

The Attachment Connection: Unveiling the Link Between Attachment Styles and Adolescent Identity

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationship between attachment styles and identity development in late adolescents. Utilizing a sample of 74 individuals aged 18-22, the research employs both the Inventory of Parent Peer Attachment, and the Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status to assess attachment styles and identity development, respectively. The findings indicate that there is no association between parental attachment and identity formation in adolescence. The first hypothesis stating that there will be a positive relationship between parental attachment bonds and identity development during late adolescence was rejected. High levels of parental attachment are associated with lower levels of identity foreclosure and diffusion, while there is no association between high level of parental attachment and identity achievement. Future research should explore longitudinal approaches to further elucidate the causal relationships and underlying mechanisms. These findings have practical implications for designing interventions aimed at promoting secure attachment relationships to support identity development during this critical developmental period.

Keywords: Attachment, Peer relations, Ego development, Identity Crisis

Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development is one of the best-known theories of personality in psychology. Much like Sigmund Freud, Erikson believed that personality develops in a series of stages.

One of the main elements of Erikson's psychosocial stage theory is the development of ego identity. Ego identity is the conscious sense of self that we develop through social interaction. According to Erikson, our ego identity is constantly changing due to new experience and information we acquire in our daily interactions with others. In addition to ego identity, Erikson also believed that a sense of competence also motivates behaviors and actions. Each stage in Erikson's theory is concerned with becoming competent in an area of life. If the stage is handled well, the person will feel a sense of mastery, which he sometimes referred to as ego strength or ego quality. If the stage is managed poorly, the person will emerge with a sense of inadequacy.

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The Attachment Connection: Unveiling the Link Between Attachment Styles and Adolescent Identity

Of Erikson's psychosocial stages, Identity vs. Role Confusion has received the most attention. As with the other crises, one may end up at any point along a continuum between identity and role confusion, in which the outcome is dependent on the extent to which an individual has committed to such things as an occupation and an ideology.

Marcia: The Ego Identity Status Paradigm

Marcia (1966), working from Erikson's ego-analytic writings, identified two dimensions in the process of identity formation: exploration and commitment. Exploration involves the active consideration of alternative possible identity elements in a quest for a more complete sense of self, whereas commitment represents a decision to adhere to a specific set of goals, values, and beliefs, whether self-initiated or adapted from others.

Based on these two dimensions, Marcia (1966) derived four identity statuses, each of which represents a juxtaposition of levels of exploration and Commitment. Someone who commits to a given career, ideology, or interpersonal style following a period of relatively intense exploration is categorized as Identity Achieved. A person who is still negotiating the exploration process, and who therefore is uncommitted, is said to be in Moratorium. An individual who has committed to a set of particular identity elements without having explored alternatives is in the Foreclosure status. Often, Foreclosure commitments are based on identification with parental or other authority figures or are based on the preferences of such individuals. Finally, a person who is without identity commitments and who is not engaged in exploration is said to be Identity Diffused.

Berzonsky: The Identity Style Paradigm

Berzonsky (1989, 1990) has developed a process-oriented paradigm of identity formation. Berzonsky describes three distinct cognitive orientations, called identity styles, by which self-relevant information is evaluated, structured, revised, and utilized. An Informational style entails a willingness to investigate multiple solutions to a given problem and to explore several options before committing to anyone. The Normative style represents growth by conforming to social and familial expectations and a high degree of commitment to authority and to the exercise of judgment. The Diffuse/Avoidant style is marked by the tendency to procrastinate and to make decisions on a situation-by-situation basis (Berzonsky, 1993). From the constructivist perspective, the Informational style may be seen as the preferable course for identity formation because it will likely entail a greater openness to experience, action on the basis of deliberate reasoning, pursuit of decision-relevant information, and the exercise of greater ego control (Berzonsky, 1990).

Parenting

Baumrind (1971) placed parents into three categories according to the degree to which they display two variables—responsiveness (warmth, love, support, care) and demandingness (control, supervision)—during child rearing. The first of Baumrind's categories is the authoritative (high responsiveness/high demandingness) parenting style. Authoritative parents set boundaries, explain punishments, and allow the child to actively participate in the family decision making process. In Baumrind's next category, the authoritarian parenting style (low responsiveness/high demandingness), parents tend to wield absolute power in the household. They value obedience, and expect the rules and restrictions they set to be closely followed. Baumrind's final parenting style is indulgent/permissive parenting (high responsiveness/low demandingness). This laissez-faire approach encourages the expression of the child's autonomy and dreams, but does not set boundaries. Maccoby and Martin

The Attachment Connection: Unveiling the Link Between Attachment Styles and Adolescent Identity

(1983) expanded Baumrind's paradigm by identifying a fourth parenting style, known as uninvolved/negligent parenting (low responsiveness/low demandingness). Other than providing the child with his basic necessities, negligent parents are likely to practice a hands-off approach to parenting.

