

Research Paper

Daydreaming Styles and Identity Exploration in Adolescents of Guwahati: A Correlation Study

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ABSTRACT

This aim of the present research was to investigate the relationship between daydreaming styles and identity exploration of adolescents. An attempt was also made to understand and gain insight about the daydreaming styles (positive-constructive, guilt and fear of failure and poor attentional control) and identity exploration in adolescents with respect to various domains (physical appearance, free time, family, work, boyfriend-girlfriend relationships, own opinion formation, perception of own place in the life cycle, self-reflection, future, future family, outlook on life, and attitude toward rules). The current study was conducted on a purposive sample of adolescents taken from Maria's Public School, Guwahati (N=90). The sample comprised of boys (N=45) and girls (N=45). In order to measure daydreaming styles and identity exploration, Short Imaginal Processes Inventory and Early Identity Exploration Scale were used respectively. Correlation analysis through SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) portrayed that a positive correlation was found between 'poor attentional control daydreaming' and 'future' aspect of identity exploration and a negative correlation was found between 'guilt and fear of failure daydreaming' and 'perception of own place in the life cycle'. Data analysis revealed that 'guilt and fear of failure daydreaming' style was the highest among the other styles of daydreaming which participants agreed to have engaged in and 'work' domain of identity exploration was found to be the highest dimension where a majority of the sample agreed to have explored.

Keywords: *Daydreaming, Fantasies, Reverie, Identity Exploration, Adolescents*

Daydreaming

The experience of daydreaming has, for a long time, been thought of as a mysterious yet fascinating dimension of human behavior. This perplexing phenomenon came to light when the father of daydreaming research, Jerome L. Singer (1976) defined daydreaming as "a shift of attention away from an ongoing physical or mental task or from a perceptual response to some internal stimulus". These inner processes encompass within them contents that a daydreamer, presumably, may realize to be intricate and ephemeral in nature, if questioned. This is so because the assortment of experiences that are enveloped in a daydream ranges from brief and passing associations which may be initiated by some outside stimulus

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through a reservoir of vast memories, recent and remote, combined with extensive fantasies that join together matter from the past in new forms into anticipation of future prospects.

Since daydreams carry completely private encounters, Starker (1996) finds it difficult to differentiate between daydreams and fantasies as both of them result from mental images that emerge from some kind of a cognitive activity which ranges from intended problem-solving to uninhibited fantasy. This internal stream of consciousness called daydreaming can also be understood as a form of imagination that is creative and novel in nature.

This throws light on Carl Jung's method of active imagination, where one gives voice to the different spheres of one's personality, engaging in a line of communication between consciousness and the unconscious. Unlike Freud who viewed these dream images as manifestations of some hidden pathology, it was Jung who believed that these images may rise from internal conflicts, but may also point to their cure. This also points to the power of human imagination and the several benefits that one can effectively make use of.

The process of understanding such a phenomenon can often be baffling to the layperson; hence some classification on it would make it easier. Daydreaming has been categorized into deliberate and spontaneous thought. The former, as the name implies, is intentional and goal-directed in nature and is task-related. The latter kind of cognition is involuntary, may not have a clear purpose as such and usually occurs when there are little or no task demands (Christoff, Ream, & Gabrieli, 2004). Much of our time is consumed in spontaneous cognition. These self-generated thoughts of the past, present, or future are subjective cognitive experiences that give thought to one's personality traits and the circumstances in our daily lives (Kane et al., 2017). Keeping in mind the definition put forward by Singer (1976), daydreaming can be understood as a purely subjective, private inner experience.

Theoretical Models and the Value of Daydreaming

Psychoanalytic Theory of Gratification of Drives. Freud saw dreaming as a medium for the release of urges and wish gratification. He believed that man, just like other animals, were driven to act by the excitation of basic instincts surrounding our need to fulfil sexual, thirst and hunger drives. This model suggests that our daydreams are reflections of our attainment of a limited number of the basic needs mentioned above. Catharsis is an important concept that flows from this theory where daydreaming, although may be associated to be a childish, wish-granting activity, may allow for the partial release of pent-up drives and emotions (Singer, 1976).

