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The Relationship Between Identity Styles and Career Indecision Among Iranian Female Adolescents

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This study investigated the relationship between identity styles and career indecision among Iranian female adolescents. A total of 126 female high school students aged 15 to 18 completed Farsi versions of the Berzonsky's Identity Style Questionnaire (ISQ-6G) and the Career Decision Questionnaire (CDQ). Participants' responses were examined using descriptive statistics and correlational analysis. Our findings demonstrated that both Informative and Normative identity styles were negatively associated with career indecision, whereas Diffuse-Avoidant identity style was positively associated with career indecision. We interpreted the results in the context of Iranian career literature, career development theories, identity formation theories, and the contradicting findings from an earlier study with American counterparts. Finally, we discussed implications for career education and counselling.

Keywords: Iranian adolescents, career indecision, identity formation

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Identity formation refers to the development of a dynamic inner structure comprised of a coherent and authentic self (Marcia, 1980). According to Erikson (1963) adolescence is a stage in this process that is characterized by identity versus role confusion, meaning that individuals at this stage will actively search for ideologies, activities, and social relationships to answer questions such as, “who am I?”, “who am I becoming?”, and “who do I want to be?”. Those who fail to find answers to these questions may in turn experience role confusion (Erikson, 1968). Marcia (1966) built on Erikson's notion of identity crisis (i.e., role confusion) during adolescence by elaborating on the importance of exploration and commitment in the process of identity formation. That is, individuals need to explore societal and familial beliefs to find their own values, goals, and vocation, and subsequently become personally committed to their choices.

Further building on Marcia's conceptualization of identity formation, Berzonsky (1990) introduced the identity style model, which describes an individual's social-cognitive responses to identity crisis and divides the process of identity formation into three different styles. First, people with an *Informative style* actively construct their identity by seeking out and evaluating information relevant to their sense of self. They are self-reflective, interested in learning new aspects about themselves, and willing to evaluate and modify their identity structure in light of new information. Second, a *Normative style* refers to individuals who construct their identity

based on their internalized societal and familial norms. By conforming to the expectations of others and the society, their identity may be distorted and undifferentiated from that of others (Berzonsky, 1992). Lastly, individuals with a *Diffuse-Avoidant style* attempt to avoid confronting identity questions and conflicts (Berzonsky, 1994). They procrastinate when making decisions, but when they have to, they tend to do so on a short-term basis without long-term commitment or exploring their values and belief systems.

Identity formation plays a key role in an individual's decision-making process, including career decisions (Berzonsky, Cieciuch, Duriez, & Soenens, 2011). In fact, constructs related to self and identity are central to major theories of career development. Having a clear self-concept facilitates the successive selection of environments that fit people's interests and values (Holland, 1997). Individuals implement their self-concept and take on different life roles as they move along the stages of career exploration, establishment, maintenance, and disengagement (Super, 1951). Furthermore, *self-efficacy*, or a sense of competency in particular areas, predicts career interests, choices, and performance (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994). Additionally, research has demonstrated associations between career indecision and negative career outcomes. For example, career indecision among college students has been correlated with high levels of anxiety, difficulty choosing a major and selecting courses (Germeijs & Verschueren, 2011; Germeijs, Verschueren, & Soenens, 2006), and a lower sense of purpose and meaning (Miller & Rottinghaus, 2014).

In contrast to the literature on career decision making in Euro-American countries, there is still a dearth of research in other contexts, including the Middle-East. In particular, there is a need for research on career decision making among Iranian youth. This demographic has been reported to have a high rate of difficulty in making career decisions (e.g., 85% in a sample of Iranian undergraduate students; Fadaei Nasab, 2012). Yet, at the time of writing this article, we did not come across formal studies and reports of career indecision in relation to their identity formation. Soliemanian, Darrodi, and Golpich (2013) employed Berzonsky's identity styles to explore Iranian university students' global sense of career development and found that having an informative identity style was positively correlated with career development, while a diffuse-avoidant identity style was negatively correlated with career development. Despite this, their study did not explore career indecision specifically. Therefore, the aim of the present study was to investigate whether identity styles are associated with career indecision in Iranian adolescents.

Method

Using a convenience sampling method, the first author recruited participants through classroom visits at a public girls-only high school located in Karaj, Iran, which she had access to through a partnership established by her university. Upon providing parental consent, 126 Iranian female students aged 15 to 18 ($M = 16.6$) (Table 1) completed the Farsi versions of the following measures in their classrooms. We examined their responses using descriptive statistics and correlational analysis.

Measures

The study used the Farsi translation of the Sixth-Grade version of the Identity Style Inventory (ISI-6G; ; Ghazanfari, 2003; White, Wampler, & Winn, 1998). White et al. (1998) developed this version based on the original ISI for college students (Berzonsky, 1989, 1992a),

but with simpler language suitable for adolescents and people with reading difficulties. The ISI-6G consists of 40 items with responses on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1= *strongly disagree* to 5= *strongly agree*. The items are grouped into three identity subscales: Informative, Normative, and Diffuse-Avoidant. The Farsi translation of the ISI-6G scale was developed and standardized by Ghazanfari (2003), who reported a Cronbach's α of .68 for the overall sample of his study. Farsinejad (2004) also reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients of .77, .60, and .66 for the Informative, Normative, and Diffuse-Avoidant subscales, respectively.

