

A Study of Construct Validity of the Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status with
a Sample of Canadian University Students

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Abstract

A validity study was completed to establish that the four ego-identity statuses are associated with the five types of identity functions as indicated by Erikson (1968) and elaborated by Adams and Marshall (1996). Approximately 1500 first year, first semester, university students completed the Objective Measure of Ego-Identity Status and the Identity Functions Scale. Correlations, regressions, and analyses of variance, consistently demonstrated that identity achievement is associated with the emergence of five ego-identity executive functions. This is the first study to validate the construct validity of the 24 item OMEIS with a Canadian student population. Further, the investigation suggests that both statuses and identity functions could be used in the study of identity formation.

A Study of Construct Validity of the Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status with a Sample of Canadian University Students

As Erik Erikson (1968) wrote his classic book on identity and crisis, Marcia (1966) utilized his theoretical perspectives to construct an interview measure of ego-identity statuses. Using the constructs of crisis (or exploration) and commitment, Marcia devised four identity statuses that could be established using a semi-structured interview. These identity statuses are well-known as diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, and achievement. In the original validation study of what is now called the identity status paradigm, Marcia used a projective test of identity formation as one of his key validity indicators and later a variety of measures in personality and social behavior (see Marcia, et al. 1993 for a review). The ego-identity constructs emerged as four useful categories to compare and contrast individual differences in identity formation and also became a tool for measuring ego-identity development (Adams & Fitch, 1982; Marica, 1976; Waterman, 1982).

Stimulated by the ideas and measurement strategies of James Marcia, and the study of identity development by Alan Waterman, and with the help of many, I constructed a self-report technique known as the Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status (OMEIS: Adams, Shea & Fitch, 1979). Important revisions and extensions of this research expanded to include self-report measures of ideological ego-identity and interpersonal (social) ego-identity (e.g., Bennion & Adams, 1988; Grotevant & Adams, 1984). The original instrument was 24 items and in the extended versions of the OMEIS, 32 items were used to measure each of ideological and interpersonal identity (total 64 items). Much of the construct validation of this measure was determined by the use of exploratory factor analysis (Adams et al., 1979), comparisons and congruence between identity statuses using the interview and self-report technique (e.g., Craig-Bray & Adams, 1986), comparisons of the identity statuses on a variety of psychological constructs and social behaviors (e.g., Adams, Ryan, Hoffman, Dobson & Nielsen, 1985; Read, Adams, & Dobson, 1984) with the most important distinctions observed for measures of ego stage development, psychological differentiation, and psychological integration.

As reported in Berzonsky and Adams (1999), diffusion is associated with low differentiation and integration, foreclosure with low differentiation and moderate integration, moratorium with high differentiation and low integration, and identity achievement with high differentiation and integration. These distinctions are consistent with Erikson's (1968) notions of the organizational principle of differentiation and integration that conceptually begin with cell growth, the differentiation and integration of organs, the operations among organ systems, and psychology and social growth and development. The comparisons of identity statuses and ego stage development (Loevinger, 1976) were an approximation of establishing differing connections between the identity statuses and ego mechanisms (Adams & Fitch, 1982). The OMEIS and two extended versions are still widely used to measure ego-identity statuses or scores for identity statuses on a continuous scale score.

It is unfortunate that the construction of the various measures of ego-identity statuses has not included a construct validation of ego-identity and the functions of identity as defined and delineated by Erikson (1968) and elaborated by Adams and Marshall (1996). In the reference manual (Adams & Ethier, 1999), I have provided evidence that there are five major functions. I

will summarize the original foundation of evidence suggesting promise for the study of identity functions of ego-identity statuses. Then I will summarize some recent test construction of a measure of identity functions (Serafini & Adams, 2002) and provide a rationale for the validation studied reported in this article.

Initial Theoretical and Empirical Foundation

Erikson (1968) does not prioritize the ego functions that accompany identity. Rather, he presents executive ego functions intermixed throughout his writing. No function is presented as subordinate to the others. Indeed, with his attention to psychological unity it would be inconsistent from his perspective to divide by essential importance what is thought to be indivisible.

One executive function of identity is to provide the structure for understanding who one is. Therefore, an individual who has an achieved identity would be expected to show low levels of anxiety about the self. This may involve aspects such as self-consciousness, self-esteem and self-acceptance. In the first of a series of studies, Adams, Abraham and Markstrom (1987) found ideologically achieved youth to be less self-conscious and the least self-focused. Additionally, Bennion (1988) and Owen (1984) established that identity statuses correlate with positive body and self-image scales as well as self-esteem and self-acceptance. Such research suggests that self-understanding is connected with important features of self-esteem.

