

RUNNING HEAD: Identity and Prosocial Behavior

Identity Statuses and Prosocial Behaviors in Young Adulthood: A Brief Report

Sam A. Hardy

Jason W. Kisling

Department of Psychology

University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Acknowledgements: This research was funded by a Gift-of-Time Dissertation Grant awarded to the first author by the Association for Moral Education. The authors would like to thank Gustavo Carlo, Carolyn Pope Edwards, Richard Dienstbier, David Moshman, and Ross Thompson for their guidance throughout the project, and Byron L. Zamboanga and Gustavo Carlo for helpful comments on an earlier draft of the manuscript. The authors also appreciate the following undergraduate students for their assistance with data collection and entry: Veronica Barra, Gina Lintel, Laura Peterson, and Mark Schroeder.

Key Words: identity, identity statuses, prosocial behavior, community service, altruism, moral development

Hardy, S. A., & Kisling, J. W. (in press). Identity statuses and prosocial behaviors in young adulthood: A brief report. *Identity*.

Abstract

Little is known about behavioral correlates of Marcia's (1966) identity statuses. Hence, the purpose of the present study was to examine links between identity statuses in young adulthood and three measures of prosocial behavior: community service, prosocial activities, and prosocial behavioral tendencies. The sample included 91 university students (age range 19-35, $M = 21.89$, $SD = 3.01$; 80% European American; 65% female). Scores on identity diffusion were negatively correlated with all three measures of prosocial behavior, whereas identity achievement was positively associated with these prosocial outcomes. However, in regression analyses, only identity achievement scores remained significantly related to the three prosocial behavior measures. Results suggest that identity development is related in important ways to prosocial behavior.

Identity Statuses and Prosocial Behaviors in Young Adulthood: A Brief Report

Identity is a mental structure that acts as a self-regulatory system, which motivates and guides behavior (Adams & Marshall, 1996). One of the primary models of identity is Marcia's (1966) *identity statuses* approach, based on Erikson's (1950) theory of psychosocial development. According to the identity statuses perspective, people differ on the extent to which they have explored identity options and made identity commitments, and can thus generally be categorized into one of four statuses: identity diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, and identity achievement (Marcia, 1966). Although much research has examined identity statuses, little work has explored behavioral correlates. Further, most studies have focused on negative behaviors, such as substance use (e.g., Jones, 1992); thus, we know little about how identity statuses might relate to positive behaviors.

While links between identity statuses and prosocial behaviors have been suggested (Adams, 1998; Marcia, 1980; Waterman, 1981), these links have not been empirically examined. Thus, the present study explored links between the identity statuses and prosocial behaviors in young adulthood. The small sample prohibited the classification of participants into the four identity statuses. Instead, measures were used that tapped the extent to which respondents endorsed statements reflecting each of the identity statuses. Those scores were then correlated with three measures of prosocial behaviors. It was anticipated that individuals high on identity diffusion would report lower levels of prosocial behavior, while those high on identity achievement would report higher levels of prosocial behavior. This is because more mature states of identity should entail greater self-regulatory mechanisms for guiding and motivating behavior. Further,

as young adults achieve identity, an increased focus outward should occur, in the form of interpersonal connections and generativity concerns (Erikson, 1950, 1968). However, it was difficult to anticipate links of prosocial behavior with foreclosure and moratorium, because they each have some characteristics in common with the two poles of identity development (diffusion and achievement).

Method

Participants

The sample ($N = 91$) included undergraduate and graduate students from a Midwestern university (age range 19-35, $M = 21.89$, $SD = 3.01$; 80% European American; 65% female).

Measures

Identity statuses. The 32 items for ideological identity from the extended version of the Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status (EOMEIS-2; Bennion & Adams, 1986) were used to assess the extent to which participants self-endorse characteristics of the four identity statuses (diffusion, moratorium, foreclosure, and achievement). The *identity diffusion* scale taps the degree to which individuals have avoided exploring identity options and making identity commitments (8 items; $\alpha = .70$; sample item: "I haven't really considered politics. It just doesn't excite me much."). The *foreclosure* scale assesses the extent individuals have made identity commitments without going through identity exploration (8 items; $\alpha = .76$; sample item: "My parents' views on life are good enough for me, I don't need anything else."). The scale for *moratorium* measures how much people are actively engaged in exploration of identity options, having not yet made identity commitments (8 items; $\alpha = .71$; sample item: "I'm not sure what religion means

to me. I'd like to make up my mind but I'm not done looking yet.”). The *identity achievement* scale assesses the degree to which people have made self-chosen identity commitments following a period of identity exploration (8 items; $\alpha = .57$; sample item: “It took me a while to figure it out, but now I really know what I want for a career.”). Participants responded to each item using a 6-point scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). Composite scores for the four identity statuses were computed by averaging responses to the corresponding items.

