Original Article

Identity Styles in Teenagers: The Role of Family Cohesion and Flexibility, Emotional Self-Regulatory, and Strategies to Cope Stress

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A B S T R A C T

Adolescence is one of the most sensitive stages of every person's life, and significant physical and psychological attention occurs in a person. While all teenagers should try to cope with this change to gain an identity for themselves. The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of family cohesion and flexibility, emotional self-regulatory and the strategies to coping stress with identity styles in teenagers. This is descriptive research about correlation. The statistical society of our study is the girl students in second year of high school of Siyahkal in academic year of 2022-2023. According to Morgan chart, 234 persons were selected in multistage clustered method. They were selected to reply the Berzonsky's identity styles questionnaires in teenagers (1992), the Olson's family cohesion and flexibility questionnaire (1985), Haffman and Kashdan's emotional styles questionnaire (2010) and Lazarus and Folkman's strategies to coping stress (1984). The Pearson's correlation coefficient and statistical methods and the step-to-step regression method were used to analyze the data. The results showed that the family cohesion and flexibility (and its components), emotional self-regulatory (and its components), and the strategies to confront stress (and its components) are the predictors of identity styles in teenagers, and there is a meaningful and positive cohesion at level 0/01 between them. The results of this study highlight the role of family cohesion and flexibility, emotional self-regulatory and the strategies to coping stress in student's identity styles.

Introduction

After the end of the childhood period, the person enters a stage whose conditions are completely different from the conditions of the previous period [1]. This period is known as adolescence period. Adolescence has been recognized as a critical period of psychosocial development. It is thought that, during the second decade of life, people use the mechanisms of adult personal relationships and coping with various behavioral problems to gain a stable personality and to find their

identity [2]. Therefore, comprehensive knowledge of this developmental period and identification process as one of its achievements is one of the important fields in psychology studies. Identity represents the foundation of personality in adulthood. If its foundation is strong, a strong personal identity is achieved. Otherwise, the result is what Erikson calls lost identity. He considers the formation of identity necessary to prepare the teenager as a person ready to do the task in adulthood [3]. Among the many groups to which people belong, family is probably the most personally important for many people [4]. Doubtless, the family is the oldest and most fundamental unit of societies [5]. Developing a coherent identity is the main task of adolescence and youth [6]. Olson is one of those who have studied the family from a systemic perspective. The dimensions discussed in Olson's model are three: family cohesion, family flexibility, and family communication. These three dimensions include and arise from many concepts about the family, its interactions and relationships, which have been presented by various theorists and therapists [7]. According to the findings of Rajesh *et al.* (2015), a decrease in family cohesion and an increase in interpersonal conflicts can lead to a decrease in the family's flexibility and, as a result, create problems in their interactions. Low family cohesion can lead to depression and reduced social acceptance, and low cohesion is associated with feelings of not belonging. Coherence is considered as one of the most influential structures of the family, which is an important dimension for trying to achieve mutual understanding among family members [8]. Likewise, clear boundaries in the family lead to the proper development of teenagers' identity [9].

According to the findings of Berezovsky & Kuk (2010), the higher the power of the couple, the better prepared they are to adapt to a joint life, and people who have a confused identity face more problems and have difficulty in establishing and maintaining the family system and have low self-esteem. Low, depression and neurosis, among them, the distribution pattern of power in the family and the type of

rethinking identity of the husband and wife can be considered from the cohesion of the family. Another variable related to identity in teenagers is emotional self regulation, the proper use of emotions plays an important role in human life, education, work, and success, and according to Kashdan Hofmann (2010), one of the most important abilities of humans is the ability to regulate and adapt [10].

Their emotions are in accordance with the requirements of specific situations. According to Ridder, emotional self-regulation means the desire to control internal states, control impulses and behaviors, and adapt it to the criteria to reach the goal [11]. Emotional self-regulation includes processes through which people influence their emotions and how they express them. Hoffman and Kashdan as well as Davidson used affective styles instead of emotion regulation methods. They classified affective styles into adaptive and tolerating concealment styles. Characteristics of the concealment style include inhibition and other strategies aimed at hiding or avoiding emotions after they arise. Adaptation style introduces people who are able to obtain and apply emotional information in solving compromise problems and are better able to adjust and adjust their experience and emotional expression according to the requirements of the context and environment. Finally, the third style (tolerance) is the characteristic of people who respond to the arousal caused by emotional experiences comfortably and non-defensively [12].