Another function of identity is to provide meaning and direction through commitments, values and goals. Adams, Shea and Fitch (1979) found that identity achieved participants showed significantly more commitment than diffused youths. Commitment can be evaluated by examining the sincerity of relationships that adolescents hold (Archer & Waterman, 1988) and the importance of religious values in adolescents' lives (Markstrom-Adams, Hofstra & Dougher, 1994). Indeed, achieved individuals approach romantic relationships in a more deliberate fashion and are more willing to share personal information with their partners (Archer & Waterman, 1988). Further, identity achieved individuals have been shown to be goal-directed and self-motivated (Blustein & Palladino, 1991).

Providing a sense of personal control and free will is another function of identity. According to Abraham (1983) the construct of locus of control refers to the extent that individuals believe they, rather than fate, chance or powerful others, hold the responsibility for reinforcement in their lives. Identity achieved individuals have been shown to report the least and diffused youth the most amount of external locus of control (Abraham, 1983; Francis, 1981; Bennion, 1988). This suggests that achieved individuals may believe that they control their own lives rather than social forces that are external to them. Conformity is also related to an adolescent's or youth's ability to maintain personal control. Adams, Ryan, Hoffman, Dobson and Nielsen (1985) have demonstrated that conformity to peers was significantly more likely among diffused versus achieved college students.

Another executive function of identity is to strive for consistency, coherence and harmony among values, beliefs, and commitments. According to Carlson (1986) achieved youth, who presumably have coherent commitments, are significantly more adjusted than diffused

youths in comparisons of overall academic adjustment. Intrinsic religious orientations are characteristic of this function of identity. According to Fulton (1997) an individual possessing an intrinsic internalized religious belief pursues it as an end in itself rather than a means to some other end, whereas an individual possessing an extrinsic social orientation uses religions as a means toward social gain. Fulton found that achieved individuals have high intrinsic and low extrinsic social orientation.

Also, a function of identity is to enable the recognition of potential through a sense of future possibilities and alternative identity choices. Two areas of major concern for an adolescent's recognition of potential are achievement or grades and career planning for the future. According to Francis (1981), achieved youth report significantly more desire to continue their studies and have higher GPA scores than diffused subjects. Additionally, adolescents committed to an identity are associated with increased career planning and decidedness (Wallace-Brosious, Serafical & Osipow, 1994). Adolescents who are identity achieved also subscribe more strongly to the idea that aspects of work represent a viable vehicle for satisfying their future aspirations than adolescents who are identity-diffused (Vondracek, Schulenberg, Skorikov, Gillespie & Wahlheim, 1995).

This historical summary of initial studies suggested early on that there are bits and pieces of evidence to suggest that Erikson was correct in his ideas that a variety of identity functions could be supported by social science evidence. It would be possible to elaborate on many other studies to support the identity functions concept but this is beyond the purpose of this report.

Measurement of the Functions of Identity

With the recognition that there is published evidence on the potential utility of building a direct measure of identity functions, Serafini and Adams (2002) have constructed a set of scale items that measure the executive functions of identity. Initial items have been constructed and validated. Further scale development is ongoing using the systematic research program that was used in the original development of the OMEIS. Perhaps most important of our early finds is that passive forms of identity, such as diffusion and foreclosure, versus more actively self-constructed forms of identity, such as moratorium and achievement, have been found to differ significantly on the identity functions scale. Further, Serafini, Adams and Maitland (2003) have found that diffuse-avoidant adolescents score lower on the functions of identity than informational identity adolescents using a measure of identity styles (Berzonsky, 1989).

Rationale for a Construct Validation of the OMEIS

Theoretical writing by Erikson (1968) has indicated that identity formation should be accompanied by a series of important executive ego (cognitive operations) functions. These ego functions have been identified in Erikson's writing, detailed by Adams and Marshall (1996), and new measurement tools for the study of ego-identity functions have been constructed (Serafini & Adams, 2002). Each of these actions now allow for an Erikson-based validation study to be completed to establish that diffusion, foreclosure, and moratorium are either not associated, or associated with lower levels, of the five executive ego-identity functions. In contrast higher identity achieved youths should report higher levels of identity functions. Further, this validation

study is being undertaken with a Canadian university population, where no validation studies for the OMEIS have been established.

Methods

Sample

A random sample of 3000 entering first year students at the University of Guelph in Ontario, Canada, was contacted with a request to participate in this study. Of the original sample of 3000 requests, 333 males and 957 females provided completed surveys. All participants were first year, first semester students enrolled across all of the majors at a comprehensive university. Respondents were predominantly White youth from working middle-class households.

