

Personality Characteristics and Identity Styles of Iranian Students

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Since personality and its components play a key role in a person's identity, the present study aims at investigating the relation between the personality characteristics and identity styles in university students of Iran. A sample of 333 university students were chosen through random sampling. The results show that personality traits of openness and conscientiousness are positive predictors of information identity status. The personality traits of extroversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness are positive predictors of normative identity status. However, the personality trait of openness is a negative predictor of normative identity status and conscientiousness is a negative predictor of diffusion identity status. The personality trait of extroversion, openness and conscientiousness are positive predictors of commitment identity status. Openness is the only characteristic trait, which is a positive predictor of informational, normative and commitment identity style and a negative predictor of diffusion/avoidant identity style.

Keywords: Identity, Normative, Diffusion/Avoidance, Commitment, Personality Traits.

Identity formation is one of the main evolutionary challenges during teenage years. Identity is thought of as an understanding of oneself which is the result of the combination of the past, present and future experiences (Erikson, 1968). (Burke, 1997) considers the process of identity as one of control – especially a system of comprehension control. Based on this theory, identity is a collection of notions employed for 'self' in a social role or situation, which defines the individual and is used as the norm or reference (Stets & Tsushima, 2001). Marcia describes for identity base (achievement, moratorium identity status, foreclosure identity status, diffusion identity status), which are based on the amount of exploration or commitment that a teenager experiences or has experienced (Crocetti, Rubini, Berzonsky, & Meeus, 2009). Also, (Berzonsky, 2003) considers the concept of identity, a theory about self and believes that there are theoreticians who are entangled with the theoretical reasoning related to them. Berzonsky has identified three styles of theory developments which are: informational normative and diffuse / avoidant.

People with achievement identity status employ what is called informational style

(Berzonsky & Neimeyer, 1994; Streitmatter, 1993). Facing identity related issues, these individuals act rationally and show significant mind endeavor. Also, they have goal oriented search and evaluation and show trust towards the information regarding them. Moreover, they have a skeptical stance to their own viewpoint and delay their judgment willingly (Berzonsky, 1990). This identity style appears to be in positive relationship with wellbeing, adaptation, conscientiousness and agreeableness (Berzonsky & Kuk, 2000; Dollinger, 1995; Nurmi, Berzonsky, Tammi, & Kinney, 1997). People with normative identity style through internalizing others' beliefs and values and not employing self-evaluation, automatically face the issues regarding identity (Berzonsky, 1990). In diffuse / avoidant identity style, individuals try to avoid dealing with issues of individual, conflicts and decision making. It seems that this identity style is in positive relationship with neuroticism, depressant reactions and non-confirmatory decision makings and in negative relationship with cognitive resistance, self-awareness, and conscientiousness and wellbeing indexes (Berzonsky, 1990; Berzonsky & Ferrari, 1996). In fact, people with diffuse / avoidant identity style

use logical methods in information processing to a lower extent (Soenens, Duriez, & Goossens, 2005).

One of the main influential aspects in identity is character and its components. (Costa Jr & McCrae, 1990) define the character features of an individual on differences dimensions as shown in the stable patterns of thought, feelings and action. The role of character features in identity evolution, which has been studied by (Grotevant, 1987). He suggests that one's flexibility, openness to experience, self-esteem and self monitoring improves the evolution of identity during lifetime. There have been numerous studies regarding the relationship between the character features (conscientiousness, openness to experiences, agreeableness, neuroticism and extraversion) and identity styles indicating that the informational identity style is in positive relationship with cognitive complicatedness, purposeful decision making, conscientiousness, admittance and successful identity (Berzonsky & Kuk, 2000). Also, conscientiousness is related to some of the features of functions such as endeavor for success, discipline and accountability (Chamorro-Premuzic & Furnham, 2003). Studies show that normative individuals are dutiful and compatible and have a positive feeling toward wellbeing, but they are not very tolerant of ambiguity and they act closed dealing with the information, which challenges their value systems and individual beliefs (M. D. Berzonsky & Kuk, 2000; Dollinger, 1995; Nurmi et al., 1997).