*Community service*¹. A single self-report item was used to measure the frequency with which participants engaged in volunteer or community service in the past year, based on a 6-point scale from 1 (*never*) to 6 (*more than once a week*).

Prosocial activities. Thirteen items from the Rushton, Chrisjohn, and Fekken (1981) self-report altruism scale were used to assess the frequency with which participants engaged in various prosocial activities ($\alpha = .88$; sample item: “I have delayed an elevator and held the door open for a stranger.”). Participants rated how often, in the last year, they had carried out 13 different prosocial activities, on a scale from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very often*). Composite scores of overall prosocial behavior were computed by averaging responses to the 13 items.

Prosocial tendencies. The 25-item self-report Prosocial Tendencies Measure (PTM; Carlo & Randall, 2002) was used to assess participants' tendencies to behave prosocially across various contexts and motives (anonymously, in public, in emotional or emergency situations, when asked, and without anticipation of reward). A composite score of overall prosocial behavioral tendency was computed by averaging responses to

all 25 items ($\alpha = .81$; sample item: “I often help even if I don’t think I will get anything out of helping.”).

Social desirability. Participants also completed a 25-item version of Crowne and Marlowe’s (1964) social desirability scale, which involved them indicating whether each item was true or false as it pertained to themselves (sample item: “I have almost never felt the urge to tell someone off.”). Item responses were recoded as “0” or “1,” with “0” being the response that indicated less social desirability, and “1” indicating more social desirability. Then, composite scores were calculated by taking the mean of the 25 items ($\alpha = .80$).

Results

Zero-order Correlations

Means and standard deviations for study variables are reported in Table 1. Bivariate correlation analyses were conducted on all study variables (see Table 2). As anticipated, diffusion scores were negatively associated with all three measures of prosocial engagement, while identity achievement scores were positively associated with these outcomes. However, scores on the foreclosure and moratorium scales were unrelated to prosocial functioning.

Regression Analyses

Three regression analyses assessed the unique contributions of scores on identity statuses to the three measures of prosocial functioning, accounting for age, gender, and social desirability (see Table 3). The regression analyses predicting community service, $R^2 = .20$, $F(7,82) = 2.94$, $p < .01$, prosocial activities, $R^2 = .18$, $F(7,82) = 2.65$, $p < .05$, and prosocial tendencies, $R^2 = .23$, $F(7,82) = 3.43$, $p < .01$, indicated that identity

achievement was a positive predictor of the prosocial functioning, whereas none of the other identity statuses were significantly related to the prosocial outcomes.

The amount of unique variance explained (UVE) by each of the identity statuses in each of the three regressions was also obtained (see Table 3). To calculate the UVE for a given predictor, the original regression analyses predicting the prosocial outcomes were rerun with each of the identity status variables entering the equation as the last step in separate analyses. This allowed for calculation of the amount of additional variance accounted for by the inclusion of a particular identity status predictor when entered last (i.e., the amount of change in R^2 in the final step). These analyses revealed that only identity achievement (but not diffusion, foreclosure, or moratorium) explained a significant amount of unique variance in the three prosocial behavior outcomes. However, approximately 60 to 75 percent of the variability in the prosocial measures explained by the identity status constructs was shared among the various predictors.

Conclusions

As anticipated, individuals with higher scores on identity diffusion reported less prosocial behavior than those with lower scores, and individuals with higher scores on identity achievement reported engaging in more prosocial behavior than those with lower scores. These findings provide some support for the notion that maturation of identity enables individuals to better form interpersonal connections, develop other-oriented concern, and increase their desire to contribute to their community and society (Adams, 1998; Erikson, 1959; Marcia, 1980).

If identity maturation does have an influence on prosocial behavior, such that individuals with more developed and sophisticated identities tend to engage in more

prosocial behavior, then important implications may follow. For example, incorporating a component to youth development and intervention programs that focuses on facilitating identity development may help in promoting positive outcomes for youth (Archer, 1994; Ferrer-Wreder et al., 2002).

The present study is a preliminary analysis of relations between identity and prosocial behavior. It is limited in that it was based on self-report data, was correlational, and included a relatively small sample size. Further research on links between identity and prosocial functioning is warranted, including work involving other approaches to identity. Research directed at examining behavioral outcomes of identity and the mechanisms involved will more fully elucidate the motivational potential of identity as Erikson (1968) portrayed it.