They have a high tolerance to stress and distress. In addition, various studies have shown that people with a diffuse identity style have more difficult problems compared to people with a normative identity style, and this may even be related to their eating, going to school, internal mental problems and depression, as well as drinking alcohol and drug abuse is rampant. In fact, emotional self-evaluation is one of the most important complex issues in this field [13]. Another variable in this research is coping strategies with stress, new theories in the field of identity have explained the complex concept of identity

crisis in a simpler concept, that is, the ability of people to deal with everyday life issues with emphasis on problem solving skills [14]. Based on psychological theories, coping strategies play an important role in reducing stress and consequently the mental health of people, and the concept of stress alone, without considering their coping skills, has a limited value in explaining and predicting the condition of people. In other words, the better people's resources are for coping, the less likely they are to be caught in situations that lead to harm. Studies show that if teenagers are not equipped with effective coping strategies and have little ability to understand their own and others' emotions, they will be less able to deal with stress and crises during adolescence and will have more behavioral problems in the form of aggression, depression, and show anxiety [15]. According to Lazarus & Folkman (1984), stress coping styles are divided into two categories: problem-oriented and emotion-oriented, and people use both types of coping styles when facing situations [16]. A type of coping that relieves emotional pressures is defined as emotion-oriented and the other type in which a person tries to change the factors that cause these emotional pressures is defined as problem-oriented coping. According to the research [17], the healthy functioning of the family helps children to gain a positive identity and increase their independence and reduce the likelihood of psychological disorders and behavioral problems. The results of the research show that cohesion and family flexibility have a direct effect on informational, normative, and confused-avoidance identity styles [18] and in another research that was conducted among high school students, the research results showed that there is a positive and significant relationship between informational identity style and identity style. Normative with all emotional self-regulation styles and there is a significant negative relationship between avoidant confused style and emotional self-regulation [19]. Research findings show that people with normative identity style internalize the values and properties of others, need external organization, desire information that is consistent with their values, have a closed mind

[20]. Based on the studies conducted in Berlin, they concluded that between family cohesion and flexibility. There is a significant relationship with the identity crisis, that is, with lower family cohesion and flexibility; the identity crisis will be formed significantly. By examining the status of identity, coping strategy and decision-making among Italian university students, it was observed that low profile identity predicts decision-making avoidance style and high self-efficacy predicts academic success and coping style [21].

Therefore, due to the fact that in our country, the young generation is the driving and dynamic force of our society, it is necessary to know their attitudes, problems, issues, and desires and establish a close communication with them. In our time, juvenile issues are one of the problems of human societies, especially in developing countries like Iran. One of the most important duties of families is to pay attention to their children, especially teenagers. If the personal identity of teenagers is formed over time and based on the experiences of social interaction and they can recognize themselves and separate themselves from others, their psychological balance is guaranteed and if frustration and lack of trust replaces trust, the teenager is isolated and instead of being stimulated to turn towards stagnation and instead of awareness and formation of a positive identity, he became confused about his role and faced an identity crisis [22]. On the other hand, the family functions as one of the most important factors has given personality to teenagers. Because the true destiny of every teenager is determined by his family [23]. According to the presented materials, the present research question is explained as follows: can family cohesion and flexibility, emotional self-regulation, and coping strategies with psychological pressure predict identity styles in adolescents?

Research Method

Population, Sample, and Sampling Method

In the present study, the statistical population includes 600 female secondary school students

of Siahkol City in the academic year 2023-2024, and the statistical sample according to Morgan's table includes 234 people, which is done through multi-stage cluster sampling. Among three high schools and one class from each grade was randomly selected. The filling of the questionnaires was fully explained to the students.