Tesch and Cameron (1987) reported that the feature of flexibility brings about individual differences in identity evolution. Feature of flexibility is in positive relationship with successful identity and in negative relationship with foreclosure identity status (Cramer, 2004). Regarding the relation of flexibility and identity styles (Berzonsky, 1990) believes that flexibility is the most important character factor in determining the individual differences in identity styles. In other words, the feature of flexibility is accompanied by an increase in tending to informational identity style and decrease in tending to normative identity style. Teenagers with achievement and moratorium identity status get better grades compared to the teenagers with foreclosure identity status

(Alberts & Meyer 1998). Moreover, (Dollinger, 1995) there is negative relationship between foreclosure identity status and flexibility and a positive relationship between moratorium and diffusion identity status with neuroticism and a negative relationship with extraversion and agreeableness. In addition, the achievement identity status was predicted by neuroticism, conscientiousness and extroversion.

Studying the relation between features of five factor character model and Berzonsky's identity processing styles, (Dollinger, 1995) showed that flexibility is in a positive relationship with informational identity style and in a negative relationship with normative identity style. Besides, three features of extroversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness are in a positive relationship with informational and normative identity style. Also, diffuse / avoidant identity style is in a negative relationship with agreeableness and conscientiousness is in a positive relationship with neuroticism. In addition, two features of flexibility and conscientiousness have a direct relationship with normative/informational identity style and shows a conversed relation with diffuse / avoidant identity style. Also, there seemed to be a direct relationship between conscientiousness with normative identity style.

Out of the five character features, openness to experience is the main determinant of individual differences in identity styles (Berzonsky, 1990). People with informational identity style show high level of openness (Berzonsky, 1990; Berzonsky & Adams, 1999; Berzonsky & Sullivan, 1992; Dollinger, 1995; Duriez, Soenens, & Beyers, 2004). In contrast, normative identity style has a negative relation with openness to experience, openness to values, function and imagination (Berzonsky & Ferrari, 1996; Berzonsky & Sullivan, 1992). Diffuse / avoidant identity style has a negative relationship with openness (Berzonsky & Sullivan, 1992). There is also a relationship between agreeableness and informational identity style and a negative relationship between conscientiousness and normative identity style and between agreeableness and conscientiousness and diffuse / avoidant identity style (Duriez et al., 2004). Compared with other individuals, people

with achievement identity got higher grades regarding extroversion and conscientiousness and lower grades regarding neuroticism and as a result showed more excitement adaptation. In addition, there is a negative relation between foreclosure identity and openness to experience, which can only be seen in males (Clancy & Dollinger, 1993; Cramer, 2000).

According to the previously conducted researches the relation between character and identity styles in university students could undergo necessary measures, which can enhance the needed knowledge in order to attain the successful identity, which is a step forward to develop the healthy character. It seems a tough transfer for many who move from school to university. They not only get separated from their families, but face new social networks and diverse cultures and educational issues and expectations. Therefore, the present study aims at surveying the relation between the character features and identity styles in university students.

Method

Participants:

A sample of 333 students of Golestan University (158 males and 175 females) were chosen through simple random sampling. The questionnaires of character features and identity styles were distributed to the students.

Instruments:

Berzonsky's identity styles (ISI): This tool was developed by (Berzonsky, 1989) for elementary level educated individuals. It includes 40 items from which 11 items are assigned to informational identity style, 10 to diffuse / avoidant style, 9 items to normative identity style and 10 items to identity commitment. Farsi Nezhad (2004) has reported Cronbach alpha of 0.77 for informational identity style, 0.60 for normative identity style, 0.66 for diffuse/avoidant and 0.68 for identity commitment. (Berzonsky, 1992) has reported Cronbach's Alpha of 0.62 for informational identity style and 0.66 for normative identity style and 0.73 for diffuse/avoidant identity style.

Revised identity questionnaire NEO-PI-R: The main version was developed by Costa and Mc Crae in 1992 to assess character with the five factor pattern (neuroticism, extraversion,

openness, agreeableness and consciousness). The reviewed version of the questionnaire (NEO-PI-R) is a kind of self assessment on character features, which is based on a famous pattern character called the five factor model. The character questionnaire of NEO-PI-R includes 240 items assessing 6 aspects in each factor (total of 30 aspects) and is graded in Likert five degrees scale ranging from absolutely disagree to absolutely agree. Also, some items have been marked conversely. This test is used for adults of both gender. Costa and McCrae (1992) have reported the Alpha coefficient between 0.74 and 0.89 with the average of 0.81. In Iran, Hagh Shenas (2005) reported similar results on a 502 individual sample in the city of Shiraz. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficients are N=0.81, E=0.71, O=0.83, A=0.71 and the validity of test-retest in the period of six months is E=0.74, O=0.76, A=0.6, N=0.53.