Links among parenting style and identity style

In a study by Campbell, Adams, and Dobson (1984), Their results suggest that those with the highest degree of attachment to their parental figures fall into the identity achieved, moratorium, or foreclosure status. Inferring from the findings of Berzonsky and Neimeyer (1994), the individuals within these statuses should adhere to either an informational or normative identity style. Campbell, Adams, and Dobson also found that the final status, diffusion (and by extension, the diffuse-avoidant identity style), was most typical among individuals who claimed to have the least amount of emotional attachment to their parents. Taken as a whole, it seems that those with greater attachment also display a willingness to actively construct their identity (i.e., adopt an informational identity style), or adopt values from those around them (i.e., adopt a normative identity style, whereas those with low attachment to their parents tend to procrastinate in their identity formation (i.e., adopt a diffuse-avoidant identity style), which may lead to higher levels of identity distress and heightened levels of anxiety over meaning of life (Berman et al., 2004; Berman et al., 2006).

With all these theories and researches previously conducted, one can assume that a positive relationship and a healthy attachment with parents will only help a child better to form their identity and sense of self.

While these previous researches have been conducted in the area of parenting and its relationship with identity formation in adolescents, not enough studies have been conducted with Indian population. India is a collectivist culture and family is the most important social institution and has been for ages, where unlike other industrialized and modernized cultures, it emphasizes on family integrity, family loyalty, and family unity. While at and around the age of 17-18 children move out of their parents' house in western societies, Indian families are closely knit even through adulthood. This exposes the fact that family life being different, its influence on parent-child relationship will also differ.

As a result, studies are required to understand whether the correlation between parenting and identity formation will be similar in the Indian context.

Objective and Research Questions

1. This study aimed to understand how adolescents form their sense of self.
2. To study how a parent-child relationship can affect the formation of identity and a sense of self later in adolescence through adulthood.
3. How different parenting styles can lead to different levels of identity formation.
4. Whether family being an important and integral part of the Indian culture will influence formation of identity differently.

The Hypotheses of the Study

Based on the literature, the following hypotheses were drawn:

- **Hypothesis 1:** There will be a positive relationship between parental attachment bonds and identity development during late adolescence.

The Attachment Connection: Unveiling the Link Between Attachment Styles and Adolescent Identity

- **Hypothesis 2:** High levels of attachment will be positively related to identity achievement or moratorium.
- **Hypothesis 3:** Low levels of attachment will be positively related to foreclosure and/or diffusion of identity.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

Table 1 showing the details of sample participants.

Age group	Males	Females	Total
18-22	36	38	74

The sampling pattern used for the study was random sampling or probability sampling. Random sampling is a part of the sampling technique in which each sample has an equal probability of being chosen. A sample chosen randomly is meant to be an unbiased representation of the total population.

The sample size was 74 late adolescents, between 18 to 22 years of age, 38 females and 36 male participants.

Instruments

Primary data was collected for the research. Online survey forms were circulated, which were filled by the sample participants. The participants were required to answer questions based on their attachment to parents and peers, and their ego identity status, taken from the standardized scales The Inventory of Parent Peer Attachment, and The Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status.

1.The Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA) is a widely used instrument developed by Gay C. Armsden and Mark T. Greenberg in 1987. The IPPA is designed to assess adolescents' perceptions of their attachment relationships with their parents and peers. Here are the key details of the IPPA:

The IPPA consists of three subscales:

- Attachment to Mother
- Attachment to Father
- Attachment to Peers

Each subscale includes a series of statements that respondents rate based on their agreement, reflecting the quality of their attachment relationships.

Items:

The original IPPA contains a total of 75 items, with 25 items per subscale.

Respondents use a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (almost never or never true) to 5 (almost always or always true).

Validity:

Construct Validity: The IPPA has shown good construct validity, with factor analyses supporting the three-factor structure corresponding to attachment to mother, father, and peers.

The Attachment Connection: Unveiling the Link Between Attachment Styles and Adolescent Identity

Convergent Validity: Studies have demonstrated significant correlations between IPPA scores and other measures of attachment, as well as related constructs like self-esteem and social competence.

Reliability:

- **Internal Consistency:** The IPPA has high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients typically ranging from 0.87 to 0.92 for the different subscales.
- **Test-Retest Reliability:** The IPPA also demonstrates good test-retest reliability, indicating stability of attachment perceptions over time.

Overall, the IPPA is a robust and reliable tool for assessing attachment in adolescents, providing valuable insights into how these relationships impact identity development and other aspects of psychological well-being.

2. The Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status (OMEIS) is a psychological assessment tool developed to measure identity development based on James Marcia's model of ego identity statuses. Here are the key details of the OMEIS:

The OMEIS assesses identity development across four statuses:

- **Identity Achievement:** Characterized by high exploration and high commitment.
- **Moratorium:** High exploration and low commitment.
- **Foreclosure:** Low exploration and high commitment.
- **Identity Diffusion:** Low exploration and low commitment.

Items:

The OMEIS contains 64 items, divided into two sections: ideological domain and interpersonal domain.

Validity:

- **Construct Validity:** The OMEIS has demonstrated good construct validity, with factor analyses supporting the theoretical structure of identity statuses as defined by Marcia.
- **Criterion Validity:** The OMEIS correlates well with other measures of identity development, supporting its use as a valid assessment tool.

