

Identity and values in adolescents: A study in Iran

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study is to analyse the relationship between identity status and personal values. The statistical population included all freshmen from University of Tehran in 2015. The sample consisted of 100 students who were selected by convenience sampling. The chosen research method is descriptive correlational. Bennion and Adams' Extended Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status and the personal values questionnaire were used for measuring the identity bases and personal values, respectively. The results of this study show that there is a positive significant relationship between achieved Identity status and religious values ($p < 0.01$), diffused identity and economic values ($p < 0.05$), diffused identity and value of power ($p < 0.05$), foreclosure identity status and religious values ($p < 0.05$) and foreclosure identity status and value of family ($p < 0.05$). In addition, the results indicate that there is a significant negative relationship between achieved identity status and economic values ($p < 0.01$), diffused identity and religious values ($p < 0.01$) and foreclosure identity status and aesthetic values ($p < 0.01$). In this study, the moratorium identity status showed no significant relationship with none of the variables. There was also no significant relationship between other personal values and identity status. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the quality of personal values which originates from family, society and cultural background plays a major role in the formation of identity. Other findings are also discussed.

Keywords: Identity, values, adolescents, identification, students.

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1. Introduction

Adolescence is an important period for the development of strategies for coping and responding to environmental needs. Due to rapid physical, psychological, social, cultural and cognitive changes, this period of life is associated with a host of problems (Vojoondi, Hashemi, Abdolpour & Mashinchi-Abbasi, 2015). One of the developmental tasks in adolescence is identification (Berk, 2007). Identification deals with the philosophy and meaning of life, which is an issue that all human beings have to face. The issue of identity has risen since the primitive man felt that he should respond to nature about who/what he is. Identity is a response that distinguishes a human being from his or her fellows, separates his or her values from the values of others and shows the belonging of a person to a specific group. In fact, one of the major developmental tasks of young people in society is to form their identity and consolidate it (Rotharam – Borus, Dopkins, Sabate & Lightfoot, 2011). According to Erikson's (1968) theory of psychosocial development, a new cognitive structure has emerged in adolescence that makes the adolescent feel he/she is a unique person. In this period of life, the adolescent seeks inner knowledge or understanding of self and tries to accumulate a collection of personal values.

The process of identity-finding in adolescents begins with withdrawing from anonymity and entering the field of presence through confrontation and conflicting with the fundamental context of identity. This confrontation provides a general early self-image for a person. When the stream of identity comes to a stand and establishes in a person, he/she finds himself/herself immersed in that context and understands it (Zakeri, Shamshiri & Khormaei, 2015).

Erikson's (1968) studies show that many of the adolescence problems are rooted in the way that a person passes through the identity crisis. If an adolescent passes this period with full knowledge and understanding, his/her immunity against problems and harms will increase and he/she can easily acquire a successful identity (Ghasemi, Arefi & Sheykholeslami, 2003). Among several studies conducted on Erikson's ideas, Marcia's (1993, 1987) studies have greatly influenced others in this field (Rice, 2001).

Marcia's model, which is developed based on Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, consists of three basic principles. Firstly, personal identity formation requires the stabilising of commitment and lack of indecision. This commitment should exist in the main areas of identity, such as profession or the selection of a spouse (Ansari & Oskoei, 2001). Secondly, identification is based on exploration, inquiry and decision-making. Finally, during a particular period, the adolescents may experience various roles and have different experiences in order to form a coherent personal identity. In Western societies, this period is well-recognised and defined as the late psychosocial period (Blisker, 1992; quoted in Rice, 2001).