References

- Adams, G. R. (1998). *The Objective Measure of Identity Status: A reference manual*. Unpublished Manuscript, University of Guelph.
- Adams, G. R., & Marshall, S. (1996). A developmental social psychology of identity: Understanding the person in context. *Journal of Adolescence, 19*, 429-442.
- Archer, S. L. (Ed.) (1994). *Interventions for adolescent identity development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Bennion, L. D., & Adams, G. R. (1986). A revision of the Extended Version of the Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status: An identity instrument for use with late adolescents.
- Carlo, G., & Randall, B. A. (2002) The development of a measure of prosocial behaviors for late adolescents, *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 31*, 31-44.
- Crowne, D. P., & Marlowe, D. (1964). *The approval motive*. New York: Wiley.
- Erikson, E. H. (1950). *Childhood and society*. New York: Norton.
- Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity: youth and crisis*. New York: Norton.
- Ferrer-Wreder, L., Lorente, C. C., Kurtines, W., Briones, E., Bussell, J., Berman, S., et al. (2002). Promoting identity development in marginalized youth. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 17*, 168-187.
- Jones, R.M. (1992). Ego identity and adolescent problem behavior. In G.R. Adams, R. Montemayor, & T.P. Gullotta (Eds.), *Adolescent identity development* (pp. 216-233). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Marcia, J. E. (1966). Development and validation of ego identity status. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 3*, 551-558.

Marcia, J. E. (1980). Identity in adolescence. In J. Adelson (Ed.), *Handbook of adolescent psychology* (pp. 159-187). New York: Wiley.

Rushton, J.P., Chrisjohn, R.D., & Fekken, G.C. (1981). The altruistic personality and the self-report altruism scale. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 2, 1-11.

Waterman, A. S. (1981). Individualism and interdependence. *American Psychologist*, 36, 762-773.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables

Variable	Range	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Age	19-35	21.89	3.01
Social Desirability	.04-.88	.43	.19
Identity Diffusion	9-45	22.52	7.41
Identity Foreclosure	8-34	16.04	5.92
Identity Moratorium	8-41	23.07	6.76
Identity Achievement	19-45	33.31	5.65
Community Service	1-6	2.65	1.52
Prosocial Activities	1.23-4.62	2.69	.65
Prosocial Tendencies	1.96-4.36	3.31	.42

Note: *N* = 91; *ns* range from 90-91.

Table 2

Bivariate Correlations

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.
1. Age									
2. Social Desirability	-.09								
3. Identity Diffusion	.00	-.02							
4. Identity Foreclosure	-.08	.20	-.08						
5. Identity Moratorium	-.12	-.15	.36**	-.26*					
6. Identity Achievement	.18	.08	-.30**	.06	-.22*				
7. Community Service	-.11	.08	-.27*	.15	-.19	.29**			
8. Prosocial Activities	-.07	.24*	-.22*	.09	-.14	.32**	.35**		
9. Prosocial Tendencies	-.05	.27*	-.24*	.01	-.16	.32**	.15	.43**	

Note: *ns* ranged from 89 to 91.

* = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$; *** = $p < .001$.

Table 3

Regressions of Identity Statuses Predicting Prosocial Behaviors

Variable	<u>Prosocial Behaviors</u>								
	<u>Community Service</u>			<u>Prosocial Activities</u>			<u>Prosocial Tendencies</u>		
	β	<i>SE</i>	<i>UVE</i>	β	<i>SE</i>	<i>UVE</i>	β	<i>SE</i>	<i>UVE</i>
Age	-.14	.05		-.11	.02		-.08	.01	
Gender	.22*	.35		-.03	.15		.20 ⁺	.10	
Social Desirability	-.06	.90		.22 ⁺	.38		.18 ⁺	.24	
Identity Diffusion	-.14	.02	.02	-.13	.01	.01	-.12	.01	.01
Identity Foreclosure	.07	.03	.00	.01	.01	.00	-.10	.01	.01
Identity Moratorium	-.14	.03	.01	-.01	.01	.00	-.11	.01	.01
Identity Achievement	.25*	.03	.05*	.29**	.01	.07**	.27*	.01	.07*
Full Model R^2			.20**			.18*			.23*

Note: $N = 90$.

Gender dummy coded as male = 0 and female = 1.

UVE is the amount of unique variance explained by a given predictor (R^2).

⁺ = $p < .10$; * = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$; *** = $p < .001$.

Footnotes

¹ In addition to being asked about the frequency of their community service, participants indicated “yes” or “no” as to whether this service was “strictly voluntary” or not. Correlations between identity statuses and volunteer service frequency of those who marked “yes” did not differ significantly from those who marked “no” (as assessed using z-tests). Thus, the study analyses were reported for the entire sample.