

An Overview of Developmental Stages of Consciousness

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Based upon research by:

Ken Wilber in Integral theory and Integral psychology
Clare Graves, Don Beck, and Chris Cowan in the development of values
Jane Loevinger and Susanne Cook-Greuter in the development of self-identity

Developmental psychologists have identified numerous features of an individual's consciousness, such as cognition (what one is aware of), values (what one considers most important), and self-identity (what one identifies with).¹ These features of consciousness develop through recognizable stages, each stage revealing a markedly different understanding of the world.²

Described below are eight stages of consciousness as understood through research about the unfolding development of values and self-identity.³ There are other developmental lines besides the values and self-identity lines selected here; however, these are two of the most important. Each stage of consciousness is identified with a color, for easy reference.⁴ It is important to recognize that these "stages" are not strict levels, like rungs on a ladder. They are more like loosely delineated areas along a spectrum of development. Thus, a stage is more like a probability wave than a concrete level of consciousness. Most importantly, when studying this material, please remember the sage advice of Robert Kegan, Harvard developmental psychologist: "We are not our stages; we are not the self who hangs in the balance at this moment in our evolution. We are the activity of this evolution. We compose our stages, and we experience this composing."⁵

The stages below are divided into egocentric stages (Infrared, Magenta, and Red), ethnocentric (Amber), worldcentric (Orange and Green), and kosmocentric stages (Teal, Turquoise, and Indigo). Those interested in learning more are encouraged to review the original sources listed in the references.

