

Role of Emotional Autonomy and Family Environment in Identity Formation of Adolescents[#]

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The purpose of the present research was to study the contribution of family environment and emotional autonomy towards identity formation in adolescents. For this purpose, 200 boys and girls (age-range 19-21 years), belonging to various colleges of city Amritsar, were administered Extended Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status-2 (EOMEIS-2; Bennion & Adams, 1986), Emotional Autonomy Scale (EAS; Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986), and Family Environment Scale (FES; Moos & Moos, 1986). Correlation coefficients were computed and Step-Wise Multiple Regression Analyses were applied to study the contribution of each variable towards the four identity statuses. Results show that all dimensions of FES have significant correlations with identity achievement and diffusion statuses. It is also revealed that two dimensions of emotional autonomy i.e., individuation and perceiving parents as people, contribute positively towards identity achievement, whereas deidealization of parents seems to predict statuses which lack commitment (moratorium and diffusion). Conflict in the family environment seems to have mixed implications for adolescent identity formation.

Keywords: emotional autonomy, identity formation, adolescents, family environment

Adolescence is a time when young people begin to assert their own identity. Identity refers to a person's stable, coherent, and integrated sense of self, that is, who one is and what one stands for, as a member of society (Erikson, 1950). According to Erikson (1968), 'Adolescence is a distinct life stage in which the complex interplay of psychological, social, historical, and developmental forces propel the individual to search for and consolidate a purposeful sense of self'.

Identity formation is a process unique to the individual, however, it can be categorized in terms of four statuses namely identity

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achievement, moratorium, foreclosure, and diffusion. Identity achievement involves commitments towards ideological and interpersonal roles, values, and opinions, after a period of exploration. Moratorium is a period of experimentation and exploration wherein the individual tries out various roles, but no firm commitments are yet made. Foreclosure is characterized by premature aborting of identity development based primarily on childhood identifications or other authority figures, without an adequate consideration of self-defined alternatives and personal abilities. Identity diffusion is manifested by lack of both commitments and exploration, wherein the individual can be encompassed from being the 'happy-go-lucky' drifter to those with severe psychopathology (Marcia, 1966).

Theoretically and clinically based writings have suggested that the process of separating from one's parents is an important step in achieving a sense of personal identity (Erikson, 1956). Jersild (1957) suggested that as one is about to become a young adult, it is important for him/her to be weaned. In theory, identity and autonomy have been viewed as related personality constructs (Josselson, 1980). Obtaining autonomy from parents is believed to foster identity tasks, and adolescents ability to take control of their lives without being dependent on their parents lays the foundation of an independent personality. Psychoanalysts (Bloom, 1980; Blos, 1979) also suggest that it is important to be weaned in a psychological sense from the emotional dependence upon parents in order to develop a healthy sense of identity.

Research also shows that a combination of emotional attachment to parents and the encouragement of adolescents' independence striving by parents is associated with healthy identity development (see, for example, Campbell, Adams, & Dobson, 1984). Other researches have shown that adolescent psychosocial development is promoted within the context of a progressive mutual redefinition of the parent-child relationship, one that continues as a sense of connectedness and an emotional bond while simultaneously encouraging autonomy (see, for example, Sandhu, 2004; Schultheiss & Blustein, 1994).

The significance of emotional autonomy for adolescents identity and functioning may differ considerably depending on the quality of parent-adolescent relationship (Lamborn & Steinberg, 1993) and the kind of family environment (Fuhrman & Holmbeck, 1995), because it has already been suggested that too much of emotional autonomy can create insecurity with parents (Ryan & Lynch, 1989) and feelings of unlovability, which hinder healthy psychosocial outcomes. Thus,

viewing the role of emotional autonomy in the development of identity is not complete without involving important contextual factors like family environment.

Researches have revealed that patterns of family environment and interaction are different for individuals in high and low identity scores (see, for example, Bhushan, 1993; Markland & Nelson, 1993; Sandhu & Tung, 2003). Tensions in the family and in the relationships during adolescence indicate problems, not positive development. Family environment characterized by warmth, support, and cohesion enhances identity formation process (Adams & Jones, 1983). However, research also shows that family environment marked by cohesion may encourage foreclosure and an indulgent environment may lead to diffusion (Papini, Micka, & Barnett, 1989).

