

A Comparative Study of Identity Style in Deaf and Normal Adolescents

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Abstract

Adolescence is a critical period of human life, during which many individuals are having problems, including uncertainty in decision-making about important life issues. In particular, there are a number of adolescents with difficulties and disabilities such as hearing impairment; this group of young people also has problems of their own. Many studies have been done on normal adolescents' identity style but less has been carried out on deaf adolescents. This study aimed to compare deaf and normal adolescents' identity styles. The present study is a causal-comparative research in which 120 adolescents (60 normal and 60 deaf) were assessed. Identity Style Inventory Revised for a Sixth-Grade Reading Level (ISI-6G) was used. The results showed that the two groups of adolescents were only different in informative identity style and no difference was observed in other identity styles. It can therefore be concluded that normal and deaf adolescents only differ in informative identity style, and there is no difference in normative and diffuse identity styles. Accordingly, it was concluded that today because of the importance given to deaf adolescents and the educational and recreational opportunities provided for them, they are less prone to stress and problems than in the past.

Keywords: Identity styles, normal adolescent, deaf adolescent.

1. Introduction

Adolescence is a critical period of human life. This intermediate period in the transition from childhood to adulthood is a preamble to physical, psychological and social transformation and influences which impact adolescent's performance in adulthood. In this period, adolescents are exposed to a considering number of mental and behavioral problems. Studies have shown that high-risk behaviors increase in adolescence; and a tendency to a variety of risky behaviors or showing multiple behaviors are observed in this period.

A lack of decision-making in the areas of school and education, career, and relationships with the opposite sex has more negative outcomes in adolescence than in childhood. Also, adolescents feel more responsible for their decisions and the related consequences than their childhood (Petersen, 1988). As a result, understanding this period is of great importance and obviously healthy adolescents can play a significant role in the advancement of their society.

One of the factors affecting the mental health of adolescents is their identity style. Identity style is one of the crucial issues of developmental psychology which has been of interest to researchers in recent years. Most studies in the past few decades in the area of identity were in the model of Marcia (Marcia, JE 1966). Marcia has noticed four separate levels of ego identity, which is described in the concept of "presence or absence of exploration and commitment crisis". These four levels are: Diffuse identity (a state of no current crisis without commitment), foreclosure (a state of former crisis with no commitment), moratorium (a state of current crisis without commitment), and identity achievement (a state of commitment with former crisis). Although considered in a normal position, these levels insist on the involvement of adolescents in identity formation process (Michael, D. Berzonsky, Rice, & Neimeyer, 1990; Grotevant & Adams, 1984).

Erikson considers identity shaping as one of the fundamental tasks of adolescence period. Berzonsky has determined three orientations for identity styles: Informative, normative and diffuse/avoidant. Individuals with successful or delayed identity use informative processing style, individuals with early identity use normative processing, and those with diffuse identity use diffuse/avoidant style. Informative identity style is seemingly the most adaptive style which is to manage daily situations. Normative style is shaped based on the imitation and following of important people in one's life, while diffuse/avoidant style is an emotion-focused strategy accompanied with a low level of commitment, self-esteem and

also unstable self-concept (MD Berzonsky & Neimeyer, 1994). Individuals with informative identity style consciously try to search for information and evaluate them. These individuals are industrious, introspective, with high self-esteem and have a good ability of problem-solving. These individuals are generally optimistic about the future, punctual and happy and not affected by others and relying on their own beliefs when doing tasks (M. Berzonsky & Adam, 2002).

Individuals with normative identity style conform with expectations, reference groups and important persons' commands on important decisions and expressing ideas and do not engage actively in assessing information, while only defending their current identity structure gained without any investigation or search (Dolinger & Dolinger, 2002).

Individuals with diffuse/avoidant identity style lack decision-making ability and make decisions with delay. These individuals have emotional and unstable behaviors with external locus of control (Adam & Shea, 2001). According to the theory of socio-psychological development (Erikson, 1968), the main task of adolescence is the formation of a stable sense of identity. Stable identity, gaining a successful identity and a successful transition from identity crisis is of significant importance to psychologists (Giddens, 1991). Identity formation in adolescence needs a number of decisions made on some of life issues such as politics, religion, employment, etc. (Schwartz, 2001).

