Authoritarianism and Procrastination by Identity Style

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Abstract: A sample of emerging adults (N=99) completed measures of identity style, authoritarianism, and procrastination. Results indicated that: (1) identity style accounts for an impressive amount of variance in both authoritarianism and procrastination, and (2) robust relationships exist between the normative style and authoritarianism and between the diffuse-avoidant style and procrastination. Implications of these findings are discussed.
Key Words: Authoritarianism; Procrastination; Identity; Identity Style

Introduction

In his psychosocial theory of development Erikson (1963, 1980) divided the lifespan into eight stages, with developmental tasks specific to each stage. These developmental tasks take the form of crises to be resolved. Of the eight psychosocial stages, it is the fifth stage – Identity vs. Role Confusion -- that captures the most attention from both scholars and the lay public.

Although Erikson situated identity formation in adolescence, and identity issues are indeed a major (if not *the* major) focus of the adolescent years, there is no reason to suspect that identity work is limited to the adolescent years. In fact, it is now apparent that identity issues remain relevant and may be addressed or revisited over the course of adulthood (see Schwartz, Adamson, Ferrer-Wreder, Dillon, & Berman, 2006; Graham, Sorell, & Montgomery, 2004; Whitbourne, Sneed, & Skultety, 2002; Van Manen & Whitbourne, 1997).

Definitions of Identity

A reading of the literature reveals that definitions of identity abound, with these definitions ranging in nature from the highly turgid to the relatively simplistic. In Erikson's (1980) words, identity is "the accrued confidence that one's ability to maintain inner sameness and continuity (one's ego in the psychological sense) is matched by the sameness and continuity of one's meaning for others" (p. 94). Marcia (1980) defines identity "as a self-structure—an internal, self-constructed, dynamic organization of drives, abilities, beliefs, and individual history" (p. 159). Waterman (1988) defines identity as a self-definition consisting of goals, values, and beliefs to which a person is committed, and Burke (1991) writes that "An identity is a set of 'meanings' applied to the self in a social role or situation defining what it means to be who one is" (p. 837). Perhaps the most easily digestible definition of identity comes from Stryker and Serpe (1982) who write that "Identities are reflexively applied cognitions in the form of answers to the question 'Who am I?'" (p. 206). According to White, Wampler, and Winn (1998), the search for identity is typified by questions such as Who am I? Where am I going?

What will I become? Failure to settle on an identity for oneself is termed "role confusion," which arises when individuals are not able to commit to definite life choices (DeHaan & MacDermid, 1996). The individual who fails to settle on a stable and coherent sense of personal identity is basically directionless, drifting through life aimlessly like the proverbial ship without a rudder, going wherever the currents may take it.

Conceptualizations of Identity

Theorists and researchers from various disciplines, traditions, and perspectives have attempted to describe identity development. The dominant post-Erikson view of identity was formulated by Marcia (1980) whose paradigm features four statuses by which identity issues are resolved, with the individual's status being determined by two factors: (1) the presence or absence of a period of exploration, and (2) the individual's commitment to self-chosen goals. People who have engaged in identity exploration, and who have committed to personally relevant goals, are categorized as identity achieved. Individuals who have committed without engaging in identity exploration are considered foreclosed. Individuals who are diffused have neither engaged in exploration nor committed to personally relevant goals. Finally, people who are currently engaged in identity exploration, but have not yet made commitments, are said to be inmoratorium. These are individuals currently experiencing what one might think of as an "identity crisis."

While it is true that Marcia's identity status paradigm has dominated identity research over the past several decades (Berzonsky, 1997), the paradigm has been criticized for its focus on identity as an outcome variable and its neglect of the processes that underlie identity development (see Kerpelman, Pittman, &Lamke, 1997). An alternative to the status paradigm is Berzonsky's (1989) process interpretation of identity development which emphasizes the social-cognitive substrates of identity.

Berzonsky's (1997) theory of identity and identity processes draws from Kelly's (1955) personal construct theory. In this view, identity is seen as something that is to be constructed not "discovered." According to Berzonsky, an identity is essentially a theory of the self consisting of assumptions, constructs, and postulates relevant to the self. Self-theories serve a pragmatic function in that they act as interpretive and problem-solving frameworks that have to be monitored, evaluated, and revised (when appropriate) across the lifespan in order to maintain efficacy.

Individuals vary in how they monitor, utilize, test, and revise their identities (Berzonsky, 1997). Berzonsky (1989, 1997) refers to these different ways of approaching and navigating identity issues as identity styles. Three identity styles are proposed: the informational style, the normative style, and the diffuse-avoidant style. The informational style entails an orientation to explore, as well as actively seeking out, processing, and evaluating self-relevant information.