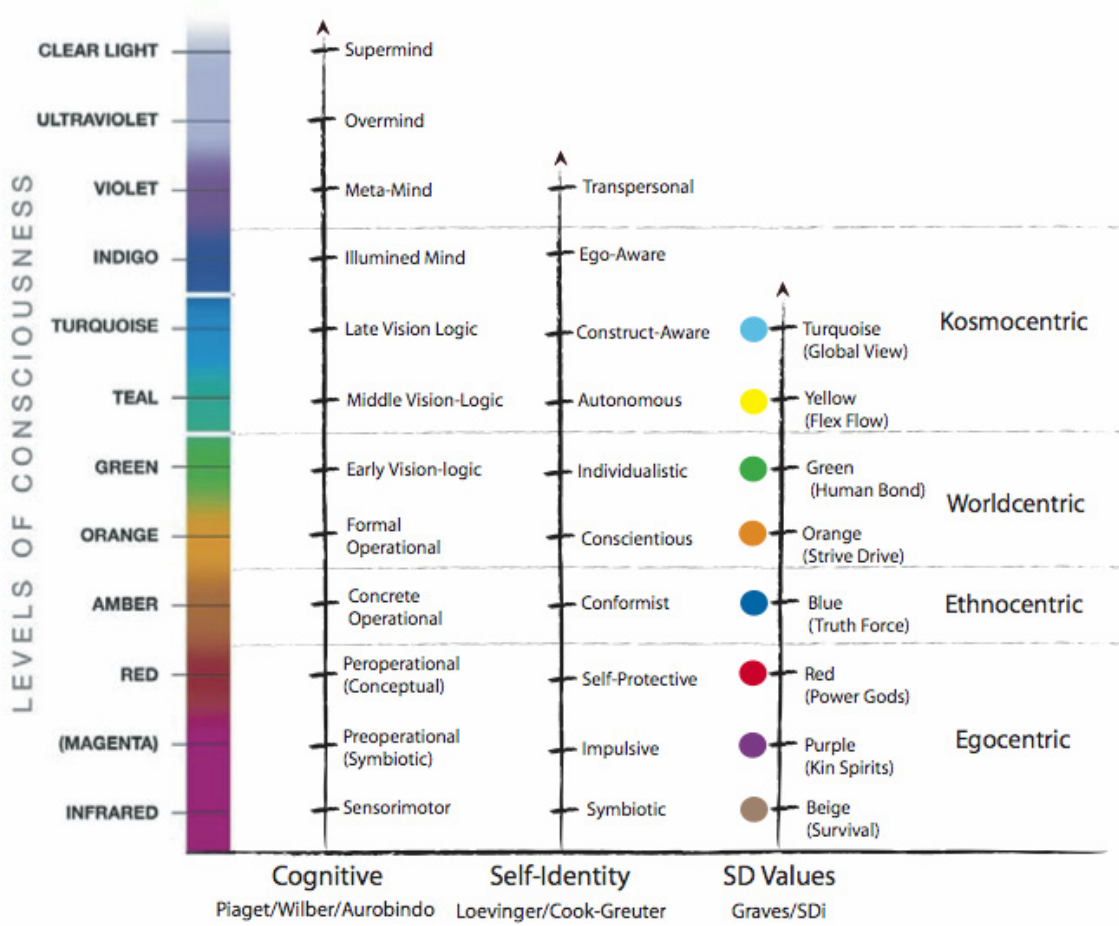
¹ Wilber, 2000a, 2005

² e.g., Wilber 2000a, Beck & Cowan, 1996; Graves, 2005; Kegan, 1982; Loevinger, 1976

³ I have compiled this information from many sources; the publicly available material I drew from is referenced. In some cases the sections were complimented by discussions with the researchers themselves, or from documents received during advanced trainings. In most cases I have used the exact terminology and phrases from the sources cited, so as to present the original researcher's voice as purely as possible. To learn more about the development of values, see www.spiraldynamics.net; for more on the development of self-identity, see <http://www.cook-greuter.com/>.

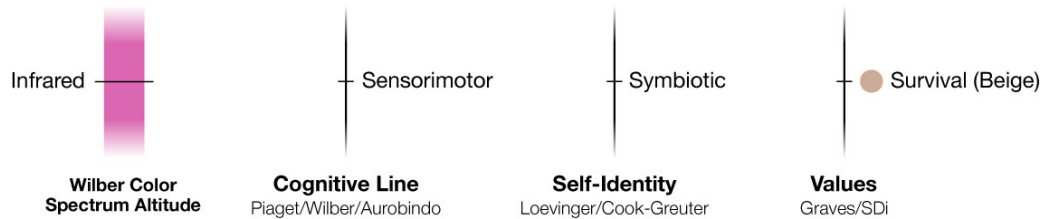
⁴ Wilber, in press

⁵ Kegan, 1982, p. 169.



EGOCENTRIC STAGES

The Infrared Stage of Consciousness



Values⁶

Bottom line: Staying alive. *Basic theme:* Do what you must just to stay alive

What's important: food, water, warmth, sex, and safety; the use of habits and instincts for survival

Where seen: the first peoples; newborn infants; senile elderly; late-stage Alzheimer's victims; mentally ill street people; starving masses; Jean Auel's *Clan of the Cave Bear*

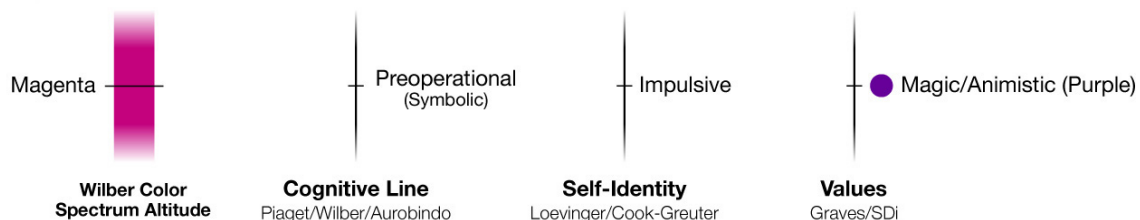
Self-Identity⁷

Main focus: No research available, but focus is likely on survival

Description: The self is undifferentiated, meaning that it cannot take a perspective on itself and the other is seen as fused with—or not distinct from—the self. Adults at this stage are usually pre- or nonverbal and often institutionalized or completely dependent on the protection and care of others.

