IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT AND SELF-ESTEEM IN A GROUP OF LATE ADOLESCENTS

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Abstract: Adolescence is critical period in the life of an individual to develop a meaningful sense of self with respect to ideological belief and interpersonal relations. The present study explores the pattern of ego-identity statuses and its relation with one's self-esteem in a group of female late adolescents selected from urban and rural colleges of West Bengal. Findings of the study indicate that identity achievement status in the field of occupation and ideological belief for occupation and religion have positive and significant relationship with self-esteem. On the other hand moratorium status was found to be negatively associated with self –esteem. Overall, the findings indicate the association of self-esteem and locational variation in determining identity achievement status of late adolescents.

Introduction:

Identity Development and Self-esteem in a Group of Late Adolescents: Identity development is a central developmental task of adolescence and its resolutions set the social-cognitive structure of individuality (Erikson, 1968). Adolescence is a critical period in the life of an individual. It is known to be a period of exploratory self-analysis and self-evaluation ideally culminating in the establishment of a cohesive and integrative sense of self or identity (Erikson, 1968). During this period adolescents are confronted with the task of searching for a meaningful sense of self, as a result of increasing cognitive capacities, physical maturation and the imminence of taking on adult roles in society. This task is called "identity crisis".

The successful resolution of an identity crisis gives the person a sense of identity; while failure to resolve the crisis results in "role confusion". Marcia theorized about ego-identity status and said that adolescent's search for an identity could be described in terms of both recognition of their existence of an identity crisis and their exploration to find a solution to the crisis and then commitment to a solution to the crisis (i.e. the development of an adult identity). Based on the high and low combination of crisis/exploration and commitment components, Marcia (1966) proposed four identity statuses which are as follows:

(a) Identity Achievement refers to the status of individuals who have experienced a period of crisis and made firm commitments to self chosen values and goals.

(b) Identity Moratorium status refers to the period where individuals are currently actively searching for alternatives, but have not yet made commitment or commitments are vague.

(c) Identity Foreclosure refers to the status of individuals who make commitments without experiencing a period of crisis. These individuals had assumed an identity based on their identification with significant others, most commonly with the parents.

(d) Identity Diffused individuals are those who have made neither any commitment to a set of values and goals, nor are actively searching to reach them through exploration.

Thus, Marcia stated that adolescent stage consists

neither of identity resolution nor identity confusion, but rather the degree to which one has explored and committed to an identity in different domains of life.

Erikson mentioned two important domains of adolescent identity development: occupation and institutional ideology. But later on, Marcia characterized ideology as including beliefs about religion and politics. Interpersonal issues such as sex-role concepts, sexual activities and friendship were also added with special concern for female identities (Bennion & Adams, 1986; Grotevant, Thorbecke, Meyer, 1982).The process of finding a vocational direction is a formidable task to achieve a meaningful sense of identity. It has been found that identity status is a strong predictor of career maturity than one's self concept, that is those higher in identity exploration and commitment showed greater career maturity than those who have simply positive ideas about themselves (Wallace-Broscicous, Serafica, & Osipow, 1994). Literature on the role of religious identity and prosocial behavior on identity development have noted that youth participating in religious communities are more likely to report a sense of purpose in their lives and also religion may help to promote prosocial behavior (Markstorm, 1999). The importance of political ideology and the need for adolescents to have the opportunity to explore many realities, challenges and perspectives have been pointed out by Adams (1985). It has been observed that high school students taking part in community service programmes have developed higher levels of political-social awareness and identity development.

The social conditions in India are changing rapidly with observable results in values and beliefs of the younger generation. Therefore, it is assumed that identity development in different domains may vary from group to group and from region to region in Indian population.

