

## Ego-Identity Status and Its Relationship with Self-Esteem in A Group of Late Adolescents

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Identity formation is the primary developmental task that occurs during the period of adolescence. The adolescent period consists of the exploration of various identities and culminates with the commitment to one final identity. The objective of the present paper is to study the relationship between different types of ego-identity statuses with self-esteem in different groups of male and female late adolescents. The study also wants to see whether gender and location (rural-urban) has significant effect on identity status of late adolescents. The study was conducted on college students selected from different districts of West Bengal. Two measures have been used in this study namely, Extended Objective Measure of Ego-identity Status and Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale. The correlation analysis conducted between self-esteem and different types of identity statuses revealed that those having high identity achievement status have high self-esteem, especially in the areas of occupation and ideological belief for religion. On the other hand, adolescents who are in crisis and not made commitment have low self-esteem. The analysis also indicated that ego-identity status of students differed with respect to gender and rural-urban location. This study contributed to adolescent literature by exploring identity status and self-esteem in Indian adolescents with emphasis to those living in West Bengal.

**Keywords:** Ego-Identity, Self-esteem, Adolescents

Adolescence is a time to sum up one's past and current experience to arrive at a sense of identity, which in turn will guide one's future plans. Erikson (1968) described identity as the central developmental task of adolescence and its resolutions set the social-cognitive structure of individuality. He viewed identity as a life-long process, and emphasized that the process has its normative crisis in adolescence. With increasing cognitive capacities, physical maturation, and the imminence of taking on adult roles in society, adolescents are confronted with the task of searching for a meaningful sense of self. This task is called "identity crisis".

Following Erikson's views, Marcia (1966) drew on two dimensions of identity formation: crisis or exploration and commitment.

Exploration refers to an examination of alternatives with the intention to make a commitment. Commitment refers to dedicating oneself to an action, goal, ideal, value or belief. And this crisis/commitment occurs in four areas, namely, occupation, religion, interpersonal relationship and politics. Based on the absence or presence of crisis/exploration and commitment, Marcia (1966) proposed four identity statuses. These are as follows: 1) Adolescents who have experienced a period of crisis and made firm commitments to a set of values and goals they adopted during the period of exploration are the identity achievers. 2) Adolescents who are actively exploring alternatives, but have not yet made firm commitment called identity moratorium. 3) Identity foreclosure adolescents find their identity through the

adoption of parental (or others') standards and values without examining the nature, quality, or personal fit of such commitments. 4) Finally identity diffusion adolescents are neither exploring nor feeling the compulsion to find a self-defined identity.

The developmental tasks to be achieved during the period of transition from puberty to adulthood include: coping with the increasing sexual urge and bodily changes accompanying puberty; choice of, and training in an occupation; finding a marriage partner; and incorporating oneself into the economy, political structure, and the community of adult society (Paranjpe, 1975). 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 accomplishments. On the other hand, Garbarino (1999) noted that religion would seem an important antidote to the experience of meaninglessness; religion may serve as a buffer against risky behaviors for some troubled youths. Hunsberger, Pratt and Pancer (2001) investigated links between high school and university students' efforts to deal with religious issues and identity development. They found identity achieved both as belief-confirming and belief-threatening consultation in dealing with their religious doubts. Identity moratorium showed modest levels of religious doubting whereas identity foreclosure individuals were found to be more religiously committed. Identity diffused individuals were uncommitted in terms of religious beliefs, held many doubts,

and avoided any kind of consultation about religion. Research into associations between identity and intimacy for both late adolescent men and women has produced mixed findings. Those who have more advanced in terms of their intimacy statuses have also generally been more advanced in terms of their identity status development (Dyk & Adams, 1990; Tesch & Whitbourne, 1982). Over the past decade, research has been undertaken into ways in which school-based community service may promote adolescent identity formation (McIntosh, Metz, & Youniss, 2005; Yates & Youniss, 1996). Yates and Youniss concluded from their work that community service during high school helped to foster greater political-moral interest, as well as a sense of ideological identity.

