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Development of youth identity in Europe: a Slovenian case

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Introduction

Preparations in Slovenia for accession to the European Community are being made on various levels, including psychological ones. The psycho-social development of adolescents and its place within the educational system make an important contemporary contribution to identity formation for these future citizens in Europe.

Research findings on the place of identity in adolescents' further psychosocial development have permeated the school system. Authors such as (Rauste-von Wright, 1986) have pointed to the shortcomings of traditional pedagogic-psychological literature, which has had the success of teaching and learning in class as its main goal. Individual and personality differences between students had generally been neglected and are mentioned only in so far as they were directly connected to learning processes.

Identity is a complex psychological phenomenon, that includes one's own interpretation of early childhood identification with significant others. It also includes a sense of direction, commitment and trust in a personal ideal, gender-role identification, individual ideology, accepted group norms, standards, internalised values, and one's self-concept. Identity summarises one's past, gives meaning to the present, and directs behaviour in the future (Adams, Gullotta, Markstrom-Adams, 1994).

Many authors have investigated methods of solving crises in adolescents' identity and creating a stable self-concept, among them the American psychologist James Marcia (1980), who regards identity as a state - or more precisely, as a dynamic personality structure which encompasses the instincts of the individual, his habits, beliefs and internalised identifications. This structure develops gradually and manifests its underlying meaning first in adolescence.

Marcia believes that adolescents' identity is composed of at least three areas: sexual, religious-political and occupational dispositions, and that these form four identity statuses. Identity statuses are ways in which adolescents solve their own identity crises and gradually form the identity of a mature person (Musek, unpublished). They are designated as: diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium and achievement. They are differentiated on the basis of two criteria: crisis and commitment. According to Marcia (1980) crisis is an active and constructive element that encourages the individual to make relevant searches, decisions and experiments. If crisis is weak or hardly exists, the adolescent remains undecided, undetermined and without a clear identity. The second criterion is identity commitment. This means a personal investment in a certain activity and a relatively coherent system of established attitudes, beliefs and values that the individual follows in his life.

Marcia (1980) suggested that institutional education actually makes it more difficult for the adolescent to successfully advance from the moratorium identity status and later establish the identity of a mature person. Such a mature person would express doubts about the purpose of learning by heart, about 'final truths' and the 'objective' facts that the school offers as the only proper way of understanding reality. But institutional

education forces the individual into foreclosure, with the adolescent being completely satisfied with the school. It is not difficult to present learning material as an indisputable fact to an adolescent who does not make any decisions and does not choose from options but rather leaves this to significant others, especially when the mediator has the authority of the school. The adolescent is passively submitted to the learning material, absorbs it uncritically and becomes a student with high learning proficiency, but the student cannot in this way advance to the next, more achieved identity status, because s/he constantly receives feedback from the highest authority that what s/he does and what s/he is, is the only socially acceptable and proper thing.

Other research, particularly with adolescents of various nationalities, suggests that identity differences are not only based on gender, academic achievement and degree of satisfaction in school, etc., but on differences between nations - and that these differences that might derive from different educational approaches towards the student within the framework of school.

The aim of the study discussed in this paper was to explore identity formation in adolescence as it is related to gender and academic achievement. The objective was to investigate how the formation of particular identity statuses in Slovenia might influence adolescents' preparation for role as future citizens in Europe.

Method

Participants

A total of 192 high school students of about 16 years of age from Slovenia (110 males, 92 females) participated in the study.

Measuring instruments

The *Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status* (OMEIS-2) constructed by Adams, Bennion and Huh (1989) was applied to measure four (each divided in two) different ego identity statuses. OMEIS-2 is based upon the Marcia's concept of identity.

Academic achievement

This was computed as the sum of general academic achievement for the previous school year.

Results And discussion

Table 1 shows basic statistical data for the participants. The students express on average achieved identity status in the area of interpersonal relations, whereas at the area of ideology they mostly exhibit diffusion. According to Marcia (1980, 1994) it is possible to conclude that there are still political and ideological questions that have not been completely defined; adolescents do not deal with them because they are of no interest, and instead allow themselves to be led by immediate impulses and authority. Perhaps the reason for such a wide gap between the ideological and interpersonal relationship identity in Slovene students lies in coincidence of their adolescence with the transitional processes in our society. Due to constant political changes and a decreasing feeling of personal security in fields such as employment, housing and material status, these adolescents may consciously want to avoid facing such problems and instead establish diffusion. In educational programs that stress issues of citizenship and identity in Europe, it would

therefore be useful for the teachers to foreground issues of forming opinions, attitudes, and values concerning European citizenship and a European identity.