Cognitive Behavior Models. By drawing a relationship between the information-processing capacity of humans and our ability to build imagery, this model is of the belief that both of these play a role in learning and adaptable behavior (Singer, 1976). The principle of understanding information perceptively and making sense of them through imagery and interior monologue also leads to the arousal of particular emotions that we associate with the information and thus to appropriately conducting behavior in this manner. Thus, daydreams are seen as reflections of an innate cognitive capacity of humans, evolving naturally at various stages in life, enabling people to shape their experiences.

Dimensions of daydreaming

Positive-Constructive Daydreaming. This facet of daydreaming represents a "happy daydreamer" who enjoys their fantasy activity and uses daydreaming to resolve difficulties, await future scenarios or as a means of self-distraction. It is the kind of daydreaming that is

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fairly free from any emotional conflict, where playful and wishful imagery drives creative thought processes.

Guilt and Fear of Failure Daydreaming. As the name suggests, this kind of daydreaming takes on a highly moral tone where the individual remains in a state of self-doubt, combined with an aspiration to achieve goals but at the same time, fearful of not fulfilling them. This kind of daydreaming is a combination of ambitions but anguishing thoughts of failure and trauma.

Poor Attentional Control. For persons who fall into this facet, daydreaming is not regarded as a useful or pleasurable activity and the content of their daydreams comprise of fantasies that are not very well connected such that the person may be unable to make use of any one fantasy for a healthy purpose or focus on any one task for a period of time. The person who engages in this kind is typically anxious, easily distractible and faces difficulty in concentrating.

Emergence of Daydreaming in Childhood

Many psychologists are of the view that from the second year of life through age eight, all children display some kind of make-believe play from where daydreaming actually develops. Jean Piaget reports that by watching children at their pretend plays, one can discover how imagination and fantasy takes form in childhood. As children mature, they learn to incorporate within themselves their games or privately act them out through the use of their own imagery. The child is, therefore, the information-processing being, who strives to accommodate all the material that he is gaining from the external environment and further tries to assimilate these in its cognitive schema. The assimilation process is exactly where the origins of imaginative play is seen.

Daydreaming in the Adolescent Years

Adolescence is a period during which daydreaming is notably increased (Weiten, 2001). Several writers have emphasised that fantasy is one of the universal forms of adolescent self-expression (Pikunas: 1961, Hurlock: 1949, Berg: 1948, Ansari: 1964). A transition from make-believe play to private imagery is seen where most daydreams are likely to take an adventurous and romantic tone, for both boys and girls respectively or they may encompass arrangements for future behavior. In an attempt to develop autonomy from parental constraints, the adolescent tries to look outside for new ways of behaving and living, alternative to the ones he saw himself growing up in. The adolescent, in actuality, is not yet ready to be truly independent but the increasing number of possibilities that he experiences in his daydreams leaves him with enough room to delve in the realm of fulfilling wishes.

Daydreaming in the Adult Years

With the ongoing duties and commitments that adult life ensues, the scope of daydreaming becomes narrowed but does not lose its usefulness altogether such that a young employee might improvise on better ways of doing his job or a retired officer may think on imbibing more enjoyable recreations for his future through imagination and thoughtful exploration of his fantasies. Others may use fantasy play to engage in self-examination or to explore the spiritual or religious aspects of their experiences. With advancing age, the elderly who are often susceptible to the “empty-nest syndrome” and depression, it is crucial to build conditions that would allow them to explore their inner living in a way that would serve as a means of sustaining life (Singer, 1976).

Daydreaming and its Relation to Psychopathology

To study an elusive phenomenon such as daydreaming and to describe it in a scientific manner, a researcher often has to be very cautious so as not to seem unbiased in his or her approach. The popular view that a person who is suffering from schizophrenia largely lives in a private world, in which he has built castles in the air for himself, is also responsible for the negative connotation that is associated with daydreaming. Sometimes, our private daydreams can even serve to be an escape or distraction in trying times. A small number of individuals may choose to engage in their fantasies to evade responsibility or to repress conscious awareness of the dilemmas that life throws at them instead of actively dealing and coping with them. At other times, indulging in one's fantasies may also lead one to realize their own weaknesses and failures, especially if the person already has a personality disposition to engage in self-pity. This would cause the person substantial personal suffering (Singer, 1976).