In relation to identity status, *self-esteem* has received considerable research attention (Marcia, 1993). *Self-esteem* is defined as a positive evaluation of one's attributes and sense of self-worthiness (Rosenberg, 1965). While research in the past reported significant relationship between identity status and self-esteem (Taylor & Oskay, 1995), there have been studies which showed no significant association between the two constructs (Rotheram-Borus, 1989). Further studies are needed to clarify the relationships between different identity statuses and self-esteem in adolescents. Also the number of published studies on self-esteem in relation to identity status in India is few. Sachar et al., (1997) observed that the self-esteem scores were lower in older girls and overall scores were lower when compared with the boys of same age group in rural India.

Examination of identity development by gender has received increased attention. Nevertheless, gender difference in identity status of adolescents, have yielded inconsistent findings. Grotevant and Thorbecke (1982) found gender differences in identity development within the more traditional Eriksonian framework. However,

some studies have shown no significant difference in identity statuses by gender (Archer, 1982). While research has revealed adolescent boys and girls to be similar in few identity statuses, such as in identity achievement and identity foreclosure (Cramer, 2000), but they tend to differ in identity moratorium and identity diffusion (Streitmatter, 1987; Cramer, 2000). On the other hand, research also showed no statistical significant difference between adolescent boys and girls in any of the four identity statuses (Streitmatter, 1993). Therefore, due to inconsistencies in findings with respect to gender differences in identity statuses, more empirical enquiry is needed for clarification.

There is also dearth of studies with respect to ego-identity statuses of rural and urban Indian adolescents. Cross-sectional and longitudinal studies of Indian children and youth ranging from the pre-puberty years to those in their mid- or even late- twenties (Garg & Parikh, 1981, 1993; Kakar, 1979a; Kakar & Chowdhry, 1970; Paranjpe, 1975; Saraswathi & Dutta, 1988; Sharma, 1996), clearly highlight the gendered and class-based nature of the presence of adolescence, marked by psycho-social identity moratorium, search for identity, and one's own place in the society. In focusing on the adult-child continuity in the Indian context, one cannot completely overlook the presence of social change, the social conflict in a transitional phase and the forms of conflict resolution (Saraswathi, 1999).

In light of the above discussion it appears that wide variation prevail in various sections of Indian society which are much more visible as a result of globalization and liberalization. The present study therefore wants to study the following things:

(1) To study the relationship between different types of ego-identity statuses with self-esteem in different groups of male and female late adolescents.

(2) To explore the effect of gender and location (rural-location) on identity status and self-esteem of late adolescents.

## Method

### *Participants:*

Participants of this study were late adolescents selected from three different districts of West Bengal namely, Murshidabad, Birbhum and Kolkata. As the target group of the study is late adolescents it was decided to sample them from different colleges. Thus, two colleges, one from rural and one from urban area of Murshidabad and Birbhum districts and two urban colleges from Kolkata were selected. 650 1<sup>st</sup> year college students were chosen (the students present at the day of testing) from the selected colleges of the three districts. Due to some missing information and outliers, the final sample size was 590, out of which there were 353 male and 237 female students. The age range of the students varied from 18 to 22 years with a mean age of 18.82 years. The majority of the students were from middle socio-economic status.

### *Measures used:*

**1. Extended Objective Measure of Ego-identity Status:** The Extended Objective Measure of Ego-identity Status (EOM-EIS) developed by Bennior and Adams (1986) is a self-report instrument consisting of 32 items, covering four identity statuses-identity achievement (experience of a period of crisis and then firm commitments are made), identity moratorium (exploring alternatives), identity foreclosure (achievement of identity through parental wishes) and identity diffusion (neither exploring alternatives nor achieving commitments) in four areas namely, occupation (extent to which a person is concerned regarding career making), religion (faith in god or any religious beliefs or practices), politics (interest in political issues) and interpersonal relationship (concern

regarding intimate relationship and choice of partner). Participants respond 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. Raw scale scores for identity achievement, identity moratorium, identity foreclosure and identity diffusion are calculated and identity status can be assigned for the four domains.

