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Identity diffusion: Role of parenting style and decision making style among adolescents

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Individuals with a diffused status are reluctant or incapable to make commitments and do not explore vigorously to establish their ego identity. It is the least developmentally mature and adaptive ego status of the four ego identity statuses given by Marcia. Identity development is significantly influenced by psychological and social dynamics experienced during an individual's lifetime, most notably during adolescence. The present study aimed at investigating the role of parenting style and decision making style among diffused adolescents. A sample of 500 adolescents of 11th and 12th class from English medium co-educational schools of Jaipur city was selected through purposive sampling technique for the screening purpose. From among them 110 adolescents identified as diffused were selected for further investigation comprised of 50 boys and 60 girls. A correlation design was used. Participants completed the Revised Version of the Extended Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status (EOMEIS-2) by Bennion and Adams (1986); Parental Authority Questionnaire (Buri, 1991); and General Decision Making Style Inventory (Scott & Bruce, 1995). The results of the study revealed that identity diffusion significantly negatively correlates with authoritative parenting style (mother & father) and rational decision style. There exist a significant positive correlation between identity diffusion and authoritarian style (mother & father), mother permissive style, intuitive and avoidant style of decision making. The findings would help the psychologists, counselors, clinical psychologists, etc. for prevention of identity related major disorders and psychopathology from the ground level.

Keywords: identity, exploration, commitment, identity status, identity diffusion, crises, parenting style

The development of a stable and coherent identity is considered a central developmental task during adolescence (Erikson, 1968). Marcia (1966) defined individual differences in identity formation along the dimensions of exploration and commitment. Exploration refers to the questioning and weighing of various alternatives or possible selves and a problem-solving behavior concerning various identity domains to form a more coherent sense of self. Commitment is a personal investment in an ego identity and participation in important actions aimed at providing one with the sense of direction and purpose in life. Within the identity status paradigm, self-reported commitment and exploration are used to define four identity statuses: achievement (high commitment/high exploration), moratorium (low commitment/high exploration), foreclosure (high commitment/low exploration) and diffusion (low commitment/low exploration).

Individuals with a diffused status are reluctant or incapable to make commitments and do not explore vigorously to establish their ego identity. It is the least developmentally mature and adaptive ego status of the four ego identity statuses. Also individuals with a diffused identity are described as dealing with their problems by avoidance (Marcia, 1980-2002). Identity diffusion is characterized by terms such as fragmentation, boundary confusion, and lack of cohesion in the subjective experience of self. They are also associated with low self-esteem, low levels of autonomy, high levels of neuroticism, identity distress, hopelessness, antisocial attitudes, and behavioral problems (Kroger & Marcia, 2011; Kaplan & Flum, 2000; Laghi et al., 2013; Phillips & Pittman, 2007). It is distinguished from the typical identity crisis of adolescents, in that

adolescents, although involved in intense conflicts and confused about the attitudes of significant others to themselves, have a clear sense of the issues and their conflicting nature and are able to describe their own personality as well as the significant others with whom they enter into conflict in an appropriate, realistic and integrated way (Kernberg, 1985).

On the cognitive domain, diffused individuals have low levels of conscientiousness, procrastination, intuitive or dependent styles of decision making or show an absence of systematic approaches to solving problems (Blustein & Phillips, 1990; Clancy & Dollinger, 1993; Selles, Markstrom-Adams, & Adams, 1994). On the interpersonal domain, diffused individuals perceive the behavior of their caretakers as distant or rejecting with low levels of attachment and likely to be isolated or stereotyped in their styles of intimacy with others (Orlofsky, Marcia, & Lesser, 1973; Campbell, Adams, & Dobson, 1984; Josselson, 1987). Identity diffusion is a core element of the "borderline personality organization" (Kernberg, 1985) and is viewed as the basis for subsequent personality pathology, leading to a broad spectrum of maladaptive and dysfunctional behaviors (Marcia, 2006). Individuals who remain diffused beyond early or middle adolescence are prone to drug abuse, risky sexual behavior, and academic failure (Jones & Hartmann, 1988-1989).