Procedure

With ethics review board and registrar's approval and assistance, students were contacted with a message requesting participation. Students were directed to a web-based survey on a server at the University of Guelph. Students not completing the survey in the first week were contacted by email a second time as a reminder. Students were assured of confidentiality, the right to withdraw, and were given two email and phone numbers to call if there were any questions. A series of incentive lotteries were used to motivate participants.

Measurements

Ego-identity statuses. The 24 item Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status survey (Adams, Fitch & Shea, 1979) was used to assess the ego-identity statuses. See the appendix for items used in this study. This brief 24 item version was used due to its brevity and frequent use in survey studies. Identity statuses are based on responses to the ideological dimensions associated with occupation, politics, and religion. These dimensions reflect the Eriksonian focus on the power and role of social institutions on ego-identity development. A 6-point scale from 1-strongly disagree to 6 strongly agree was used in this study. Marcia et al (1993) have described this instrument as the premiere self-report scale measuring ego-identity. Diffusion represents low exploration and low commitment, foreclosure represents low exploration and moderate to high commitment, moratorium represents high exploration and low commitments, with identity achievement representing high exploration and high commitments. Cronbach alpha in data from this study were as follows: diffusion (alpha = .63), foreclosure (alpha = .67), moratorium (alpha = .64), and identity achievement (alpha = .67). The total subscales scores for each of the identity statuses were used in this study for the primary analyses and the more familiar identity status paradigm categorical classification was used in a secondary analysis. Adams, Fitch and Shea (1979) developed the instrument to be used either way with a recommended preference for using summed scale scores for each of the identity statuses that uses the full distribution of variance in a given sample. Further, this strategy avoids the use of a single typology to represent a participant's nature and recognizes that aspects of each identity status exist in every person.

Functions of identity. Serafini and Adams (2002) have constructed the Identity Functions Scale to measure the executive ego functions detailed by Adams and Marshall (1996) based on

Eriksonian writing. Two related studies were completed to establish substantive, structural, and external validity of the scales. The scales measured (a) structure or self-understanding, (b) goals, values and commitments, (c) harmony and consistency of values, (d) willfulness or self-chosen direction, and (e) future potential for the self. Three items were used for each of the five functions with a response format of 1 = never, 2=seldom, 3=sometimes, 4=often, and 5=always. Example items are as follows: structure or self-understanding includes “I accept who I am.”: goals, values and commitments, “I tend to set goals and then work towards making them happen”: harmony and consistency, “I feel I have a consistent sense of self from one day to the next”: willfulness, “I make my own decisions in life: and future, “I do not have a sense of a tangible ture ahead of me (e.g., career)”. Cronbach alphas using the data reported here are as follows: structure (alpha = .83), goals (alpha = .82), harmony (alpha = .80), future (alpha = .78), and will (alpha = .69).

Results

The means and standard deviations for the Identity Function Scale and the Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status scales are reported in Table 1. Also, Table 1 includes the correlation matrix. These analyses are reported separately for females and males. A series of t-tests with Bonferoni corrections were computed for comparisons between the means for males and females. No significant mean differences were observed for gender in this sample.

Insert Table 1 about here

Linear structural equations were used to assess a model where each of the four identity status scores were regressed on each of the five identity functions. While no gender differences were observed on mean comparisons it was thought prudent to assess each model separately by gender.

Using LISREL programs we computed the just-identified model, nonsignificant paths were trimmed, which resulted in the elimination of all of the diffuse paths, and two paths for foreclosure. The final over-identified model for males is reported in Figure 1. This model has a variety of excellent fit indices: $\chi^2(4) = 5.064$, $p = .281$; RMSEA = .028, Goodness-of-Fit = .996; Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit = .996. The significant coefficients for male participants indicate that diffusion is unassociated with any form of identity function. Foreclosure predicts a positive association with goals (beta = .14) and a negative association with will (beta = -.14). Moratorium status scores are negative associated with all subscales of the identity function measure. The betas range from a low of -.22 to a high of -.40. Identity achievement scale scores predicted a positive association with every subscale of identity functions except for will. The betas ranged form .16 to .31. Figure 1 includes the amount of variance accounted for in each of the subscales of identity functions. These values range from 9.2% to 35.0% of variance.