Measurement Tools

In this study, four questionnaires were used to estimate the four defined variables, which are mentioned below.

Berezovsky Identity Style Questionnaire

Berezovsky Identity Style Questionnaire was created by Berezovsky in 1989 and revised in 1992. Berezovsky's (1992) identity style questionnaire is a 40-item scale whose validity has been confirmed through correlation evaluation with Bennion & Adams' (1986) identity status scale. Ghazanfar (2013) also obtained its reliability coefficient through Cronbach's alpha. Cronbach's alpha obtained for each of the subscales was: commitment 0.75, normative orientation 0.72, confusion/avoidance orientation 0.82, informational orientation 0.76, and the total scale is 0.83.

Family Cohesion and Flexibility Questionnaire

Family Conformity and Cohesion Evaluation Scale (FACES-III) was created by Olson *et al.* (1985) which consisted of 40 items and 2 subscales of cohesion (20 questions) and adaptation (20 questions). It is used to measure family harmony and harmony. The assessment scale of family harmony and cohesion has a relative internal consistency with only an overall alpha of 0.68 for the whole tool, 0.77 for cohesion and 0.62 for adaptation. The correlation coefficient in the retest was 0.83 for family cohesion and 0.80 for family adaptability, which indicates very good stability. Family Adaptation and Cohesion Evaluation Scale (FACES-III) by summing all the items to get the total score and adding the score of the even items to get the cohesion score and

adding the score of the individual items to get the compatibility score will be the higher the cohesion score, it is more tense, the higher the conformity score, and more chaos in the family. In the research conducted by Mazaheri *et al.*, the validity of the assessment of family cohesion and adaptability was obtained by Cronbach's alpha of 0.74 for the dimension of cohesion and 0.75 for the dimension of adaptability (Ahngarkani et al., 2013). Its internal consistency was obtained through Cronbach's alpha for correlation (0.689) and for adaptability (0.636). Apparently, family adaptation and cohesion benefit from good face validity, but regarding other types of validity, relevant data are not available (Mazaheri & Ashoori, 2012).

Emotional Self-Regulation Questionnaire

Hofmann & Kashdan's (2010) emotional styles questionnaire contains 20 questions and after translation and re-translation, the content validity and reliability of this questionnaire were obtained using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. They reported compatibility 0.82, secrecy 0.84, and tolerance 0.68. The validity of the questionnaire was acceptable in their research [24]. Kareshki's research (2013) was conducted with the aim of investigating the validity of this questionnaire on undergraduate students of Ferdowsi University of Mashhad Medical Sciences and principal component analysis and structural validity were used. The validity of this questionnaire was confirmed with 3 factors. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were used to measure reliability. Cronbach's alpha coefficient in the subscale of concealment was 0.70, compatibility was 0.75, and tolerance was 0.50. The general result of the research showed that the emotional style questionnaire in Iranian students has sufficient validity and reliability [25].

Lazarus and Folkman Coping Styles Questionnaire

Lazarus & Folkman Coping Strategies Questionnaire (1984), these two psychologists made the coping strategies assessment based on this theory. This questionnaire has 66

questions. The coping strategies questionnaire has 8 subscales, which consist of problem-oriented coping and emotion-oriented strategies. Lazarus (1993) reported the internal consistency of the subscales using Cronbach's alpha of 0.66 for the problem-oriented strategies subscale and 0.79 for the emotion-oriented strategies.

The present study was conducted among secondary school female students (16 to 18 years old) of Siahkol City in a multi-stage cluster method, and in this part, the information obtained from the research tools was analyzed using SPSS-23 statistical software. To analyze the data, Pearson's correlation coefficient test was used, the results of which are presented.