Identity development is significantly influenced by the environmental and psychological dynamics experienced during an individual's lifetime, most notably during adolescence. The way in which parents approach adolescence is crucial for the development of adolescents' ego identity (Phinney et al., 2005; Schachter & Ventura, 2008). Parents can either help or hinder this process through their child rearing behaviors (Adams, Dyk, & Benissisnion, 1990). Diane Baumrind (1966-1971) classified parents have three parenting styles, which are authoritarian, authoritative, and indulgent-permissive based on the inclusion or exclusion of two

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dimensions (responsiveness & demandingness). Prototypic authoritarian parents are generally described by their attempts to shape, control, and evaluate behavior and attitudes in accordance with a set standard of conduct. Authoritative parents exercise discipline rationally, encourage good communication, and provide reasons for their actions. Permissive parents style, in which parents are highly involved with their children but place very few controls and are more passive in their limited disciplinary actions. Various researches since the mid-1970s utilizing these parenting styles has demonstrated that authoritative parenting is optimal, as compared to authoritarian or permissive styles, for positive outcomes to various psychosocial issues associated with adolescence (Steinberg, 2001). Parental authoritative style is effective in assisting adolescent identity development because of three prominent factors that comprise this style - warmth, firmness, and psychological autonomy granting. Authoritative parents can also support processes of formation of ego identity such as exploration (encouraging adolescents to attain information) and commitment (by explaining the importance of different domains). An authoritative parenting style encourages independence and autonomy within an atmosphere of emotional support (Baumrind, 1991; Steinberg, 2000; Smits et al., 2008) and therefore supports development of ego identity during adolescence. Development of ego identity is encouraged when parents provide guidance and support adolescents' search for autonomy. The authoritative parenting style has been found to be the most effective parenting style that encourages optimal development of ego identity during adolescence (Smits et al., 2008; Romano, 2004; Ahadi, Hejazi, & Fomany, 2014; Aldhafri & Al-Harthy, 2016; Justickis & Rageliene, 2016). The authoritarian parenting style restricts processes of forming adolescents' ego identity and leads to diffused identity. Parents portraying the permissive parenting style encourages autonomy, but fails to guide adolescents to form stable ego identities and thus adolescents remain in state of diffusion (Laboviti, 2015).

The decision-making style refers to the unique manner in which an individual approaches, responds to, and acts in a decision-making situation (Arroba, 1977; Payne, Bettner, & Johnson, 1993). From the ego identity perspective, the exploration and commitment processes not involve only vocational decisions, but also involve a lot of general decisions related to political, friendship, and dating domains, values, beliefs, and goals. In adolescence lack of decision making competencies is correlated with the lack of knowledge of one's own abilities and present and future preferences that is necessary to work out a self-image mirroring one's own identity (Blustein & Philips, 1990). The model of Scott and Bruce (1995) distinguishes five decisional styles: Rational (characterized by complete & exhaustive search of information), Intuitive (characterized by automatic, quick, emotion-based information processing), Dependent (denying responsibility for their choices & projects responsibility towards others, generally authority figures), Avoidant (represented by the tendency to avoid & procrastinate) and Spontaneous (the choice is dictated by immediate feelings). Identity-achieved persons have gone through a period of exploration and have made a commitment to a specific decision after careful exploration (Marcia, 1966-1980). The overriding decisional characteristic of the diffusion status is the tendency to avoid decision-making situations. These persons may rely on intuitive and spontaneous styles or may seek answers from others to reduce the deliberation and consequent anxiety (Marcia, 1980; Kuzgun, 2005; Bacanlı, 2012; Pellerone,

2013). Thus the review suggests that identity diffusion is highly influenced by adolescent's decision making style and their perception of parenting style. With this view in consideration, the present study has been undertaken to fulfill the following objectives.

Objective of the study

To examine the relationship of parenting styles and decision making styles with identity diffusion among adolescents.