During adolescence, individuals experience great evolutionary and physical changes. A tendency towards independence from family and joining peer groups, besides an increase in communications with friends are among various evolutionary changes of this period.

Furthermore, part of adolescence identity is formed in peer groups (Marcia, 1966). Among adolescents there are some who are with certain disabilities, including disabilities in vision, hearing, mental retardation and behavioral problems. Hearing is one of the five senses that speech is deeply affected by; with lack of hearing relationships with others would be impaired. According to available statistics, about 1.5 millions of Iranian population are deaf or with hearing problems. Two children out of every thousand births are born with severe sensorineural hearing loss (Ajalloueyan, Amirsalari, Yousefi, Raeessi, & Hassanalfard, 2011).

A total of seventy million deaf people live around the world, of which 84,000 live in Iran (Mahdieh, et al., 2005). A large number of people who are deaf or with impaired hearing are born to families of normal parents. From parents' perspective, deafness (anacusia) is the most complex sensory loss which faces parents with constant stress and anxiety (Meinzen-Derr, Lim, Choo, Buyniski, & Wiley, 2008).

Mental health is of great importance to individuals with physical, sensory and motor deprivation. Accordingly, deaf children demand special attention to learn and prepare for social life. In addition, they must be prepared to live among their own kind; they must find a way to communicate. Anxiety, lack of self-confidence, fear of rejection by others, negativism, isolation, depression, lack of self-awareness, avoidance of classroom games, double-emotional orientation, lack of social sophistication and aggressiveness are of the common issues among the deaf (Bazrafshan-sabereh, 1389). The birth and presence of a child with hearing loss encounters families with unique and different challenges (Eldik, PDTreffers, Veerman, & FCVerhulst, 2004).

Parents with children who are deaf or hearing problems encounter serious problems at every stage of their child's life (school, adolescence, graduation, career, marriage, etc.) which are less common for normal children's parents to face (Janjua, Woll, & Kyle, 2002). Various researches have shown that families with deaf or exceptional children as compared to families with normal children are having less mental health (Movallali & Nemat, 2010).

Based on the above and given the importance of identity in adolescence and the abundance of problems in this area -considering the few studies done on deaf adolescents- this study aimed to compare deaf and normal adolescents' identity styles, and has answered the question whether there are differences between these two groups or not?

2. Measuring Instruments

This study is a causal-comparative research. The study population was female high school students (normal and deaf) in Tehran, Iran. A total of 120 students (60 normal and 60 deaf) were examined. The samples were selected from 6 schools in Tehran by cluster random sampling method. The samples were taken from 6 different schools due to the low number of deaf students in high schools. For normal students, the samples were completely selected randomly in each class. After taking permission from the Department of Exceptional Children Education and Tehran Education Headquarters and in coordination with school administrators besides gaining the students' satisfaction, the questionnaires were distributed to students.

Because of deaf students' understanding problems, their lack of vocabulary resources and the various questions they had about the questionnaire as well as a lack of understanding of the meaning of some words, the questions were conceptualized for them. But, for normal adolescents, questionnaires were only distributed and no questions were explained to them.

2.1 Identity Style Inventory Revised for a Sixth-Grade Reading Level (ISI-6G)

The Identity Style Inventory Revised for a Sixth-Grade Reading Level (ISI-6G) is a self-report instrument composed of four sub-scales created by Berzonsky, Nurmi, Kinney and Tammi (1992). This inventory is comprised of 40 questions in the following categories: informative scale (11 questions), normative scale (9 questions), diffusion identity (10 questions), and commitment style (10 questions). Participant responses are scored according to a Likert-type rating where agree=1 and disagree=5. Berzonsky (1999) has reported an alpha coefficient for the ISI-6G scales as follows: informative=0.62, normative=0.62 and diffusion=0.73. According to White and colleagues (1998), the alpha coefficients for each subscale are as follows: informative=0.73, normative=0.67 and diffuse=0.69. In the revised version of White, et al. the correlation coefficient is much similar to the original version. Accordingly, the alpha coefficient has been reported as following: informative=0.84, normative=0.81 and diffuse=0.84.