Results

Table 1. Analysis results of the participants' demographical characteristics

Variable		F	%
Gender	Male	158	47.4
	Female	175	52.6
Age	17-21	124	36.9
	22-26	124	37.2
	27-31	86	25.8
Marital Status	Married	56	16.8
	m	277	83.2

Table 1 shows the analysis results of demographical characteristics of the sample under study in the variables of gender, age and marital status. Table 2 shows the results of the descriptive indexes of the research variables (Mean and Standard deviation) and the correlation among the research variables suggest that there is relation between the personality traits and identity status.

Multi-variable regression analysis was employed to predict the identity status based on personality traits. The results showed (as seen in Table 3) that personality trait of openness ($b=0/206$, $p<0/01$) and conscientiousness ($b=0/197$, $p<0/01$) are positive predictors of information identity status and account

Table 2. Pearson correlation between variables

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Neuroticism	45.57	8.72								
Extroversion	52.01	9.75	.45**							
Openness	50.51	9.63	-.23**	.5**						
Agreeableness	47.16	9.47	.18**	.05	.03					
Conscientiousness	50.65	10.11	-.59**	.52**	.22**	.3**				
Informational	40.22	5.58	-.21**	.34**	.44**	.09	.4**			
Normative	32.96	4.39	-.21**	.31**	.06	.22**	.42**	.37**		
Diffuse / avoidant	28.75	7.01	.25**	-.17**	-.1	-.08	-.32**	-.06	-.19**	
Commitment	35.97	6.28	-.41**	.42**	.28**	.09	.53**	.4**	.38**	-.36**

*P<0.05 **P<0.01

Table 3. Multi-variable regression of identity status based on personality traits

Dependent variables	Predictor	SE	b	t	sig	R ²
	Constant	3.439	16.657	4.843	0.000	
	Neuroticism	0.036	0.055	1.524	0.12	
	Extroversion	0.032	0.025	0.778	0.43	
informational	openness	0.029	0.206	7.158**	0.000	0.305
	Agreeableness	0.027	-0.16	0.573	0.56	
	Conscientiousness	0.034	0.197	5.837	0.000	
	Constant	2.864	18.237	3.368	0.000	
	Neuroticism	0.03	0.042	1.41	0.15	
	Extroversion	0.027	0.113	4.22**	0.000	
normative	openness	0.024	-0.058	-2.43*	0.015	0.215
	Agreeableness	0.024	0.067	-2.96**	0.003	
	Conscientiousness	0.028	0.131	-4.66**	0.000	
	Constant	4.85	34.34	7.07**	0.000	
	Neuroticism	0.05	0.086	1.7	0.09	
	Extroversion	0.045	0.013	0.29	0.77	
diffuse/avoidant	openness	0.041	-0.02	0.49	0.61	0.117
	Agreeableness	0.039	0.006	0.15	0.87	
	Conscientiousness	0.048	-0.189	-3.96**	0.000	
	Constant	3.72	19.32	5.18**	0.000	
	Neuroticism	0.039	-0.058	-1.49	0.13	
	Extroversion	0.035	0.079	2.26*	0.024	
commitment	openness	0.031	0.076	2.42*	0.016	0.343
	Agreeableness	0.03	-0.032	-1.07	0.28	
	Conscientiousness	0.037	0.257	7.034**	0.000	

*P<0.05 **P<0.01

for 30/5 percent ($R^2 = 0/305$) of information identity status variance. Personality traits of extroversion ($b=0/131$, $p<0/01$), agreeableness ($b=0/067$, $p<0/05$) and conscientiousness ($b=0/113$, $p<0/01$) are positive predictors of normative identity status and the personal trait of openness ($b=0/058$, $p<0/01$) is a negative predictor of normative identity and account for 21/5 percent ($R^2=0/215$) of normative identity status variance. The personal trait of conscientiousness ($b=-0/189$, $p<0/01$) is a negative predictor of diffusion identity status and account for 11/7 percent ($R^2=0/117$) of the variance and the personal traits of extroversion ($b=0/206$, $p<0/01$), openness ($b=0/076$, $p<0/05$) and conscientiousness ($b=0/275$, $p<0/01$) are positive predictors of commitment identity status and account for 34/3 percent ($R^2=0/343$) variance of the commitment identity status.

