Research Paper

The Relationship between Identity, Self- Esteem and Meaning in Life among Late Adolescent Women

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ABSTRACT

Late adolescence represents a period of transition, involving new experiences such as the entrance into college. This presents an opportunity for identity development, especially among women since there has been a growth of choices in the educational and occupational fields. The study explores the relationship between identity processing style, identity commitment, identity orientation, self- esteem and meaning in life. The Identity Style Inventory, Aspects of Identity Questionnaire IV, Rosenberg Self- Esteem Scale and Meaning in Life Questionnaire were given to a sample of 199 late adolescent women in the age range of 17-20 years. The results show that significant relationships are present between the identity constructs and self- esteem and meaning in life.

Keywords: Late Adolescence, Identity Processing Style, Identity Commitment, Identity Orientation, Self- Esteem, Meaning in Life

Identity in its essence has been defined to mean "sameness, oneness" (Noonan and Curtis, 2018). It finds its roots in philosophy where it has been considered as a marker that differentiates one object from another (Sollberger, 2013). This has led to an understanding of identity as referring to sameness or continuity in terms of the experience of the self over time, and difference in terms of inter- individual variations. (Baumeister, 2005).

The conceptualization of identity has expanded in psychology, beginning with William James (1890, 1983) who described that the self is composed of "I" and "Me". The "I" is the knower and the "Me" is the known; consisting of the material, social and spiritual aspects of the self (Leary, 1990).

Erik Erikson, in his psychosocial theory of development (1950) (cited in Oyserman, Elmore and Smith, 2012), describes identity as a coherent conception of the self that is made up of goals, values and beliefs, to which an individual is strongly committed (Papalia, Olds and

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Feldman, 2004). In his theory, identity development in adolescence is a synthesis of childhood skills, beliefs and identifications in order to form a coherent self that provides a sense of continuity (Sokol, 2009). On the basis of Erikson's dimensions of crisis and commitment, Marcia (1966) (cited in Kroger and Marcia, 2011), defined four states of ego (self) development that correlated with personality characteristics. These identity statuses are identity achievement (commitment following crisis), identity foreclosure (commitment without crisis), identity moratorium (crisis leading to commitment) and identity diffusion (absence of crisis and commitment) (Kroger and Marcia, 2011; Papalia et al. 2004).

Identity Processing Style

Following Marcia's outcome based approach, Berzonsky developed a social cognitive approach that focused on the different ways in which individuals "approach or avoid the tasks of constructing and reconstructing a sense of self- identity" (Berzonsky, 1994, p.458). He referred to this concept as identity processing style. An identity style is a strategy that individuals characteristically use or would prefer to use when dealing with identity conflicts. The three identity processing styles that he posited are *informational*, *normative* and *avoidant/ diffuse* (Berzonsky, 1989).

People with an informational style proactively deal with identity issues by actively seeking out, evaluating and using self- relevant information. They are open to new information and are willing to revise aspects of their identity upon feedback. This results in a stable, coherent and integrated identity structure.

A normative style is characterized by the tendency to be reactive, automatically internalize and conform to the expectations of significant others. They are concerned with preserving their existing identity structure and have low tolerance for ambiguity. This results in a rigid structure of identity.

A diffuse/ avoidant style is associated with chronic procrastination and defensive avoidance. There is reluctance to confront and deal with personal problems or identity conflicts by oneself, because of which, the individual's behavior is determined by situational or external demands and consequences. The resulting identity structure is fragmented and inconsistent (Berzonsky, Macek and Nurmi, 2003; Berzonsky, 2010).

Gender differences have been reported for these styles, in which women have been found to be higher on normative style and men on diffuse style indicating that women are higher in identity exploration (Crocetti, Sica, Schwartz, Serafini and Meeus, 2012).

Identity Commitment

Identity commitment is an important aspect of Marcia's identity statuses. It refers to the fundamental choices that adolescents have made with regard to the various developmental domains and the self- confidence they derive from it (Crocetti, Rubini, Berzonsky and Meeus, 2009). In an effort to separate the exploration and commitment components of identity, the Identity Styles Inventory consists of a separate subscale for identity commitment. Berzonsky (1992) characterized identity commitment as the strength of commitment or clarity in one's

standards, goals, beliefs and convictions. It has been seen that informational and normative styles are positively associated with identity commitment, while diffuse style is negatively associated with it (Wilson, 2011).

