MEASURMENTS OF IDENTITY AND COMMUNICATION

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The theory of identity development has many different psychological viewpoints. Identity theorists believed that they could create benefits to the world through their study of identity development (Bosma, 1994). Today, Erikson’s (1963) theory remains one of the primary sources for identity development studies. Erikson believed that a person’s identity developed over time through many stages (Erikson, 1950). Erikson’s series of stages developed and built on each other (Erikson, 1963). This series of eight stages followed the epigenetic principle, building on one another and taking a piece of one stage to the next stage (Erikson, 1963).

The incendiary stage that explodes the development of Erikson’s identity is Identity versus Identity Confusion (Erikson, 1963). However, the root of identity takes hold during the Trust versus Mistrust stage and grows until death. However, identity is first dealt with in the Identity versus Identity Confusion stage (Erikson, 1963). In the Identity versus Identity Confusion stage, a person first begins to question their true identity.

According to Erikson, through this stage adolescents learn to deal with the effects of social conformity, as well as peer relationships in the face of their emerging uniqueness. In this stage, people view themselves as if they are unique beings, with important interpersonal relationships (Erikson, 1963). In the Identity versus Identity Confusion stage a person gives up certain ideas he or she has accepted in the past and takes on new, novel ideas (Erikson, 1963).

The basic strength gained in identity development is fidelity. Fidelity is a belief of a certain view of the future (Erikson, 1982). This also includes the creation of a self-controlled perimeter within views of religion, society, and politics. In order to truly understand the concept of self in relation to religion, society, and politics a person must have the ability to make meaningful exchanges of ideas.
Theoretically the interpersonal communication influences a person’s identity development. This exchange of ideas between people allows individuals to view perspectives other than their own. The fact that a person can reflect the self back to another like mirror allows the individual to see the self and new perspectives. Through these free exchanges of ideas a person has more choices to add to his or her view of self.

Erikson’s (1975) view of defiance is a view that a person in the middle of an identity crisis will adopt any view that is opposing social norms. Many times he or she adopts certain views just because they reject social norms. Defiance is beneficial in identity development because it opens up a person’s perspective to view normally unacceptable concepts. The person then integrates these concepts into their identity.

On the other hand the antipathic aspect of fidelity, Erikson (1982) theorized about is role repudiation. This concept can be expressed overtly in the form of diffidence. Diffidence is a lack of self-confidence that manifests itself in trouble with verbally expressing oneself. Erikson’s theory of diffidence implies that communication in any form, but especially interpersonal, affects identity development (Erikson, 1982). Therefore, lack of communication may lead to a lack of crisis in the Identity versus Identity Confusion stage. Thus leading to what Marcia (1966) labeled, diffusion.

Psychologists, such as Marcia continued the search for identity beyond Erikson’s stages of ego development (Marcia, 1966). By dividing identity into four sections, diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, and achievement, Marcia operationalized Erikson’s theory (Erikson, 1950, Marcia, 1966). Diffusion is where a person has no crisis, a searching of self, or commitment, a secure decision. Foreclosure is all commitment, but no crisis. Moratorium occurs
when a person has crisis, but no commitment. An achieved person has crisis, but is committed to their secure decision.

It is logical to assume that interpersonal communication is used during the achievement and moratorium stages. Contrastingly, less interpersonal communication is used in foreclosed and diffused stages. Marcia believed that identity would especially benefit adolescents and young adults because it would increase their understanding of diverse populations and ideas.

Along with understanding comes perspective taking (Selman, 1980). An adolescent who can perspective take is better equipped to solve problems and deal with life in a more mature manner. Through perspective taking, adolescents increase their identity by communicating newly acquired ideas. When adolescents possess perspective-taking skills, they increase their psychological well being (Enright, 1983).

