The Relationship between Identity Styles and Romantic Attachment with Identity Commitment among college students in Iran.

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ABSTRACT: The aim of this study was determine the relationship between Identity Styles (informational, normative, diffuse/avoidant with Romantic Attachment (anxiety, avoidance). In current study was used to correlation-descriptive research method. The statistical population were 1250 male and female undergraduate section students of Islamic Azad university, Dehaghan branch. The sample included 307(%60 of female and %40 of male) who were chosen by quota sampling method. The identity styles inventory (ISI) by Berzonsky (1989) and revised experiences in close relationships questionnaire (ECR-R) by Fraley et al (2000) was used to examine the research variables. The data were analyzed by T test, analysis of variance, Pearson correlation coefficient and multiple of regression analysis. The data obtained were analyzed by appropriate statistical techniques through the application of SPSS 18. The results revealed that the best predictors of identity commitment were, information identity style (p<0.000), diffuse/avoidant identity style (p<0.000), normative identity style (p<0.001) and attachment avoidance (p<0.016).

Key words: Informational identity style, Diffuse/avoidant identity style, Normative identity style, Attachment anxiety, Attachment avoidance.

INTRODUCTION

Identity formation, and achieve a consistent definition of self, is the most important aspects of psychosocial-social development in adolescence. According to Erikson's theory, identity, provides a objective sense of internal totality and acts as a interpreting context which is answered the questions about the "purpose" and "meaning" of life (Erikson, 1968; as quoted by Hejazi and Fartash, 2007). According to Erikson's theory, when the identity formation goes well, intimacy is formed. In this case, the person obtains the ability to create the close and lasting relations which is based on release attachment, deep commitment, trust, affection and support (Erikson, 1968; quoting the ShoariNezhad, 2002).

During the past four decades, researchs on adolescent identity, was conceptualized based on Marcia's identity paradigm. But recently, some researchers have focused on the processes of identity formation, and cognitive- social processing orientation or styles that adolescents apply to different identity status. Identity processing style is how the people process own information, how they discussion and make decision about their information and identity subjects(ZareiNezhad, 2011).

Berzonsky raises three identity processing styles: informational identity style tend to consider multiple solutions to the problem before committing to one of them. Normative identity style is tend to cohort with family and community's expectations and a high degree of commitment to the important people and use the their opinion. Diffuse /avoidant identity style is tend to procrastination and delaying personal decisions and avoiding the identity issues (Berzonsky et al, 2011).
According to Marcia two dimensions of identity are important: exploration and commitment. Exploration is discovered the career options and personal values. The commitment is decision about the identity path, and personal enterprise in order to achieve the desired identity (Santrick, 2010). People who rely on informational and normative identity style, they have acquired the stronger identity commitment toward people with diffuse/avoidant style. The lack of strong commitments in people with diffuse/avoidant, puts them in a vulnerable position (Hejazi & Fartash, 2007).

While adolescents are engaged in identity formation processes, many also are entering into romantic-type relationships. During the last decade, there has been increasing attention paid to the unique and valuable contribution that adolescents’ romantic relationships make to their development (Collins et al, 2009; Meier & Allen, 2009; Roisman, et al 2009; Welsh & Shulman, 2008). Just as parent–adolescent relationships have been theorized to support adolescent identity formation (Beyers & Goossens, 2008; Meeus & Weid, 2007), adolescents’ romantic relationships offer a context for youth to try out different identities as they explore various facets of themselves (Furman & Shaffer, 2003). Within romantic relationships, adolescents experiment with different ways of being and behaving and discover new things about who they are as individuals separate from their family of origin. In these romantic relationships, interesting gender differences emerge. For example, males report greater discomfort with communication (Giordano et al, 2006), whereas females report higher levels of affective intensity, support, and caregiving (Schulman & Scharf, 2000), more time, closeness and commitment with friends (Johnson, 2004), and higher intimacy (Montgomery, 2005). With intimacy defined as the capacity to receive care from and provide it to another person, while simultaneously maintaining one’s autonomy (Cassidy, 2001; Montgomery, 2005), this capacity is clearly linked to attachment representations (Maysless & Scharf, 2007). Bowlby (1969/1982) maintains that these representations emerge in infancy as a caregiver provides the “secure base” from which the infant can explore the broader world. The caregiver’s responsiveness to the infant’s signals provides the basis for the development of a specific attachment style. This attachment process later shapes an individual’s beliefs and interactions regarding interpersonal relationships. Hazan and Shaver (1987, 1990) extended Bowlby’s work by studying attachment styles among adults within the context of romantic relationships, with the partner as the attachment figure. In adulthood, attachment representations have been conceptualized in terms of two dimensions, anxiety and avoidance (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Mickelson et al, 1997; Wei et al, 2007). Feeney asserts that attachment anxiety results from a fear of rejection or abandonment and represents the extent to which an individual worries that affection for a partner will not be returned, whereas attachment avoidance results from fear of one’s own incompetence within a relational context and reflects discomfort with interpersonal closeness. As adolescents gain experience in romantic relationships, their attachment representations are reshaped, ultimately affecting future relationships and life decisions in adulthood (Feeney & Van Vleet, 2010; Meier & Allen, 2009).

