Identity Development and Sex Roles During Adolescence

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Introduction and Existing Literature

- Adolescence is marked as a period of ongoing transitions, exploration, and development that occur in a variety of domains (Mater, 1984) including identity development & sex role orientation (Erikson, 1959; Renk & Creasy, 2003).
- Identity – Identity style refers to the method that an individual uses to acknowledge and examine relevant information for his/her identity development (Kerpelman, Pittman, & Adler-Baeder, 2008). Styles include:
  - Informational – Being open to gathering varied sources of information in order to make identity decisions.
  - Normative – Identity decisions are based primarily on expectations of significant others.
  - Diffuse – General avoidance of identity decisions.
- Sex role orientations – Refer to the possession of certain traits that are considered socially desirable and, therefore, are thought to be socially sanctioned for either males or females (Spence & Helmreich, 1978).
  - Mixed evidence exists about the stability (Kohlberg, 1969; Witt, 1997) and flexibility (Barrett & White, 2002; Fan & Marini, 2000) of sex role orientations across the lifespan.
- Soenens, Duriez, and Goossens (2005) found cultural conservatism (i.e., the endorsement of traditional values) was negatively associated with the informational style and positively associated with the normative style.
- Renk and Creasy (2003) found that 17–22 year old females and males who reported high masculinity used significantly higher levels of problem-focused coping, whereas those reporting high femininity used higher levels of emotion-focused coping.

Measures

- Identity Processing Style. A shortened version of the Identity Style Inventory—III (ISI; Berzonsky, 1992) assesses individuals’ degree of informational, normative, and diffuse identity processing styles on a 5-point likert scale (1 = not at all like me; 5 = very much like me). Participants’ mean subscale scores were used as continuous variables to avoid arbitrary categorization as “high” or “low” for each style. \( \alpha = .73 \) and .81 for the instrumental and expressive subscales, respectively.
- Sex Role Orientation. The Personal Attributes Questionnaire – Short Form (PAQ; Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1975) assesses femininity/expressive and masculinity/instrumental characteristics. Response were scored on a 5-point likert scale (1 = very uncharacteristic; 5 = very characteristic). Sum scores were Computed, \( \alpha = .73 \) and .81 for the instrumental and expressive subscales, respectively.
  - o Male: Expressive M = 3.80, SD = .72; Instrumental M = 3.79, SD = .70
  - o Female: Expressive M = 4.08, SD = .60; Instrumental M = 3.66, SD = .63

Table 1. Descriptive information for variables of interest including correlations between variables and the mean, standard deviation, and range of each variable.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Informational Style</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Normative Style</td>
<td>.51***</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Diffuse Style</td>
<td>.09***</td>
<td>.18***</td>
<td>1.00</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Expressiveness</td>
<td>.35***</td>
<td>.26***</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Instrumentality</td>
<td>.27***</td>
<td>.30***</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.44***</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Grade Level</td>
<td>.06***</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.05**</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Identity style means by grade level, \( \alpha \) = .73

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Ninth</th>
<th>Tenth</th>
<th>Eleventh</th>
<th>Twelfth</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Informational Style</td>
<td>3.90*</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>3.99</td>
<td>4.01*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Normative Style</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>3.63</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diffuse Style</td>
<td>3.08b</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>2.94b</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Corresponding letters indicate a difference at the p < .01 level.

Table 3. Regression analysis predicting instrumentality and expressiveness.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Instrumentality</th>
<th>Expressiveness</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>beta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>-.19</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.12***</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.13***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade Level</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.04*</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.01</td>
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<tr>
<td>Informational Style</td>
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<td>.02</td>
<td>.17***</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.27***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normative Style</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.24***</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.13***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diffuse Style</td>
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<td>.02</td>
<td>-.08***</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.08***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adjusted R²</td>
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<td>.15</td>
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Summary of Main Findings and Conclusion

- Hypothesis 1: Identity processing style will vary by grade level. Informational style scores were higher for seniors than freshmen, and diffuse style scores were lower for seniors than freshmen. Normative style scores did not vary across grade levels. See Tables 1 and 2.
- Hypothesis 2: Masculinity and femininity will vary by grade level. Masculinity and femininity scores were similar across grade levels. Table 1.
- Hypothesis 3: Identity Style will predict varying levels of masculinity and femininity. The diffuse style was negatively related to development of both orientations (i.e., masculinity and femininity), whereas the informational and normative styles were positively related to both orientations. See Table 3.
- Hypothesis 4: Participants’ sex will moderate the relationship between identity style and sex role orientations (not shown). None of the interaction terms added to the multiple regression analyses were significant. Informational and diffuse styles predict instrumentality and expressiveness similarly for males and females.
- This exploratory study suggests that sex role orientations are fairly stable throughout high school, but identity processing styles do develop during these years. Higher instrumental and expressive scores were positively associated the informational and normative identity processing styles. The use of a diffuse processing style appears to be negatively associated with sex role orientation.

Sample

- 3,606 adolescents enrolled in Family and Consumer Science high school classes in a Southeastern state (grades 9–12). The participants ranged in age from 14 to 19 (M = 16.3) and were predominantly Caucasian (68.4%) females (79%).
- 33% were Freshmen, 27.6% were Sophomores, 21.7% were Juniors, and 17.7% were Seniors.
- 40.9% lived with both original parents (i.e., biological or adoptive), 24.9% lived with an original parent and stepparent, 25.7% were in single–parent families, and 8.4% reported a different living arrangement.
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