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Role of Parenting and Attribution Styles in Identity Diffusion among Adolescents

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Abstract

The present study aimed at investigating the role of parenting style and attribution style in the development of diffused identity status among adolescents. A sample of 500 adolescents of 11th and 12th class from English medium 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 comprising 50 boys and 60 girls. A correlation design was used. Participants completed the Revised Version of Extended Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status (EOMEIS-2) by Bennion and Adams (1986) for screening out adolescents with diffused identity. Further Parent Authority Questionnaire (Buri, 1991) and Attribution Style Questionnaire (Peterson & Seligman, 1982) were administered on the selected participants. Findings revealed a significant positive correlation between identity diffusion and authoritarian style (mother and father), mother permissive style, bad achievement and combined bad achievement-affiliation dimension of attribution style. The results of the study showed that identity diffusion significantly negatively correlated with authoritative parenting style (mother and father) and good achievement and combined good achievement-affiliation dimension of attribution style. 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, identity status, exploration, commitment, identity diffusion crises, parenting style, attribution style.

Identity

Identity concerns are fundamental dimension and psychosocial task for an adolescent's life. Beginning in their early teens, adolescents start to ask questions such as "Who am I?" "What am I doing in my life?" "What kind of relationships do I want?" "What kind of work do I want to do?" and "What are my beliefs?" (Archer, 1982). Identity is described as an overall sense of who you are

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currently and in the future, as well as how individuals fit into their social environment (Erikson, 1968). Marcia (2002) refers to ego identity as a sense of who one is, based on the past, and who one realistically can be in the future. Thus it is a combination of the adolescents' history, beliefs, and values in a self-configuration. 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, 2010; 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 and Hartmann, 1988, 1989).

Identity Development :

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 childrearing behaviors (Adams, Dyk, & Benisisnion, 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 dimensions (responsiveness and 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 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 & Foumany, 2014; Aldhafri & Al-Harthy 2016; Justickis and Rageliene,

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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).

Attribution Style :

Attribution style or Explanatory Style refers to how people explain the events of their life. Attribution Theory by Weiner proposes that the way in which individuals perceive or judge why an event occurs, and the allocation of responsibility, guides subsequent behavior (Weiner, 1972). In 1985, Weiner proposed that the perceived causes of events have three common properties: locus, stability and controllability. Attribution theory distinguishes between the individual themselves (locus) and their ability to exert control (controllability). This theory presents a process by which explanations of events have been shown to impact on an individual's affectivity and behavior, and has applied this to help explain theories of motivation, achievement and learning. Furthermore, the theory also pertains that the way in which events are explained can be altered by the individual in order to increase individual success (Weiner, 1985). In this way, it also provides support for the concept that how people attribute causes to events in their lives will impact upon their future expectancies, or dispositional optimism (Scheier & Carver, 1985). Various studies on identity status and locus of control have revealed that individuals with diffused status of identity tend to have external locus of control. On the contrary individuals with well-developed and achieved identity tend to have internal locus of control (Abraham, 1983; Mozaffari, Fathabadi & Bagherian, 2009; Lillevoll, Kroger & Martinussen, 2013; Janarthanam and Gnanadevan, 2015). Research on a possible link between identity and locus of control grew from investigations that showed youth became more internal in their locus of control as they matured (Matteson, 1977). Within attribution style is embedded locus of control. However, the locus of control is concerned with expectancies about the future while attribution style is concerned with attributions for the past. Whereas locus of control cuts across both positive and negative outcomes, authors in the attribution style field have distinguished between a Pessimistic Explanatory Style, in which failures are attributed to internal, stable, and global factors and successes to external, unstable, and specific causes, and an Optimistic Explanatory Style, in which successes are attributed to internal, stable, and global factors and failures to external, unstable, and specific causes. While reviewing, research on the relationship between attribution style and identity statuses has been noticeably missing from the extant literature. A plethora of findings revealed the association between locus of control and identity status or optimism and identity status. It

enabled the researcher to select the variable in present study by considering the following findings.

Objectives

- I. To examine the relationship between parenting style and identity diffusion among adolescents.
- II. To examine the relationship between attribution style and identity diffusion among adolescents.

