Exploring Three Approaches to Identity Development

Diane M. Ganiere and Robert D. Enright

Received February 1989; accepted March 28, 1989

Identifications from the past, current feedback from social relations, and one's own priorities combine to make up one's identity. These insights were incorporated into three separate identity development programs and administered to 57 high school seniors. Pretests and posttests included the Rasmussen Scale of Ego-Identity and a Self-Identity Social-Similarity Grid. Significant differences in change were demonstrated on the grid between the experimental groups and the control. That there were no significant changes in the Rasmussen scores highlights the diverse attempts to operationalize the many aspects of Erikson's theory. Suggestions for administering and evaluating future identity development programs are made.

INTRODUCTION

Many in the field of adolescent psychology have called for intervention programs to improve identity development (Adams and Gullotta, 1983; Garbarino, 1985; Jensen, 1985; Santrock, 1987). In response to the need there have been several interventions in the published literature. Enright and his colleagues focused on the adolescents' understanding of the various ways in which they were similar to, yet different from other persons and groups (Enright and Deist, 1979; Enright et al., 1983; Enright et al., February 1980; Enright, et al., 1980). They were able to measure identity development from short-term interventions on the Rasmussen Ego Identity Scale (1964). Bernard (1979) concentrated on adolescents' understanding of their own per-
sonal history, alternatives for development, and sources of gratification, but found no significant change when testing participants with Marcia's Identity Status Interview (1966). Rachman (1972) had adolescents reflect upon those with whom they identify, their own values and directions; he implied success but did not report any measures. Overby-Christopher (1978) and Levinger and Toomey (1982) have also emphasized values clarifications as means for strengthening identity; both studies relied on participant acclaim as proof of success. Given the modest results in the above studies, it seemed appropriate to attempt a more robust intervention. The purpose of our efforts was to pinpoint the major components that might stimulate identity and then test their effects on an adolescent sample.

There are three key concepts for intervention that consistently emerge in the literature. One of them is that identity consists of self perceptions and images derived from others' perceptions of oneself. Erikson (1960, p. 47) says "in the baby's earliest exchange of smiles there is something of a self-realization coupled with a mutual recognition. . . ." This process of feedback continues through adolescence and adulthood (Erikson, 1959). Horrocks and Jackson (1971) note that once conscious identity becomes an issue the individual's actions are not based solely on others' judgments, but find their source in an internal structure of concepts that have been substantiated over a period of time. However, even at the highest stages of maturity, one's self-perceptions are not likely to be invulnerable to opinion. Ahammer (1973) states that one of the factors conducive to identity change is lack of social reward.

Another concept in identity development literature is that "social-self" perceptions and images are strongly influenced by early identifications. Erikson (1960) describes early identifications as nonselective and uncontrollable, and depending on satisfactory mutuality between mothering adults and the mothered child. Breger (1960) gives an example of how incorporating parental roles helps the child cope with his or her own impulses and anxieties, as well as the demands of the larger society. Erikson describes the later process of identity development as a subordination of significant childhood identifications influenced by the circle of peer and broader social interactions:

Identity formation, finally, begins where the usefulness of identification ends. It arises from the selective repudiation and mutual assimilation of childhood identifications, and their absorption in a new configuration.

(Erikson, 1960, p. 47)

The third concept shared by most writers on the topic of identity development is that social-self perceptions are influenced by values. In Erikson's work, values emerge insofar as values inevitably play a part in an individual's choices. He clarifies: "from among all possible and imaginable relations, he must make a series of every narrowing selections of personal, occupational, sexual, and ideological commitments." (Erikson, 1960, p. 11).