How influences others: No research available

The Magenta Stage of Consciousness



Values⁸

Bottom line: Safety and security. *Basic theme:* Keep the spirits happy and the 'tribe's' nest warm and safe

⁶ Beck & Cowan, 1996; Wilber, 2000b

⁷ Cook-Greuter, 2002

⁸ Beck & Cowan, 1996; Wilber, 2000b

What's important: allegiance to chief, elders, ancestors, and the clan; obeying the desires of spirit beings and mystical signs; preserving sacred objects, places, events, and memories; rites of passage, seasonal cycles, and tribal customs; kinship and lineage

Where seen: Belief in voodoo-like curses and good-luck charms; family rituals; ancient grudges; magical ethnic beliefs and superstitions; strong in some less developed countries, gangs, athletic teams, and corporate 'tribes'

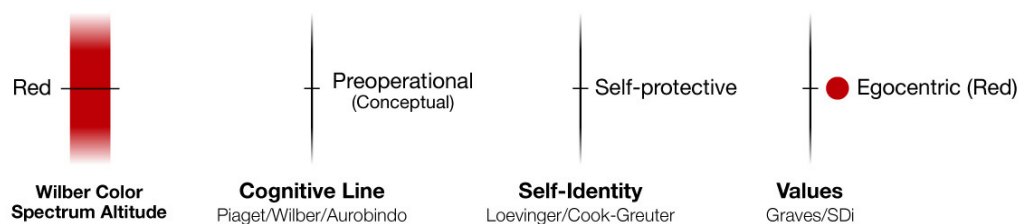
Self-Identity⁹

Main focus: safety and gratification of basic needs; following one's impulses

Description: Often found in very young children, who are governed by their impulses; adults at this stage have an inadequate conception of the complexities of life and may easily feel confused and overwhelmed; have an expedient morality (actions are only bad if one is caught)

How influences others: Temper tantrums, taking (stealing) what they want, withdrawal

The Red Stage of Consciousness



Values¹⁰

Bottom line: Power and action. *Basic theme:* Be what you are and do what you want, regardless

What's important: Power, spontaneity, heroism, immediate gratification; standing tall, calling the shots, receiving respect, and getting attention; being daring, impulsive, and enjoying oneself without regret; conquering, outsmarting, dominating

Where seen: The 'terrible twos'; rebellious youth; frontier mentalities; feudal kingdoms; epic heroes; wild rock stars; gang leaders; soldiers of fortune

Self-Identity¹¹

Main focus: Own immediate needs, opportunities, self-protection

Description: First step toward self-control of impulses; sense of vulnerability and guardedness; fight/flight response is very strong; very attack-oriented and win/lose in nature; short-term horizon; focus on concrete things and personal advantage; sees rules as loss of freedom; feedback heard as an attack

How influences others: Takes matter into own hands, coerces, wins fight

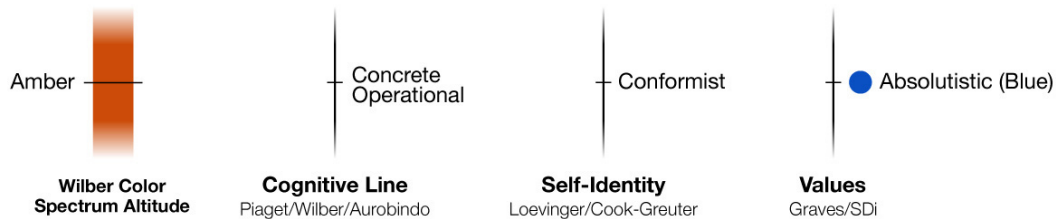
⁹ Cook-Greuter, 2005; Ingersoll & Cook-Greuter, submitted

¹⁰ Beck & Cowan, 1996; Wilber, 2000b

¹¹ Cook-Greuter, 2005; Ingersoll & Cook-Greuter, submitted

ETHNOCENTRIC STAGE

The Amber Stage of Consciousness



Values¹²

Bottom line: Stability and purposeful life. *Basic theme:* Life has meaning, direction, and purpose with predetermined outcomes

