

**The Relationship between Identity Styles and Conformity:
Perspectives of Students at Islamic Azad University – Shahr-e Rey
Branch**

العلاقة بين أنماط الهوية والإمتثال: وجهات نظر الطلبة في جامعة آزاد الإسلامية

Ameer Maadal^{1,*}, Salwa Al-Majali² & Saba Nader Zadeh³

أمير معدل¹، وسلوى المجالي²، وصبا نادر زادة³

¹College of Psychology & Educational Sciences, Allameh Tabatabai University Tehran, Iran. ²College of Education, Humanities & Social Sciences, Al Ain University, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. ³College of Psychology & Educational Sciences, Allameh Tabatabai University Tehran, Iran.

¹كلية العلوم التربوية والنفسية، جامعة العلامة طباطبائي، طهران، إيران. ²كلية التربية، والعلوم الإنسانية والاجتماعية، جامعة العين، أبوظبي، الإمارات العربية المتحدة. ³كلية العلوم التربوية والنفسية، جامعة العلامة طباطبائي، طهران، إيران

*Corresponding author: a.translation.edition@gmail.com

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Abstract

The present correlational, quantitative research aimed to examine the relationship between identity styles and conformity. To do so, a probability sample of 365 students were selected from Islamic Azad University – Shahr-e Rey Branch, Iran. among whom the conformity and identity styles questionnaires were distributed. The degrees of correlation between these two variables were determined by Pearson's bivariate correlation coefficient. The findings showed that there is a positive correlation between each of these identity styles and conformity. However, this relationship was only significant between the diffuse/avoidant identity style and conformity. The limitations and suggestions for further research are also mentioned in the present paper.

Keywords: Identity Style; Informational Style; Normative Style; Diffuse-avoidant Style; Conformity

ملخص

البحث الإرتباطي والكمي الحالي يهدف إلى الكشف عن العلاقة بين أنماط الهوية والإمتثال، وتم توزيع إستبيان الإمتثال وأنماط الهوية على عينة إحتماية مكونة من 365 شخص، وتم تحديد درجات التباين بين هذين المتغيرين من خلال إختبار بيرسون، وكشفت النتائج أن هناك علاقة إيجابية بين كل من أنماط الهوية والإمتثال، ولكن هذه العلاقة كانت ذات دلالة إحصائية لنمط الهوية المتشئت/المعياري فقط، وتمت في هذا البحث مناقشة قيود البحث الحالي وتم تحديد بعض المقترحات للأبحاث القادمة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: نمط الهوية، نمط المعلوماتي، نمط المعياري، نمط التجنبي، الإمتثال.

Introduction

Sense of identity provides the ability to experience one's self as something that has continuity and sameness, and to act accordingly (Erikson, 1963). According to Berzonsky (1988), Identity is a unified configuration that emerges from, but is not reducible to, earlier identifications and life experiences. He (1990) proposed a process model of identity formation that focused on differences in the social-cognitive processes and strategies individuals use to engage or avoid the tasks of constructing, maintaining, and/or re-constructing a sense of identity: Three different social-cognitive identity processing styles are postulated within this model: Informational, normative, and diffuse-avoidant.

Conformity, on the other hand, is a problem in social influence (Asch, 1956, as cited by Maadal, 2020) and denotes that one goes along with the demeanors or norms of a group. One of the first persons who studied the role of conformity was Asch (1956). He designed an experiment in which a group of people were present. The majority of people in this group were confederates and merely one person was the real participant. All these persons coalesced in one place and explicitly responded to a trivia question asked by the researcher. The answer to this question was easy, however, all confederates deliberately gave a wrong response to that question. This in turn led the actual participant to give the same response given by these individuals. Following this experiment, other studies were conducted in which this variable was included (e.g. Maadal, 2020; Alquist, 2013; Van de Waal, 2013). Some of the other

studies were performed using a questionnaire and had a correlational nature.

Informational Style

Information-oriented individuals, who perceive their parents as autonomy-supportive (Smits et al., 2008 & 2010) and authoritative (Berzonsky, 2004), deal with identity issues and personal problems by actively seeking out, processing, evaluating, and utilizing self-relevant information. They are skeptical about their self-constructions and willing to test and revise aspects of their self-identity when confronted with dissonant feedback (Berzonsky, 1990). They are also less likely to have conservative goals and values, and they interpret religious contents in a symbolic and personal way (Duriez et al., 2012; Duriez & Soenens, 2006; Berzonsky et al., 2011). In contradiction to individuals with a diffuse/avoidant style, persons with an informational style are prepared to effectively adapt within a university context, score high on academic autonomy, are socially skilled, academically show a good performance, and their sense of educational purpose is clear (Berzonsky & Kuk, 2000 and 2005).