Reliability:

- **Internal Consistency:** The OMEIS exhibits high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients generally above 0.70 for the various subscales.
- **Test-Retest Reliability:** Studies indicate good test-retest reliability, confirming the stability of identity status assessments over time.

In summary, the OMEIS is a comprehensive and reliable measure for assessing the different statuses of ego identity development, providing valuable insights into the processes of identity formation in adolescents and young adults.

Design: The research methodology proposed for this study was Quantitative research. The research was correlational in nature. The two variables studied were: Identity status and parenting attachment style.

The Attachment Connection: Unveiling the Link Between Attachment Styles and Adolescent Identity

Procedure

The sample participants were provided with questionnaires to measure their scores on the variables. Their informed consent was taken after which they had been instructed to fill the questionnaires measuring their attachment style and identity development. The inclusion criteria for the sample were the undergraduate college students between the age group of 18 to 22 years, belonging to the arts, science or commerce streams. After the questionnaires had been collected and scoring was conducted according to the manual. The scores were then analysed to study the correlation between the variables.

RESULTS

The data was analyzed using the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS)

Hypothesis 1: There will be a positive relationship between parental attachment bonds and identity development during late adolescence

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of two variables

Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Parental Attachment	251.37	41.213	73
Identity Development	206.36	24.125	73

Table 2: Correlation between parental attachment and identity development

Correlations

		Parental Attachment	Identity Development
Parental Attachment	Pearson Correlation	1	-.059
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.623
	N	73	73
Identity Development	Pearson Correlation	-.059	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.623	
	N	73	73

As seen from the table above, there is a negative correlation between the two variables indication an inverse relationship.

Hypothesis 2: High levels of attachment will be positively related to identity achievement or moratorium

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for Total identity achievement and Moratorium and Parental Attachment.

Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
TOTAL Identity Achievement and Moratorium	110.96	10.515	73
Parental Attachment	251.37	41.213	73

The Attachment Connection: Unveiling the Link Between Attachment Styles and Adolescent Identity

Table 4: Correlation between Total identity achievement and Moratorium and Parental Attachment.

Correlations

		TOTAL Identity Achievement and Moratorium	Parental Attachment
TOTAL Identity Achievement and Moratorium	Pearson Correlation	1	-.090
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.449
	N	73	73
Parental Attachment	Pearson Correlation	-.090	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.449	
	N	73	73

As seen from the table above, the correlation between Identity achievement and Moratorium with Parental attachment is negative and highly correlated.

Hypothesis 3: Low levels of attachment will be positively related to foreclosure and/or diffusion of identity

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics for Total identity foreclosure and diffusion and Parental attachment

Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
TOTAL Identity Foreclosure and Diffusion	95.12	16.209	73
Parental Attachment	251.37	41.213	73

Table 6: Correlation between Total identity foreclosure and diffusion and Parental attachment

Correlations

		TOTAL Identity Foreclosure and Diffusion	Parental Attachment
TOTAL Identity Foreclosure and Diffusion	Pearson Correlation	1	-.052
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.663
	N	73	73
Parental Attachment	Pearson Correlation	-.052	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.663	
	N	73	73

As seen from the table above, correlation between Identity foreclosure and diffusion with parental attachment is negative and moderate.

DISCUSSION

The current research was conducted to study the relation between attachment to parents and development of identity in adolescence. The online survey form consisted of two sections: the first section measured the attachment of the respondents to their parents and peers using the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment and the second section measured their identity

The Attachment Connection: Unveiling the Link Between Attachment Styles and Adolescent Identity

status using The Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status. The survey forms were then analyzed.

Contrary to study conducted by Campbell, Adams, and Dobson (1984), the result indicated negative correlation between the two variables in hypothesis 1. A Study by Mark J. Benson, Paula B Harris, and Cosby S Rogers (2010) tested hypotheses from attachment theory and identity theory, both of which emphasize the influence of parent-child relationships and environmental exploration on the development of individuals. The findings indicate that identity achievement is related to attachment to mother, but is unrelated to attachment to father.

A negative correlation was found for the hypothesis 3, which indicated association between high level of [parental attachment and low levels of foreclosure and diffusion. In the same study by Mark J. Benson, Paula B Harris, and Cosby S Rogers (2010), they found that high attachments to both mother and father, however, are associated with lower foreclosure and lower diffusion, which supports the result for hypothesis 3.

CONCLUSION

Overall, after reviewing the results of the survey, the findings of the study indicate that there is no association between parental attachment and identity formation in adolescence. The first hypothesis stating that there will be a positive relationship between parental attachment bonds and identity development during late adolescence was rejected. High levels of parental attachment are associated with lower levels of identity foreclosure and diffusion, while there is no association between high level of parental attachment and identity achievement. Thus, the second and third hypotheses were rejected.

Limitations

The study had many limitations. Due to the small size of the sample (74 participants) the results cannot be generalized. Also, though the survey form was anonymous, the questionnaire consisted of questions of personal nature regarding relationship with parents and peers, and the identity of the respondent. Thus, there is still a possibility of the participants not being completely honest while answering.

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The Attachment Connection: Unveiling the Link Between Attachment Styles and Adolescent Identity

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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