Identity Orientation

In contrast to the process orientation of Berzonsky's identity processing styles, identity orientation refers to the relative importance that individuals place on different identity attributes or characteristics when framing a self- definition. It thus refers to the content of self- attributes in the definition of one's self- identity (Cheek, Smith and Tropp, 2002). The origins of identity orientation lie in the basic differentiation of the personal and social self. This has expanded to result in four types of identity orientation; personal, social, collective and relational.

Personal identity orientation is a private sense of self, based internally and on one's self- knowledge and self- evaluation. Individuals preferring this orientation tend to define themselves in terms of their emotions, thoughts, ideas, beliefs and personal goals. Thus it is grounded in private self- attributes such as personal values, goals, and unique psychological states (Berzonsky et al., 2003).

Social identity orientation is a sense of self within an individual that is externally based and is concerned with the interactions with and reactions of others (Carducci, 2009). People who tend to define themselves in this manner are concerned with public self- elements such as reputation, popularity and impressions (Berzonsky, 1994).

Collective identity orientation is concerned with membership in a large, impersonal group and thus refers to the expectations and normative standards of significant others and referent groups (Berzonsky, 1994; Maarleveld, 2009). This reflects a communal emphasis based on ethnic heritage, religious affiliation, occupation or country of citizenship (Carducci, 2009). Relational identity orientation is based on one's intimate, interpersonal and role relationships with significant others. An individual with this orientation with define the self in terms of the roles played in close relationships with others (Cheek et al., 2002; Maarleveld, 2009).

These identity orientations have been associated with differing preferences for occupational and recreational choices. For example, women with a personal identity orientation have been found to take active roles and show initiation in one's career, while those with a social identity orientation tend to choose traditional female careers and experience career indecision. Different identity orientations also indicate whether individuals prefer individual or team based recreational activities (Carducci, 2009).

Representing the process and content aspects of identity, the relationship between identity processing style and identity orientation has been studied. It has been found that the type of attributes that late adolescents use to define their sense of identity varies with the type of processing style used. In this context, informational style has been associated with personal identity orientation, normative style with collective orientation and diffused/ avoidant style with social orientation (Berzonsky et al., 2003).

Self- esteem

Self- esteem is an important aspect of self- concept and forms the evaluative dimension of the self (Baumeister, 2005). It can refer to the summary judgment of everything that a person can assess about the self in terms of who one is, what one does, what one has and how one appears physically, psychologically and socially (Bailey, 2003). It is also considered as an attitude, either towards the self as a whole or towards specific aspects of the self (Rosenberg, Schooler, Schoenbach and Rosenberg, 1995). It has been proposed to consist of two components: competence and self- worth. Competence is associated with efficacy- based self- esteem and self- worth is concerned with the degree to which individuals feel they are persons of value (Cast and Burke, 2002).

Global self- esteem is the general value that an individual places on the self and is contrasted with specific self- esteem that refers to appraisals of specific traits or abilities. Global self- esteem is measured through scales such as Rosenberg's and Coopersmith's self- esteem inventories. Rosenberg (1965) defined self- esteem as the favorable or unfavorable attitudes towards the self as a totality (cited in Suls and Krizan, 2005). Global self- esteem has been found to be strongly associated with psychological well- being and is important for adolescent developmental outcomes such as the transition to university (Rosenberg et al., 1995; Friedlander, Shupak and Cribbie, 2007).

Self- esteem has also been categorized as high, low and defensive. While high self- esteem is indicated by having clear, consistent and definite ideas about the self, low self- esteem is characterized as self- concept confusion. Defensive self- esteem results from an imbalance between competence and worthiness in which one dimension's strength does not correspond with that of the other. This results in feelings of vulnerability manifesting in the form of defensive behaviors (Mruk, 2013).

Self- esteem and identity have been theoretically linked with each other through the identity theory which posits that identity is a set of meanings that represents the feelings and expectations that one has when occupying a social position. When the social situation matches the meanings created in identity then self- verification occurs resulting in increased feelings of competence and worth, thus increasing self- esteem (Cast and Burke, 2002).

Meaning in Life

Victor Frankl (1984) described that the primary motivational force for man is to strive to find meaning in one's life. He conceptualized this as "will to meaning", which can be realized by creation or action, by experience, or by the attitude that one takes towards suffering that is unavoidable (Frankl, 1984). Meaning in life has been described in various terms such as making sense of life, an affective quality, based on a sense of self- worth and purpose (Steger, 2012).