Hypothesis of the study

There would be a significant relationship of parenting styles and decision making styles with identity diffusion among adolescents.

Research design

A correlational design was used for the purpose of present study.

Method

Participants

The sample size of the present study comprised of 500 students of class 11th and 12th English medium co-educational schools in Jaipur city. Non probability purposive sampling technique was used in the study. Age limit of the sample was from 15-19 years. Out of the 500 adolescents, 110 students identified as having pure diffusion identity status were selected for further study comprising of 50 boys and 60 girls.

Instruments

Demographic Questionnaire: Demographic information of the participants regarding name, age, gender, class, faculty, socio-economic status and educational status of the family, details of any physical illness, etc. was collected.

The Revised Version of the Extended Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status (EOMEIS-2): The revised version of the Extended Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status (EOMEIS-2) by Bennion and Adams (1986) is a 64 item scale that evaluates identity in terms of Marcia's (1980) stages of identity development. Participants indicated on a six-point Likert type scale the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with each of the 64 statements. An overall score for identity diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium and achievement was obtained for each participant by taking the total score of the sixteen questions that related to each identity status. Two questions were asked for each of the following: occupation, politics, religion, friendship, recreation, philosophy, and dating and sex roles, for each identity status. Cronbach's alpha scores were .58 to .80, with retest yielding scores of .63 to .83 (Bennion & Adams, 1986). The content validity showed 94 percent agreement across nine judges (Bennion & Adams, 1986) on a study of college students. An identity status can be assigned by the use of cut off scores, thus a person can be assigned or rated as achiever, foreclosure, in moratorium or diffused.

Parenting Authority Questionnaire (PAQ): Parenting styles were measured by parenting style questionnaire developed by Buri (1991). According to Buri (1991) within the model proposed by Baumrind (1971) three distinct prototypes of parental authority have been offered- permissive, authoritarian and authoritative. The questionnaire is a psychologically appropriate and authentic tool

assessment of parenting style. It is a 30 item scale contained 10 items for each of the three types of parenting style: authoritarian, authoritative and permissive. This is a 5-point Likert scale and adolescents rate their parents on the items using a five-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. There are two forms of the scale one for mothers and another for fathers. The test reliability estimates were $r=.78$, $.92$ authoritativeness, $r=.86$, $.85$ authoritarian, $r=.81$, $.77$ for permissiveness for mother and father respectively. The scale has acceptable internal consistency ($.87$) and retest reliability ($.77$ to $.92$).

General Decision Making Style: Scott and Bruce's (1995) General Decision-Making Style is a 25 items scale inventory. It is comprised of five subscales: rational, intuitive, dependent, avoidant, and spontaneous decision-making style. Each scale contains five items. A higher score on any of the five scales indicates a higher presence of that particular decision making style. Cronbach's alpha calculated for each individual style containing five items demonstrated acceptable reliability with values ranging from $.76$ to $.86$. In general, the scales were positively correlated with magnitudes in the low to moderate range. The GDMS assess an individual's preference for these five dimensions, or decision making styles. This instrument has been the subject of validation studies (Gambetti, Fabbri, Bensi, & Tonetti, 2009; Loo, 2000; Spicer & Sadler-Smith, 2005) as well as field-based research (De Bruin, Parker, & Fischhoff, 2007; Thunholm, 2008-2009). This evidence suggests the GDMS would be useful tool for inclusion of this research drawing from both theoretical and pragmatic perspectives.

Procedure

The present study was divided into two phases. First the test of identity status was administered to the sample of 500 adolescents for screening purpose. The cut off marks for each status was calculated using the identity status rule book and the adolescents were assigned to categories accordingly. Adolescents who were identified as diffused ($n=110$) were selected for further investigation comprised of 50 boys and 60 girls.