Marcia proposes four identity statuses based on the models facing identity. According to Marcia (1980), these statuses, which come one after another, are different from each other, depending on the fact that they lead to commitment or to a period of exploration and decision-making. The first status is the late or moratorium identity that occurs before acquisition of identity. The objective of this period is to get prepared for commitments and to create an opportunity for further self-recognition in terms of concrete and mental facts (Feiz-Dargah, 1995). The second status, termed foreclosure identity, refers to individuals who have a very little exploration status and mostly remain committed to the values of their childhood. They remain committed to the ideology or profession which has not been found and had been already prepared and recommended by parents to them and, therefore, do not experience the identity crisis. Some of the characteristics of these people include a high respect for authorities, conformity with peers, low independence of opinion, low self-esteem and avoidance to introduce themselves as independent individuals (Iranfar, 1999). In the third status, which is role confusion or diffused identity, regardless of exploring or not exploring different alternatives, a person is not committed to following a particular path in life. In Marcia's (1987) view, these people do not experience the critical period and do not feel any adherence to a religion, political philosophy, gender

roles, career and personal beliefs and standards (Archer & Waterman, 1990; quoted in Rice, 2001). In fact, diffused identity refers to a status of a deadlock in life (Feiz-Dargah, 1995). From a developmental perspective, diffusion is the most irrational and difficult status of identity. The fourth status, which is called successful identity or achieved identity, is the final step in the formation of identity. In this status, people who pass through a period of exploring various ways reach a sustainable commitment. Independence of opinion, creativity, complex thinking, high level of moral judgment, flexibility, low anxiety and authoritarianism, internal control and high self-esteem are some of the characteristics of these people (Iran far, 1999).

In reality, some people never reach the moratorium and advanced identity and remain in the foreclosure status. In addition, a large number of adolescents remain in the stage of diffusion. Moreover, certain people who achieve the advanced status return to the previous statuses in the following years (Marcia, 1989). In many cases, identity is directly linked with the individual values of a person (Zastrow, 2001). Values are reflections of the people's thinking in a certain culture and in a specific period of time. Values manipulate their behaviours and judgements and their orientation in different matters (Mohammed Khalifa, 1999). Therefore, a set of values form the identity of a person (Bahmani-Azad, 1999). On the other hand, the essential core of the culture of a society is the long-standing beliefs and values of that society (Kroeber and Clockhan, quoted in Kim, Atkinson & Yang, 1999).

The system of values, which is often formed without one's apparent knowledge or intention, means a set of interrelated values that regulate individual behaviours and actions (English and English, quoted in Mohammed Khalifa, 1999). As part of a person's identity, values are not only helpful in the formation of identity but also play a major role in solving the identity crisis. Values are involved in the formation of both personal identity and social identity. By setting clear and positive values, the successful resolution of identity crisis, will protect adolescents against many social problems (Ghasemi et al., 2003). Therefore, studying the relationship between values and identity in young people is of special importance. Since few studies have been conducted on this, the main objective of the present research is to study the relationship between values and identity in adolescents. The main concern of this study is to clarify the role of values in the formation of the personal identity bases.

2. Method

The current study is a correlational descriptive research. The statistical population consisted of female and male freshmen from University of Tehran in 2015. The participants were selected using convenience sampling method. The sample size was determined as 100 students consisting of 43 males and 57 females.

2.1. Tools

2.1.1. Personal values questionnaire (PVQ)

This questionnaire was designed by Sherry and Verma (1971), which consisted of 10 subscales and 40 questions, each question can be answered on a 3-point Likert scale. The scale measured 10 different values which are religious values, social values, democratic values, aesthetical values, economic value, value of knowledge, hedonistic values, power values, family prestige value and value of health. Validity of PVQ was assessed by Karami (2005) through a hierarchy of personal values using two methods. In the first method, he examined 20 undergraduate psychology students in higher years. He distributed PVQ among the students who were asked to rank the 10 values. In the second method, the two hierarchies were matched with each other. The correlation coefficient of the scale was obtained as 64%, which was significant at $p < 0.05$. It can be concluded that PVQ tool is reasonably valid in determining hierarchical values of a group. Reliability of the scale was assessed through test and re-test, one within 2 months interval and another within 11 months interval. Reliability coefficients were all above 53% for each variable in retest (Karami, 2005).