The relationship between identity and family environment still remains fuzzy and contradictory. This exploratory research will aim to study the inconsistent picture of the role of emotional autonomy and family environment in determining the identity development of adolescents, against the backdrop of Indian culture which promotes connectionism rather than individualism.

METHOD

Sample

The sample comprised 200 adolescents (100 boys and 100 girls) ranging in the age from 19 to 21 years, with a mean age of 20.12 years. The data was collected from colleges of city Amritsar (Punjab, India). The participants belonged more or less to similar socio-economic status, i.e., Indian middle class.

Instruments

Following tests were used to achieve the objectives of the present study.

Extended Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status-2 (EOMEIS-2)

This scale was developed by Bennion and Adams (1986) and it measures identity formation on two domains i.e., ideological (which includes area like occupation, religion, politics, and philosophical life style) and interpersonal (which covers areas like friendship, recreation, dating, and sex roles). Only the areas of friendship and recreation were studied in the interpersonal domain and other two

areas were left out because of their inappropriateness for the adolescents of Indian culture, as dating etc. are not openly discussed. Both the domains of the scale measure each participant on four identity statuses, namely identity achievement, moratorium, foreclosure, and diffusion. In this study, the scores on both the domains were added to yield total identity scores on four statuses, for each participant. The items of the instrument are like:-

1. It took me a while to figure it out, but now I really know what I want for a career (Identity achievement-occupation).
2. I'm still trying to decide how capable I am as a person and what work will be right for me (Moratorium-occupation).
3. My parents decided a long time ago what I should go into for employment and I'm following through their plans (Foreclosure-occupation).
4. I'm not really interested in finding the right job, any job will do. I just seem to flow with what is available (Diffusion-occupation).

The participants respond by giving their degree of agreement with each item on a 6 point scale ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. The scores on an identity status in a specific domain (ideological or interpersonal) describes the individuals identity formation on issues relevant to that domain i.e., higher scores on moratorium in interpersonal domain suggest that the adolescent is currently exploring the areas of friendship and life style and has not yet made firm commitments in these areas. Test-retest reliability ($N=50$) over a 15 days period of time, for the four statuses ranged from 0.73 to 0.91. The instrument has been successfully used on Indian adolescents by Graf (2003), and Sandhu (2004).

Emotional Autonomy Scale (EAS)

Emotional Autonomy Scale (EAS) was developed by Steinberg and Silverberg (1986). It consists of 20 items which cover four components of emotional autonomy; non dependency on parents (N), individuation (I), deidealization of parents (D), and perceiving parents as people (P). The participants are asked to indicate their responses to each item on a four-point likert-type scale ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. Out of 20 items 11 are negatively phrased whereas 9 are positively phrased. For the positive items, 'strongly disagree' is 1, 'disagree' is 2, 'agree' is 3 and 'strongly

agree' is 4. Higher score indicates a higher level of emotional autonomy. The test-retest reliability ($N=50$) over a 15 days period, for different subscales was found to range from 0.71 to 0.81. The instrument has been successfully used in Indian culture by Graf (2003) and Sandhu (2004).

Family Environment Scale (FES) -Form R

The Family Environment Scale was developed by Moos and Moos (1986). It comprises 10 subscales that measure the social environmental characteristics of all types of families. The 90 items in the 10 subscales can be categorized under 3 headings:

- (A) Relationship dimensions which includes Cohesion (C), Expressiveness (EX), Conflict (CON)
- (B) Personal Growth Dimensions includes Independence (IND), Achievement Orientation (AO), Intellectual Cultural Orientation (ICO), Active-Recreational Orientation (ARO), Moral Religious Emphasis (MRE).
- (C) System Maintenance Dimensions which includes Organization (ORG), Control (CTL).

The response categories are 'true' or 'false'. Scoring is a simple clerical task using the template. The number of crosses showing through the template in each column are counted. Higher score on a particular dimension shows more emphasis on that particular area in the family environment. Test-retest reliability ($N=50$) over a 15 days period of time, for different subscales was found to range from 0.72 to 0.86.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To study the relationship of identity statuses with the emotional autonomy and family environment, all variables were correlated by applying appropriate correlational analysis techniques and were further subjected to Step Wise Multiple Regression Analysis to check the contribution of each independent variable towards the dependent variable.