Identity Status and Self-esteem: Self-esteem has received considerable attention in relation to identity status. Self-esteem is defined as a positive evaluation of one's attributes and a sense of self-worthiness (Rosenberg, 1965). When women are confused about their identity, they may have trouble in advancing their career. Self-esteem has important part to play in women's leadership identity. During adolescence, individuals are concerned about their self-image – what am I like? How good am I? What should I, or might I

become? This sort of questions come up in the mind of an individual during adolescence and in this period major decisions like occupational choice etc. have to be taken. Youth unemployment has been commonly linked with low self-esteem and negative feelings of psychological well being and self worth (Feather, 1990; Winefield, 1997).Whatever the reasons for unemployment, adolescents who are unable to find suitable jobs face a number of latent consequences that are likely to impact on identity development. These adolescents will often miss a clearly defined sense of purpose and structure in their daily lives, they will also miss participation in goals and purposes beyond themselves, and recognition by a significant reference group for personal status and recognition. On the other hand, Garbarino (1999) noted that religion would seem to be an important antidote to the experience of meaninglessness; and it may also serve as a buffer against risky behavior for some troubled youths. Researches done in this field indicated that identity achievement and moratorium males scored higher in self-esteem than did identity foreclosure and diffusion males (Orlofsky, 1978). Marcia & Friedman (1970) found highest self-esteem in identity foreclosure status whereas identity achievement status scored the lowest. They said that identity foreclosure might be more adaptive for women than men. But in another study Schenkel and Marcia (1972) using women participants did not observe any differences in self-esteem scores among four identity statuses, when using occupation, religion and politics as the identity content areas.

Later studies using objective methods to measure identity statuses found that identity achievement was positively correlated with self-esteem for both men and women, whereas identity diffusion was negatively associated with self-esteem (Cramer, 2000). Taylor & Oskay (1995) observed that for American students, identity achievement was positively associated with self-esteem, while identity moratorium, foreclosure and diffusion were all negatively associated with self-esteem. Balistreri et al. (1995) measured identity status, and found that regardless of gender, identity achievement and foreclosure students scored significantly higher in self-esteem than did moratorium and diffusion. In addition, self-esteem correlated positively with commitment scores but not with exploration scores. In view of these studies, it is expected that in the present study identity achievement status will have positive relationship with self-esteem.

Many researchers believe that industrialization in the late 19th century has brought about the emergence of adolescence as a distinct period in the life span of an individual. The existence of adolescence may vary within a culture and also by gender and social class. Saraswathi (1999) argued that Indian children in the upper social class typically had a more distinct stage of adolescence than children in the lower social class and Indian girls in general experience a greater continuity between childhood and adulthood than do boys. In India, wide variations prevail in different sections of the society, which in recent times is observed to be much due to globalization and liberalization and the influence of mass media have also brought about changes in the life style of rural people as well.

In light of the above discussion it appears that adolescents experience a critical problem of modifying their behavioural roles as they move from childhood to adulthood. Therefore, it is important to know the pattern of ego- identity status in different groups of late adolescents; especially in the present study we are interested in studying female adolescents.

In view of this, the following research objectives are to be answered in the present study:

- To find out the pattern of ego-identity status in female adolescents coming from rural and urban locations of West Bengal.
- To explore the pattern of relationship between different types of identity statuses and self-esteem.

Method:

Participants: As the objective of the study is to investigate the pattern of ego-identity status in late adolescent females, it was decided to select college students as participants because of convenience to select this age group of sample from colleges.

Altogether data were collected from 237 female students studying in different undergraduate colleges (rural and urban) in the state of West Bengal. The mean age for the students was 18.51 years. The socio-economic condition of the participants varied from lower to higher socio-economic status, but majority of them came from middle socio-economic status (60.0 %).

Measures: All the participants were administered the following measures:

Extended Objective Measure of Ego-identity Status (Bennion and Adams, 1986): The Extended Objective Measure of Ego-identity Status (EOM-EIS) is a self-report instrument consisting of 32 items covering four dimensions, which are occupation, religion, politics and interpersonal relationship. Participants responded to items on a 6-point Likert -type scale, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". There are 8 items for each of the four content areas. Each item was written in a way to assess one's status in one content area. Every individual thus, receives score for all the four statuses i.e. identity achievement, moratorium, foreclosure and diffusion.

Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale: Rosenberg Self-esteem (RSE) scale is a widely used self-esteem measurement developed by Rosenberg (1965). The scale measures self-esteem, which is a positive evaluation of one's attributes and sense of self-worthiness. It consists of 10 items. Participants indicated their agreement-disagreement level for each item along a four point Likert -type scale, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". Higher scores in the scale indicate higher self-esteem.

Apart from these measures some background

information for example, age, gender, socio-economic condition, rural-urban location, type of family (nuclear / joint) etc. were also collected from all the participants through a Background Information Schedule.

Results: Data collected from the students were first scored and then means and standard deviations for different measures for the total sample and location wise (rural-urban) were calculated and the results are presented in the following tables:

Table-1 Means and Standard Deviations (SD) of Identity Statuses in different domains (n=237)								
Identity Statuses	Occupation		Religion		Politics		Interpersonal relations	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Achievement	9.95	1.89	10.26	1.59	9.78	2.10	8.08	2.64
Moratorium	9.38	1.89	7.12	2.71	9.68	2.03	7.92	2.68
Foreclosure	6.30	3.08	8.19	2.78	6.16	2.37	7.11	2.70
Diffusion	8.04	2.32	7.89	2.78	9.68	2.35	7.30	2.86

Table-2 Means and Standard Deviations (SD) of Identity Statuses in different domains for Urban and Rural and Students									
Identity Statuses		Occupation		Religion		Politics		Interpersonal Relations	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Achievement	Urban	9.79	1.86	10.27	1.70	9.57	2.26	7.94	2.73
	Rural	10.12	1.92	10.24	1.48	10.02	1.88	8.24	2.54
Moratorium	Urban	9.31	1.98	7.22	2.77	9.69	1.96	7.95	2.92
	Rural	9.45	1.79	7.01	2.65	9.66	2.12	7.88	2.39
Foreclosure	Urban	5.54	3.07	8.12	2.93	6.03	2.36	7.14	2.61
	Rural	7.14	2.87	8.26	2.61	6.30	2.39	7.06	2.82
Diffusion	Urban	7.90	2.03	8.20	2.73	9.94	2.12	7.17	2.64
	Rural	8.21	2.61	7.54	2.81	9.38	2.55	7.44	3.09

From the above table it is observed that there are locational variation in the mean scores of students. Female adolescents were more identity achieved in the area of occupation and ideological belief than interpersonal relations. For interpersonal relations, students were found to be in crisis period and not committed fully. Rural students were found to be more identity achieved than urban students. For political ideology both rural and urban students were found to be more diffused than in other areas.

Relationship of self-esteem with different dimensions of identity statuses: The present study wanted to explore the relationship of self-esteem with different dimensions of identity statuses. We also calculated the mean and SD values of self-esteem scores of urban and rural students which are presented in Table3.

Table-3 Means and Standard Deviations (SD) of Self-esteem scores for total sample, Rural and Urban Students			
	Total sample	Urban	Rural
Mean	27.53	27.69	27.35
SD	3.98	3.54	4.42

Though the self-esteem scores across rural-urban location varied to some extent, i.e. rural students scored slightly lower than urban students, but no significant differences were observed. Next, product moment correlation coefficients were computed between self-esteem and different dimensions of identity statuses for the total sample, rural and urban students separately with respect to different ideological and interpersonal domains. The results are presented in Tables 4 & 5.