Hypotheses

- 1 There would be a significant relationship between parenting style and identity diffusion among adolescents.
- 2 There would be a significant relationship between attribution style and identity diffusion among adolescents.

Method

Participants : The sample size comprised 500 students of class 11th and 12th of English medium co-educational schools in Jaipur. Non probability purposive sampling technique was used in the study. Age limit of the sample was from 15- 19 years. First the students were given suitable measure for measuring their identity status for the screening. Out of which, 110 students identified as having diffused identity status were selected for further study comprising of 50 boys and 60 girls.

Materials

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 & 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 test-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

ge students. An identity status can be assigned by the use of cut off scores, thus a n 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) in the model proposed by Baumrind (1971) three distinct prototypes of parental authority have been offered- permissive, authoritarian and authoritative. This questionnaire is a psychologically appropriate and authentic tool for the assessment of parenting style. It is a 30 item scale contained 10 statements for each of the three types of parenting style: authoritarian, authoritative and permissive. This is a 5-point Likert type 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 scale one for mothers and another for fathers. Test retest reliability estimates were $r=.78$, $.92$ authoritative, $r=.86$, $.85$ authoritarian, $r=.81$, $.77$ for permissiveness for mother and father respectively. The scale has acceptable internal consistency (.74 to .87) and retest reliability (.77 to .92).

Attribution Style Questionnaire (ASQ) : The Seligman Attribution Style Questionnaire (also known as the ASQ) is one of the most validated profiling tools in the world. Designed by Professor Martin Seligman, the SASQ test uncovers a person's explanatory style (attitude) how they explain significant events in their life. The ASQ is a self-report instrument that yields scores for explanatory style for bad events and for good events using three causal dimensions: internal versus external, stable versus unstable, and global versus specific causes. The ASQ presents 12 hypothetical events, half good and half bad, and the test-taker is asked to write down the one major cause of each event and then rate the cause along a 7-point continuum for each of the three causal dimensions. The ASQ takes an average of about 20 minutes to complete but there is no time limit. Research for the ASQ has encompassed over 500 studies and 100 universities providing validity for the instrument. Also, the test has been administered to over 400,000 employees. Peterson reported a composite Cronbach alpha coefficient for the three subscales- locus, stability, and Globality. The test-retest coefficient was calculated at .64.

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 as per the identity status rule book and the adolescents were assigned to statuses accordingly. Adolescents who were identified as diffused (N=110) were selected for further investigation comprised of 70 boys and 60 girls.

Results

Table 2 revealed the results of bivariate analysis. Identity diffusion is significantly negatively correlated with authoritative parenting style of both mother ($r = -.27, <0.01$) and father ($r = .23, <0.05$). It is also revealed from the above table that there exists a significant positive correlation between Identity Diffusion and authoritarian style of both mother ($r = .49, <0.01$) and father respectively ($r = -.49, <0.01$).

Table 1 : Descriptive Statistics Mean and Standard Deviation of the variables studied (N=110)

VARIABLES	Mean	SD
Identity Diffusion	61.22	4.63
Mother Permissive	31.80	7.05
Mother Authoritarian	39.79	5.37
Mother Authoritative	28.22	6.67
Father Permissive	31.30	7.02
Father Authoritarian	41.57	5.23
Father Authoritative	27.18	6.72
Good Achievement (Gach)	4.57	1.23
Good Affiliation (Gaf)	4.41	1.21
Bad Achievement (Bach)	5.18	1.20
Bad Affiliation (Baf)	4.27	1.23
Good Achievement affiliation (Gacaf)	4.49	.99
Bad Achievement affiliation (Bacaf)	4.72	.98

Table 2 : Correlation coefficients between identity diffusion and variables selected (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*
ATTRIBUTION STYLE	
Good Achievement (Gach)	-.22*
Good Affiliation (Gaf)	-.17
Bad Achievement (Bach)	.23*
Bad Affiliation (Baf)	.05
Good Achievement Affiliation (Gacaf)	-.24**
Bad Achievement Affiliation (Bacaf)	.18*

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

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

It is also found that identity diffusion positively significantly correlates with permissive style of mother. No significant relationship was found between identity diffusion and permissive style of father. Results revealed significant negative correlation between Identity diffusion and good achievement dimension of attribution style ($r = -.22, <0.01$). Significant positive correlation was obtained between Identity Diffusion and bad achievement dimension of attribution style ($r =$

.23, <0.01). A significant correlation was found between identity diffusion and combined good achievement and affiliation attribution style ($r = .24, <0.01$). Findings also revealed a significant correlation between identity diffusion and combined bad achievement and affiliation attribution style ($r = .18, <0.05$), as well as bad affiliation dimension of attribution style ($r = .18, <0.05$).