Table 1

Correlation Coefficients, Regression Coefficients, and F-ratios for the Status Identity Achievement (N=200)

S. No.	Variables added	r	R.C.	R ²	F
1.	Intellectual Cultural Orientation	0.87**	2.55	0.75	250**
2.	Expressiveness (EX)	0.85**	0.98	0.82	35**
3.	Independence	0.84**	0.78	0.82	-
4.	Achievement Orientation	0.80**	-0.38	0.82	-
5.	Perceiving parents as people	0.79**	0.71	0.85	15**
6.	Organization	0.77**	0.02	0.86	5**
7.	Orientation	0.76**	0.49	0.86	-
8.	Individuation	0.65**	0.74	0.88	20**
9.	Cohesion	0.63**	0.62	0.89	10**
10.	Control	0.53**	-0.42	0.89	-
11.	Moral-Religious Emphasis	0.52**	-0.52	0.89	-
12.	Conflict	-0.51**	-1.38	0.90	10**
13.	Deidealization of parents	-0.05	-0.03	0.90	-
14.	Non-dependency on parents	-0.03	0.55	0.90	-

** $p < 0.01$

Table 2

Correlation Coefficients, Regression Coefficients, and F-ratios for the Status Moratorium (N=200)

S. No.	Variables added	r	R.C.	R ²	F
1.	Achievement Orientation	0.57**	3.57	0.32	45.7**
2.	Independence	0.47**	1.03	0.32	-
3.	Expressiveness	0.38**	-0.10	0.35	4.29**
4.	Intellectual Cultural Orientation	0.37**	-0.63	0.39	6.67**
5.	Deidealization of parents	-0.34**	0.08	0.47	13.33**
6.	Moral-Religious Emphasis	0.34**	2.88	0.47	-
7.	Non-dependency on parents	-0.32**	-0.65	0.47	-
8.	Organisation	0.32**	0.76	0.49	3.33**
9.	Active-Recreational Orientation	0.32**	0.37	0.52	6**
10.	Perceiving parents as people	0.23*	-0.70	0.52	-
11.	Cohesion	0.21*	-0.89	0.60	16**
12.	Individuation	0.17	0.12	0.60	-
13.	Control	-0.11	-1.06	0.65	12.5**
14.	Conflict	0.11	4.62	0.79	70**

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Table 3

Correlation Coefficients, Regression Coefficients, and F-ratios for the Status Foreclosure (N=200)

S. No.	Variables added	r	R.C.	R ²	F
1.	Perceiving parents as people	-0.68**	-0.43	0.47	94**
2.	Individuation	-0.64**	-0.17	0.51	8**
3.	Expressiveness	-0.61**	-0.58	0.52	2
4.	Deidealization of parents	-0.52**	-0.95	0.65	32.5**
5.	Independence	-0.52**	-1.47	0.66	2.5*
6.	Control	0.48*	0.07	0.67	2.5*
7.	Achievement Orientation	-0.43**	0.12	0.67	-
8.	Conflict	-0.32*	-1.32	0.76	30**
9.	Intellectual Cultural Orientation	-0.31**	-1.47	0.77	3.33**
10.	Nondependency on parents	-0.26**	0.66	0.77	-
11.	Moral-Religious Emphasis	0.17	-0.23	0.77	-
12.	Cohesion	0.16	0.64	0.78	3.33**
13.	Organization	-0.12	0.01	0.78	-
14.	Active-Recreational Orientation	-0.08	0.18	0.78	-

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Table 4

Correlation Coefficients, Regression Coefficients, and F-ratios for the Status Diffusion (N=200)