In Iran, ISI-6G was administered and validated by Ghazanfari (1383) on a sample of 1832 high school students (864 males and 968 females). He used Cronbach's alpha coefficient to evaluate ISI-6G internal consistency on the original data, and the relating results were as follows: informative style=0.67, normative style=0.52 and diffuse/avoidant style=0.62. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the deaf sample was as follows: informative style=0.71, normative style=0.62 and diffuse/avoidant style=0.74.

The coefficients for the deaf were high perhaps because the questions for this group were conceptualized, or could be because that the deaf students responded to questions more accurately and in terms of age they were at least two years older than the normal students. The coefficients indicated that ISI-6G has acceptable reliability and consistency. The information obtained from the questionnaires was analyzed by SPSS software.

3. Findings

Normal students aged from 15-18 years and deaf students from 17-22. The reason for deaf students' high age is that they study first and fifth grades in two years. Therefore, when in high school they are two years older than the normal students. Also, many of deaf students have started their first grade in elementary school at the age of eight. Table 1 presents the means for normal and deaf adolescents by different identity styles.

Table 1. Statistical indices of identity styles of deaf and normal adolescents

| SD | Mean | N | Group | Identity styles |
|------|-------|----|--------|-----------------|
| 7.05 | 37.58 | 60 | Normal | Informative |
| 7.63 | 33.88 | 60 | Deaf | |
| 5.84 | 30.90 | 60 | Normal | Normative |
| 5.71 | 29.95 | 60 | Deaf | |
| 5.05 | 30.18 | 60 | Normal | Diffuse |
| 6.10 | 28.75 | 60 | Deaf | |
| 4.95 | 33.78 | 60 | Normal | Commitment |
| 5.71 | 34.23 | 60 | Deaf | |

To compare the identity styles of normal and deaf adolescents, independent t-test was used. One of the assumptions of parametric tests is distribution normality of the dependent variable in the two groups. To verify this assumption Kolomogrov-Smirnov Test was used, the results of which is given in Table 2.

Table 2. Kolomogrov-Smirnov Test results to verify distribution normality of identity styles in both groups

| Sig. level | K-S | Groups | Variable |
|------------|-------|--------|-------------|
| 0.518 | 0.816 | Normal | Informative |
| 0.683 | 0.717 | Deaf | |
| 0.892 | 0.578 | Normal | Normative |
| 0.736 | 0.685 | Deaf | |
| 0.293 | 0.979 | Normal | Diffuse |
| 0.412 | 0.886 | Deaf | |
| 0.420 | 0.881 | Normal | Commitment |
| 0.775 | 0.661 | Deaf | |

Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality results are shown in Table 2 to verify distribution normality of identity styles in both deaf and normal adolescents. Based on the results presented in the above table, the scores distribution in two groups by identity styles at the level of 95% ($\alpha = 0.05$) is not significant. In other words, considering that the insignificance of Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test means the confirmation of null hypothesis: "normal distribution of identity styles scores in two groups of deaf and normal", it can be concluded with 95% confidence that the identity styles distribution of scores in two groups is normal. Thus, two independent groups test was applied according to the normal distribution of scores.

Table 3. Levine's test results for homogeneity of variances in scores of identity styles

| Sig. level | F | Variable |
|------------|-------|-------------|
| 0.782 | 0.077 | Informative |
| 0.713 | 0.136 | Normative |
| 0.033 | 4.679 | Diffuse |
| 0.161 | 1.994 | Commitment |

As shown in Table 3, given the obtained significance levels higher than 0.05, the variances are homogeneous and parametric tests can be used to test the assumptions.