Results

Table 1. Pearson correlation coefficients between family flexibility and identity styles in teenagers

Commitment	Confused identity	Normative identity	Information identity	Variable
0.11	-0.06	0.21**	0.11	coherence
0.36**	-0.11	0.47**	0.30**	conformity
0.30**	-0.08	0.42**	0.26**	Family flexibility
0.16*	-0.05	0.03	0.18**	Secrecy
0.32**	-0.06	0.25**	0.26**	compatibility
0.13*	-0.07	0.11	0.20**	Tolerance
0.26**	0.03	0.15*	0.26**	Emotional self-regulation
0.19**	-0.03	0.29**	0.22**	Seeking social support
0.06	-0.03	0.15*	0.23**	responsibility
0.21**	-0.02	0.21**	0.25**	problem solving
0.22**	0.04	0.23**	0.24**	Positive reassessment
-0.04	0.15*	0.05	0.07	Direct confrontation
-0.12	0.19**	-0.03	-0.03	avoidance
-0.16*	0.26**	-0.10	-0.10	Avoidance
0.09	0.08	0.16*	0.15*	Continence
0.23**	-0.07	0.30**	0.31**	Problem-oriented coping
-0.08	0.25**	-0.05	-0.05	Emotional coping

Based on the results, there is a significant positive correlation between informational and normative identity and commitment with family adaptation and flexibility at the level of 0.01. There is a significant positive correlation between informational identity and secrecy, adaptability, tolerance and emotional self-regulation at the level of 0.01. In addition, there is a significant positive correlation between normative identity and compatibility at the level of 0.01 and with emotional self-regulation at the level of 0.05. Finally, there is a significant positive correlation between commitment, secrecy, and tolerance at the level of 0.05 and

with adaptability and emotional self-regulation (r=0.26) at the level of 0.01. There is a significant positive correlation between informational identity and seeking social support, responsibility, problem solving, positive reappraisal, and problem-oriented coping at the 0.01 level and with self-control at the 0.05 level. Also, there is a significant positive correlation between normative identity and seeking social support, problem solving, positive reappraisal, and problem-oriented coping at the 0.01 level and with responsibility and self-control at the 0.05 level. Furthermore, there is a significant positive correlation

between confused identity and direct confrontation at the level of 0.05 and with avoidance and avoidance and emotion-oriented coping at the level of 0.01. Finally, on the one hand, there is a significant positive correlation between commitment and seeking social support, problem solving, positive reappraisal, and problem-oriented coping at the 0.01 level, and there is a significant negative correlation with avoidance at the 0.05 level. To determine the contribution of family cohesion and flexibility, emotional self-regulation, and coping strategies with mental pressure in predicting identity styles in teenagers, stepwise regression statistical method was used. Before the regression analysis, its assumptions were examined. To check the independence of the errors from each other as a regression assumption, Durbin-Watson's test was used and

its value was equal to 1.94, which is desirable, because if this statistic is between 1.5 and 2.5, there is no correlation. It is accepted between errors. Also, to check the normality of the distribution, the Kolmograf-Smirnov test was used, and due to the non-significance of the variables, it can be mentioned that the assumption of the normality of the distribution of the scores has been met, so the conditions are ready for the step-by-step regression analysis. For this purpose, family cohesion and flexibility, emotional self-regulation, and coping strategies with mental pressure were entered into the regression equation separately as predictor variables. The results of the regression analysis are presented in Table 2, because we have four identity styles and are presented in separate tables.

Table 2. The results of regression analysis to predict informational identity style based on predictor variables

P	T	Beta	B	R^2	R	Variable	Step
0.01	5.06	0.31	0.20	0.10	0.31	Problem-oriented coping	First
0.01	4.09	0.25	0.12	0.16	0.40	Conformity	Second
0.01	3.05	0.19	0.32	0.19	0.43	Emotional self-regulation	Third

According to the results of Table 2, among the studied variables, three variables of problem-oriented coping, adaptation, and emotional self-regulation had the necessary predictive power

to enter the regression equation and predicted about 19% of the variance related to the informational identity style.

Table 3. Results of regression analysis to predict normative identity style based on predictor variables

P	T	Beta	B	R^2	R	Variable	Step
0.01	8.10	0.47	0.18	0.22	0.47	Conformity	First
0.01	3.88	0.22	0.11	0.26	0.51	Family flexibility	Second
0.01	2.66	0.16	0.21	0.28	0.53	Problem-oriented coping	Third

According to the results of Table 3, among the studied variables, three variables of adaptation coping, family flexibility, and problem-oriented coping had the necessary predictive power to

enter the regression equation and predicted about 28% of the variance related to the normative identity style.