What's important: Sacrificing self for a transcendent Cause, (secular or religious) Truth, Mission, future reward; laws, regulations, and rules; discipline, character, duty, honor, justice, and moral fiber; righteous living; controlling impulsivity through guilt; following absolutistic principles of right and wrong, black and white; being faithful, maintaining order and harmony; one right way to think/do; convention, conformity

Where seen: Puritan America, Confucian China, Dickensian England, Singapore discipline; totalitarianism; codes of chivalry and honor; charitable good deeds; religious fundamentalism (e.g., Christian and Islamic); "moral majority"; patriotism

Self-Identity¹³

Main focus: Socially expected behavior, approval

Qualities: Emergence of capacity to see and respond to what others want; self-identity defined by relationship to group, whose values impart strong sense of "shoulds" and "oughts"; values that differ from one's own are denigrated or avoided; conform to norms of whatever group they want to belong to (including gangs and peer-groups); avoid inner and outer conflict; think in simple terms and speak in generalities and platitudes; attend to social welfare of own group; "us vs. them" mentality; feedback heard as personal disapproval

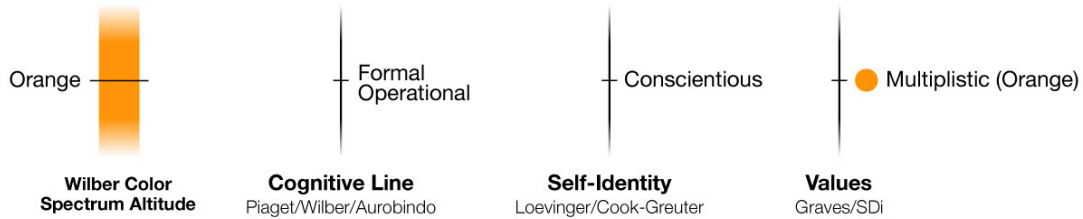
How influences others: Enforces existing social norms, encourages, cajoles, requires conformity with protocol to get others to follow

¹² Beck & Cowan, 1996; Wilber, 2000b

¹³ Cook-Greuter, 2005; Ingersoll & Cook-Greuter, submitted

WORLDCENTRIC STAGES

The Orange Stage of Consciousness



Values¹⁴

Bottom line: Success and autonomy. *Basic theme:* Act in your own self interest by playing the game to win

What's important: Progress, prosperity, optimism, and self-reliance; strategy, risk-taking, and competitiveness; goals, leverage, professional development, and mastery; rationality, objectivism, demonstrated results, technology, and the power of science; use of the earth's resources to spread the abundant "good life"; advance by learning nature's secrets and seeking the best solutions

Where seen: The Enlightenment; Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*; Wall Street; emerging middle classes around the world; colonialism, political gamesmanship; sales and marketing field; fashion and cosmetics industries; Chambers of Commerce; the Cold War; materialism; The Riviera, Rodeo Drive

Self-Identity¹⁵

Main focus: Delivery of results, effectiveness, goals; success within the system

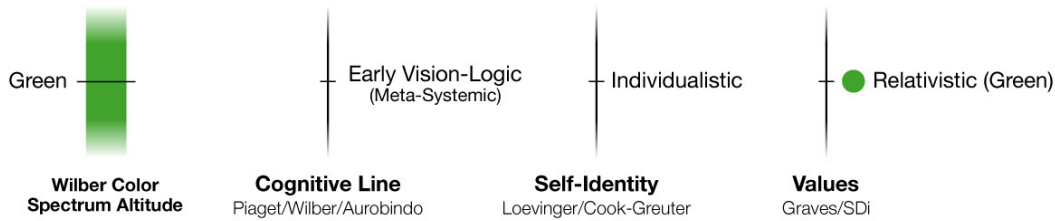
Qualities: Primary elements of adult "conscience" are present, including long-term goals, ability for self-criticism, and a deeper sense of responsibility. Interested in causes, reasons, consequences, and the effective use of time; future-oriented and proactive; initiator rather than pawn of system; blind to subjectivity behind objectivity; feel guilt when not meeting own standards or goals; behavioral feedback accepted

