existing beliefs and priorities as they select their own perspective on work, religion, education, relationships, sexuality, and ideology (Blsker & Marcia, 1991). As they embark on their search for autonomy, the adolescent will explore new ways of being and believing that will lead to a personal sense of self and identity (Comstock, 1994; Klimstra, Hale, Raaijmakers, Branje, & Meeus, 2010; Mascheroni & Jimenez, 2015).

Relationships with friends, family, and relational others is critical to healthy development as the adolescent reframes the childhood self into a new individual identity (Klimstra et al., 2010). Navigating this process can be difficult for many adolescents, where fear of rejection and isolation leads to distress and negative well-being outcomes that, potentially, lingers into the adult years (Hewitt Caelian, Chen, & Flett, 2014).

James Marcia's identity status paradigm conceptualizes Erickson's identity theory with a focus on exploration of developmental options and a commitment to intrinsically defined identity traits and priorities (Klimstra et al., 2010). Identity achievement occurs after the experience and resolution of crisis, conflict, and active identity consideration (Muuss, 1996).



## BUILDING HOPE FROM DISTRESS



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