To test the research hypothesis that there is a significant difference between the means of identity styles in normal and deaf adolescents, independent t-test was used, the results of which is shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Independent t-test results to compare the mean scores of identity styles in deaf and normal adolescents

| Sig. | df | t | Groups | Identity style |
|-------|---------|-------|----------------|----------------|
| 0.007 | 118 | 2.756 | Normal deaf | Informative |
| 0.370 | 118 | 0.900 | Normal deaf | Normative |
| 0.164 | 114.048 | 1.400 | Normal deaf | Diffuse |
| 0.646 | 118 | 0.461 | Normal deaf | Commitment |

According to Table 4, it can be concluded that there is a significant difference between informative identity style scores of normal and deaf adolescents. ($\alpha = 0.01$). That is, it can be said with 99% confidence that normal adolescents' scores are higher than deaf ones in informative identity style, while there is no significant difference between normative, diffuse and commitment identity styles of normal and deaf adolescents.

4. Conclusions

This study aimed to compare normal (15-18 years old) and deaf (17-22 years old) high school adolescent students' identity styles.

According to previous studies, identity is a complex system of self-definition formed in a social context (Espin, Stewart, & Gomez, 1990). The evolutionary stage of adolescence is a stage of transition between childhood and adulthood considered as an important stage in establishing identity. In this stage, one becomes aware of his/her feelings, values and goals, and tries to find a position in society. In fact, it is a key milestone in the construction and reconstruction of the adolescent's individual identity (Šramová, Bianchi, Láštiová, Fichnová, & Hamranová, 2008).

Most of the studies conducted on identity styles during the last decade investigated the correlation between identity styles and adolescence outcomes (e.g. general correspondence, academic achievement, interpersonal communications quality and decision-making) (Kerpelman, Pittman, & Adler-Baeder, 2008). Among these studies, informative identity was significantly associated with the best outcome, while diffuse identity has brought about the worst (Adams, et al., 2001; Michael D Berzonsky & Kuk, 2005; Vleioras & Bosma, 2005).

On the other hand, all the previous studies have been conducted to investigate the identity styles in normal adolescents and no research has been done about adolescents with disabilities such as hearing problems.

In the present study, we compared normal and deaf high school adolescents' identity styles. The findings suggest

that informative identity style of normal adolescents is higher than deaf ones, while there is no significant difference between the normative, diffuse and commitment identity styles of normal and deaf adolescents. It seems that the equality of normative, diffuse and commitment identity styles in normal and deaf teenagers is because of identical available training and educational resources for the two groups. The advantage of accessible media, social networks and the Internet are among other related educational and training factors. Teachers and parents training in dealing methods with deaf adolescents are also other major effective factors. Furthermore, a change in the attitude and behavior of society and a fair dealing with these groups of people are of other factors involved in the formation of an identical identity style for them.

In many studies it has been stressed that identity style is a consequence of exposure to educational procedures. Interventions in the form of training and educational programs are effective in the formation of identity style in adolescence, when a person is in the process of identity formation (Kerpelman, et al., 2008; Shivpuri, Schmitt, Oswald, & Kim, 2006).

However, studies have shown that deaf children enjoy normal distribution in terms of intelligence and their IQ scores distribution are the same as normal subjects' (Vernon, 2007). Therefore, under similar environmental, educational and training conditions, they can obtain a similar identity as normal adolescents. The only significant difference is in the informative identity style; it was shown that normal adolescents' identity style is more informative than deaf ones. This may be due to a defect in language and social communication skills of deaf adolescents (Higashi, 2007). In addition, self-esteem which is an important factor involved in informative identity style of deaf individuals is lower than normal ones (Wolffe, 2006) -leading to a difference in identity style between the two groups.

One of the limitations of this study was the method of investigating the individual identity style of the deaf i.e. each and all questions were conceptualized for deaf adolescents and questionnaires were filled under the researcher's guidance, while for normal adolescents only general descriptions were given. Another limitation of this study was that it was only conducted on female adolescents.

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