Insert Figure 1

The same analytic strategy was used for females with the final over-identified model revealing similar excellent fit indices: $\chi^2(4) = 6.641$, $p = .156$, RMSEA = .026, Goodness-of-Fit = .998; Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit = .984. Significant coefficients and pathways are reported in Figure 2. Again, diffusion is not associated with any form of identity function. Foreclosure has a negative association with will ($\beta = -.27$). Moratorium status scale has negative associations with all five identity functions. These significant coefficients range from a low of $-.15$ to a high of $-.42$. The identity achievement scale score has a positive predictive association with all five identity functions, ranging from a low of $.11$ to a high of $.32$. The amount of variance accounted for in each of the subscales of the identity function range from a low of 10.0% to a high of 38.6%.

Insert Figure 2

Given the identity functions subscales were positively correlated the subscales were totaled and a step-wise regression was computed entering diffusion, followed by foreclosure, moratorium and achievement, into the equations. This was, again, computed separately for males and females. The full block was significant for males, $F(4) = 45.07$, $p < .00001$, and females, $F(4) = 110.74$, $p < .00001$. The standardized beta coefficients, t-test values, and level of significance are reported in Table 2. For males, significant coefficients were observed for diffusion, moratorium, and identity achievement and account for 34.5% of variance in the total scale score for identity functions. For females significant coefficients were observed for foreclosure, moratorium and identity achievement and accounted for 30.5% of the variance. The amount of variance accounted for in the total score for identity functions by ego-identity status scale scores is judged both substantial and significant and on average greater than that for any given subscale of the Identity Functions Scale.

Insert Table 2

Using classification rules designated by Adams, Shea and Fitch (1979) pure identity status types were identified from the total sample: diffusion ($n = 132$), foreclosure ($n = 135$), moratorium ($n = 119$), and achieved ($n = 241$). A multivariate analysis of variance was computed on the five identity function scales using a gender x ego-identity status factorial. The multivariate F test was significant using the Pillais, Hotelings and Wilks calculations, with the Wilks F test being $F(15) = 13.16$, $p < .0001$, for the main effect of ego-identity type. No significant differences were observed for gender or gender x ego-identity type. The univariate F -tests for the ego-identity effects are reported in Table 3. The identity achievement status group was significantly higher on all five identity functions than the other three statuses based on individual contrasts using Scheffee tests.

Insert Table 3

Discussion

The Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status has become one of the major self-report assessment devices for use in identity status research. Marcia et al., (1993) offer a wealth of evidence that the identity-status-paradigm has been extremely useful in the study of adolescent and emerging adult identity development. This investigation provides additional support for the theoretical notion that identity achievement is accompanied by emergence of healthy ego mechanisms that facilitate the functional purposes of identity. The findings expand upon the work by Serafini and Adams (2002) using an abbreviated set of measures for each identity function. The various forms of correlations reported in this article consistently demonstrate that identity achievement connects positively with the various types of identity function (except for will). Diffusion is unassociated with ego identity functions and suggests, as others have indicated (e.g., see Erikson, 1968; Marcia et al., 1993), that it is an empty and groundless form of identity that leaves a youth vulnerable to life's demands. Such evidence provides further proof for the need to address identity diffusion in young adults with various forms of social interventions that help move them toward a self-constructed identity.

There are two unexpected findings in this investigation. Although foreclosure is associated with lower levels of will and self-control, it has at least one positive connection to goals. This suggests that the form of commitment expressed in foreclosure is supported by goals and directions, at least for males, but it is undermined by the absence of will that is necessary to effectively energize and direct goal accomplishment. The second unexpected finding focuses on moratorium. Moratorium has often been viewed as a healthy state of mind for adolescents, where they grapple with choices and options about their identity. But the engagement in exploration may be accompanied with perturbations of the mind that reduce the emergence of positive ego-identity mechanisms that help to construct a strong and capable personality. Nonetheless, if a student emerges from moratorium into identity achievement many new and important ego strengths are likely to emerge as well.

This validity study suggests that the identity status paradigm, as measured by the OMEIS, has a documented connection with the ego operations suggested by Erikson (1968) and elaborated by Adams and Marshall (1996). It remains to be determined if the combination of identity status and ego-identity functions will predict more behaviors, attitudes, or values, than the identity status measure alone. Nonetheless, the underlying construct of identity functions within ego-identity appear to be very similar for females and males. However, continuing consideration of gender differences remain an important part of measurement development.