When a person achieves to identity commitment, that he takes decisions in various fields of his life such as work and marriage and adherence to particular religious or political views and gains specific strategies to achieve personal goals and determination life path (AghaMohammadian & Hoseini, 2006). Commitment acts as a map that helps person to focus abilities and efforts on the specific direction and avoids the dispersion.

Berman et al (2006), showed that individuals in the foreclosed identity status group had significantly lower relationship avoidance scores than the diffused identity status group, and the foreclosed group had significantly lower relationship anxiety scores than both the achieved identity and moratorium groups. Identity status and romantic attachment style were significantly related among the college sample, but not among the high school sample. Some ethnic differences in attachment style were noted. Developmental implications are discussed.

Hejazi & Fartash (2007) showed that, identity commitment has a positive significant relationship with informational identity and normative identity style, and negative significant relationship with diffuse/avoidant identity style. There is highest correlation between normative identity style with identity commitment.

McNamara Barry et al (2009), results in their research indicated that identity achievement was related positively to four romantic relationship qualities, but not to any friendship qualities. Several achieved adulthood criteria were related positively to romantic relationship qualities; however, achieved adulthood criteria were related negatively to friendship qualities. It appears that progress on salient developmental tasks of adulthood carries important implications for emerging adults’ social relationships, but in ways that are more differentiated than commonly assumed.

Mikaeli Manei (2011) showed that identity styles are able to predict and explain significantly all components of compatible with the university.

Pittman et al (2011), argue that identity development and the formation of intimate relationships may be parallel and mutually influencing processes beginning in adolescence. In the current study, we examined empirical linkages among identity and intimacy variables during the period of middle adolescence.
Avila et al. (2012) indicated that identity is exclusively predicted by romantic attachment at this life stage, and not by parental attachment.

Ker pelman et al. (2012), showed that identity styles were found to have unique and direct associations with identity commitment. Attachment anxiety showed only indirect associations and attachment avoidance had both direct and indirect associations with identity commitment. Tests of moderation revealed that gender, race and relationship status had no influence on the direct associations of identity styles or romantic attachment with identity commitment. Few differences in association strength among identity styles and romantic attachment emerged for gender or race.

Crocetti et al. (2013), showed that normative and informational identity styles have a positive significant relationship, and diffuse/avoidant identity have a negative relationship with commitment. Therefore, according to importance of commitment, this question was raised to researcher: What are the factors make strong commitment? Among the different factors, do identity formation and achieve romantic attachment can provide strong identity commitment to students?

Research hypotheses

The first hypothesis: There is a relationship between identity styles (informational, normative, and diffuse/avoidant) with identity commitment.

The second hypotheses: There is a relationship between romantic attachment (attachment avoidance, attachment anxiety) with identity commitment.

METHODS

According to aim of the present study, that was the relationship between identity styles and romantic attachment with identity commitment, it was used to descriptive- correlation research method. Statistical Society were 1250 (750 females and 500 males) undergraduate students of all majors in Islamic Azad University, Dehaghan branch in Iran. The sample included 307 (%60 females and %40 males) who were chosen by quota sampling method.

The Identity Styles Inventory (ISI) by Berzonsky (1989) and Revised Experiences in Close Relationships (ECR-R) by Fraley et al. (2000) were used to examine the research variables:

Identity Styles Inventory (ISI); Berzonsky (1989): To evaluation identity styles and identity commitment was used this inventory. The questionnaire was made by Berzonsky (1989, 1992) and then was revised twice by himself. The questionnaire has 33 items that 7 items was in connection with informational style, 9 items related to diffuse/avoidant identity style and 8 questions was about the normative identity style. 9 items related to identity commitment. Responses were on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Higher scores indicate stronger use of a given identity style and stronger identity commitment. Ghazanfari (2008) reported inventories’ consistency coefficient 0.67 for informational style, 0.52 for normative style, 0.62 for diffuse/avoidant style and 0.57 for identity commitment. The alpha coefficient reported for informational, normative and diffuse/avoidant identity styles, respectively, 0.58, 0.50 and 0.67 by Piri et al. (2005).