Steger and colleagues have provided a holistic definition of meaning in life as "the sense made of and significance felt regarding, the nature of one's being and existence." (Steger, Frazier, Oishi and Kaler, 2006, p. 81). It can be defined as a sense of coherence,

understanding of life, understanding of the world, and purposefulness. It enables one to search for important lifelong aspirations.

According to the framework developed by Steger (2006), meaning in life has two dimensions; presence of meaning and search for meaning. Presence of meaning refers to whether individuals perceive their lives are significant and purposeful. It is an understanding of the self, of the world and how one fits with the world; it is concerned with a valued outcome. Search for meaning refers to the strength, intensity and activity of the effort used to establish an understanding of the meaning and purpose of one's life; it is concerned with a process (Dezutter et al., 2013).

In drawing parallels with identity development, it is seen that forming a sense of meaning during adolescence becomes a central focus and meaning creation has been considered to unfold in conjunction with the development of identity. Search for meaning may serve the same purpose as identity exploration and presence of meaning can be seen to provide the same functions as identity commitment for an individual (Dezutter et al., 2013).

Need for the study

Late adolescence (commonly seen as the passage between ages 18 to 20 or 17 to 21) is a stage essential to set the foundation for one's developmental future as the individual is faced with several choices pertaining to education, work and independence (Zarrett and Eccles, 2006). According to Erikson (1950), certain tasks important during the stage of late adolescence include the management of demanding roles, identification of personal strengths and weaknesses to refine skills, finding meaning and purpose in the roles acquired and making necessary life changes or coping with changes. One milestone for late adolescents is the transition to college which provides several possibilities for independence, self-governance and exploration of the self. It also provides challenges such as dealing with the changes in familial and peer relationships (Zarrett and Eccles, 2006). These factors can contribute to identity development and the need for making meaning in order to create a sense of coherence with the past and present (McLean, 2005).

Identity formation has been found to be inconsistent across genders, in certain cases due to cultural rearing processes that separate the ways in which males and females view the self. Females are seen to proceed with identity formation at a faster pace than males and consider issues pertaining to career, religion, political views and relationships to be more important. (Sandhu and Tung, 2006).There is a gradual transformation from collective to individual identity and an increased emphasis on equal opportunities for women in India (D' Souza, 2006; Alagaraja and Wilson, 2015). With a greater entry for women into different careers in India and changing social perceptions of gender roles, the range of possibilities for establishing a sense of identity has widened more recently, providing relevance to study the relationship between identity constructs and self- esteem and meaning in life among late adolescent females studying in college.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Berzonsky et al. (2003) studied the relationship between identity processing styles, identity orientations and identity structure (commitment) among late adolescent students. The findings of the study showed that identity processing styles were related to identity orientations and the structural consolidation of identity. Specifically, informational style was associated with personal identity orientation with a well- integrated and committed structure of identity. A similar structure was found with the normative style which was associated with collective identity. Diffuse/ avoidant style was associated with social identity orientation and an uncommitted and poorly integrated sense of identity. These findings were observed across gender and culture. While cultural context played a role in which identity style was given importance, the relationships between the identity styles and orientations were the same across culture.

Boyd, Hunt, Kendall and Lucas (2003) studied the relationship between identity processing style and self- perceived academic self- efficacy and academic performance. Women were found to be higher on informational style and men on diffuse style. Individuals who endorsed an informational style felt prepared for college and their ability to deal with college experiences. Normative types also felt prepared and felt supported by their family for their decision to go to college. Those with a diffuse style anticipated difficulty with college work and did not feel supported. Identity styles influenced academic persistence for men wherein those with a diffuse style were more likely to have changed their college. This study indicated the importance of having different modes of treatment for clients with different styles of processing information.

Berzonsky (2005) studied the effects of priming of self- attributes on identity processing style and self- definition. Three priming conditions were set to increase the availability of the three orientations (personal, social and collective). Participants were randomly assigned to one of three cognitive priming conditions. They were required to either list the personal characteristics, social expectations or the collective group concerns that the participants used to define themselves. Through a 3 by 3 multivariate analysis it was seen that informational style individuals accessed more social and collective self- attributes than normative and diffuse types. Personal self- attributes, compared with social and collective, were the most accessible by all the three identity styles. This showed that personal self- attributes were most accessible. Additionally, informational types scored the highest on personal self- attributes, normative types had highest scores on collective orientation and diffuse types were highest on social orientation.