The normative style is characterized by a less powerful orientation to explore, a concern with the standards and expectations of significant others (e.g., parents and other authority figures), and a resistance against information that challenges or calls into question currently held beliefs and values. Finally, the hallmarks of the diffuse-avoidant style are procrastination and an avoidance of dealing with personally relevant issues, with this delay in dealing with personally relevant issues resulting in a tendency for situational demands and consequences to determine a course of action. While people are capable of using all three styles, they may develop a preferred style that may vary from one identity domain to another. Berzonsky's identity styles correlate with Marcia's statuses, with the informational style being consistent with the moratorium and achieved statuses, while the normative and diffuse-avoidant styles correspond to the foreclosed and diffused statuses, respectively.

Identity, Authoritarianism, and Procrastination

Previous research has revealed associations between the normative style and authoritarianism and the diffuse-avoidant style and procrastination. With regard to authoritarianism, Marcia (1967) found a tendency for foreclosures (characterized by a normative orientation) to endorse authoritarian values more. Subsequent scholars have found that the normative orientation is typified by internalizing and conforming to the standards, expectations, values, beliefs, and ways of coping of authority figures and significant others (White, Wampler, & Winn, 1998; Berzonsky, 1992; Nurmi, Berzonsky, Tammi, & Kinney, 1997). Berzonsky and Sullivan (1992) found a tendency among normatives not to seek problem-relevant information unless from a high prestige source, a tendency that is quite authoritarian in nature, and Soenens, Berzonsky, Vansteenkiste, Beyers, and Goosens (2005) found that normatives are characterized by a controlled causality orientation, meaning that they organize their behavior on the basis of external controls and constraints and tend to define themselves in terms of the norms and expectations held by significant others (e.g., parents and other authority figures). Finally, Duriez and Soenens (2006) found that the normative style is positively related to right wing authoritarianism (characterized by a submissive orientation toward authority figures, as well as a reliance on authorities and significant referent groups).

In general, authoritarianism may be thought of as a predisposition "to act in an obedient and respectful manner in situations in which there is a socially sanctioned expectation that an overt or implied command or request will be followed" (Rigby, 1987, p. 616). While a general acceptance of norms and authority may be desirable, necessary even, for civil society, authoritarians view and adhere to social norms and authority in a manner that is both less critical and more dogmatic. Questioning conventions or authority figures is virtually absent from the cognitive or behavioral repertoires of the authoritarian. Actually violating conventions or the dictates of authority figures is an even more remote possibility where the authoritarian is concerned.

Altemeyer (1996; 1988) defines authoritarianism in terms of three attitudinal clusters: authoritarian submission, authoritarian aggression, and conventialism. As used in this paper, "authoritarianism" corresponds to Altemeyer's concepts of authoritarian submission and conventialism. Authoritarian submission involves a general acceptance of the statements and actions of perceived established authorities and a general willingness to comply with their instructions without further inducement (Altemeyer, 1996). Basically, authoritarians believe that authorities should be trusted, respected, and obeyed. Such individuals assume that authority figures know what is best and display indignation when people criticize or disobey authorities.

Conventialism, according to Altemeyer (1996), entails a pronounced acceptance of, and adherence to, the traditional social norms of one's society. Social conventions are viewed as both moral and social imperatives,

with authoritarians rejecting the notions that social customs are arbitrary and that one group's customs are as good as another's (Altemeyer, 1996). The authoritarian's adherence to social norms is highly resistant to change, and authoritarians are likely to view failure or refusal to abide by social norms as "wrong," sinful, or deviant.

Milgram's (1974) experiments on obedience demonstrated that *most* people can be induced to obey authority figures, and as Altemeyer (1988) points out, even to commit callous, hideous acts. The fact is, however, that some people can be induced to obey with significantly less pressure or prodding. Authoritarianism is of practical concern and interest because individuals who are highly pro-authority can be transformed easily into what Milgram called an "agentic state" by virtue of being "set" to obey (Rigby, 1987). Once in such an agentic state, there are few limits as to what an individual will do at the behest of authority, even if it involves violating one's conscience and harming others.