Identity as an important construct in Adolescents

First recognized by psychoanalyst Erik Erikson (1950), identity is described as a person's understanding of themselves as a distinct, separate entity. Erikson (1968) also elucidated identity as an understanding of the self which results from the unification of past, present and future experiences. In adolescents, identity formation is an important developmental task where the person goes through a process of inner soul searching whereby they explore the traits that defined themselves in their childhood and combine them with emerging traits and commitments of adolescent life. Out of the eight stages that Erikson postulated in his theory of psychosocial developmental stages, the fifth stage occurring in the adolescent period, called 'Identity Vs. Role Confusion' is believed to bring the most changes to an individual's psychological life (Rostowski, 1997).

Identity Exploration in Adolescents

It was Marcia (1966) who elaborated on Erikson's view of identity formation which occurs based on the amount of exploration and commitment that the adolescent is going through or has already experienced. Exploration implies the adolescent engaging himself in considering and choosing among significant choices as well as actively questioning the pros and cons of various options and commitment refers to the individual personally investing in those choices.

Assuming that identity development exists on a continuum (Marcia, 1967) identity diffusion and identity achievement prevail in the extremities. The former implies that the adolescent has not yet committed himself to any specific developmental task nor has he explored any developmental options that are available to him and the latter indicates the opposite, where the adolescent has actively explored various values and roles and made associated commitments regarding a sense of identity.

Thus, the process of exploration is vast itself as the adolescent searches among meaningful alternatives that would enable them to discover themselves and the person they would like to be, while respecting the values, goals and beliefs they hold dear (Luyckx et al., 2008). Thus, this explorative process would determine the degree to which they would commit and engage themselves in their respective choices. This is also closely connected to their maturing autonomy (Weeks and Pasupathi, 2010), their evaluation of their future as possessing individual existence and the initiation of their first intimate relationships (Furman and Shaffer, 1999).

Identity and its Relationship to Psychological Well-Being

Since achieved identity develops on the basis of exploration and commitment, having one would also predict higher states of well-being. Erikson (1968) believes that a mature and consistent sense of identity is a reflection of a healthy psychological spirit and an expression of a flourishing personality structure. Marcia (1989) also builds a relationship between identity and psychological well-being and suggests that the status- identity achievement, is the most fitting because it reflects a good personal ability to adjust to the environment. In today's fast changing society that brings on unforeseeable circumstances, the potential to tour the environment and to make fulfilling commitments is a fundamental survival tactic (Archer, 1989).

Purpose of the Present Study

Research has estimated that up to half of our waking moments are spent daydreaming, thus it is safe to believe that this phenomenon must really render some kind of evolutionary adaptive value. However, something of importance would have both upsides and flipsides, and research has suggested that daydreaming when maladaptive in nature can have a strong association with anxiety, loneliness and rumination. Since adolescence is a time during which daydreaming is remarkably increased, the present study is an attempt to explore whether this phenomenon helps them to explore their sense of identity and if yes, in which aspects of identity does different daydreaming styles allow them to explore in. Keeping in mind the benefits and drawbacks of this highly natural and complex phenomenon, it is hoped that the results of the present study will be able to encourage young adolescents to understand the nature of their daydreaming and allow them to harness this ability in a way that empowers them to express themselves creatively and establish a strong sense of identity through exploration and commitment.

METHOD

Sample:

A purposive sample of 90 participants from Maria's Public School, Guwahati, was drawn. Boys (n = 45) and girls (n = 45) both were given representation in the sample. Their age range falls between 14-17 years.

Instrument:

Short Imaginal Processes Inventory. This study measured different daydreaming styles by using the 45-item Shortened Imaginal Process Inventory (SIPI) (Huba, Singer, Aneshensel, & Antrobus, 1982) which is a shortened version of the IPI (Singer & Antrobus, 1963). The survey included 45 open-ended questions with 15 questions pertaining to each daydreaming pattern using a Likert-type scale ranging from 1-5 ("directly untrue, uncharacteristic of me" to "very true, strongly characteristic of me") for positive constructive, guilty and fear of failure, and poor attentional control daydreaming. Internal consistency for the three sub-scales ranges between $\alpha = .80 - .83$. Convergent validity of SIPI was ensured with the original imaginal processes inventory; displaying greater level of convergent validity (Huba, Singer, Aneshensel, & Antrobus, 1982; $\alpha = .70$).