Sandhu and Tung (2006) studied gender differences in adolescent identity formation process in the age range of 13 to 21 years belonging to early, middle and late adolescence. Gender differences and similarities were sought to be understood through the study using the identity statuses. It was seen that middle adolescent girls were higher on achievement and moratorium while buys were higher on diffusion for the ideological and interpersonal

domains. Same results were found for late adolescents in which girls were also found to score higher on foreclosure than boys, indicating that females engage in greater exploration of identity issues followed by commitment to them.

Meaning in life across the lifespan was studied by **Steger, Oishi and Kashdan (2009)** on four life stage groups; emerging adulthood, young adulthood, middle adulthood and older adulthood. Mean scores on the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ) were found to be similar and higher on all the age groups for both the subscales. This indicated that they were more likely to feel their lives to be meaningful and also to be involved in the search for meaning. Meaning in life was positively related with well- being at all ages and individuals at later life stages reported greater levels of presence of meaning in life than younger adults. Search for meaning in life was associated with greater distress among older adults.

Crocetti et al. (2012) examined the connections between identity styles, dimensions, statuses and functions. Five functions of identity have been defined; sense of structure, sense of coherence and harmony, future orientation, goals and direction, and a sense of personal control. Multivariate analysis of variance showed that males were higher than females on diffuse style and emerging adults scored higher on informational style than did late adolescents. Females were higher than males in in- depth exploration in educational and interpersonal domains. They also showed higher commitment in the interpersonal domain. It was seen that endorsement of informational and normative styles can promote a firm sense of identity. Formation of a stable identity can result from positive associations of identity functions with commitment and in- depth exploration.

Rani and Devi (2016) studied the pattern of identity development among adolescents belonging to different age groups from schools and colleges in a city India. It was seen that as age increased, scores on personal identity development changed. A greater percentage of late adolescents had higher levels of personal identity. Girls across age were consistently higher on relational identity scores, compared with boys. This was attributed to better communication skills of girls. For social identity boys across age showed higher level of social identity scores compared with girls. Among late adolescents boys showed higher scores on collective identity, compared with girls.

The findings of the studies show that there are significant relationships among identity constructs of processing style, orientation and commitment. These constructs have also been implicated in measures of psychosocial functioning such as self- efficacy and academic performance. These findings imply the importance of the identity constructs, self- esteem and meaning in life in late adolescence, whose relationships are explored in the present study.

METHODOLOGY

Research Problem

Identity plays a pivotal role in the daily functioning of individuals. Identity formation acquires a salient role during the late adolescence stage due to the opportunities presented in the form of changing identity norms for women. Self- esteem also plays an important role because of the way in which one evaluates the self in light of information obtained in new

settings like college. These experiences permit the process of meaning making that allows one to form a sense of coherence during identity development. In this context the objectives and hypotheses of the study have been developed.

Variables
1. Identity processing styles: Informational, Normative and Diffuse/ Avoidant processing styles.
2. Identity commitment
3. Identity orientations: Personal, Social, Collective and Relational identity orientations.
4. Self- esteem
5. Meaning in life: Presence of Meaning and Search for Meaning in life.

Objectives
To find the relationship between identity processing styles, identity commitment, identity orientations, self- esteem and meaning in life among late adolescent women studying in college:
1. To find the relationship between identity processing styles and identity orientations.
2. To find the relationship between identity processing styles and identity commitment.
3. To find the relationship between identity orientations and identity commitment.
4. To find the relationship between identity processing styles and self- esteem.
5. To find the relationship between identity processing styles and meaning in life.
6. To find the relationship between identity orientations and self- esteem.
7. To find the relationship between identity orientations and meaning in life.
8. To find the relationship between identity commitment and self- esteem.
9. To find the relationship between identity commitment and meaning in life.
10. To find the relationship between self- esteem and meaning in life.

Hypotheses
1. There will be no significant relationship between the identity processing styles and identity orientations.
2. There will be no significant relationship between identity processing styles and identity commitment.
3. There will be no significant relationship between identity orientations and identity commitment.
4. There will be no significant relationship between identity processing styles and self- esteem.
5. There will be no significant relationship between identity processing styles and meaning in life.
6. There will be no significant relationship between identity orientations and self- esteem.
7. There will be no significant relationship between identity orientations and meaning in life.
8. There will be no significant relationship between identity commitment and self- esteem.
9. There will be no significant relationship between identity commitment and meaning in life.
10. There will be no significant relationship between self- esteem and meaning in life.

