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EMOTIONAL AUTONOMY AND PARENTAL STYLES AS A PREDICTOR OF POSITIVE IDENTITY STYLE

Abstract:

For adolescent proceeding at the road to identity formation is a major challenge they must negotiate. The role that emotional autonomy and parental styles may play in establishing identity styles was investigated. A sample of 237 males and females students of age group 15-171/2 years was drawn from public high school in Shiraz city. These students responded emotional autonomy, parental styles and identity styles questioners. Preliminary results indicated that positive identity was positively correlated with authoritative parental style and emotional autonomy and negatively with authoritarian. Regression analyses confirmed that parental styles and emotional autonomy predict positive identity. The results indicated that emotional autonomy and parental styles variables combined accounted for %46 of the variation in strength of positive identity. The findings are consistent with the view that emotional autonomy may contribute to the way in which middle adolescents negotiate the task of constructing a sense of identity. Hence, identity style may represent one mechanism by which the cumulative effects of emotional autonomy affect psychosocial outcomes among young adults. Alternative explanations of the findings are considered.

Keywords:

parental styles, emotional autonomy, positive identity.

Introduction

Identity formation is an essential developmental challenge associated with adolescence (Berzonsky, Susan, Meeus, 2007; Cote, 2009; Erikson, 1968). A consolidated, well integrated identity structure provides a personal frame of reference for making decisions and interpreting expiries and self- relevant information, which enables people to maintain meaningful sense of self- sameness and self- continuity despite the random events and inevitable changes they encounter during their lives (Berzonsky, 2005a). It is evident that the development of personality is the lifelong process; however, it is adolescence that is a key developmental era. Identity is awareness of uniqueness, awareness of one self as a subject with own opinion, where parental values, attitudes, and also own experience of an adolescent are included (Erikson, 1968). According to Berzonsky (2003), who was inspired by Marcia's conception of identity, social-cognitive processes take part in forming the personality identity. According to Berzonsky's concept, one of the three personality identity styles prevails, which he assigned to three variables that exist in a correlation relations with certain personality traits: 1/ *Informative identity style* is typical for individuals actively searching their personalities, who are open to experience, who are oriented to seek information, who have an active approach to problem solving so, called positive identity(Berzonsky, 1992, Berzonsky & Sullivan, 1992, Berzonsky & Ferrari, 1996). 2/ *Normative identity style* is typical for an individual who passively overtakes patterns while self-definition, who is conscientious, focused on goal. His behaviour is adapted to norms and expectations of others, and thus he is conformably oriented. He is not comfortable with ambiguity, he reaches foreclosure identity (Berzonsky, 1992, Berzonsky & Neimeyer, 1994). 3/*Diffuse identity style* is bound to maladaptive strategies, neuroticism, depressing. Where an individual puts off defining of his personality, he has a low self-esteem, his behaviour is conditioned to situational factors, he avoids personal conflicts, insecurities, he reaches diffuse identity style, it was called negative identity (Berzonsky, 1992, Berzonsky 2003, Berzonsky, & Kuk, 2000). . According to Marcia's identity status theory, adolescents with positive identity have to decide upon their own roles through experiences that expose them to opportunities and situations that challenge how they understand and manage such experiences (Marcia, 1966). Their struggles and exploration through this exposure will promote a more in-depth and multi-angled appraisals of their experience, build up their stress-coping abilities, and advance their problem-solving efficiency and effectiveness by positive identity. The enhancement of positive identity development in young people can be achieved at both the individual and the social levels. According to Harter, one's evaluation of oneself, often called self-esteem, can influence identity formation and the emotions and performance related to it. Positive self-evaluation typically energizes a person while negative self-evaluation, especially when it is prolonged and hinges upon attributes that cannot be easily changed or acquired, can disturb person's emotions and performance (Catalano et al., 2004).

The present study focused on positive identity and relationship with adolescents' perceptions of their relationships with their parents and emotional autonomy. Although

an adolescent's perception of parental monitoring and family communication may differ from that of the parents or an independent third party, research indicates that adolescents' personal views of family interactions may be better predictors of their behavior and senses of well-being than information from other sources (Cottrell et al., 2003; Crocetti, Rubini, & Meeus, 2008; Schwartz, 2001; Sun, &Shek, 2010). This study investigated the role that parental solicitation (i.e., efforts to control adolescents' activities and actively solicit information), adolescents' willingness to disclose to parents, and open communication within the family and emotional autonomy may play in accounting for differences in identity style in adolescents.