Table 4. Results of regression analysis to predict confused identity style based on predictor variables

P	T	Beta	B	R^2	R	Variable	Step
0.01	4.07	0.26	0.40	0.07	0.26	Avoidance	First
0.02	2.38	0.15	0.27	0.09	0.30	Emotional coping	Second

According to the results of Table 4, among the studied variables, two variables of escape, avoidance and emotion-oriented coping had the necessary predictive power to enter the regression equation and predicted about 9% of the variance related to confused identity style.

Table 5. The results of regression analysis to predict commitment identity style based on predictor variables

P	T	Beta	B	R^2	R	Variable	Step
0.01	5.90	0.36	0.18	0.13	0.36	Compliance	First
0.01	3.63	0.23	0.25	0.17	0.42	Compatibility	Second
0.01	3.14	0.15	0.29	0.20	0.44	Family flexibility	Third
0.01	2.97	0.18	0.13	0.22	0.47	Emotional self-regulation	Fourth
0.01	2.80	0.25	0.47	0.25	0.50	Problem-oriented coping	Fifth

According to the results of Table 5, among the variables of this study, five variables of adaptation, adaptability, family flexibility, emotional self-regulation, and problem-oriented coping had the necessary predictive power to enter the regression equation, and about 25% of the variance is related to identity style. They predicted commitment.

Discussion

The results showed that there is a significant positive correlation between family cohesion and flexibility and identity styles in teenagers at the level of 0.01. Kaniušonytė & Žukauskienė (2017), conducted research entitled: "*Relationships with parents, identity styles and positive development of youth during the transition from adolescence to adulthood*" [23-25]. The results of the findings showed that positive relationships with parents play an important role in successful adaptation and this relationship partially mediates with identity styles. In the way in which parents respond to their children's need for independence and connection, appropriate management of identity and overall positive development during the transition to adulthood is affected [26]. Behzadi & Sarvghad (2015), in research entitled: *"The relationship between family cohesion and flexibility and identity styles with the mediating role of metacognitive state in female students".* The results showed that family flexibility has a direct effect on informational, normative and confused [27], avoidant and metacognitive identity styles. Family cohesion has a direct effect on normative identity style and metacognitive state. According to the study and examination of the relationship between identity styles in teenagers with family cohesion and flexibility, it can be concluded that one of the necessary conditions for having a stable life is cohesion and connection. Also, due to the closeness and similarity of the two concepts of "family cohesion" and "commitment" in the interpersonal field, [28] said: Family cohesion is the feeling of solidarity, bond, and emotional commitment that the members of a family have towards each other [29]. Lingren (2003), defines cohesion as emotional closeness with other people. In his opinion, two qualities related to family cohesion include commitment and spending time with each other. Because people interact with family for a long time and spend more time with them. In fact, they share their thoughts [30-32], feelings, and emotions. The type of parenting style, the degree of family support for children and giving them independence of action has an effect on their identity formation [33]. The results showed that there is a significant positive correlation between emotional self-regulation and identity styles in teenagers at the level of 0.01 [34]. In the research Firouz Abadi *et al.* (2014), they showed that there is a significant correlation between informational identity style and normative identity style with all emotional self-regulation styles [35], but only a significant negative relationship between confused identity style, avoidance with distance and

focus on the style of changing behavior and emotional selfishness was revealed in this walk.