Table 1
Participants' Demographic Information

Age	Grade	<i>n</i>
15	9	20
16	10	20
17	11	74
18	12	8

N= 126

Originally developed by Osipow, Carney, and Barak (1976), the Career Decision Scale (CDS) – Farsi translation (Karimi, 2008) is used in career counselling to identify an individual's career decision making difficulties. The scale consists of 18 items, two of which examine career choice certainty while the remaining 16 measure career indecision. For the purpose of this study, only the career indecision composite score, which is comprised of the total score of the latter 16 items, was used. Sample items include: "Several careers have equal appeal to me"; "I'm having a difficult time deciding among them", and "I can't make a career choice right now because I don't know what my abilities are". The items are scored on a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = *not at all like me* to 4 = *exactly like me*. Karimi (2008) reported a Cronbach's α of .92 in a sample of Iranian college students.

Results

Table 2 summarizes the means, standard deviations, and correlations among the research variables. We performed Pearson correlations to test whether participants' identity styles were correlated with their scores on the career indecision scale. Results indicated that having an *Informative* style was negatively correlated with career indecision, with $r(124) = -.208, p = .02$, suggesting that adolescents who scored higher on an Informative identity style were likely to be certain about their career decisions. Similarly, a *Normative* identity style was negatively correlated with career indecision, with $r(124) = -.254, p = .004$, meaning that adolescents higher on a Normative identity style were also likely to be certain about their career decisions. Lastly, our results found a positive relationship between *Diffuse-Avoidant* identity style and career indecision, with $r(124) = .222, p = .01$, meaning that adolescents with this identity style were likely to be indecisive about their career decisions.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships between identity styles and career indecision among Iranian adolescents. The results suggested that Iranian adolescents who scored higher on an *Informative* identity style, that is, those who actively seek out information to establish their identity, were less likely to experience difficulty with careers decisions. In addition, adolescents who are higher on a *Diffuse-Avoidant* identity style reported higher levels of career indecision. These results are consistent with Berzonsky's conceptualization of *Informative* and *Diffuse-Avoidant* identity styles, as well as empirical findings from samples of American adolescents (Vondracek, Schulenberg, Skorikov, Gillespie, & Wahlheim, 1995) and Iranian university students (Soliemanian et al., 2013). On the other hand, participants in this study who were conforming to normative expectations and standards (i.e., a *Normative* identity style) reported less difficulty making career decisions. This finding is inconsistent with Vondracek et al's (1995) study, which reported that American adolescents with a *Normative* identity style were no different from those with *Diffuse-Avoidant* style in their inability to make career decisions.

Table 2

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Among the Research Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. Informative style	–	.459**	.057*	-.208*	36.2	6.4
2. Normative Style		–	.47*	-.254**	31.4	5.2
3. Diffuse-Avoidant Style			–	.222*	28.7	7.1
4. Career Indecision				–	39.7	8.1

Note. $N = 126$ * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

The difference between Iranian and American adolescents may be due to the fact that Iranian students live in a collectivistic culture. Hofstede's (2001) research on dimensions of culture indicated that Iranians endorse collectivistic values, such as loyalty, benevolence, and preserving group unity, and view negatively individualistic values such as autonomy. With high levels of loyalty to family and in-group orientation (Yeganeh, 2011), Iranian adolescents are expected to incorporate societal and familial values and norms in their decision making, which is thought to fulfil individual needs and desires (Assadi et al., 2007; Beeman, 1986; Javidan & Dastmalchian, 2003). Although Berzonsky (1992) conceptualized a *Normative* identity as maladaptive, "distorted and undifferentiated" (p. 772), this conceptualization may be based on Western individualistic values and may not apply to other populations such as Iranian adolescents.

As preliminary research on identity styles and career indecision with this population, the results of this study have implications for career education and counselling. Educators and counsellors need to take into consideration their adolescent clients' identity formation style while providing them with career counselling. Effective interventions with Iranian adolescents may include the exploration of undiscovered aspects of their identities and their fit with social and familial norms in a culturally sensitive manner. This includes not assuming that a *Normative* identity is a sign of maladjustment or underdevelopment. Adolescents with a *Diffuse-Avoidant* style may benefit from tasks that gently expose them to career issues in order to reduce their anxiety and increase their self-efficacy in career decision-making.

This study is not without limitations. First, we obtained our sample from a high school to which the first author had access, and that happened to be a girls-only high school. As we obtained a convenience sample of 126 female students, the results are not generalizable to Iranian adolescents as a whole. Second, the psychometric properties of the Farsi version of the ISI-6G have not been extensively studied, and what has been reported so far is not robust (Ghazanfari, 2003). Future studies should attempt to obtain a more representative sample and use psychometrically superior instruments. Given the results of this study, future research that is particularly needed would be investigations into whether or not conforming to social and familial expectations indeed leads to personal fulfilment among Iranian adolescents, and when it does not how they negotiate their career decisions in their cultural contexts.

Conclusion

This study sought to fill a gap in career development research by examining the relationships between career indecisions and identity styles among a sample of Iranian female adolescents. While the relationships between career indecision and a *Diffusive-Avoidant* identity (positive correlation) and an *Informative* identity style (negative correlation) were consistent with the findings of an American counterpart (Vondracek et al., 1995), the negative correlation between a *Normative* identity style and career indecision was inconsistent with the finding with an American sample. This raises a question about an assumption embedded in Bersonsky's conceptualization that *Normative* identity style is maladaptive and an indication of immature development. However, given the limitations of this study, the results should be interpreted tentatively. Further studies are warranted in order to test the validity of identity models as well as their application in culturally sensitive career education and counselling.

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