Adolescents' Perceptions of parental styles and Identity Styles

There are some evidences that are consistent with the view that parenting practices contribute to differences in identity style (Ratner,2014; Gunoe, &Moor, 2002; Ratner, 2014). Baumrind's (1971) authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive typologies are currently widely employed models of parenting styles. Perceived parent-adolescent relationships have been found to be associated with identity style in adolescents. For example, authoritative parenting practices, which include communicating explanations, being responsive, and making reasonable demands within a climate of warmth and acceptance, were linked to an informational style, and permissive parenting was correlated with diffuse-avoidance (Berzonsky, 2004). A normative style was related to strict authoritarian parenting (Berzonsky, 2004) and to family cohesion, care, and emotional closeness (Fullinwider-Bush & Jacobvitz, 1993; Mathis & Adams, 2004; Passmore, Fogarty, Bourke, & Baker-Evans, 2005). Therefore, we investigated the role that parental solicitation (i.e., efforts to control adolescents' activities and actively solicit information), adolescents' willingness to disclose to parents, and open communication within the family may play in accounting for differences in identity style in adolescents. Because a parental emphasis on providing explanations and responding to questions and feedback from adolescents should encourage the adoption of an informational style (Berzonsky, 2004), we predicted that an informational style (as a positive identity) would be positively associated with open communication and disclosure. Because parental supervision and structure and family closeness should enhance the extent to which adolescents comply with parents and internalize their standards (Barber, Stolz, & Olsen, 2005; Mathis & Adams, 2004; Soenens, et al., 2004).

Emotional Autonomy Development during Adolescence

Transition of adolescents to adulthood involves dramatic changes that are required by the assumption of adult roles (McBride-Chang, Chang, 1998; Tung, 2005; Best, Hauser, & Allen, 1997; Kumru, & Thompson, R. 2003); these challenges may result in home-leaving failure with return to a family dependent role for short or extended periods (Chen, & Dornbusch, 1998; Collins, et al., 2000; Crittenden,1990). Therefore, autonomy is a crucial developmental task of adolescence, namely because it is closely linked to individuation and identity formation (Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986; Ryan & Lynch, 1989; Steinberg et al., 1992). Moreover, emotional autonomy is an important

contributor for identity forming of the adolescent and it was found to play an important role in the overall achievement of adolescent independence from the family (Fuhrman, & Holmbec, 1995; Sandhu, 2004; Kumru, & Thompson, 2003; Steinberg, & Silverberg, 1986). Research about the consequences of emotional autonomy in early adolescence, has yielded inconsistent results. On the one hand, some authors have suggested that emotional autonomy has positive developmental outcomes. Chen and Dornbusch (1998) examined the differential correlates of various aspects of emotional autonomy. High de-idealization and non-dependency, the alleged core aspects of emotional autonomy, were associated with positive outcomes such as better school grades. On the other hand, Ryan and Lynch (1989) reported that high emotional autonomy was related to greater feelings of insecurity with parents and lower feelings of lovability, both in adolescent and young adult samples. Surprisingly, authoritative and permissive parenting significantly predicted lower emotional autonomy, while authoritarian parenting was related to greater autonomy. The authors concluded that those youngsters, who experienced high levels of emotional autonomy, may be experiencing feelings of detachment. Several authors lent support to this conclusion by reporting negative associations between emotional autonomy or detachment and a series of psychosocial outcome variables.

Research Hypotheses

Positive Identity Would be significantly dependent on parenting style and emotional autonomy? Moreover, it was hypothesized that positive identity would be significantly and positively predicted by parental authoritative and emotional autonomy, whereas would be significantly and negatively predicted, by parental authoritarian and permissive?

Method

Population, Sample, and Sampling method: The population in this research includes all the high school students of Shiraz city in Iran. To choose the research sample, the multi-step cluster randomized sampling method was employed. Altogether 237 students (143 females and 84 males) were selected as the sample. The age group is 15 - 17 ½ years with mean age 16.28.

Research tools

Emotional autonomy: the emotional autonomy scale (Steinberg Silverberg, 1986), has four dimensions as Parental de-idealization, Perceives parents as people, Non dependency on parents and Individuation. Items are 20 in number and are presented in declarative statements and adolescents were asked to indicate their degree of agreement with each item on a four point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Identity Style Inventory: The fifth version of the Identity Style Inventory (ISI) has been used to operationally define identity styles in most empirical investigations. This scale assesses three confusion or avoidant, informational and normative styles in a five degree spectrum (1 = completely disagree to 5 =completely agree). Confirmatory factor analysis on an independent sample indicated that this 3-factor solution provided

the best fit. Scores on the 3 style scales demonstrated good test-retest reliability and internal consistency (Berzonsky, 2013). It mentions that this study used only information subscale of ISI as assessing positive identity.

Parenting styles scale: the parenting style questionnaire of Baumrind (1972) was used to assess the parenting styles of parents of adolescents participating in the study. The questionnaire consists of 30 questions which assess three authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive parenting styles on a five point scale of completely agree to completely disagree. Scores on the 3 style scales demonstrated good test-retest reliability and internal consistency.

Procedure

Questionnaires were distributed during class hours under the instructors' supervision. Respondents filled out the questionnaires anonymously. Average completion time was 20 minutes.