Erikson theorized that a young adult needs both to be able to communicate and take in new ideas. Communication is a very vital part of Erikson’s identity development. Without communication, a person could not express his or her ideas, express basic needs, or communicate about ability. These all culminate into a healthy identity development. Given this theoretical interconnection between identity development and interpersonal communication the purpose of this study is to describe the relationship between the degree identity achievement and communication. Specifically the hypothesis is that identity development is negatively correlated with communication apprehension.

**Methods**

**Participants**

Fifty-five students (13 males, 42 females) were selected by convenience from their psychology and theology classes. All of the college-age participants attended the same small,
Midwestern Christian liberal arts college. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 23 ($M = 18.90$, $SD = 1.22$). Demographic surveys did not include ethnicity. All volunteers signed an informed consent form and received ethical treatment throughout the study.

**Instruments**

The Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PCRA) defined the construct of interpersonal communication.

**Ego Identity Scale**

The other measure for identity was the Ego Identity scale (EIS). The EIS is a 12-item measure, used to measure Erikson’s concept of ego identity (Erikson, 1968). The participants choose between two statements, one reflecting ego identity and one reflecting lack of ego identity. Participants circled “a” or “b.” For five items, the answer “a” represented ego identity; where on the other seven “b” represented ego identity. To score the EIS, each statement reflecting ego identity receives one point. The total sum of points constitutes the score.

The reliability of this test has been measured with split-half reliability (.68). The validity was measured with convergent measures. The writers reported that scores correlated, but no exact figures were reported. An example of a question from the EIS states, A) “I enjoy being active in clubs and youth groups.” B) “I prefer to focus on hobbies which I can do on my own time, at my own pace.” Statement “A” exhibits ego identity.

**Personal Report of Communication Apprehension 24**

The PCRA 24 is a measurement of negative feelings toward communication, termed communication apprehension. To define interpersonal communication, the experimenter used the six-item Likert scale interpersonal subtest of the PRCA 24. The test taker rates each item 1 to 5; 1, being strongly agree, 2, agree, 3, undecided, 4, disagree, and 5, strongly disagree. An example
of a question in the PCRA 24 interpersonal subsection is “While participating in a conversation
with a new acquaintance, I feel very nervous”. Starting with a score of 18, items 14, 16, and 17
are added to the score of 18, and then items 13, 15, and 18 are subtracted. Possible scores range
from six to 30.

Procedures

Two designated classes, a introductory level psychology class and a 200-level theology
class, participated in the experiment. In the theology class, the professor proctored the test for the
experimenter for the purpose of saving time. In both classes, the participants filled out an
informed consent form. After signing the form, the experimenter or test proctor distributed the
surveys in a counterbalanced order and directed the participants how to fill out the surveys. The
participants sat in their theology or psychology classroom and completed the surveys. The
volunteers completed the surveys in 15 to 20 minutes. The experimenter and test proctor sat
quietly in front of the classroom. The participants finished the surveys and handed them into the
experimenter or test proctor. Each participant received a debriefing statement and continued with
class after the experiment ended.

Results

EIS scores ranged from one to 11 $(M = 7.4, SD = 2.42)$. Scores on the PRCA24 ranged
from six to 30 $(M = 14.65, SD = .52)$.

The one correlation supported the hypothesis that identity negatively correlates with
communication apprehension. A significant negative correlation emerged between the EIS and
the PRCA24 $(r = -.42, p < .001)$. This correlation supported my hypothesis by showing that as
Eriksonian identity increased communication apprehension decreased.
Male data split independently from female data yielded a significant correlation between the EIS and the PRCA24 ($r = -.77, p < .002$). Female data split independently from male data yielded non-significant correlations, which did not support the hypothesis. The EIS also had no significant correlations with the PRCA24 ($r = -.2, p < .21$).

Discussion

The results obtained in this study supported the hypothesis by exhibiting a significant negative correlation between identity level and communication apprehension. Erikson (1959) stated that identity requires a social environment in order to develop adequately. The results of the study coincide with this Eriksonian theory.

With a limited sample size the generalization of this study is restricted. However, this study provides a stepping-stone for future research. This study could be advanced to a quasi-experimental design.
References