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Sample

The sample consisted of 199 late adolescent undergraduate females in the age range of 17- 20 years, studying in the first and second year of college in different science and arts related fields. Convenience sampling was used to obtain the sample from two women colleges.

Instruments

Four measures were used in this study,

1.   Identity Style Inventory (ISI- 3) (Revised Version) (Berzonsky, 1992):

The self- report inventory measures the Informational, Normative and Diffuse/ Avoidant identity processing styles and the strength to which people endorse these styles. It has four subscales measuring informational style (11 items), normative style (9 items), diffuse/ avoidant style (10 items), commitment (10 items). It is based on a 5 point Likert type scale where 1 stands for 'not at all like me' and 5 stands for 'very much like me'. Scores can be added for each subscale and analyses can be performed separately for each subscale. Alpha coefficients have been found to range from 0.64 to 0.76. Internal and external validity is present for the scale (Luyckx, 2007; Wilson, 2011).

2.   Aspects of Identity Questionnaire IV (AIQ- IV) (Cheek, and Briggs, 2013):

The self- report questionnaire consists of 45 items and measures Personal Identity Orientation (10 items), Social Identity Orientation (7 items), Collective Identity Orientation (8 items) and Relational Identity Orientation (10 items). There are 10 additional items that are not scored under any subscale. It is a 5 point Likert type scale where 1 is 'not important to my sense of who I am', 2 is 'slightly important to my sense of who I am', 3 is 'somewhat important to my sense of who I am', 4 is 'very important to my sense of who I am', and 5 is 'extremely important to my sense of who I am'. Total score for each subscale is obtained by adding the scored for those items. Internal consistency has been found to range fom 0.72 to 0.92. Convergent validity has been established with measures of relational self- concept. Discriminant validity showed moderate positive correlation with the AIQ- III and other measures of self- concept related to the identity orientations (Cheek et al., 2002; Mehri, Salari, Langroudi and Baharmizadeh, 2011).

3.   Rosenberg Self- Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965):

The self- report scale measures global self- esteem dealing with items reflecting favorable or unfavorable attitude towards the self. It has 10 items with four response options; strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. The scores range from 10 to 40. Higher the score, higher the level of self- esteem. Internal consistency has been found to range from 0.77 to 0.88 and test- retest reliability over a two week period was found to be 0.5. Convergent validity was established with Coopersmith self- esteem inventory (0.52), MMPI- 2 Low Self-esteem Subscale (-0.61) and Single Item Self- esteem Scale (0.69) (Rosenberg 1965; Swenson, 2003).

4.   Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ) (Steger, Frazier, Oishi and Kaler, 2006):

The self- report questionnaire consists of 10 items on a 7 point Likert type scale ranging from 1 'Absolutely Untrue' to 7 'Absolutely True'. 5 items are of the Presence of Meaning in life subscale and 5 items are of Search for Meaning in life subscale. The item scores are added for

each subscale and higher the score greater the level in that dimension. The total possible score for each subscale is 35. Alpha coefficients over two time periods were found to be 0.81 and 0.86 (Presence subscale) and 0.84 and 0.92 (Search subscale). The subscales were unrelated with social desirability showing discriminate validity (Steger et al., 2006).

Procedure

A short pilot survey was conducted to check the ease of understanding the questionnaires. Based on this a few statements in the ISI-3 were clarified for respondents with care to not change the meaning of the statements. These clarifications were added along with the questionnaire. Data was collected through physical administration of questionnaires to groups of students in first and second year undergraduate courses, after relevant permission was obtained. Descriptive statistics like mean and standard deviation was used. Pearson's correlation was used to find the relationships between the variables.

RESULTS

Table No. 1 Mean (M) scores, percentages of the mean scores and Standard Deviation (SD) values of the variables in the study

Variables	Mean (M)	%	Standard Deviation (SD)
Age	18.04	-	0.744
Informational processing style	40.33	73.32	5.836
Normative processing style	32.60	72.44	4.987
Diffuse processing style	33.29	66.58	6.216
Identity commitment	36.28	72.56	5.688
Personal identity	41.79	83.58	4.810
Relational identity	39.76	79.52	6.080
Social identity	24.21	69.17	4.838
Collective identity	25.94	64.85	4.983
Self- esteem	27.68	69.2	3.987
Presence of meaning in life	24.39	69.68	5.958
Search for meaning in life	26.20	74.85	5.837

n=199

Table 1 show that the mean age of the sample of 199 participants is 18.04. Percentages were computed for all the variables to facilitate comparisons among the variables as the identity style and orientation variables had unequal number of items.

