Identity Formation, nAchievement, and Fear of Success in College Men and Women

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This study examined the performance of male and female identity statuses on achievement-related variables to clarify whether the four identity positions have different consequences for men and women. Previous research had suggested that an identity crisis period (achievement and moratorium) was more adaptive for males, while identity commitment, with or without a crisis period (achievement and foreclosure), was more adaptive for females. Identity status was determined for 111 college men and women who were tested for nAchievement, fear of success, fear of failure, and self-esteem. As predicted, identity achievement and moratorium men and women scored higher in achievement motivation and self-esteem than foreclosure and diffusion subjects. However, while diffusions and foreclosures were highest in fear of success of the male statuses, moratoriums and achievements were highest in fear of success of the female statuses. Contrary to previous research, the results indicate that moratorium women resemble identity achievements more than foreclosure women do, at least on achievement-related and self-concept variables, and suggest reasons why moratorium has appeared in past research to be a less adaptive status and foreclosure a more adaptive status for women.

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INTRODUCTION

Marcia's technique (1966) for assessing Erikson's construct (1959, 1963) of ego identity has stimulated considerable research interest. This approach describes four identity positions or styles individuals adopt to cope with the problem of arriving at a stable self-definition as they make the transition from adolescence to adulthood. These four identity "statuses" are based on the criteria of crisis and commitment in the areas of occupation and ideology (these being the areas specified by Erikson as particularly relevant to assumption of the adult role in Western society). "Crisis" refers to an active selection among meaningful alternatives with questioning of former choices and beliefs, and commitment refers to the degree of investment in the chosen alternatives. Identity achievement individuals have experienced a crisis and have emerged with stable occupational and ideological commitments. Moratorium individuals are currently in crisis, with commitments lacking or vague. Those in the foreclosure status have experienced no crisis and have firm, usually parentally determined, commitments. Identity diffusions lack commitments and, unlike moratorium individuals, are not in crisis attempting to arrive at a commitment.

Identity status is determined by means of a 20-30 minute semistructured interview. Interjudge reliability and construct validity for the statuses have been established in several studies (Marcia, 1966; Marcia and Friedman, 1970).

The early research with the identity statuses was conducted using male subjects only. Most of this research has shown that the most adaptive status for men is identity achievement, followed by moratorium (the status which by being "in crisis" is closest in chronological proximity to identity achievement). Identity achievement subjects appear fairly stable, able to establish and pursue realistic goals, and able to cope with sudden shifts in the environment. These subjects tend to have the highest grade point averages of all the statuses (Cross and Allen, 1970). Since identity achievements are no higher in overall intelligence than the other statuses (Jordan, 1971; Marcia, 1966), their higher grade point averages are probably a function of their greater stability and goal orientation. In addition, achievements and moratoriums have been shown to be higher in overall ego identity (Marcia, 1966), to perform better on a concept attainment task under stress, to be less susceptible to self-esteem manipulation (Marcia, 1967), to be more reflective (as opposed to impulsive) in their decision-making styles (Waterman and Waterman, 1974), to have a higher level of moral judgment (Podd, 1969) and a more internal locus of control (Waterman et al., 1970), and to be more capable of intimate engagement with peers (Orlofsky et al., 1973) than foreclosures or diffusions, the less developmentally mature statuses. Additional findings for the statuses are that moratoriums report the highest anxiety levels (consistent with their currently being in crisis) and are lowest in authoritarianism, foreclosures being the most authoritarian status (Marcia, 1966, 1967).