S. No.	Variables added	r	R.C.	R ²	F
1.	Intellectual Cultural Orientation	-0.89**	-0.95	0.79	395**
2.	Conflict	0.86**	0.28	0.82	15**
3.	Organization	-0.86**	-0.36	0.83	5**
4.	Achievement Orientation	-0.85**	-1.27	0.84	5**
5.	Control	-0.83**	-0.84	0.88	40**
6.	Independence	-0.79**	-0.42	0.88	-
7.	Moral-Religious Emphasis	-0.77**	-0.39	0.88	-
8.	Control	-0.74**	0.09	0.88	-
9.	Expressiveness	-0.69**	-0.50	0.89	10**
10.	Active-Recreational Orientation	-0.63**	0.08	0.89	-
11.	Deidealization of parents	0.58**	1.25	0.92	33.3**
12.	Perceiving parents as people	-0.53**	-0.56	0.93	12.5**
13.	Non-dependency on parents	0.50**	-0.11	0.93	-
14.	Individuation	-0.19	0.36	0.93	-

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Correlational Analysis

The correlations between different identity statuses (achievement, moratorium, foreclosure, and diffusion) and dimensions of family environment and emotional autonomy are shown in Tables 1, 2, 3 and 4. It is evident from Table 1 (for identity achievement) and Table 4 (for diffusion), that all dimensions of FES have significant correlation with identity achievement and with diffusion, though in the opposite directions. The family environment of individuals scoring high on identity achievement differs from those scoring high on diffusion in that the former report their family members as helpful, cooperative, and providing autonomy in taking their decisions and expressing themselves. Also, stress is laid on participation in various activities beyond the realm of work and education, and adolescents are encouraged to be social, competitive, virtuous, and value based. All the activities in their family are properly organized and executed collectively. On the other hand, high diffusion scorers' family environment is characterized by conflict. Also, high identity achievement scorers report higher individuation and higher ability to perceive parents as people; however high diffusion scorers report higher deidealization of parents and non-dependency on parents, whereas lower perception of parents as people with roles except that of a parent.

Table 2 shows the correlations of moratorium status with the dimensions of FES and EAS. The following dimensions of FES have significant positive correlations with moratorium-achievement orientation, independence, expressiveness, intellectual cultural orientation, moral religious emphasis, organization, active recreational orientation, and cohesion. The dimensions of personal growth of FES are quite important in the moratorium status. Also, the direction of all significant correlations of moratorium with FES is same as the direction of correlations of identity achievement with FES. This confirms the strong association of family environment variables with the higher statuses of identity formation.

Table 2 also reveals that deidealization of parents and non-dependency on parents have significant inverse correlations with moratorium, while it has significant positive correlations with perceiving parents as people. This correlational pattern is exactly opposite to the relationship between diffusion status and EAS dimensions.

Table 3 shows the correlations of foreclosure status with FES and EAS. The following dimensions of FES have significant inverse correlations with foreclosure-expressiveness, independence,

achievement orientation, conflict, intellectual cultural orientation, while it has significant positive correlation with control. Thus, families of foreclosure individuals seemingly provide lesser independence and stimulation to their children. Children are not encouraged to explore away from the families and are not allowed to openly express themselves and their differences with other family members.

Also, all the dimensions of EAS have significant inverse correlations with foreclosure status. Thus, foreclosure status goes hand in hand with very little emotional autonomy in adolescents.

Step-Wise Multiple Regression Analysis

A Step-Wise Multiple Regression Analysis was performed to determine the amount of variance in the dependent variable that could be accounted for by the different variables (dimensions of emotional autonomy and family environment) and the impact of each independent variable in the prediction of the dependent variables (four identity statuses: achievement, moratorium, foreclosure, and diffusion).

Results of regression analysis reveal that 90%, 79%, 78%, and 93% of variance is explained by the selected variables for identity achievement, moratorium, foreclosure, and diffusion respectively. In order to delineate the variable significantly contributing towards the dependent variable, *F*-ratios were calculated and the level of significance was checked. The results of regression analyses and *F*-ratios are also given in Tables 1, 2, 3, and 4 for four identity statuses.