The diffuse-avoidant orientation has been associated with procrastination (Adams, Berzonsky, & Keating, 2006; Nurmi, Berzonsky, Tammi, & Kinney, 1997; Berzonsky, 1993; Berzonsky, 1990). The tendency is for those with a diffuse-avoidant identity style to delay or avoid dealing with things until eventually a course of behavior is determined by situational/contextual consequences. In other words, where the diffuse-avoidant orientation is concerned, there is seldom any advanced planning or work. To the contrary, course of action tends to be determined by the immediate situation. Procrastination may be defined as a failure to get things done in a timely manner (Haycock, McCarthy, &Skay, 1998) or as a tendency to put off doing something until a future date (Johnson, Green, &Kluever, 2000). Occasional procrastination is not unusual, but for some people procrastination is a chronic tendency that causes significant problems (Balkis &Duru, 2007). External consequences associated with procrastination include academic problems (Balkis &Duru, 2007; Ferrari, Keane, Wolfe, & Beck, 1998; Burka & Yuen, 1983), work/professional problems (Balkis &Duru, 2007; Burka & Yuen, 1983), and strained relationships (Balkis &Duru, 2007; Burka & Yuen, 1983). Internal consequences of procrastination include various forms of psychological distress (Balkis &Duru, 2007; Tice & Baumeister, 1997; Burka & Yuen, 1983). Rather interestingly, Tice and Baumeister (1997) found that procrastinators report less stress in the short term, but over time, actually end up suffering from more stress and health problems than non-procrastinators.

Purpose

The present study sought to replicate the findings of previous scholars with regard to the relationship between the normative identity style and authoritarianism and between the diffuse/avoidant style and procrastination. The merits of replication are detailed cogently by Park (2004) who was provoked to study the topic when review comments on a proposed replication study included the question, "What is the value of replication?"

Two major purposes of replication are: (1) to strengthen a theory so that it will become part of our general knowledge system, and (2) to test its truth or veracity to determine if it should be supported as knowledge at all (Park, 2004). Before a result can serve as a basis for theory, it needs to pass the test of reproductability (Amir in Park, 2004). In fact, if theories or research findings are sound, they ought to stand up under repeated replications. The only way to guarantee that a phenomenon is robust is repeated replication by independent researchers (McElvie in Park, 2004). The fallibility of social science research makes replication even more important (Tsang & Kwan, 1999).

Although relatively rare in the social sciences, where there is great pressure to be original, replication studies have much to offer. Unfortunately, as Park (2004) points out, when a replication study supports a finding or theory, the attitude of publishers is "So what?" or "We already knew it." Therefore, despite the fact that replication is critical to the validity of research findings, descriptions of replication studies in the social science literature are rare, as it can be quite difficult for researchers involved in such endeavors to find publication outlets for their work.

Method

Sample

The sample for this study consisted of 99 emerging adults (Mean age =21.84) enrolled in introductory psychology courses. By gender, the sample was 68% female and32% male. In terms of ethnicity, of the sample was predominantly of European ancestry (78%),with most of the remaining participants being African American (20%). Participants received extra credit for participating in this study.

Measures

Participants completed a questionnaire that included measures of identity style, authoritarianism, and procrastination. These measures are described below.

Identity Style Inventory - Revised for a Sixth-Grade Reading Level (ISI-6G). Identity style was assessed with the Identity Style Inventory Revised for a Sixth-Grade Reading Level (ISI-6G) (White, Wampler, & Winn, 1998), a 40-item measure that participants complete using a 5-point Likert-type scale. In the present study, the ISI-6G revealed only marginal reliability, with coefficient alphas as follows: Information = .56, Diffuse-avoidant = .67, and Normative = .61. Means for the three ISI-6G scales used in this study were as follows: Information = 39.67 (SD = 4.84), Normative = 30.57 (SD = 5.29), and Diffuse/avoidant = 26.13 (SD = 6.00). With regard to actual assignment to identity style, 28.3% of participants were classified as using an information-oriented style, 33.3% a normative style, and 38.4% a diffuse/avoidant style.

Authority Behavior Inventory (ABI). Acceptance of authority (authoritarian submission and conventionalism) was measured using 12 items from the Authority Behavior Inventory (Rigby, 1987). A sample item reads, "Do you show special respect for people in high positions?" Participants responded to each statement using a 5-point Likert-type scale (1=Never, 5=Very frequently). The 12 items showed acceptable reliability (alpha = .77). Scores ranged from 23 to 55, with the mean authoritarianism score being 44.03 (SD = 6.66). Higher scores indicated a greater degree of authoritarian submission and conventionalism.

Procrastination Scale. Tendency toward procrastination was assessed using 10 items from the Procrastination Scale (Tuckman, 1991). An example of the type of item on the PS is "I postpone starting on things that I don't like to do." In terms of reliability, the 10 items used in this study showed acceptable reliability (alpha = .78). Scores ranged from 15 to 37 (Mean = 24.38, SD = 5.52), with higher scores reflecting a greater tendency toward procrastination.