Research Berezovsky (2003) indicates that informational identity style has a positive relationship with positive adaptation and resilience [36]. Berzonsk & Kuk (2000) found that autonomy, educational conflicts, interpersonal relationship development; with educational and self-defined goals have a positive correlation with the informative identity style and a negative correlation with the confused/avoidant identity style. People with an informational style are active and searching, and they evaluate, examine, and then make decisions [37]. They have an internal source of control when dealing with information inconsistent with self-concept. Therefore, these people should have self-regulation and monitor and control their actions and behavior through conscious planning. On the other hand, people with a normative identity style are people who need social recognition and approval and have an external source of control. These people do not search for information, unless this information is verified by a reliable source. They have specific career or educational goals that are externally controlled and inflexible. Therefore, they may not be self-regulating people by themselves, but due to their characteristics, i.e. attention to social recognition and approval, they can be considered good self-regulators. According to the obtained results, people who have a confused/avoidant identity style, because they lack a coherent and stable identity, they cannot make a correct assessment of the situation and plan for it by examining the conditions. When faced with stressful situations, they cannot manage their emotions and try to avoid it by avoiding stress. The lack of coherent identity, on the one hand, and the lack of adaptive emotion regulation strategies and on the other hand cause the stressful situation to continue and the person to face more stress. The results showed that there is a positive and significant correlation between coping strategies with psychological pressure and identity styles in teenagers [38].

The research findings Karjoo (2014) showed that the problem-oriented coping style is positively and significantly related to informational orientation and normative orientation. Likewise, avoidant coping style is negatively and significantly related to information orientation [39]. In addition, avoidant coping style is positively and significantly related to confused/avoidant orientation. The results indicated that informational and normative identity styles positively and significantly predict problem-oriented coping style, and informational identity style predicts avoidant coping style negatively and significantly. According to the present results, most teenagers use the problem-oriented strategy in dealing with stressful issues. If teenagers are not equipped with effective coping strategies and have little ability to understand their own and others' emotions, they will be less able to deal with stress and crises during adolescence and show more behavioral problems in the form of aggression, depression and anxiety [40]. It should be noted that how a person responds to stressful events depends on the level of adaptation, availability of support resources and many other factors. For this reason, people respond to stress in different ways. Previous experiences in coping with stressful situations, using inappropriate strategies in facing stressful factors can increase problems, while appropriate coping strategies can have beneficial consequences [41]. Having more skill in stress control will lead to less anxiety and decrease the level of depression and overall improve the quality of life (Faule et al, 2009). Finally, the results showed that among the variables of this study, five variables of adaptation, adaptability, family flexibility, emotional self-regulation and problem-oriented coping had the necessary predictive power to enter the regression equation. Family cohesion and flexibility, emotional self-regulation and coping strategies with psychological stress are predictors of identity styles in adolescents. Identity style refers to the strategies that a person specifically uses in decision-making and problem-solving situations and examines related information.

Conclusion

When faced with information that is inconsistent with the self-concept, they are ready to revise and accept the new concept. Also, the healthy structure of families will lead to the adaptation of teenagers and, accordingly, a healthy identity style. If the teenager feels that the family members have the ability to exchange information, share their thoughts and feelings with each other, understand each other, the division of duties between the members is fair and these duties and roles are clearly defined for the members have been explained and the family members can express their emotions according to various stimuli and act appropriately in implementing and maintaining the standards that the family considers for them. Various studies in the field of identity suggested that different social processes such as parenting styles of parents lead to different identity styles, so that if the way the family interacts with each other is loving, warm and supportive, it causes their children to be as well. adopt positive identity styles. According to this research, people with informational identity style are good-natured, have strong social relationships, hope for the future and are cheerful, and their performance in tasks and responsibilities is not influenced by others, but based on their own beliefs. These people use appropriate cognitive methods to deal with mental pressures and suffer less from depression, psychosis and emotional-mood diseases. People with a normative identity style are consistent in their decisions and opinions with the expectations, orders of reference groups and important people. These people do not actively seek and evaluate information, but their effort is to defend the existing identity structure that they have acquired without research and discovery. In this style of identity, people do less challenging work and do not do risky work. These people tend to imitate others. As a result, they are less tolerant of ambiguity and problems. People with confusion/avoidance identity style often lack decision-making power and make their decisions with tolerance, procrastination and long delays. The control source of these people is external and they have emotional and unstable behaviors. These people are in a state of indecisiveness and avoid doing various tasks and affairs of life, have low self-esteem, negative self-concept and lack self-regulation.

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