Among the identity processing styles the percentage of the mean score of the informational style (73.32%) was the highest. Commitment mean score was 36.28 out of a possible score of 50 with %=72.56. Among the identity orientations personal identity had the highest

percentage of mean score (83.58, M=41.79). The mean score for self- esteem was 27.68 out of a possible score of 40 and the percentage was 69.2. The mean for presence of meaning was 24.39 with %=69.68 and for search for meaning mean score was 26.20 with %=74.85.

Standard deviation values show that the scores for diffuse style (SD= 6.216) had the highest variability and self- esteem had the least variability in scores (SD= 3.987).

Table No. 2 Pearson's correlation for the identity styles, identity commitment, identity orientations, self- esteem, presence of meaning in life and search for meaning in life

	Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1	INF	-										
2	NOR	.409***	-									
3	DIF	.089	.122	-								
4	COM	.253***	.420***	-.211**	-							
5	PI	.211**	.107	-.159*	.287***	-						
6	RI	.104	.127	-.043	.067	.408***	-					
7	SI	.069	.092	.078	-.081	.164*	.211**	-				
8	CI	.171*	.344***	.152*	.172*	.237*	.218**	.380***	-			
9	SE	.048	.158*	-.066	.424***	.207**	.139	-.094	.062	-		
10	PRE	.076	.199**	-.146*	.465***	.182**	-.102	-.149*	.169*	.486***	-	
11	SEA	.300***	.168*	.052	-.063	.055	.054	.131	.151*	-.165*	-.125	-

Note. INF=informational processing style, NOR=normative processing style, DIF=diffuse processing style, COM=commitment, PI=personal identity orientation, RI=relational identity orientation, SI=social identity orientation, CI=collective identity orientation, Se=self- esteem, PRE=presence of meaning in life, SEA=search for meaning in life.
n=199
*p<0.05 **p<0.01 ***p<0.001

The table shows that personal identity orientation is positively related with informational style and negatively with diffuse style. Collective identity orientation is positively related with all the three identity processing styles. Relational and social identity orientations are not significantly related with any of the identity styles. Commitment is positively related with informational and normative styles and negatively with diffuse style. It is also positively related with personal and collective identity orientation and shows no significant relationship with social and relational orientations.

Among the identity styles, informational and normative styles are positively related with each other. No significant relationship was found with diffuse style. Among the identity orientations, personal, relational, social and collective orientations were found to positively relate with each other.

Self- esteem is positively related with normative style, personal identity orientation and commitment. Presence of meaning in life is positively associated with normative style, personal and collective identity orientations and commitment. It is negatively related with diffuse style and social identity orientation. Search for meaning is positively associated with informational and normative styles. It is positively associated with collective identity orientation. Self- esteem is positively associated with presence of meaning and negatively with search for meaning. No significant relationship was present between presence of and search for meaning in life.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of the study was to understand the relationship of the identity constructs of processing styles, orientations and commitment with self- esteem and meaning in life, which are seen to play an important role during the period of late adolescence.

Table 1 showed that the sample on average endorsed the informational style the most and the diffuse style the least. The identity commitment score showed that participants were more likely to be committed to their identity. Participants were also more likely to consider their personal attributes and abilities as their defining features to a greater extent. The importance given to personal identity could be attributed to their current stage of development i.e., late adolescence as they may prefer to maintain a focus on internal aspects of the self during this period of self- exploration and revision. Mean scores on the MLQ scale showed that participants are involved in searching for meaning to a greater extent than experiencing presence of meaning in life. This could be because late adolescents are involved in making meaning of their lives in order to construct their life stories (McLean, 2005), for which reason they may be searching for meaning to a greater extent. A study by Steger, Kawabata, Shimai and Otake (2008) found that differences between presence of and search for meaning in life could be influenced by culture.

The results obtained for Hypothesis 1 show that there are certain significant relationships between the identity styles and orientations specifically, the relationship of personal orientation with informational and diffuse style. Other studies have arrived at similar results (Berzonksy, 1994; Lutwak, Ferrari and Cheek, 1998; Berzonksy et al., 2013).These findings indicate that defining oneself through a personal orientation reflects the tendency to approach identity issues using reflection and experience based thinking (Berzonsky et al., 2013) which is characteristic of the informational style. Since diffuse style is characterized by people who tend to be influenced by external demands due to the use of avoidance strategies (Berzonsky and Ferrari, 2009), it could reduce the importance given to personal identity orientation.