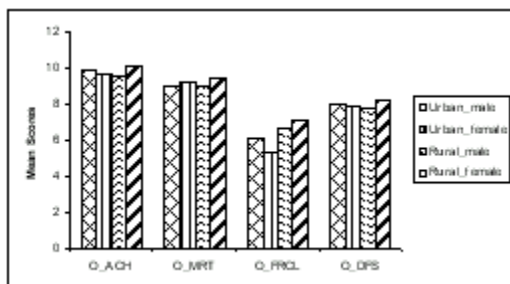
**2. Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale:**

The Rosenberg Self-esteem (RSE) scale developed by Rosenberg (1965) is a widely used self-esteem measurement developed by Rosenberg. 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 indicate their agreement-disagreement level for each item along a four point Likert type scale, ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”. Higher score in the scale indicate higher self-esteem. The maximum possible score of the scale is 4 and the minimum is 1.

**Results and Discussion**

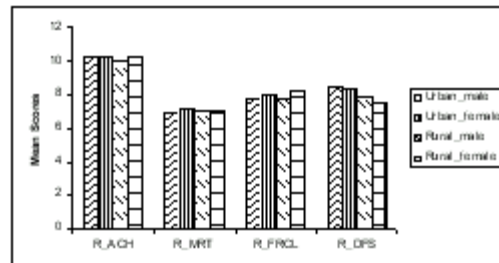
Means for all the measures location (rural – urban) and gender wise were calculated and were graphically presented in the following figures:

**Figure 1: Mean scores of different dimensions of Ego-identity status by location (rural – urban) and gender wise in occupation area**



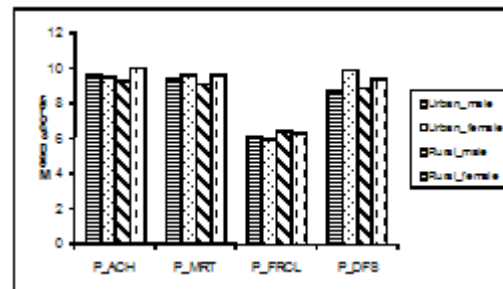
O\_ACH = Occupation\_Achievement  
 O\_MRT = Occupation\_Moratorium  
 O\_FRCL= Occupation\_Foreclosure  
 O\_DFS = Occupation\_Diffusion

**Figure 2: Mean scores of different dimensions of Ego-identity status by location (rural – urban) and gender wise in religion area**



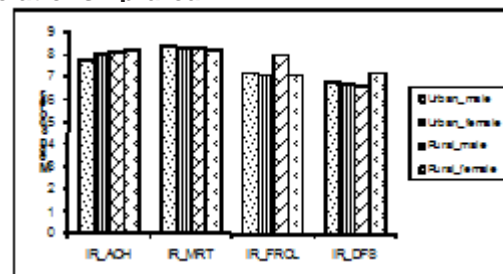
R\_ACH = Religion\_Achievement  
 R\_MRT = Religion\_Moratorium  
 R\_FRCL= Religion\_Foreclosure  
 R\_DFS = Religion\_Diffusion

**Figure 3: Mean scores of different dimensions of Ego-identity status by location (rural – urban) and gender wise in politics area**



P\_ACH = Politics\_Achievement  
 P\_MRT = Politics\_Moratorium  
 P\_FRCL= Politics\_Foreclosure  
 P\_DFS = Politics\_Diffusion

**Figure 4: Mean scores of different dimensions of Ego-identity status by location (rural – urban) and gender wise in interpersonal relationship area**



IR\_ACH = Interpersonal Relationship\_Achievement  
 IR\_MRT = Interpersonal Relationship\_Moratorium  
 IR\_FRCL= Interpersonal Relationship\_Foreclosure  
 IR\_DFS = Interpersonal Relationship\_Diffusion

The figures indicated that identity achievement for religion was observed to be the highest whereas identity foreclosure was observed to be the lowest with respect to politics for all the groups. It was found that except interpersonal relationship area all the groups scored the highest in identity achievement rather than other three statuses i.e. identity moratorium, identity foreclosure and identity diffusion. It stated that majority of these adolescents had experienced a crisis period and had committed to occupation, set values on religion and fixed goals about politics. In interpersonal relationship area, majority of the students from rural and urban area were found to be in identity moratorium status, which indicated that they were considering all alternatives but had not taken any decision.