How influences others: Provides logical argument, data, experience; makes task/goal-oriented contractual agreements

¹⁴ Beck & Cowan, 1996; Wilber, 2000b

¹⁵ Cook-Greuter, 2005; Ingersoll & Cook-Greuter, submitted

The Green Stage of Consciousness



Values¹⁶

Bottom line: Community harmony and equality. *Basic theme:* Seek peace within the inner self and explore, with others, the caring dimensions of community

What's important: Sensitivity to others and the environment; feelings and caring (in response to the cold rationality of Orange); harmony and equality; reconciliation, consensus, dialogue, participation, relationships, and networking; human development, bonding and spirituality; diversity and multiculturalism; relativism and pluralism; freeing the human spirit from greed, dogma, and divisiveness; distributing the earth's resources and opportunities equally among all

Where seen: Frequently visible in the helping professions (e.g., health care, education, and feelings-oriented business activities); John Lennon's *Imagine*; Netherlands' idealism; sensitivity training; cooperative inquiry; postmodernism; politically correct; human rights and diversity issues

Self-Identity¹⁷

Main focus: Self in relation to the system and in interaction with the system

Qualities: Makes decisions based upon their own view of reality; aware that interpreting reality "always depends on the position of the observer"; more tolerant of oneself and others due to awareness of life's complexity and individual differences; questions old identities; more interested in personal accomplishments independent of socially sanctioned rewards; increased understanding of complexity, systemic connections, and unintended effects of actions; begins to question own assumptions and those of others; talks of interpretations rather than truth; systematic problem solving; begins to seek out and value feedback

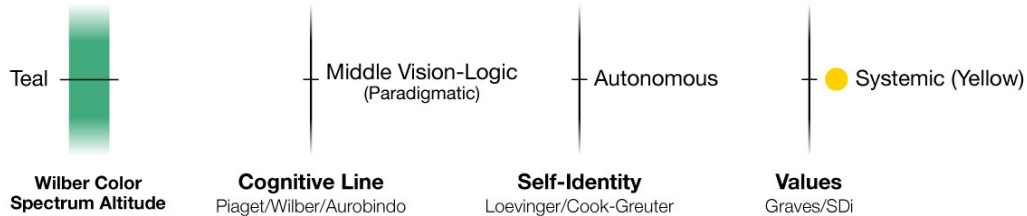
How influences others: Adapts (ignores) rules when needed, or invents new ones; discusses issues and airs differences

¹⁶ Beck & Cowan, 1996; Wilber, 2000b

¹⁷ Cook-Greuter, 2005; Ingersoll & Cook-Greuter, submitted

KOSMOCENTRIC STAGES

The Teal Stage of Consciousness



Values¹⁸

Bottom line: Qualities and responsibilities of being. *Basic theme:* Live fully and responsibly as what you are and learn to become

What's important: The magnificence of existence (over material possessions); flexibility, spontaneity, and functionality; knowledge and competency (over rank, power, status); the integration of differences into interdependent, natural flows; complementing egalitarianism with natural degrees of ranking and excellence; recognition of overlapping dynamic systems and natural hierarchies in any context

Where seen: Peter Senge's organizations; W. Edward Deming's objectives; Stephen Hawking's *Brief History of Time*; chaos and complexity theories; eco-industrial parks (using each other's outflows as raw materials)

Self-Identity¹⁹

Main focus: Linking theory and principles with practice; dynamic systems interactions