Regression Analysis for Identity Achievement

A perusal of the Table 1 suggests that among family environment variables, intellectual cultural orientation (250, $p < 0.01$), expressiveness (35, $p < 0.01$), organization (5, $p < 0.01$), cohesion (10, $p < 0.01$) contribute positively towards identity achievement, while conflict (10, $p < 0.01$) contributes negatively towards identity achievement. The results suggest that the families, which take interest in political, social, intellectual, and cultural activities, which encourage one another to express their opinions, and are organized in the execution of various task and responsibilities and provide help and support for one another, they foster and promote identity achievement in adolescents. The cohesive family environment provides a dependable base to fall upon, if they experience failures associated with exploration. Similar results have been reported by Matos,

Barbosa, Almeida, and Costa (1999), and Kumru and Thompson (2003).

However, family environment marked by openly expressed conflicts, anger, and aggression hampers the achievement of an identity. Tense family environment may polarize the parent and the child thus most of their energies are used up in resolving conflicts and differences, and they may end up being alienated, hostile and rebellious, instead of being an individual with a healthy achieved identity. Nelson, Hughes, Handal, Katz, and Searight (1993) have also found lesser identity development in adolescents from high conflict families.

A perusal of Table 1 suggests that the emotional autonomy dimensions which are significantly positively contributing to identity achievement are perceiving parents as people (15, $p < 0.01$) and individuation (20, $p < 0.01$). Individuation helps an adolescent to loosen one's infantile ties and prompts him or her to define oneself as a person. Also, the realization that their parents have other roles apart from being parents, and also have flaws along with strengths, spurs adolescents to define themselves in a new light. Moore (1987) also demonstrated that adolescent ego-identity is dependent on adolescents separation from their parents. Josselson (1980) suggests that two processes, individuating and gaining autonomy contribute to identity formation. He believes that individuation leads to greater autonomy which facilitates identity formation, which functions in a recursive way to encourage individuation.

Regression Analysis for Moratorium

Table 2 suggests that the following dimensions of FES contribute significantly positively to moratorium status-achievement orientation (45.7, $p < 0.01$), organisation (3.33, $p < 0.01$), active-recreational orientation (6, $p < 0.01$), and conflict (70, $p < 0.01$); while the dimensions which contribute negatively are expressiveness (4.29, $p < 0.01$), intellectual cultural orientation (6.67, $p < 0.01$) cohesion (16, $p < 0.01$) and control (16, $p < 0.01$). Thus, the families in which do not exert excess control on the child, and where great stress is laid upon being competitive and an achiever, and to participate in social and recreational activities, propel the adolescents to explore away from the family. However, some amount of familial conflict may here be necessary for adolescents' separation from the fused family environment and hence search for his own individuality and identity. Emotional distance from family may compel individuals to think about their own place in the outside world. Papini et al. (1989) found

that the exploration of ego identity was greatest in families in which mothers report relatively higher frequencies of conflict. Kidwell, Dunhum, Bacho, Pastorino, and Portes, (1995) found that subjects actively engaged in identity exploration were most likely to have conflicts with parents and other authority figures.

Also, environment marked by expressiveness, intellectual cultural orientation and cohesion in the family may create lesser tendency in adolescents to be in the moratorium status. Moratorium can be a painful and unrewarding status for some adolescents, but if familial support is given, it can be transcended smoothly and culminate into healthy identity achievement. Even identity achieved individuals can revert to moratorium status, in the face of any contextual change. But if familial support, co-operation is available, and if adolescents can discuss various matters freely in the family, their chances of going through a confusing period decreases.

On the emotional autonomy scale, deidealization of parents contributes positively to moratorium. When adolescents realize that their parents are not omnipotent and infallible, adolescents start looking for new models and standards in life to commit themselves to. So, the exploration process initiates in order to search the various options available.

Multiple Regression Analysis for Foreclosure

Table 3 shows that the following dimensions of FES contribute negatively to foreclosure - independence (2.5, $p < 0.05$), conflict (30, $p < 0.01$), intellectual cultural orientation (3.33, $p < 0.01$). However, control contributes positively to foreclosure (2.5, $p < 0.05$).

Thus, when the family environment is marked by less autonomy to individuals and they are not exposed to various extra familial activities, foreclosure is encouraged. Quintana and Lapsley (1990) also suggest that parental control restricts individuation.