The present study : identity diffusion among early adolescents significantly correlates with parenting style of parents as authoritarian and authoritative. Authoritarian parents value independence and their : Adolescents who have experienced authoritarian parenting, less problems, and as compared to a diffused important ideas to have emotional development in the family context from having authoritative parenting. Literature supporting the findings transcends many boundaries (2001; Cakir & Aydin, 2005; 2007; Khalatbari, Maddahi & 2014; Ahadi, Hejazi & Fournageliene, 2016). It is also correlates positively with motivation. Adolescents tend to give more freedom than having unlimited boundaries in their own attempts in developing patterns. Regarding this, in adulthood frame his/her thoughts, feelings (2010; Laboviti, 2015).

Adolescents, who attribute to believe that it will remain stable identity diffusion and higher on achievement attribution the reasons of bad achievement

.23, <0.01). A significant negative correlation also obtained between identity diffusion and combined good achievement affiliation dimension of attribution style ($r = -.24, <0.01$). Findings also showed significant positive correlation between identity diffusion and combined bad achievement and affiliation dimension of attribution style ($r = .18, <0.05$). No significant correlation found between good as well as bad affiliation dimensions of attribution style.

Discussion

The present study sheds light on the role of psycho-social factors in identity diffusion among early 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 and Huichang, 2006; Luyckx et al. 2007; Khalatbari, Maddahi and Ghorbanshiroudi, 2011; Blesitein, 2012; Yousefi, 2014; Ahadi, Hejazi & Foumany, 2014; Aldhafri & Al-Harthy 2016; Justickis and Rageliene, 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; Laboviti, 2015).

Adolescents, who attribute the reasons of good achievement internally, believe that it will remain stable and influence them globally score lower on identity diffusion and higher on achievement. Results also revealed that adolescents, who attribute the reasons of bad achievement internally, believe that it will remain stable

and influence them globally score higher on identity diffusion. Furthermore adolescents who attribute the reasons for combined good achievement and affiliation dimension of attribution style internally, believe that it will remain stable and influence them globally, tend to score lower on Identity Diffusion. Findings also showed that adolescents, who attribute the reasons for combined bad achievement affiliation to self, believe that it will remain stable and influence them globally, tend to score higher on Identity Diffusion. Thus, to conclude, results overall suggests that attributing uncontrollable bad events to internal, stable, and global factors lead to Identity Diffusion and are pessimist. While reviewing the literature, studies on relationship between attributional style and identity status found missing. Studies shed light on either locus of control or optimism- pessimism in relation with Identity status. This compelled the research to focus on unleashing the role of attribution in the facilitation and hindrance of well-defined identity. Achieved status or informational identity style is related to optimism while diffusion or avoidant with pessimism (Sohrabajee, Rizayi & Mohammadi, 2016). In contrast, diffused status or style of identity tends to be pessimistic people. They believe bad things emanated from permanent and constant conditions. They allow that frustration is on the part of his life and permeates into other sectors. When a problem occurs and things go wrong, the pessimists blame themselves (Seligman, 2003). They have low self-reliance, more mood disorders, more stress, weaker body system and more suffering infectious diseases (Sohrabajee, Rizayi & Mohammadi, 2016).

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, attributing uncontrollable bad events to internal, stable, and global factors by an adolescent determines identity diffusion status. The findings of the study unravel the role of psycho-social factors in depth which would be helpful to psychologists, counselors, clinical psychologists, etc. for therapeutic purpose.

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Role of Parenting and Attribution Styles in Identity Diffusion among Adolescents

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