Revised Experiences in Close Relationships (ECR-R); Fraley et al. (2000): This scale was made by Brennan, Clark, and Shaver in 1998 for measure the attachment dimensions of anxiety and avoidance using 9 selected items for each dimension. The revised edition of this scale was made by Fraley et al. (2000). This questionnaire that is a self-report instrument, has 36 items. Responses were on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree); higher scores indicate greater avoidance and anxiety. When answering the items, respondents were asked to think about all of the romantic relationships they had had rather than a specific one. If they had never had a relationship that would be considered romantic, they were asked to answer the questions for how they expected they would feel if they were in such a relationship. Brennan et al. reported reliabilities for the full anxiety and avoidance scales (18 items per scale, α=.91 for anxiety and α=.94 for avoidance). For the abbreviated scales, the nine anxiety items had an alpha of 0.86 and the nine avoidance items had an alpha of 0.89 in the college sample (N = 294). The 18 and nine item scales were correlated 0.97. In this study, the alpha coefficient was obtained for all of the questionnaire, anxiety and avoidance, respectively, 0.83, 0.88 and 0.70.

RESULTS

The first hypothesis: There is a relationship between identity styles (informational, normative, and diffuse/avoidant) with identity commitment. Findings related to the first hypothesis are presented in tables 1 and 2.
Table 1. Correlation coefficients and squared multiple correlation coefficient for predicting identity commitment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>$R$</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
<th>Adjusted $R^2$</th>
<th>SE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage 1</td>
<td>0.412</td>
<td>0.170</td>
<td>0.167</td>
<td>4.011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 2</td>
<td>0.510</td>
<td>0.261</td>
<td>0.256</td>
<td>3.791</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 3</td>
<td>0.538</td>
<td>0.289</td>
<td>0.282</td>
<td>3.723</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to findings of table 1, the informational identity style only predicts %17 of identity commitment. With the arrival the diffuse/avoidant identity style increases amount predicting of commitment %26.1. According to model 3, With the arrival the normative identity style increases amount predicting of commitment %28.9.

Table 2. The results of stepwise regression analysis to predict the identity commitment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>model</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Invariant coefficient</td>
<td>20.581</td>
<td>1.076</td>
<td>19.122</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informational identity style</td>
<td>0.311</td>
<td>0.039</td>
<td>0.412</td>
<td>7.890</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invariant coefficient</td>
<td>14.385</td>
<td>1.436</td>
<td>10.019</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informational identity style</td>
<td>0.326</td>
<td>0.037</td>
<td>0.431</td>
<td>8.719</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diffuse/avoidant identity style</td>
<td>-0.227</td>
<td>0.037</td>
<td>-0.302</td>
<td>-6.116</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invariant coefficient</td>
<td>12.592</td>
<td>1.504</td>
<td>8.354</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informational identity style</td>
<td>0.269</td>
<td>0.040</td>
<td>0.355</td>
<td>6.686</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diffuse/avoidant identity style</td>
<td>-0.184</td>
<td>0.038</td>
<td>-0.264</td>
<td>-4.800</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normative identity style</td>
<td>0.175</td>
<td>0.050</td>
<td>0.192</td>
<td>3.491</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to findings of table 2, the best predictors of identity commitment are, respectively, informational identity style ($p<0.000$), diffuse/avoidant identity style ($p<0.000$) and normative identity style ($p<0.001$). According to beta coefficients, a unit increasing in the amount of information identity style, increases predicting of identity commitment 0.355 and a unit increasing in the amount of diffuse/avoidant identity style, increases predicting of identity commitment 0.264. Also a unit increasing in the amount of normative identity style, increases predicting of identity commitment 0.192.

The second hypothesis: There is a relationship between romantic attachment (attachment avoidance, attachment anxiety) with identity commitment.

Findings from stepwise regression analysis to test the second hypothesis are presented in tables 3 and 4.

Table 3. Correlation coefficients and squared multiple correlation coefficient predicting identity commitment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>model</th>
<th>$R$</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
<th>Adjusted $R^2$</th>
<th>SE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage 1</td>
<td>0.287</td>
<td>0.071</td>
<td>0.068</td>
<td>4.241</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to findings of table 3, attachment avoidance only predicts %71 of identity commitment.

Table 4. The results of stepwise regression analysis to predict the identity commitment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>model</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Invariant coefficient</td>
<td>22.462</td>
<td>1.346</td>
<td>16.683</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance attachment</td>
<td>-0.081</td>
<td>0.017</td>
<td>-0.267</td>
<td>-4.836</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
According to findings of table 4, only predictor of identity commitment is attachment avoidance. According to beta coefficients, a unit increasing in the amount of attachment avoidance, increases predicting of identity commitment 0.267(p<0.000).