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Table 1: Correlation Matrix

Variables	Variables									Males		Females	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	M	SD	M	SD
1 Structure	1.00	.55	.45	.24	.51	-.15	-.01	-.35	.23	3.95	.79	3.93	.73
2 Harmony	.65	1.00	.50	.20	.45	-.20	-.07	-.27	.30	4.10	.71	4.12	.65
3 Goals	.45	.48	1.00	.34	.39	-.07	-.05	-.25	.27	3.60	.92	3.86	.78
4 Future	.22	.19	.33	1.00	.16	-.27	-.03	-.55	.49	3.05	.97	3.14	.91
5 Will	.51	.54	.36	.13	1.00	-.05	-.29	-.23	.21	4.15	.56	4.15	.55
6 Diffusion	-.18	-.22	-.24	-.30	-.06	1.00	-.07	.47	-.28	3.45	1.09	3.25	1.07
7 Foreclosure	.01	-.05	.12	-.05	-.18	-.04	1.00	.09	-.05	2.57	1.07	2.55	1.01
8 Moratorium	-.34	-.30	-.27	-.52	-.27	.37	.21	1.00	-.40	2.86	1.07	3.09	1.06
9 Achievement	.30	.34	.34	.46	.16	-.27	.04	-.39	1.00	3.90	1.06	3.85	.99

Lower diagonal males, upper diagonal females

Table 2:

Standardized Beta Coefficients, T-test, and Level of Significance for Stepwise-Regression

Analyses

<u>Variables</u>	<u>Standardized Beta</u>	<u>T-test</u>	<u>Significance</u>
Males			
Diffusion	-.10	- 2.00	.0464
Foreclosure	.01	< 1.00	.8112
Moratorium	-.34	-6.53	.00001
Achievement	.32	6.53	.00001
Females			
Diffusion	.04	1.17	.2409
Foreclosure	-.06	-2.21	.0277
Moratorium	-.38	-11.98	.00001
Achievement	.29	10.06	.00001

Table 3:

The univariate F tests for the main effect for ego-identity statuses

<u>Variables</u>	<u>F-test</u>	<u>Probability level</u>
Structure	16.33	.0001
Harmony	16.85	.0001
Goals	15.87	.0001
Future	36.16	.0001
Will	13.45	.0001

Appendix

The 24 items for the Objective Measure of Ego-Identity Status

A. Occupation Items

My parents had it decided a long time ago what I should go into and I'm following their plans (**Foreclosure**)

I haven't chosen the occupation I really want to get into, and I'm just working at whatever is available until something better comes along (**Diffusion**)

I'm still trying to decide how capable I am as a person and what work will be right for me (**Moratorium**)

I might have thought about a lot of different jobs, but there's never really been any question since my parents said what they wanted of me (**Foreclosure**)

I'm not really interested in finding the right job, any job will do. I just seem to follow with what is available (**Diffusion**)

It took me a while to figure it out, but now I really know what I want for a career (**Achievement**)

It took me a long time to decide but now I know for sure what direction to move in for a career (**Achievement**)

I just can't decide what to do for an occupation. There are so many possibilities (**Moratorium**)

B. Religion Items

When it comes to religion I just haven't found anything that appeals and I don't really feel the need to look (**Diffusion**)

I don't give religion much thought and it doesn't bother me one way or the other (**Diffusion**)

A person's faith is unique to each individual. I've considered and reconsidered it myself and know what I can believe. (**Achievement**)

I'm not sure what religion means to me. I'd like to make up my mind but I'm not done looking yet (**Moratorium**)

Religion is confusing to me right now. I keep changing my views on what is right and wrong for me (**Moratorium**)

I've gone through a period of serious questions about faith and can now say I understand what I believe in as an individual (**Achievement**)

I attend the same church as my family has always attended. I've never really questioned why (**Foreclosure**)

I've never really questioned my religion. If it's right for my parents it must be right for me. (**Foreclosure**)

C. Politics Items

Politics is something that I can never be too sure about because things change so fast. But I don't think it's important to know what I can politically stand for and believe in (**Diffusion**)

I haven't really considered politics. It just doesn't excite me much (**Diffusion**)

There are so many different political parties and ideals. I can't decide which to follow until I figure it out (**Moratorium**)

I've thought my political beliefs through and realize I can agree with some and not other aspects of what my parents believe (**Achievement**)

I'm not sure about my political beliefs, but I'm trying to figure out what I can truly believe in (**Moratorium**)

I guess I'm pretty much like my folks when it comes to politics. I follow what they do in terms of voting and such. (**Foreclosure**)

My folks have always had their own political and moral beliefs about issues like abortion and mercy killing and I've always gone along accepting what they have (**Foreclosure**)

I've thought my political views through. Some ideas agree and others disagree with my parents (**Achievement**)

I really have never been involved in politics enough to make a firm stand one way or the other (**Diffusion**)