Discussion

The result of the present survey shows that only the characteristic traits of openness and consciousness are positive predictors of informational identity style. Also, the characteristic trait of openness is a negative predictor of normative identity style (Berzonsky, 1990). In fact, openness is the main factor of character for determining the individual differences in identity styles. Further, the characteristic of openness is accompanied by the increase in tendency towards informational identity style and decrease in tendency towards normative identity style (Alberts & Meyer, 1998; Berzonsky, 1990; Berzonsky & Adams, 1999; M. D. Berzonsky & Sullivan, 1992; Cramer, 2000; Dollinger, 1995; Duriez & Soenens, 2006a; Duriez et al., 2004). Individuals with the characteristic of openness have intellectual curiosity and are curious about the world around them and enjoy new theories and unusual values (Costa & McCrae, 1992). They value various mental incentives and also they have a better understanding of new ideas (Costa & McCrae, 1998). Openness is related with cognition (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982) and the need to understanding new situations and creativity (Mowen, 2000). In fact, openness is determined through the characteristics such as strong imagination, rationality and curiosity and also tendency towards new ideas

(McCrae & Costa, 1987). Cognition, cognitive complicatedness and contemplation regarding oneself are also among the characteristics of individuals with informational identity style (M. Berzonsky & Kinney, 1995; Berzonsky & Kuk, 2000; Dollinger, 1995; Nurmi et al., 1997). While facing different issues these individuals act logically and show much mental endeavor and have a purposeful search (Berzonsky, 1990). On the other hand, facing new and different issues from their fundamental values and beliefs, individuals with normative identity style, lack openness and become biased and inflexible. Furthermore, normative identity style is negatively related with openness to experience, openness to values and imagination (Berzonsky & Sullivan, 1992; Dollinger, 1995). Therefore, it seems logical that individuals with normative and informational identity style are different from each other in the characteristic of openness.

Also, the result of the present survey shows that the personality traits of extroversion and consciousness are the positive predictor of normative identity style. Various studies suggest that normative individuals are conscientious and adaptive and have a positive sense of welfare, but while facing the information, which challenge their value system and individual beliefs they do not act openly (Berzonsky & Kinney, 1995; Berzonsky & Kuk, 2000; Dollinger, 1995; Nurmi et al., 1997). Based on the findings of (Clancy & Dollinger, 1993), the characteristics of extroversion, adaptation and consciousness are related to normative identity style. Also, (Duriez & Soenens, 2006b) have come to the conclusion that when a decision needs to be made and while choosing between options, conscientious individuals act based on important people's expectations and decisions in their life and do not freely make decisions in critical and different situations. They make quick decisions based on their admitted criteria, which have been acquired from the important people in their life. This is while individuals with normative identity style, too, when facing identity issues and decision making they act in line with the expectations and orders of the important people and reference groups (Berzonsky, 1990); and their decisions are dependent on their family

and peers groups (Berzonsky & Sullivan, 1992). Therefore, given these common characteristics, it seems acceptable that consciousness is a positive predictor of normative identity style.

Characteristic trait of consciousness is a negative predictor of diffusion identity style. This finding is in line with the results of the studies conducted by (Clancy & Dollinger, 1993; Dollinger, 1995; Duriez & Soenens, 2006b; Duriez et al., 2004). In diffusion/avoidant identity style, individuals try to avoid personal issues, conflicts and decision makings. It seems that this identity style has a positive relation with neuroticism, depressive reactions and non-confirmatory decision making strategies and has a negative relation with cognitive resistance, self awareness, consciousness and welfare indexes (Berzonsky, 1990; Berzonsky & Ferrari, 1996; Nurmi et al., 1997). In addition, individuals with diffusion/avoidant style, showed weaker social ties, lower self-esteem (Nurmi et al., 1997; Vleioras & Bosma, 2005); lower psychological welfare (Adamset al., 2005) more adaptation problems such as committing crimes and conduct disorder (Vleioras & Bosma, 2005); and also low expectations of success and inappropriate function (Boyd, Hunt, Kandell, & Lucas, 2003). At the same time, conscious people are healthy and diligent who have clear goals in life and are known with characteristics such as precision, responsiveness, self ordering and work consciousness (McCrae & Costa, 1987); they are also people with purpose and like to have progress and are so perseverant (Barrick & Mount, 1991).

In this study, openness is the only characteristic trait, which is a positive predictor of informational, normative and commitment identity style and a negative predictor of diffusion/avoidant identity style. In order to explain this finding, we view that there is a relationship between commitment and identity styles as compared to individuals with diffusion/normative identity styles. People with informational and normative identity styles show stronger commitments (Berzonsky, 1990).

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