

**Detailed abstract**

**M.A. Thesis in Educational Psychology**

**Developmental study of changes in identity status dimensions of Iranian adolescents & young adults (12 to 24 years old) from Marcia's point of view**

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Why do we perceive ourselves as we do? What exactly makes us who we are? The answers to these questions might change with time or experience. The process of finding our true self, results in defining identity. James Marcia offered a model to explain ways in which individuals engage in the task of identity formation. In identity status model, he describes four clearly differentiated identity statuses based on the amount of exploration and commitment that the adolescent is experiencing or has experienced. Exploration refers to the adolescent's period of engagement in choosing among meaningful alternatives; commitment refers to the degree of personal investment the individual exhibits. With the aim of those two components in mind, Marcia has developed four basic identity statuses: identity diffused, foreclosure, moratorium, and identity achievement. This paradigm assumes that identity formation is domain specific. That is adolescents will or may have a distinct identity status in these four domains – occupation choice, sex roles, political ideology, and religion.

Numerous studies conducted in support of the statuses focus less on developmental issues and more on classification issues. According to Marcia's theory, throughout the lifecycle identity status shifts will occur. Specifically, he pointed out that Identity formation begins before adolescence and often extends beyond it, into adulthood. There is not only serious debate concerning the amount of change in identity formation but also on the timing of changes in identity formation in adolescence. The current study aimed to contribute to the change versus stability debate by examining the developmental course of the dimensions underlying the statuses (i.e., exploration and commitment) during a long period from early adolescence to emerging adulthood. In addition, gender differences in both aspects of change were explored.

The sample consisted of 370 participants divided into an early to middle adolescent cohort (range= 12-14, n = 71; 19.18%), a middle to late adolescent cohort (range= 15-18, n = 121;

32.7%), and an emerging adulthood cohort (range= 19-24, n = 178; 48.10%). Participating adolescents were recruited from various randomly selected junior high, high schools, and Shiraz University in the province of Fars, Iran. The Ego Identity Process Questionnaire (EIPQ) was administered to the participants.

The cross-sectional findings showed the mean of commitment in occupation choice, political ideology, religion, dating and sex role domains rising steadily to age 19 years and declining thereafter, while a declining steadily pattern appeared for personal values, friendship and family domains throughout the entire period of adolescence and emerging adulthood. Regarding exploration dimension, while the mean of commitment in religion, personal values, and sex role rising steadily to age 19 years and declining thereafter, a declining steadily pattern appeared for occupation choice, political ideology, friendship, dating and family domains.

Multivariate and Univariate Analysis of Variance and t-tests results revealed that the emerging adulthood cohort had significantly lower levels of commitment in occupation choice and political ideology domains when compared to the middle to late adolescent boys and girls, the same pattern revealed in the exploration for sex role. Moreover, levels of commitment to personal values and dating domains increased from early adolescence to emerging adulthood, whereas reverse shift pattern exhibited in the exploration of political ideology and occupation domains for the two cohorts.

Also, in some domain, we did find gender differences in the identity dimensions underlying the statuses. More specifically, tests revealed that the girls displayed higher levels of exploration (in religion and family domains) and commitment (in friendship, dating, and sex role domains) when compared to boys throughout the entire period of adolescence to emerging adulthood. In other domains, boys and girls exhibited similar patterns. In general, our findings were consistent with previous studies, as we found evidence for stability, but also for small progressive and regressive developmental changes in identity dimensions as adolescents grew older from early adolescence to emerging adulthood. This means that the development does not have a fixed end-target, achievement, and is also not unidirectional, i.e., always proceeding from the low statuses to the high: a reverse developmental pathway is also possible. Lastly, we find support for the idea that identity changes are totally domain specific.