Results and discussion

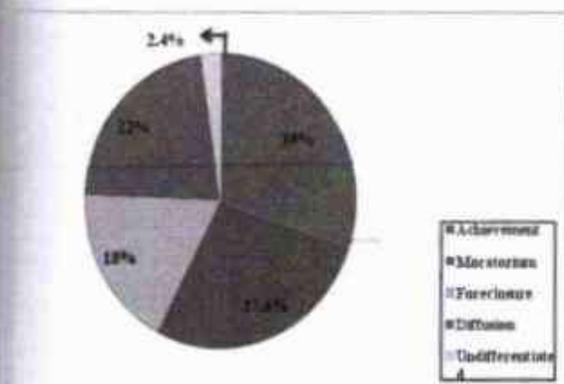


Fig. 1: Pie-graph showing distribution of sample in relation to Identity Status ($n=500$)

The present study made an attempt to examine the relationship of parenting style and decision making style among diffused adolescents. Findings revealed that identity diffusion significantly correlates with both the variable. Adolescents who perceive their

parents as authoritarian tend to score higher on identity diffusion status. Authoritarian parents value obedience and conformity, and tend to favor punitive and forceful measures of discipline. Authoritarian parents also tend not to encourage independence and their style of parenting restricts the child's autonomy. Adolescents who have explored and committed to an identity experienced more openness, less problems, and better overall communication with both their parents, as compared to a diffused identity status (Bhushan & Shirali, 1992). The most important ideas to have emerged from the last 25 years of research on adolescent development in the family context has concluded that adolescents benefit the most from having authoritative parents. Ample evidence has been provided in the literature supporting the findings of the present study that authoritative parenting transcends many boundaries and leads to identity achievement status (Steinberg, 2001; Cakir & Aydin, 2005; Shuqing, Wenxin, & Huichang, 2006; Layckx et al., 2007; Khalatbari, Maddahi, & Ghorbanshiroudi, 2011; Blesstein, 2012; Yousefi, 2014; Ahadi, Hejazi, & Foumany, 2014; Aldhafri & Al-Harthy, 2016; Justickis & Ragelienė, 2016). It is also revealed from the findings that identity diffusion correlates positively with mother's permissive style of parenting. Permissive parents tend to give more freedom than is age appropriate, it is also characterized by children having unlimited boundaries for their behavior. So, young children are left on their own attempts in developing culture appropriate values, attitudes, and behavior patterns. Regarding this, in adolescence it could be more difficult for the child to frame his/her thoughts, feelings, behavior or self-view (Kohler & Christensen, 2010; Labovini, 2015).

Table 1: Correlation coefficients between identity diffusion and variables taken for the present study ($n=110$)

Variables	Identity diffusion
Parenting style	
Mother Permissive	.20*
Mother Authoritarian	.49**
Mother Authoritative	-.27**
Father Permissive	.12
Father Authoritarian	.52**
Father Authoritative	-.23*
Decision Making style	
Rational	-.72**
Intuitive	.25**
Dependent	.07
Avoidant	.43**
Spontaneous	-.11

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

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Adolescents who fail to act logically and making painful strategies tend to score higher on identity diffusion. The overriding decisional characteristic of diffusion status is the inclination to avoid or procrastinate decision-making situations, and persons in the diffusion status may rely on intuitive style. Intuitive style is characterized by the reliance on inner experience, fantasy, and a propensity to decide rapidly without much deliberation or information gathering. The intuitive decision makers accept responsibility for choice, but focus on emotional self-awareness, fantasy and feeling, often in impulsive manner. In adolescence lack of decision making competencies is correlated with the lack of knowledge of one's own abilities and present and future preferences that is necessary to work out a self-image mirroring one's own identity. The findings of the present study are in agreement to the few earlier findings (Marcia, 1980; Waterman & Waterman, 1974; Kuzgun, 2005; Bacanlı, 2012; Pellerone, 2013).

Conclusion

The present study indicates that the authoritarian parenting style of both mother and father, and permissive parenting style of mother leads to identity diffusion in adolescents. Further, avoidant and intuitive decision making style of an adolescent determines identity diffusion status. The findings of the study unravel the role of psychosocial factors in depth which would be helpful to psychologists, counselors, clinical psychologists, etc. for therapeutic purpose.

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