Table 4 Coefficient of Correlations Between different Identity Statuses and Self-esteem in Different Domains				
Identity Statuses	Occupation	Religion	Politics	Interpersonal Relations
Achievement	.21**	.17**	-.02	.09
Moratorium	-.24**	-.15*	.01	.10
Foreclosure	-.07	.04	.02	.09
Diffusion	-.10	.15*	.10	-.12

Table5 Coefficient of Correlations Between different Identity Statuses and Self-esteem for Urban and Rural students					
Identity Statuses		Occupation	Religion	Politics	Interpersonal Relations
Achievement	Urban	-.02	.04	.07	.06
	Rural	.42**	.32**	-.11	.12
Moratorium	Urban	-.32**	-.05	-.04	.08
	Rural	-.16	-.26**	.05	.13
Foreclosure	Urban	.05	-.09	.24**	.06
	Rural	-.07	.02	-.16	.11
Diffusion	Urban	-.21*	.15	.10	-.004
	Rural	-.02	.15	.10	-.20*

The positive correlation values reported in the above tables indicate that the identity achievement statuses in occupation and religion domains have positive relationship with self-esteem. This is true for the rural students too. On the other hand, identity moratorium statuses have negative relationship with self-esteem. In most of the cases, identity foreclosure and diffusion statuses were found to be negatively correlated with self-esteem which indicate that these students have low self-esteem about themselves or vice versa. These results are in accordance with the earlier findings obtained by Taylor and Oskay (1995) and Cramer (2000).

Further, we divided the participants into two groups based on their median self-esteem scores: (i) those scoring at and above the median as high self-esteem group, and (ii) those scoring below the median as low self-esteem group. Then correlation coefficients were calculated between different dimensions of identity statuses and self-esteem with respect to occupational and ideological domains. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4 Coefficient of Correlations Between different Identity Statuses and Self-esteem in Different Domains				
Identity Statuses	Occupation	Religion	Politics	Interpersonal Relations
Achievement	.21**	.17**	-.02	.09
Moratorium	-.24**	-.15*	.01	.10
Foreclosure	-.07	.04	.02	.09
Diffusion	-.10	.15*	.10	-.12

The above values indicate that the adolescents having high self-esteem are generally identity achieved in occupation and religion area. On the contrary, those who are in identity moratorium stage i.e. those who are in crisis period and not made commitments have negative relationship with self-esteem. Identity foreclosed individuals of the high self-esteem group have also negative relationship with self-esteem. But for the low self-esteem group these relationship patterns are more or less insignificant.

Discussion: The present study was performed to investigate empirically the pattern of ego-identity status in different groups of late adolescents. The participants were from urban and rural locations of West Bengal. The findings indicate that the pattern of ego-identity status and self-esteem varied with regard to location. On an average, students scored higher in identity achievement status which indicate that for these domains they have gone through the period of crisis and made commitments in the areas of occupation, religion and politics, whereas for interpersonal relations status they are not still committed. At the same time, West Bengal students were also found to be more diffused in the areas of occupation and politics.. Rural-urban locational difference in foreclosure status for occupation, religion and politics was also observed which indicate that rural students follow parental wishes more. This may be due to the fact that rural students have less exposure to the outside world than urban students and thus, this difference was noticed. However, the overall results indicate that female students also pass through identity crisis like male students. This may be due to the influence of globalization and liberalization as the rural female students were also observed to be exploring alternatives or have made commitments in the ideological and interpersonal area. These findings do not support the findings of Saraswathi (1999), who indicated that Indian girls generally do not experience adolescence but experience a continuity from childhood to adulthood.

As expected identity achieved status was found to have positive association with self-esteem. As reported in other Western studies (Cramer, 2000; Taylor & Oskay, 1995) Indian adolescents, who have passed through a

crisis period and made commitments in the areas of occupation and religion, were found to possess positive self image about themselves or vice versa. But, students, who are in foreclosure and diffused statuses, were found to have negative association with self-esteem image or vice versa.

In sum, it can be said that adolescence is a critical period in the life of an individual to construct a meaningful sense of self with respect to ideological belief and interpersonal relations. Our findings indicate how these late adolescents of urban and rural locations arrive at their identity solutions and how values, beliefs and positive self images help them to explore alternatives and to arrive at meaningful solutions.

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