It is also revealed from the results that cohesion in the family is contributing to foreclosure status. It emerges from the results that cohesion in the absence of independence is not an indicator of the emergence of a distinct sense of self. Montemayor, Brown, and Adams (1985) found regression in identity development in families perceived by teenagers as high in cohesion. Such families expect youngsters to follow the authority figures, and provide little opportunity to them to explore. Children from such families are unfamiliar with independence and their environment, and are attracted towards a safe and secure foreclosed identity.

It is also evident that family environment marked by open expression of anger and aggression makes them less vulnerable to foreclosure. Willemssen and Waterman (1991) have also found that lack of conflict in the family predicts foreclosure status. Marcia (1980) and Matteson (1974) suggest that foreclosed individuals seem to be 'participating in a love affair' with their families.

The following dimensions of EAS significantly contribute negatively to foreclosure-perceiving parents as people (94; $p < 0.01$) individuation (8; $p < 0.01$), deidealization (32.5; $p < 0.01$). Thus, if the adolescents recognize their parents as persons with some weaknesses; individuate themselves from their family of origin, and repudiate the idealized images of their parents, they are lesser prone to be foreclosed. Thus, emotional autonomy seems to be pertinent to avoid foreclosure in identity. Campbell et al. (1984), Kroger (1989), and Marcia (1966), have also reported individuals in foreclosure status to be very low on autonomy, and to be overly reliant upon their parents. Sandhu and Tung (2005), suggest that emotional autonomy predicts lesser foreclosure in adolescents.

Multiple Regression Analysis for Diffusion

The following dimensions of FES contribute negatively to diffusion i.e., intellectual cultural orientation (395; $p < 0.01$), organisation (5; $p < 0.01$), achievement orientation (5; $p < 0.01$), cohesion (40; $p < 0.01$), expressiveness (10; $p < 0.01$), while conflict (15; $p < 0.02$) contributes positively to diffusion, while the dimension of EAS which contributes negatively to diffusion is perceiving parents as people (12.5; $p < 0.05$), and the dimension which contributes positively to diffusion is deidealization (33.3; $p < 0.01$). Thus, families in which there is emphasis on involvement and participation in political, social, intellectual, and cultural activities, where individuals are motivated to excel in various fields, where open expression of feelings and views are accepted and where the family members provide commitment and co-operation to each other, makes adolescents less vulnerable to be diffused personalities. Such families constantly remind them of their life tasks thus preventing the development of attitudes of disinterest and unconcern. However, conflict in the family may make adolescents vulnerable towards directionlessness and aimlessness. Literature also suggest that adolescents who perform 'lowest' on identity assessments have typically been described as having experienced rejecting and detached home reactions with parents as being indifferent, inactive, uninvolved, detached, and rejecting (see, for example, Jordan, 1970; Matteson, 1974).

Also, when the individuals acknowledge that their parents are also individuals beyond their role as parents, some amount of dissonance occurs, which compels them to start exploring the world and their selves. However deidealization of parents promotes identity diffusion in adolescents as suggested by the results. Too much deidealizing of the parents can lead to feelings of insecurity and unlovability, and these perceptions may withdraw the adolescents from various life challenges, thus promoting diffusion. In a similar vein, some researchers have suggested that autonomy may prove to be a double edged sword for the psychological development of adolescents, resulting in aberrant behaviour and other unhealthy outcomes (see, for example, Matos et al., 1999; Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986).

CONCLUSION

Overall, it can be suggested that family environment and emotional autonomy are important contributors towards the identity formation of adolescents. Regarding emotional autonomy, it can be said that adolescents' increasing ability to individuate and to perceive their parents as people beyond their roles as parents, are indicators of healthy adolescent identity, whereas deidealization of parents may not be predictive of adolescents firm commitment towards life issues. Thus, different dimensions of emotional autonomy have a unique contribution towards the four identity statuses. Also, within the family environment, it has come forward that adolescent identity is fostered in environments characterized by a combination of cohesion, encouragement, and discipline. However a confusing picture emerges regarding conflict in the family. Lastly it is even suggested that the results may be viewed in the light of cultural context and present day set-up as Indian society itself is undergoing rapid socio-economic changes. Invasion of media, increasing number of women in the work force, decreasing family size, and large scale migration to urban areas are making a strong impact on the structure and composition of the family, thereby impacting adolescents' psycho-social development.

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