Identity is an overarching concept that shapes and is shaped by our relationships with others. Identities are closely tied to what we do and our interpretations of those actions in the context of our relationships with others. Identities provide an important central figure in a self-narrative or life story that provides coherence and meaning for everyday events and life itself. Because life meaning is derived in the context of identity, it is an essential element in promoting well-being and life satisfaction. It is important to acknowledge that identity is not just an individual quest for a sense of self, but it is also social and cultural. Our interactions with others and our culture influence our expectations and actions in relation to occupation and our identity. Identity is also not just in the present tense, or being, but incorporates who we would like to be in the future, or becoming (Wilcock, 1999). The occupational therapy role can include helping clients to build their identity.

Time

Another dimension to examine in young adulthood is the concept of time and how one develops a sense of self over time (Bonovitz, 2018). Children and adolescents might experience time as unlimited, recalling summers as a child that seemed to last forever, whereas in young adulthood, adulthood, and middle age, time might seem to pass quicker. In occupational science literature, this concept of tempo, or pace of life, can relate to a stage in your life and is impacted by our occupational choices (Farnworth, 2003). In young adulthood, the meaning of time changes, and the focus is on what time is left, an awareness of aging, and projecting yourself into the future (Golarusso, 1991). This future focus relates to Farnworth’s concept of temporality, which she defines as “one’s sense of past, present, and future” (2003, p. 119). As occupational therapists, it is important to consider our clients’ senses of tempo and temporality as they contribute to their identity, occupational choices, and life narrative.

Occupational Balance

The process of becoming adult brings with it many new occupations, roles, and responsibilities, making striking the right balance difficult to attain. Making choices about what occupations to pursue and what to abandon is part of becoming an adult. Occupational balance is defined as getting the “right mix of occupations” (Wagman, Hakansson, & Bjorklund, 2012, p. 325). This balance of occupations is subjective and determined by the individual. The perfect balance isn’t so much about equal time spent doing different categories of occupations, such as self-care, productivity, and leisure, but more about linking your occupations with your values. Having a life of occupational integrity (Pentland & McColl, 2008) can be defined as the “extent to which an individual can design an occupational life that is consistent with his or her values … the extent to which he or she feels a sense of balance and well-being” (p. 6). As occupational therapists, we can help our clients to explore their values and make strong connections between their ideals and their choices in occupations. How people spend their time becomes more important than how much time is spent. As a young adult, time use, which focuses on what one does with one’s time and why (Farnworth, 2003), reflects values and choices and can lead to a sense of balance.