Early Identity Exploration Scale (English Adaptation). The two versions of the Early Identity Exploration Scale (EIES) (Klym & Ciecuch, 2015), a version for boys and a version for girls were used, each consisting of 12 exploration scales: physical appearance, free time, family, work, boyfriend-girlfriend relationships, own opinion formation, perception of own place in the life cycle, self-reflection, future, future family, outlook on life, and attitude toward rules. In each scale, a brief description of two persons (according to

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the participant's sex) differing from one another with respect to what they do, feel and think in a particular field are employed to enable participants to compare themselves to described persons and foster self-reflection. Participants then view a set of 4–7 items in each scale and estimate the frequency of thoughts/feelings/acts described by each item on a 5-item Likert scale (from *very rarely or never* to *very often or always*). The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients for the scales ranged between 0.62 and 0.91.

Procedure:

In order to collect the data a formal permission from the Founder Managing Trustee of Maria's Public School, situated in the city of Guwahati, in India, was taken and a list of students were obtained on a random basis. They were briefed regarding the nature and objectives of the study and informed consent of the students was taken. The required personal information was obtained through the demographic sheet and the confidentiality of their information was ensured. Before the questionnaires were given out, a short ice breaking session was held where participants were introduced to ambient music solely for the purpose of enhancing their mood and the atmosphere as well as to strengthen the process of rapport formation with them. The participants were then given the instructions to respond to the statements in the questionnaires. Any doubts that the participants had were clarified while they filled the form. After completing the questionnaires, they were debriefed about the variables the researcher plans to study. The participants of study were appreciated for their cooperation and support in the study.

RESULTS

Frequency of scores achieved on the patterns of daydreaming styles are displayed in Table 1 and also in Figure 1. Guilt and fear of failure daydreaming was found to be the highest scored pattern of daydreaming, followed by positive-constructive and poor attentional control daydreaming.

Table 1 Patterns of daydreaming on the Short Imaginal Processes Inventory (SIPI) (N=90)

Level of Daydreaming	Positive Constructive Daydreaming	Guilt and Fear of Failure Daydreaming	Poor Attentional Control Daydreaming
High	65	80	55
Low	24	9	34

Frequency of scores obtained on each of the twelve domains of identity exploration are displayed in Table 2. 'Work' was found to be the greatest dimension of identity exploration where majority adolescents have explored, followed by 'Own Opinion Formation'. The lowest dimension of identity exploration where the least adolescents have explored, 'Future Family'.

Table 2 Identity exploration on the Early Identity Exploration Scale (EIES)

Identity exploration	High (N)	Average (N)	Low (N)
Physical Appearance	12	67	11
Free-Time	50	40	0
Family	28	60	2
Work	75	15	0
BF-GF Relationship	23	54	13
Own Opinion Formation	66	24	0

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Identity exploration	High (N)	Average (N)	Low (N)
Perception of Own Place in the Life Cycle	53	35	2
Self-Reflection	51	33	6
Future	41	45	4
Future Family	4	41	45
Outlook on Life	37	49	4
Attitude Toward Rules	70	4	16

The correlations of all the variables analyzed in the present study are displayed in Table 3. A positive correlation of .283 is observed between ‘Poor Attentional Control Daydreaming’ and ‘Future’. A negative correlation of -.264 is observed between ‘Guilt and Fear of Failure Daydreaming’ and ‘Perception of Own Place in the Life Cycle’. No significant relationship was found between the other variables in the present study.

Table 3 Correlation Matrix for all the Variables Used in the Study (N = 90)

Variables	Positive- Constructive Daydreaming	Guilt and Fear of Failure Daydreaming	Poor Attentional Control Daydreaming
Physical Appearance	.041	.015	.001
Free-Time	-.201	.082	.010
Family	-.042	-.139	-.138
Work	.094	-.035	.035
BF-GF Relationship	.014	-.064	-.184
Own Opinion Formation	.051	-.056	.006
Perception of Own Place in the Life Cycle	.030	-.264*	-.186
Self-Reflection	-.013	.022	.026
Future	.010	-.072	.283**
Future Family	.147	.066	.081
Outlook on Life	-.087	.010	-.080
Attitude Towards Rules	1.04	.024	-.028

DISCUSSION

This research study was an attempt to study daydreaming styles and identity exploration among adolescents and investigate the relationship between them. Analysis of data showed that ‘guilt and fear of failure daydreaming’ was most prevalent among the adolescents who were studied (see table 1). This implies that their daydreams hold more of distressing events where they imagine themselves fearing new responsibilities or failing their near and dear ones. They may fantasize about receiving an award but may imagine not being able to live up to the expectations of others or may be afraid of doing something wrong (Singer et al., 1970).