Collective identity orientation was positively associated with all the processing styles. The relationship between collective orientation and normative style has been obtained by many studies (Berzonsky 1994; Lutwak et al., 1998; Berzonsky, 2005; Berzonsky et al., 2003; Berzonsky et al., 2013) and has been theoretically linked with each other due to the emphasis of the style on the influence of significant others (Berzonsky, 1994). Social identity and relational identity orientations were not found to have a significant relationship with the identity styles. These orientations represent defining oneself in terms of interpersonal and intimate interactions with significant others, which could have been internalized at a younger age due to cultural influences and do not show salience during the process of identity construction or reconstruction occurring during late adolescence.

The results obtained for Hypothesis 2 show that identity commitment is significantly associated with the three identity styles. Similar results have been found by Imtiaz and Naqvi (2012) for commitment. Berzonsky (2003) has also found that individuals using informational and normative styles have greater self- clarity and therefore higher scores on identity commitment while those using diffuse style have lower scores on commitment. It is possible that identity commitment (clarity) is less defined when using diffuse style in approaching identity issues because of the tendency to avoid directly dealing with such issues. Identity could be constructed with the influence of transitory environmental influences leading to greater confusion of the self and disintegration of the identity structure.

The results obtained for Hypothesis 3 show that commitment is positively associated with personal and collective identity orientations. These findings show that the tendency to define oneself in terms of personal and/or collective self- attributes is associated with higher commitment to one's identity and greater clarity in identity structure. This could reflect the relative importance of the stage of adolescence and cultural context in developing a well-integrated identity structure. Berzonsky et al. (2003) found that individuals with an informational style tended to root their identity in personal self- attributes and have a well integrated identity structure that is also flexible. Normative style was associated with collective self- elements and a clearly defined identity structure which was rigid and less flexible. Diffuse style was associated with an uncommitted identity structure, associated with social identity. The positive relationship between personal identity orientation and informational style could explain the relationship between commitment and personal orientation. Likewise, the positive relationship between normative style and collective identity could explain the positive association obtained between commitment and collective identity orientation.

The results obtained for Hypothesis 4 show that among the three identity styles, normative style was significantly and positively associated with self- esteem. Nurmi, Berzonsky, Tammi and Kinney (1997) found that students with an informational and normative style reported higher levels of self- esteem. The use of normative style provides a stable identity structure that is facilitated by the acceptance of significant others which could provide the individual with a more favorable attitude towards the self.

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The results obtained for Hypothesis 5 show that presence of meaning in life is positively associated with normative style and negatively with diffuse style. Search for meaning in life was positively associated with informational and normative styles. Beaumont (2009) found that presence of meaning was positively associated with informational and normative style while it was negatively associated with diffuse style. Additionally she identified a path model in which endorsement of an informational style positively predicted self- actualization and self- transcendence that in turn positively predicted presence of meaning and subjective happiness. However, in the present study normative style, rather than informational style, was positively associated with presence of meaning. This difference could be attributed to cultural differences highlighting individualistic- collectivistic cultures. A similar relationship between normative style and sense of coherence was found in the study by Vaziri, Jomheri and Farrokhi (2014) and attributed the results to the collectivistic cultural context.

In Beaumont's study (2009), search for meaning was positively related with normative and diffuse styles but had no significant relationship with informational style. This again contrasts with the findings of the present study where search for meaning was positively associated with informational style. It is possible that given the cultural context and stage of adolescence of the present sample, that searching for meaning in one's life has a stronger association with exploration of one's identity in a proactive, reflective manner and a similar association with identity exploration in a reactive manner.

The results obtained for Hypothesis 6 show that among the identity orientations personal identity was significantly and positively associated with self- esteem. Gonzales- Backen et al. (2015) found that social identity (defined in terms of ethnic identity and place of residence) and personal identity played a role in self- esteem among ethnic minority students like Asian Americans. It is possible that during the stage of late adolescence when identity formation is salient, personal identity orientation can be conceptualized to give a greater understanding of the self in terms of one's feelings, motives and strengths. This could provide a stable base for evaluation of the self and a clear definition of the self resulting in high self- esteem.