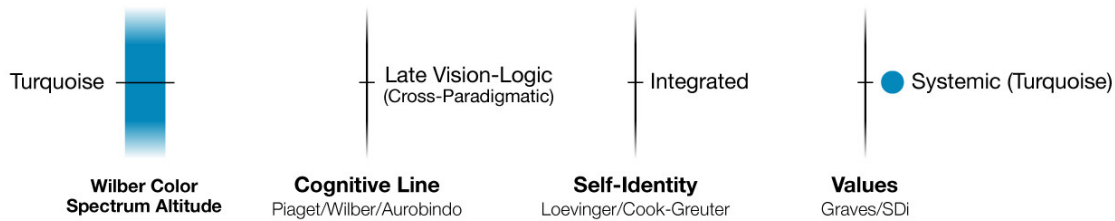
Qualities: Comprehends multiple interconnected systems of relationships and processes; able to deal with conflicting needs and duties in constantly shifting contexts; recognizes the need for autonomy while parts of a system are interdependent; recognizes higher principles, social construction of reality, complexity and interrelationships; problem finding not just creative problem solving; aware of paradox and contradiction in system and self; sensitive to unique market niches, historical moment, larger social movements; creates "positive-sum" games; aware of own power (and perhaps tempted by it); seeks feedback from others and environment as vital for growth and making sense of world.

How influences others: Leads in reframing, reinterpreting situation so that decisions support overall principle, strategy, integrity, and foresight

¹⁸ Beck & Cowan, 1996; Wilber, 2000b

¹⁹ Cook-Greuter, 2005; Ingersoll & Cook-Greuter, submitted

The Turquoise Stage of Consciousness



Values²⁰

Bottom line: Global order and renewal. *Basic theme:* Experience the wholeness of existence through mind and spirit

What's important: Holistic, intuitive thinking and cooperative actions; waves of integrative energies; uniting feeling with knowledge; seeing the self as both distinct and a blended part of a larger, compassionate whole; recognition that everything connects to everything else in ecological alignments; universal order, but in a living, conscious fashion not based on external rules (amber) or group bonds (green); the possibility and actuality of a “grand unification”; the detection of harmonics, mystical forces, and the pervasive flow-states that permeate any organization

Where seen: David Bohm’s theories; Rupert Sheldrake’s work on morphic fields; Gandhi’s ideas of pluralistic harmony; Mandela’s pluralistic integration; integral-holistic systems thinking

Self-Identity²¹

Main focus: Interplay of awareness, thought, action, and effects; transforming self and others

Qualities: Highly aware of complexity of meaning making, systemic interactions, and dynamic processes; seeks personal and spiritual transformation and supports others in their life quests; creates events that become mythical and reframe meaning of situations; may understand “ego” as a “central processing unit” that actively creates a sense of identity; increasingly sensitive to the continuous “re-storying” of who one is; may recognize ego as most serious threat to future growth; continually attend to interaction among thought, action, feeling, and perception as well as influences from and effects on individuals, institutions, history and culture; treat time and events as symbolic, analogical, metaphorical (not merely linear, digital, literal); may feel rarely understood in their complexity by others

How influences others: Reframes, turns inside-out, upside-down, clowning, holding up mirror to society; often works behind the scenes

²⁰ Beck & Cowan, 1996; Wilber, 2000b

²¹ Cook-Greuter, 2005; Ingersoll & Cook-Greuter, submitted

The Indigo Stage of Consciousness

Values

Currently under research, no data available

Self-Identity²²

Main focus: Being, non-controlling consciousness; witnessing flux of experience and states of mind

Qualities: Emergence of a perspective that is ego-transcendent or universal; people holding this stage of consciousness seem to "...experience themselves and others as part of ongoing humanity, embedded in the creative ground, fulfilling the destiny of evolution" (Cook-Greuter, 2002, p. 32); consciousness ceases to appear as a constraint but rather as one more phenomenon that can be foreground or background; an integration of feelings of belongingness and separateness occurs; multiple points of view can be taken effortlessly; the pattern of constant flux and change becomes the context for feeling at home; one is able to respect the essence in others, no matter how different they may be; one is in tune with their life's work as "a simultaneous expression of their unique selves" and as part of their shared humanity.

How influences others: No research data available

²² Cook-Greuter, 2005; Ingersoll & Cook-Greuter, submitted

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