From the analysis it was observed that both urban (M = 28.76) and rural (M = 28.14) males had higher self-esteem than females. It indicated that they appraised their own worth in more positive ways than females. They had positive thinking about themselves. Rural females (M = 27.39) also scored slightly lower on self-esteem in comparison to urban females (M = 27.61) which showed that they evaluated their attributes and self-worthiness not so positively.

The main objective of the study was to find out the relationship of ego-identity status with self-esteem, therefore, product-moment correlation coefficients were calculated between ego-identity status subscales and self-esteem for different groups of students. The results were presented in Table- 1.

**Table 1: Correlation coefficients between different dimension of Ego-Identity statuses and Self-Esteem scale**

Dimensions	Total Sample (N = 590)		Urban (N = 291)		Rural (N = 299)	
	Male (N=353)	Female (N=237)	Male (N=168)	Female (N=123)	Male (N=185)	Female (N=114)
O_ACH	.21**	.22**	.26**	.01	.17*	.41**
O_MRT	-.07	-.22**	.02	-.29**	-.14	-.16
O_FRCL	-.06	-.08	-.14	-.08	.01	-.07
O_DFS	-.09	-.10	.05	-.22*	-.21**	-.02
R_ACH	.16**	.18**	.25**	.06	.10	.32**
R_MRT	-.20**	-.16*	-.23**	-.05	-.18*	-.26**
R_FRCL	-.14**	-.03	-.11	-.08	-.16*	.02
R_DFS	-.01	.15*	-.02	.15	-.03	.15
IP_ACH	.07	.09	.04	.05	.10	.12
IP_MRT	.06	-.01	.09	.18*	.03	-.17
IP_FRCL	-.04	.08	-.002	.04	-.06	.12
IP_DFS	-.04	-.04	-.05	-.08	-.03	.02
P_ACH	.03	-.02	.11	.06	-.04	-.11
P_MRT	-.04	-.003	.04	-.06	-.10	.04
P_FRCL	-.15**	.02	-.08	.23**	-.20**	-.15
P_DFS	-.05	.10	.02	.10	-.11	.10

\*  $p < 0.05$  \*\*  $p < 0.01$



The positive correlation values between self-esteem and different types of identity statuses reported in Table- 1, showed that those having high identity achievement status had high self-esteem, especially in the areas of occupation and religion. This was true for both male and female students, except in case of urban females where almost zero relationship was obtained. In most of the cases, identity moratorium, identity foreclosure and identity diffusion statuses were found to be negatively correlated with self-esteem.

Identity foreclosure was significantly and positively correlated with self-esteem for urban females with respect to politics, which indicated that influenced by their parental wishes, these adolescents made commitments for their political beliefs and thus had positive self-image. It was observed that identity foreclosure status was significantly and negatively correlated with self-esteem for rural male students in both religion and politics areas. This showed that the students, specially male students in general, who had made commitments for ideological beliefs for example in the religion and politics areas had negative self-image or vice versa. Identity moratorium was positively correlated with self-esteem for urban females in interpersonal relationship, which suggested that these urban females explored many alternatives without making any commitment but still built a positive picture about themselves. It was also found that rural females with identity foreclosure status in interpersonal relationship area had positive self-image about themselves. It might be due to the fact that in our culture females generally accept parental wishes at the time of choosing their life partners.