Results of the present study also revealed that ‘Work’, followed by ‘Own Opinion Formation’, were found to be the highest domains where adolescents have explored their identities in (see table 2). This indicates that adolescents have considered what they would like to do in their adult life and what professions would be most suitable for them (Marcia, 1966). Adolescents have contemplated having opinions that may not be compatible with

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those of their parents and have considered the idea of solidifying their own views or discarding those of their parents (Duckett et al., 1989).

Having explored the above-mentioned domains of identity exploration that were most significant among adolescents who also engaged in ‘guilt and fear of failure daydreaming’ more than the other daydreaming patterns, the results demonstrate the fact that although adolescents may display much striving for achievement and inner reflection, their daydreams and fantasies express considerable self-doubt. It is not surprising that this style of daydreaming was marked by an ‘Obsessional Neurotic’ personality trait by Singer & Antrobus (1972) that reflects a typical superego conflicting pattern. This is consistent with Shrimpton et al’s (2017) study where they found that individuals who indulged in ruminative self-focus were more inclined to daydream about tormented fantasies surrounding their failures and fears. The reason for these results could be the growing trends of psychosocial pressures that adolescents struggle with in today’s fast paced world that we are living in, which manifests in the form of guilt and fear laden daydreams. This is also consistent with Dr. Sybil Gottlieb’s study on the fantasies of high school students, where by age thirteen and fourteen there is a shift in the direction of achievement, mostly due to the fact that most adolescents are preoccupied in assuming the adult roles expected by society (Singer, 1976).

Results of the current study also showed a significant positive correlation between ‘Poor Attentional Control Daydreaming’ and ‘Future’ (see table 3). The ‘Future’ domain proposes the idea that adolescents have considered the various directions they can take in life, the life goals which mean to them and the kind of lifestyle they would like to undertake in the future (Luyckx et al., 2006, 2008). As Singer & Antrobus (1972) have already marked this style of daydreaming as reflected by an ‘Anxiety-Hysteria syndrome’, the reason for this could be that exploring one’s identity in future-oriented ways might often develop feelings of anxiety and uneasiness, which the adolescent may unconsciously cope with through the defense mechanism of repression and thus indulge in daydreams that are often filled with unconnected fantasies which the adolescent does not pay much heed to.

A significant negative correlation was also found between ‘Guilt and Fear of Failure Daydreaming’ and ‘Perception of Own Place in the Life Cycle’. This indicates that the more the adolescents engage in daydreams that induces fear and guilt in them, the lesser they explore their identity with regard to where they stand in the life cycle. For an adolescent who is uncomfortable with the idea or experience of being treated as a child by his/her parents, this domain of exploration can be especially more stressful and anxiety provoking for the adolescent if he or she already engages in fantasies that make them question themselves and their capabilities which makes them avoid exploring their identity in this particular domain.

Limitations and Implications for Further Study

The present study has uncovered very important findings; however, it also holds many concerns, which can be explored in the future. Although the purposive sampling technique was used, the results cannot be generalized to the overall adolescent population. An attempt to study how gender differences would play a role in the variables will make the study more interesting and thorough. Moreover, for a more extensive picture of the findings, with qualitative analysis, we would be able to comprehend the variables studied in its entirety. Finally, a tool that would measure identity exploration and daydreaming as a whole and not in multiple domains may be able to expose a more significant association between them.

CONCLUSION

Keeping in mind that adolescents who generally lack real world experience, due to which they are constantly trying to make sense of complex information and events happening around them, may unknowingly choose to engage in a highly creative mental phenomenon called daydreaming, the findings of the present study will be useful for mental health professionals in dealing with adolescents who engage in maladaptive daydreaming and those who may also experience an identity crisis. It would encourage professionals working in the area of mental health to foster daydreaming in positive-constructive ways such that their fantasies induce pleasurable thoughts and emotions which would further enable them to participate in self-awareness and deal with life's challenges more effectively.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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