Hypotheses

This study was guided by several hypotheses:
1. A normative orientation would be associated with higher authoritarianism scores.
2. The diffuse-avoidant style would be associated with a greater tendency toward procrastination.
3. An informational orientation would be associated with lower authoritarianism and procrastination scores.

Results

Correlations

Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were calculated for raw scores on the information, normative, and diffuse-avoidant scales of the ISI-6G, authoritarianism, and procrastination. As can be seen in Table 1, scores on both the normative and information scales of the ISI-6G were positively associated with authoritarianism score, while diffuse-avoidant score was negatively related to scores on the measure of authoritarianism. Concurrently, there was a significant positive relationship between diffuse-avoidant score and procrastination.

Normative score was inversely related to procrastination score, while there was no relationship whatsoever between information score and procrastination.

Table 1 Bivariate Correlations between ISI-6G Raw Scores, Authoritarianism, and Procrastination

		1	2	3	4	5
1.	Information					
2.	Normative	.35**				
3.	Diffuse/Avoidant	-.23*	-.03			
4.	Authoritarianism	.44**	.46**	-.22*		
5.	Procrastination	.01	-.29**	.26*	-.10	

Note. **$p < .01$ *$p < .05$
Authoritarianism by Identity Style

It had been expected that participants with a normative orientation would score significantly higher on the measure of authoritarianism than participants with either an information or a diffuse-avoidant orientation. To test this expectation, analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to compare the three identity styles in terms of participants' authoritarianism scores. For this analysis, participants were classified in terms of their "dominant" style.

Results supported the hypothesis, indicating significant differences in authoritarianism scores on the basis of identity style [$F_{(2, 96)} = 10.31$, $p < .01$]. Descriptive statistics are shown in Table 2. Of the three

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identity styles, the normative style was associated with the highest authoritarianism scores. Individuals classified as diffuse-avoidant had the lowest mean authoritarianism score. Although the normative and informational styles did not differ significantly in terms of authoritarianism score, both styles were associated with significantly higher authoritarianism scores than the diffuse-avoidant style.

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations for Authoritarianism and Procrastination by Identity Style

	Identity Style		
Variable	Information	Normative	Diffuse-Avoidant
Authoritarianism			
Mean	44.84$_a$	47.18$_a$	40.70$_b$
Standard Deviation	5.28	5.29	7.22
Procrastination			
Mean	25.00$_{ab}$	21.78$_a$	26.13$_b$
Standard Deviation	6.21	4.23	5.27

Note. Means in the same row with different subscripts differ significantly. $_{ab}$ Not significantly different from the means for either of the other identity styles.

Procrastination by Identity Style

It was anticipated that the diffuse-avoidant style would be associated with the highest mean procrastination score. This hypothesis was tested using a one-way (identity style x procrastination) ANOVA. Results indicated a significant effect for identity style [$F (2, 94) = 6.24$, $p < .05$] (See Table 2 for means and standard deviations). Individuals classified as diffuse-avoidanthad the highest mean procrastination score, while individuals classified as normative had the lowest. Although diffuse-avoidant participants had a significantly higher mean procrastination score than participants classified as normative, there were no significant differences in procrastination score between individuals with an informational orientation and individuals categorized as either diffuse-avoidant or normative.

Regression Analyses

Linear regression analyses were employed to evaluate the amount of variance in authoritarianism and procrastination explained by raw scores on the information, normative, and diffuse-avoidant scales of the ISI-6G. Results demonstrated that scores on the identity scales were predictive of both authoritarianism and procrastination. In the first regression, scores on the ISI-6G scales accounted for 33% of the variance in authoritarianism score [$F (3, 94) = 15.68$, $p < .01$]. Results of the second regression indicated that identity style scores explained 17% of the variance in procrastination score [$F (3, 94) = 6.42$, $p < .01$].

Discussion

The results of this study add to the growing literature on the influence and correlates of identity style and the merit of the identity style construct. Previous scholars have proposed associations between the normative identity style and authoritarianism (Duriez and Soenens, 2006; Soenens et al., 2005; White et al., 1998; Berzonsky, 1992; Nurmi et al., 1997, Berzonsky & Sullivan, 1992) and between the diffuse-avoidant style and procrastination (Adams et al., 2006; Nurmi et al., 1997; Berzonsky, 1993; Berzonsky, 1990). This study's results replicate the findings of previous scholars and unambiguously demonstrate normative-authoritarianism and diffuse/avoidant-procrastination nexuses. Based on the work of previous scholars, three hypotheses were explored:

1. A normative orientation would be associated with higher authoritarianism scores.
2. The diffuse-avoidant style would be associated with a greater tendency toward procrastination.
3. An informational orientation would be associated with lower authoritarianism and procrastination scores.