2.1.2. Bennion and Adams' objective measure of ego identity status

The questionnaire was developed based on the theory of Erikson and Marcia on identity, and it comprises 64 items and four sub-scales. The subscales are as follows: (1) diffused identity; (2) foreclosure identity; (3) moratorium identity; and (4) achieved identity. The scale had adequate validity (Shekarkan and Omidian, 2001). Agha Soltani (1999) assessed the reliability of the scale using Cronbach's alpha and obtained the following coefficients: 72% for diffused identity, 86% for foreclosure identity, 67% for moratorium identity and 76% for achieved identity. Rohani (1999) obtained Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the total scale as 78% showing internal consistency.

3. Findings

3.1. Descriptive findings

The descriptive statistics for the identity status variables are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics relevant to identity status scores by gender

Identity status		Frequency	Mean	S. deviation	S. error
Diffused identity	Male	43	41.87	9.64	1.67
	Female	57	42.24	8.27	1.12
Foreclosure identity	Male	43	38.96	10.54	1.83
	Female	57	38.74	9.39	1.27
Moratorium identity	Male	43	58.33	10.48	1.82
	Female	57	60.61	10.23	1.39
Achieved identity	Male	43	63.96	9.85	1.71
	Female	57	67.61	9.77	1.19

The descriptive statistics for the personal values variables are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics relevant to personal values by gender

Personal values		Frequency	Mean	S. deviation	S. error
Religious values	Male	43	13.78	4.54	0.791
	Female	57	14.59	3.05	0.415
Social values	Male	43	7.18	3.11	0.542
	Female	57	8.16	2.47	0.336
Democratic values	Male	43	10.84	2.81	0.490
	Female	57	11.12	2.52	0.343
Aesthetical values	Male	43	9.75	3.20	0.557
	Female	57	11.01	3.31	0.450
Economic value	Male	43	14.33	4.12	0.718
	Female	57	12.75	3.38	0.460
Value of knowledge	Male	43	14.03	2.32	0.404
	Female	57	14.59	3.08	0.420
Hedonistic values	Male	43	15.21	3.37	0.586
	Female	57	14.77	2.85	0.389
Power values	Male	43	11.24	2.93	0.511
	Female	57	10.62	2.91	0.396
Family prestige value	Male	43	10.93	2.83	0.494
	Female	57	8.74	3.23	0.440
Value of health	Male	43	10.69	2.39	0.416
	Female	57	11.53	2.57	0.350

3.2. Inferential findings

The research question was: Is there a significant relationship between identity status and personal values? To answer this question, Pearson’s correlations were calculated and the results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Correlations between identity status and personal values

	Religious values	Social values	Democratic values	Aesthetical values	Economic value	Value of knowledge	Hedonistic values	Power values	Family prestige value	Value of health
Diffused identity	-0.29**	-0.16	-0.06	-0.11	0.23*	-0.11	0.08	0.23*	0.02	-0.04
Foreclosure identity	0.27*	0.01	0.06	-0.29**	-0.24	-0.03	0.01	0.09	0.42*	-0.18
Moratorium identity	-0.10	-0.03	-0.01	-0.10	0.08	0.00	0.05	0.11	0.14	0.18
Achieved identity	0.29**	0.16	-0.08	0.07	-0.26*	0.12	-0.18	-0.10	-0.00	0.03

* $p < 0/05$; ** $p < 0/01$.

As shown in Table 3, the following relationships were found between the research variables: there was a positive relationship between achieved identity status and religious values ($p < 0.01$); a negative relationship between achieved identity status and economic value ($p < 0.05$); a negative relationship between diffused identity status and religious value ($p < 0.01$); a positive relationship between diffused identity status and economic value ($p < 0.05$); a positive relationship between diffused identity status and power value ($p < 0.05$); a positive relationship between foreclosure identity status and religious value ($p < 0.05$); a negative relationship between foreclosure identity status and aesthetic value ($p < 0.01$); and a positive relationship between foreclosure identity status and family status ($p < 0.05$). In addition, no significant relationships were found between moratorium identity status and the 10 values. Furthermore, there was no significant relationship between other personal values and the four identity states.