The second objective of our study was to find out the effect of gender and location on ego-identity status Two-way ANOVA was thus performed. From ANOVA results significant main effect of rural-urban location

was observed with respect to identity foreclosure (occupation)  $F(1, 586) = 19.15, p < .01$ ; and identity diffusion (religion)  $F(1, 586) = 7.77, p < .01$ . This indicated that rural students ( $M_{(rural)} = 6.87, S.D. = 3.19$ ) in occupation area scored higher than urban students ( $M_{(urban)} = 5.81, S.D. = 3.12$ ). It suggested that rural students gave much importance to their parental wishes. For religion urban students ( $M_{(urban)} = 8.40, S.D. = 2.74$ ) were more diffused than rural students ( $M_{(rural)} = 7.75, S.D. = 2.98$ ), which means that they had neither experienced crisis nor committed to political ideology. Significant main effect of gender was observed with respect to identity moratorium (occupation)  $F(1, 586) = 4.81, p < .05$ ; identity foreclosure (Interpersonal relationship)  $F(1, 586) = 5.07, p < .05$ ; and identity achievement (politics)  $F(1, 586) = 3.83, p < .05$ ; & and identity diffusion (politics)  $F(1, 586) = 16.84, p < .01$ . In occupation area female students scored higher ( $M_{(female)} = 9.33, S.D. = 1.89$ ) in most of the cases than male students ( $M_{(male)} = 8.95, S.D. = 2.15$ ). In interpersonal relationship female students scored lower ( $M_{(female)} = 7.09, S.D. = 2.73$ ) than male students ( $M_{(male)} = 7.64, S.D. = 2.86$ ) which means that they gave primary importance to their parental wishes on that matter. In selecting partner they were dependent on their parents. Under politics female students scored higher ( $M_{(female)} = 9.78, S.D. = 2.09$ ) in identity achievement than male students ( $M_{(male)} = 9.42, S.D. = 2.23$ ). It means that female students were more committed to political ideology than male students. They also scored higher in identity diffusion status ( $M_{(female)} = 9.65, S.D. = 2.41$ ) than male students ( $M_{(male)} = 8.78, S.D. = 2.57$ ). From figures 5 & 6 significant interaction effect of gender and location was noticed with respect to identity foreclosure (occupation)  $F(1, 586) = 4.83, p < .05$ ; and identity achievement (politics)  $F(1, 586) = 5.96, p < .05$ .

Figure 5: Interaction effect of location (rural – urban) and gender on foreclosure status of occupation area

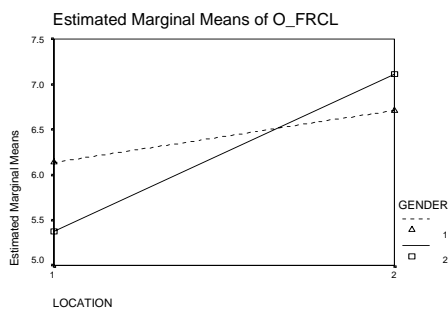
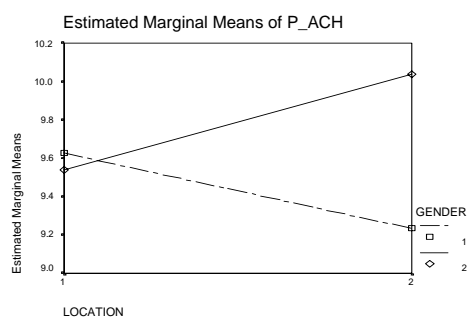


Figure 6: Interaction effect of location (rural – urban) and gender on achievement status of politics area



commitments without exploration i.e. who generally follow parental wishes differed location as well as gender wise. The students who were diffused with respect to ideological belief viz. religion and politics, i.e. who had neither experienced crisis nor made any commitments were also found to differ with respect to gender and rural-urban location.

The present study highlighted the pattern of identity development amongst adolescents living in urban and rural areas of West Bengal. Thus this study contributed to adolescent literature by exploring – identity status and self-esteem in Indian adolescents with emphasis to those living in West Bengal.

### Conclusion

Overall, the findings of the study indicate that ego-identity status of students differed with respect to gender, and rural-urban location. Female students even from rural

areas were observed to have identity crisis with respect to occupation, ideological beliefs and interpersonal relationships. Adolescents with identity achievement status have higher self-esteem whereas identity moratorium, identity foreclosure and identity diffused adolescents have lower self-esteem. It may, therefore, be concluded from this study that ego-identity status enhances one's positive self-image.

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