The first two hypotheses received strong support. Of the three identity styles, the normative style was associated with the highest mean authoritarianism score, a finding entirely consistent with previous literature. A concurrent finding was that the diffuse/avoidant style was associated with the lowest authoritarianism scores.

With regard to the second hypothesis, it was found that the diffuse/avoidant style was related to the highest procrastination scores. This finding replicates what previous scholars have found. At the same time, the normative style was associated with the lowest mean procrastination score.

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The third hypothesis was not supported by this study's findings. Results indicated individuals with an informational orientation did not differ significantly from individuals categorized as either diffuse-avoidant or normative in terms of procrastination score. Interestingly, results indicated a positive association between the information style and authoritarianism, a finding that was unexpected as the informational style typically is associated with openness to experience, consideration of information from a variety of sources, and critical thinking as opposed to blind adherence to dogma, convention, and authority. Berzonsky (personal communication, June 4, 2007) suggested that commitment may moderate the informational-authoritarianism relationship. In other words, he raised the possibility that highly committed individuals with high informational scores may tend to be authoritarian (or at least close-minded) whereas less committed individuals with high informational scores may be more open-minded.

To test Berzonsky's proposition, the sample was divided into high commitment and low commitment groups on the basis of a median split. Then the authoritarianism scores of individuals with high informational and high commitment scores were compared to the authoritarianism scores of individuals with high informational but low commitment scores.

The difference between the two groups was statistically significant, $t(96) = -3.64$, $p < .001$. Individuals with high informational and high commitment scores had significantly higher authoritarianism scores (M = 45.69, SD = 5.50) than individuals with high informational but low commitment scores (M = 40.87, SD = 7.49). These findings, therefore, support the idea that level of commitment moderates the association between the informational style and authoritarianism.

The assumption here is that both authoritarianism and procrastination are related to outcomes that are less than desirable. Authoritarianism is, after all, inconsistent with tolerance, freedom, and democratic values, and procrastination is associated with a host of maladaptive outcomes and appears to be antithetical to achievement and well-being in various life domains (e.g., academic, career, relationship). The relationship between the normative style and authoritarianism and the relationship between the diffuse/avoidant style and procrastination are best envisioned as cognitive-behavioral complexes. Taking a systemic view, by changing one element, you change the nature of the complex.

A growing body of evidence suggests that it is possible to direct identity development processes (see Duriez&Soenens, 2006). Programs can be developed to promote an informational orientation and to preclude or modify normative and diffuse/avoidant orientations.

By steering individuals away from normative and diffuse/avoidant orientations, it logically follows that tendencies toward authoritarianism and procrastination are altered as well. Programs for diffuse/avoidant individuals might feature activities designed to encourage meaningful exploration, decision making, problem solving, future viewing, goal setting, and delay of gratification (White & Jones, 1996; Jones et al., 1992). Individuals employing a normative style might benefit from interventions focused on encouraging exploration, forming alternative commitments, and shifting from an external to an internal orientation (Jones et al., 1992; White & Jones, 1996). In terms of the timing of such attempts to direct or alter identity style, while identity work may occur throughout the lifespan, it is probably desirable to start earlier (i.e., in adolescence) rather than later since adolescents are likely more malleable than people who are well into adulthood.

Limitations

A key limitation of this study was the relatively small sample drawn exclusively from a single region of the U.S. Another potential limitation is that this paper does make certain assumptions (e.g., an informational style is preferred over a normative or diffuse/avoidant style, authoritarianism and procrastination are traits to be discouraged). Although some might take exception to these assumptions, the reader is reminded that they are based on empirical research findings and not the subjective views or preferences of the author. A final limitation has to do with the poor reliability of the ISI-6G. The measure has demonstrated disappointing reliability, not just in this study, but in other studies as well (for instance, see the reliabilities reported in White et al.,1997).

Conclusion

The study described in this paper has replicated the findings of previous identity scholars by demonstrating an association between the normative identity style and authoritarianism and between the diffuse/avoidant style and procrastination. The task now is to take what is known about identity style and the correlates of identity style to policy makers, educators, and people involved in fields such as mental health, social work, and corrections, and impress upon them the relationship between identity style and various life outcomes and the importance of developing and dedicating resources to effective educational and intervention programs intended to place individuals on trajectories more likely to result in positive life outcomes and the full realization of potential.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Ethical approval: All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Informed consent: Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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