Normative style

Normative individuals, whose parents are supportive, controlling (Smits et al., 2008 & 2010) and authoritarian (Berzonsky, 2004), have a relatively less mentally effortful style; they more automatically adopt, internalize, and strive to maintain the prescriptions, goals, and commitments of significant others (Berzonsky, 2008). This identity style is also characterized by having extrinsic and conservation goals, conservative values, being more religious (Duriez et al., 2012; Duriez & Soenens, 2006; Berzonsky et al., 2011), and by a passive, submissive, obedient orientation towards important authority and identification figures, rather than by an active, assertive, domineering way of relating to others (Soenens et al., 2005).

Ferrari, 2009). Another study (Berzonsky, 1993) revealed that compared to individuals with a normative or a diffuse/avoidant style, individuals who use an information-oriented style are more receptive to new actions, ideas and personal feelings. Also, compared to information-oriented and diffuse/avoidant styles, normative style is significantly and positively associated with more defensiveness to considering information that threaten hard-core areas of the self, such as actions and personal values. Duriez and Soenens (2006) found that informational style is negatively related to social dominance orientation and right-wing authoritarianism, diffuse/avoidant style is positively related to social dominance orientation, and normative style is positively related to right-wing authoritarianism and negatively related to support for democratic values (Miklikowska, 2012). Finally, soenens et al. (2005), examined the relationship between identity styles and causality orientation. The results of their study revealed that an autonomous causality orientation is positively related with an informational identity style and negatively related to a diffuse/avoidant style, a controlled causality orientation is positively related to the use of a normative identity style, and the impersonal orientation positively predicted the use of the diffuse/avoidant identity style.

Research Problem

Although previous research touches upon the tendency to conform among different identity styles (e.g. Soenens et al., 2005), further studies are needed to draw a clear picture as to what degree identity styles are associated more with conformity. Therefore, we in this research endeavor to accomplish this objective.

Method and Participants

The sample of the present study was probability and comprised of 365 undergraduate students from Islamic Azad University – Shahr-e Rey Branch, Iran, of which 44.65 percent (i.e. 163 persons) were female, 53.97 percent (i.e. 197 individuals) were male, and five persons did not report their gender and thus, are regarded as missing. These students were between the ages of 17 and 48 with a mean age of 21.91.

aspect of social life (e.g. Berzonsky *et. al.*, 2011), logically it seems that such individuals also avoid conformity while facing different aspects of social life and behave according to their own internal criteria.

On the other hand, as mentioned earlier, individuals with a normative identity style have controlling and authoritarian parents. Moreover, some studies have shown that unlike individuals with an informational identity style, these persons tend to be more conforming (Berzonsky *et. al.* 2011; Berzonsky & Papini, 2014). Although these studies examined only a part of these persons' behavior in terms of degree of conformity, it seems that such people behave in this manner in various aspects of their life. Individuals with a diffuse/avoidant identity style behave according to their environmental conditions. Therefore, according to findings as well as logically, people with this identity style tend to be more conforming.

Based upon these arguments, hypotheses of the present research are as follows:

1. There is a negative and significant correlation between the informational identity style and conformity.
2. There is a positive and significant correlation between the normative identity style and conformity.
3. There is a positive and significant correlation between the diffuse/avoidant identity style and conformity.

Results

In order to determine the relationship between different identity styles and conformity, the Pearson's correlation method was used. The results of this analysis are shown in table 1.

As can be seen in table 1, among the three identity styles, diffuse/avoidant style has a positive and significant correlation with conformity. Two other identity styles have also a positive but insignificant relationship with conformity.

On the other hand, the second hypothesis was premised upon that there is a positive and significant correlation between the normative identity style and conformity. Findings showed that there is a positive correlation between these variables, to the effect that the more normative is the identity style of individuals, the more they tend to conform. However, this relationship is not significant and thus the second hypothesis is rejected. This finding is inconsistent with the findings by Berzonsky *et. al.* (2011), and Berzonsky & Papini (2014), which indicated that there is a significant relationship between these variables. Furthermore, it contradicts common sense and represents another example of fundamental attribution error.

In the current research, the only hypothesis that was confirmed was the third hypothesis, suggesting that there is a positive and significant correlation between the diffuse/avoidant identity style and conformity. This finding seems theoretically logical, because as mentioned earlier, individuals with this identity style do not cling to their values and beliefs while making their daily decisions, but decide and behave according to external situations and factors (Berzonsky & Ferrari, 2009). This finding is consistent with what Berzonsky (1990) pointed out. Furthermore, in practice one can infer important implications from this finding. In other words, in order to modify the behavior of individuals with a diffuse/avoidant identity style, therapists can concentrate more on their status. For instance, if a student with this identity style has poor academic performance, he/she can be placed among individuals with good academic performance. By doing so, such person, will be more likely than individuals with other identity styles to improve his/her academic performance. Moreover, therapists as well as the individuals with this identity style themselves can predict how they will behave in different situations.

Limitations and suggestions

Like all studies, the present research has also some limitations. The first limitation of this research is its limited statistical population, to the effect that subjects of the study consisted solely of the students of the Islamic Azad University, Shahr-e-Rey Branch; However, this is the first

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