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was determine the relationship between identity styles (informational, normative, diffuse/avoidant) and romantic attachment (anxiety, avoidance) with identity commitment.

First hypothesis regarding the relationship between identity styles (informational, normative, and diffuse/avoidant) with identity commitment, was confirmed. The second hypothesis stating relationship between romantic attachment (anxiety and avoidance) with identity commitment was confirmed only in the case of avoidant attachment and the third hypothesis regarding the relationship between identity styles (informational, normative, and diffuse/avoidant) with romantic attachment (anxiety and avoidance), showed that informational and diffuse/avoidant identity styles predict avoidance attachment and anxiety attachment is predicted by diffuse/avoidant identity style. The current study, informational and normative identity styles have positive relationship with identity commitment. This relationship correspond to findings results of Kerpelman et al (2012); Crocetti et al(2013) and Mikaeili Manei (2011). According to research results of Hejazi and Fartash(2007), there is highest correlation between normative identity style with identity commitment. Another finding of the current study showed that, there is negative significant relationship between diffuse/ avoidant identity style with identity commitment. This finding is consistent with research finding of Kerpelman et al(2012).

Another finding of second hypotheses, showed that there is no significant relationship between anxiety attachment with identity commitment. This finding is not consistent to another researches findings such as Kerpelman et al(2012); Pittman et al(2011) and Avila et al (2012).

In the case of relationship between identity styles with romantic attachment, the findings of current study is consistent to findings of another research such as Kerpelman et al(2012); Berman et al (2006) and McNamara Barry et al(2009).

According to findings of this research, The best predictor of identity commitment were, respectively, informational, diffuse/avoidant and normative identity styles. Informational and normative identity styles had positive relationship to identity commitment. People that have informational identity style, search and evaluation the information and then they are committed to their most appropriate. In addition, the identity commitments that are selected Following a period of exploration and experimentation, are stronger (Shokri et al, 2008). People with normative identity style without researching and evaluating information, ara committed to the expectations and instructions of reference groups and important individuals (Hejazi & Fartash, 2007). Therefore, as we expected, this two identity styles had positive relationship with identity commitment.

Another finding of current study showed that there is negative significant relationship between diffuse/avoidant identity style with identity commitment. This means that students that had diffuse/avoidant identity style, they had achieved the Lower scores of identity commitment. In diffuse/avoidant identity style, people are always trying to avoid the personal issues, conflicts and decisions (Daneshvarpoor et al, 2008). This avoidance of exploration situations, undermines the decision about identity path and personal investing of achieve identity (namely identity commitment).

According to the results, the only predictor of identity commitment, was avoidance attachment. Avoidance attachment had negative correlation with identity commitment. Thus it can be predicted that students who feel uncomfortable from close relationships with their partners and tend to maintain their independence, show a weaker identity commitment. It is important to have a emotional and reassuring close relationship to parents, and experience this relationship as a source of relax and support. It seems that this relationship (parental attachment) acts as a developmental field for exploration and commitment processes, that is main reason for the identity formation(Smits et al, 2008)

Since the child attachment system is active across the life cycle and leading romantic love (Bowlby, 1982), people who have not had a secure attachment with their parents for example they had avoidance attachment), in the process of exploration and achieve to strong identity commitment, they are in trouble. Perhaps we can explain this subject such that people who have an avoidant attachment in adulthood, they have avoided confrontation with positions and identity explorations during the their identity formation thus identity commitment is weak for them because they essentially have done attempt to identity exploration, And thus they are not able to make decisions and investment (commitment).

Other finding of the study showed no significant relationship between anxious attachment and identity commitment. This issue is inconsistent with other researchs findings such as Smits et al (2008); Pittman et al.
(2011); Avila et al (2012); Kerpelman et al (2012). According to the findings of this researches, the negative relation between anxious attachment and identity commitment was expected. But in this study anxiety attachment could predict significantly identity commitment. According to research of Kerpelman et al(2012), identity styles may also directly affect on identity commitment. While the dimensions of romantic attachment rely on all or some identity styles to their relationships with identity commitment (mediate effect of identity style). Since the only diffuse/avoidant identity style predicts romantic attachment (the part of third hypothesis findings), accordingly, perhaps the commitment that attachment anxiety was not able to predict it, it has been informational or normative commitment.

CONCLUSIONS

Therefore it can be concluded that including the factors that constitute a strong identity commitment for students, are achievement of successful identity formation and obtain to secure romantic attachment.

Research suggests

Variables of this study are considered in a longitudinal study from early adolescence to early adulthood. Also topic of this research is studied at other universities and in other social and cultural context.Current topic is investigated in other courses.

REFERENCES