Result

The mean, standard deviation and correlation matrix of the identity styles (diffusion/avoidant, informational and normative), parenting style (authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive) and emotional autonomy are presented in Table1, the significant items are marked with an asterisk. As you see, the inter-correlation between variables of study ranges from -0.12 to 0.46. According to Table 1, informational identity style has meaningful relationship with emotional autonomy and authoritative parenting style and consistent with the expectation this relationship is negative with authoritarian and permissive parenting styles.

Table1. Means, standard deviations, and correlations among all study variables

Measures	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1.Positive identity	36.78	5.43	1				
2. Authoritative	41.34	5.23	.33**	1			
3. Authoritarian	41.72	5.65	-.22*	-.11*	1		
4.Permissive	24.78	5.32	-.21*	-.14*	-.13*	1	
5.Emotional autonomy	45.67	6.43	.41**	.34**	-.21*	-.27*	1

*p<0.05; **p<0.01

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to evaluate how well the strength measures predicted positive identity level. The predictors were the four strength indices, while the criterion variable was overall positive identity. The linear combination of the four strength measures was significantly related to the positive identity, R^2=.46, F (5, 236), $p<$ .001. This result indicates parental styles and emotional autonomy able to explain %46 variance of positive identity. Results of this regression, including beta-weights, can be found in Table 2. On the comparison of the beta-weights, it is found that among five predictors of positive identity, emotional autonomy with a .37 beta is the most power predictor of positive identity. Moreover, positive identity was positively predicted by the authoritative parenting style. Finally, the positive identity was negatively predicted by both the authoritarian and permissive parenting styles.

Table 2: The results of the regression effect coefficients

	B	β	T	sig
1. Authoritative	.26	.32	6.78	.01
2. Authoritarian	.14	-.20	5.98	.05
3.Permissive	.12	-.18	4.69	.05
4.Emotional autonomy	.31	.37	9.54	.001

Discussion

Overall, it can be suggested that emotional autonomy and parenting styles are important contributors the identity formation of adolescents. Regarding emotional autonomy, it can be said that adolescents' increasing ability to individuate and to perceive their parents as people beyond their roles as parents, are indicators of healthy adolescent identity, whereas de-idealization of parents may not be predictive of adolescents firm commitment towards life issues. The findings are consistent with our hypothesis that differences in the way youth initiate and regulate their behavior are associated with the way in which they tend to approach or manage to avoid the process of constructing and reconstructing a sense of identity. Emotional autonomy was predictive of a positive identity, indicating that youth who base their actions upon personal values and interests and display high levels of self-regulated functioning are more likely to actively seek out and process positive identity. Similarly, and consistent with our reasoning, these youth were also less likely to avoid identity-relevant problems, presumably because their well-integrated functioning is suspect to prevent them from dealing with identity issues. Information-oriented identity (positive identity) has a positive relationship with internal locus of control and negative relationship with authoritarianism (Steinberg, Elmen, & Mounts,1989). In this identity style the individual explores alternatives and decides on whatever is considered proper. They are aware of their individual emotions and believe that they are open to new horizons and experiences. They have liberal values, intellectual curiosity and insight, in addition to complex cognitive schemata and consciousness. Nermin Çelen, & Kuşdil (2009) reported an orientation pattern of independence and active achievement for late adolescence high in identity, while those low in identity were more passive and affective. In contrast, Crocetti, Rubini, and Meeus (2008) found Fore-closures (negative identity) lowest on the autonomy scale and highest on need for social approval. Graf (2003) reported that Fore-closures and Identity Diffusions had lower autonomy scores than did Identity Achievements and Moratoriums.

Second, positive identity style was positively predicted by the authoritative parenting style. The approaches used by parents to rear up their children, plays an essential role in providing their children with mental health. Healthy relationships make it possible to specify children's needs and set up to address the needs of the children. According to the research findings, families play a key role in character building of the adolescent. An adolescent is in need of his family's support to acquire confidence and develop

identity. Family environment and parents conduct have a considerable effect on character development. The results of the study indicated that democratic (authoritative) parenting style has a significant relationship with the formation of positive identity. But, the impersonal orientation was a negative predictor of the positive identity. Thus, youth who feel that they are unable to regulate their behaviour effectively are likely to avoid dealing with important identity-relevant tasks, leaving them confused and uncertain about themselves. That is, parents who are democratic in their parenting style (i.e., deliver punishments within a warm, accepting, and empathic context that recognizes the adolescent as an autonomous individual) elicit the most psychologically adaptive identity styles. Alternatively, parenting styles that emphasize warmth without control, and control without warmth, tend to elicit a negative identity (diffuse-avoidant), which has been linked to various psychological maladjustments in prior literature (e.g., Abaspoor, et al., 2015; Ahadi, et al., 2014; Barber, et al., 2005; Passmore, et al.,2005).

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