The results obtained for Hypothesis 7 show that presence of meaning in life is positively associated with personal and collective identity orientation and negatively associated with social identity. Search for meaning in life is positively associated with collective identity orientation. It is possible that individuals in the study experience a greater extent of coherence and understanding of their lives with a greater inclination towards defining the self in terms of personal attributes and in terms of the larger group. Personal identity orientation could provide in depth understanding of the self, which could contribute to a greater clarity of one's life providing a sense of coherence. Identifying oneself in terms of the larger group could relate with higher presence of meaning possibly by providing a sense that one's life is significant. Social identity orients an individual to be concerned with one's reputation and popularity which largely depend on external and transitory influences. With the nature of such influences, an individual may experience a lowered sense of coherence of one's life.

The positive relationship between search for meaning in life and collective identity orientation could be manifested through cultural factors, as it is possible that in the Indian context, late adolescent women are enabled to search for meaning in life by identifying with the larger group such as nationality and ethnicity.

The results obtained for Hypothesis 8 show that identity commitment and self- esteem are significantly and positively associated with each other. Stronger commitment to one's identity reflects greater clarity and integration of an individual's identity structure. High self-esteem has been conceptualized as having a greater clarity and definition of the self while low self- esteem is characterized by self concept confusion (Mruk, 2013). The positive relationship obtained between the two constructs show that a definite identity structure is associated with a definite conception of the self and more favorable attitudes towards the self while a fragmented identity structure is associated with confusion about the self and less favorable attitudes towards the self.

The results obtained for Hypothesis 9 show that identity commitment and presence of meaning in life are positively associated with each other, while commitment and search for meaning did not have a significant relationship. Beaumont's study (2009) found a positive relationship with presence of meaning and a negative relationship with search for meaning. These findings could show that clarity in identity structure is associated with the clarity and significance experience with the meaning in one's life.

The results obtained for Hypothesis 10 show that self- esteem was positively associated with presence of meaning in life and negatively associated with search for meaning in life. Routledge et al. (2010) found that high self- esteem "protected" individuals from losing a sense of personal meaning when confronted with existential threats and similar results were obtain from collectivistic cultures such as China. It has also been seen that positive beliefs and evaluations about the self can produce positive emotions and mood that can enable one to perceive life as being meaningful (King, Hicks, Krull and Baker, 2006). These findings could explain the positive relationship between self- esteem and presence of meaning in life. Negative association with search for meaning in life could indicate that individuals with less self- concept clarity engage in greater efforts in searching for meaning in life.

CONCLUSION

The present study aimed to understand the relationship between identity processing style, identity orientation, identity commitment, self- esteem and meaning in life among late adolescent women studying in college. It was seen that when exploration of identity issues occurs through proactive, reflective and experience based approaches, concurrently there is a greater tendency to define oneself through personal self- attributes. The inclination to define the self through such attributes is lesser when there is procrastination and avoidance of dealing with such issues.

Among the externally based identity orientations (collective, social and relational), collective identity was found to be more salient during this stage in the construction or reconstruction process of identity formation, indicating the importance of cultural factors.

Commitment to one's identity increases with greater endorsement of informational and normative styles and decreases with diffuse style. Similarly, defining the self through personal self- attributes and through the larger, collective group is associated with higher commitment to and clarity in one's identity structure. Additionally, stronger commitment to one's identity is associated with wellbeing factors of self- esteem and presence of meaning in life.

The late adolescents in the sample experience more favorable attitudes towards the self when the influence of significant others was taken into account while dealing with identity issues. Defining the self through personal orientation was also directly associated with self- esteem. Female late adolescents are likely to experience their lives to be more meaningful and purposeful with a tendency towards the normative identity approach and a lesser inclination towards the diffuse/ avoidant approach. Normative style is also implicated in search for meaning in life showing the importance that this approach plays in searching for and experiencing meaning, within the cultural context. Collective identity orientation is directly associated with both presence of and search for meaning in life. The relationship observed between normative style and collective identity and their concurrent relationship with psychosocial and wellbeing factors such as meaning in life can be embedded in the larger context of cultural factors.

Between the two psychosocial factors of self- esteem and meaning in life, a firm and clear definition of one's self- concept is associated with greater experience of meaning in life and lesser search for meaning.

Implications

The findings of the study imply the ways in which one processes information and defines one's identity are dynamically linked. Additionally, they concurrently relate with the strength of one's identity structure (commitment). These identity constructs are associated with psychosocial factors of self- esteem and meaning in life, implying the importance of identity in psychosocial functioning during late adolescence. This study provides the basis for further exploration of the relationships between these constructs in various contexts, assessing the influence of cultural factors on these variables and their use in the field of mental health.

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