4. Discussion

As mentioned earlier, identification is a developmental task in adolescence. In many cases, identity is directly linked to an individual’s value system. Therefore, it is essential to explore the concept of identity and values among adolescents. The present study aimed to investigate the relationship between identity status and personal values. The results showed that some of the personal values had positive relationship with identity states while others had negative relationships with identity states. On the other hand, some of the personal values had no significant relationship with identity states. These findings are consistent with the findings of some previous studies (Arcker and Waterman, quoting Rice, 1990; Marcia, 1980, 1987; Ghasemi et al., 2003). Since no similar study was conducted on this subject, the findings were explained based on theoretical framework and comparable studies. The findings showed a significant and positive relationship between achieved identity status and religious value. According to Marcia’s (1980) theory, it can be concluded that adolescents with high religious values are highly committed and explorative. In other words, they possess a clear and consistent religious value system to which they commit and consider it highly important.

There was a negative and significant relationship between achieved identity status and economic value. This means that the students with achieved identity status possess a low economic value. In other words, the individuals with achieved identity status who possess the highest quality of identity, based on Marcia’s (1980) theory, do not benefit from economic values. On the other hand, a significant and positive relationship was found between diffused identity status and economic value.

Therefore, the adolescents with diffused identity status possess high levels of economic value and place special importance on economic issues.

The findings indicated a significant and inverse relationship between diffused identity status and religious values. In other words, the individuals with diffused identity status possess weak religious values. According to Marcia's (1987, 1980) theory, diffused individuals are not committed, explorative and coherent. They are not committed to a certain religious identity or religious value systems and do not inquire in this field (Arcker and Waterman, quoting Rice, 1990).

In addition, there was a significant and positive relationship between diffused identity status and power value. This means that the adolescents with diffused identity status possess high scores in the power value and are placed at high levels. According to aforementioned findings, the students with diffused identity status are not coherent with religious issues and do not care about these subjects, but they specially pay attention to economic and power issues.

On the other hand, there was a significant and positive relationship between religious value and foreclosure identity. Accordingly, the students with foreclosure identity, similar to the students with achieved identity status, do not possess strong religious values. Based on Marcia's (1980, 1987) theory, the students with foreclosure identity and the students with achieved identity are strongly committed but not explorative. Furthermore, there was a negative and significant relationship between foreclosure identity status and aesthetic values. Therefore, the students with foreclosure identity status possess a low aesthetic value. There was also a significant and positive relationship between foreclosure identity status and family prestige value. The students with foreclosure identity status possess high family prestige values and highly pay attention to the family values. According to Marcia's (1980, 1987) theory, these people have a recorded identity that they have earned from their parents. However, no significant relationships were found between moratorium identity status and the ten values. Based on theoretical foundations (1980, 1987), the individual with moratorium identity status are explorative but not committed to their values. For other variables, there was no significant relationship between personal values and identity status.

Consistent with the present study, Ghasemi et al. (2003) showed that family-oriented values can significantly predict identity status and relevant dimensions. Therefore, it can be stated that family is the most important factor in acquisition of values as well as development of identity of children.

The findings show that the quality of individual values originating from their families, society and culture has an important role in development of their identity. From psychological and sociological perspectives, it can be stated that negligence in the education of individuals and perseverance of the values in them may change and distort the individual and social identity and lead to self-alienation, especially in an era of cultural influences and transformations. In education, it is essential to train individuals, so that they can internalise their national and religious values for development of national and cultural identity. Therefore, education system, higher education, families and media should design a consistent and purposeful programme in this area. It can be concluded that useful training programmes for families as well as positive and productive developments in national education system or design of intervention and counselling programmes positively contribute to development of individual and social identity.

5. Limitations

The limitations of the study are as follows:

1. The small size of the sample population limits its generalisability.
2. Lack of control of periphery variables, emotions and personal problems in the participants.

6. Further studies

The following are recommended:

1. Carrying out this research on other communities (non-student societies)
2. Determining the relationship between the variables of this research with other psychological variables.
3. To achieve more precise data, we propose further studies with wider samples and use of stratified cluster sampling.
4. It is proposed to first carry out the study within different cultural groups and then consider inter-cultural comparison.
5. Also recommend other researchers to compare the role of parents, schools and even media separately in the form of Gary's identity and values in young people.

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