Table 1 Basic statistical results

Identity status	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
IDEOLOGICAL						
diffusion	13	44	31.51	5.62	0.644	.324
foreclosure	8	35	20.28	5.99	.055	0.493
moratorium	13	42	28.21	5.07	0.286	0.083
achievement	10	45	28.16	5.94	0.128	.555
INTERPERSONAL						
diffusion	12	40	23.70	4.96	.364	.549
foreclosure	8	36	20.22	5.29	.373	.448
moratorium	11	42	26.58	5.29	0.109	.455
achievement	14	46	32.40	5.22	0.010	.421

Table 2 shows the results of one-way analyses of variance for individual identity statuses as regards the gender of the students. Moratorium identity status of ideology and the achieved identity status in the area of interpersonal relations are more prominent with females ($M=20,00$; $M=33,07$) than with males ($M=27,10$; $M=31,45$). Diffusion and foreclosure at the area of interpersonal relations are more prominent with males ($M=25,25$; $M=21,68$) than with females ($M=22,59$; $M=19,22$).

Table 2 Gender differences in the identity of Slovenian adolescents

Identity status	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p
IDEOLOGICAL					
diffusion	23,265	1	23,265	,736	,392
foreclosure	119,621	1	119,621	3,382	,068
moratorium	164,310	1	164,310	6,574	,011*
achievement	5,858	1	5,858	,165	,685
INTERPERSONAL					
diffusion	330,856	1	330,856	14,387	,000***
foreclosure	268,829	1	268,829	10,103	,002**
moratorium	11,999	1	11,999	,427	,514
achievement	120,721	1	120,721	4,513	,035*

* difference between groups is statistical significant ($p < ,05$)

** difference between groups is statistical significant ($p < ,01$)

*** difference between groups is statistical significant ($p < ,001$)

In the field of ideology, females devote significantly more effort to discovering their capabilities and the most suitable work for them; they establish a critically productive attitude towards their life-style and do not form opinions on political issues until they have given them thorough thought. Male students are more prominent in the field of interpersonal relations. Gender roles are not so much an issue with them: they give less

thought to relationships with girls, and considerably less attention to leisure activities; they also have fewer friends, who in fact do not really interest them much. According to Marcia (1966, 1944) the extent of their diffusion in the area of interpersonal relations is greater than that of their female peers. On the other hand their foreclosure is more prominent. They accept the opinions and beliefs of their parents more readily than their female peers, for example in the areas of partner selection, selection of friends, interest activities and life-style.

This data does not accord with the findings of Adams and Fitch (1982), who do not record any relevant differences between genders. They do, however, match the conclusions of Rothman et. al (1984), who concluded that males are more insecure in the area of human relations, which is manifested through their diffusion.

The comparison of results from American students (Adams, Bennion, Huh, 1989) with those from Slovenia shows that both American and Slovene adolescents were characterised by achieved identity status in both fields - ideology and interpersonal relations. However, American males generally established the achieved identity status in the area of ideology as well as interpersonal relations, while the Slovene participants are characterised by the achieved identity status only at the area of interpersonal relations: in the field of ideology they exhibit diffusion. The Slovene participants did not appear to be interested in political or social problems, or to give them any thought. In the light of such results, an efficient educational program could be developed which would centre specifically on the stimulation of greater political and ideological engagement in male students. Workshops and seminars within such programs would need to pay attention to the significance of gender and gender roles in forming the European identity.

Table 3 shows the results of one-way analyses of variance for individual identity statuses of students as regards general academic achievement of the previous school year.

The tested participants with high school proficiency ($M=23,43$) exhibit a more prominent foreclosure in the area of interpersonal relations, whereas those with less school proficiency exhibit a higher statistically significant tendency towards diffusion in the area of interpersonal relations.

Students from our research with high school proficiency could be classified under the profile that Marcia (1980, 1994) designates as foreclosure, characterised by a strong capacity for self-organisation, behaviour in accordance with accepted group norms, strong submission to authorities, diligence, conservatism, and so on. On any assessment the more proficient students have a more prominent foreclosed identity status than that of their less proficient peers. Marcia (1994) concludes that persons with that identity status are not capable of holding executive or creative positions later in professional life, irrespective of their diligence. If we transpose Marcia's findings to the Slovene cultural environment, it may be that excellent students 'shine' only during the period of their education, whereas in the processes of creation and leadership they allow themselves to submit to less capable, but socially more skilful and more autonomous persons (Riggio, Trockmorton, 1986, quoted from Lamovec, 1994).

Table 3 Academic achievement differences in identity of Slovenian adolescents

Identity status	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p
IDEOLOGICAL					
diffusion	225,528	4	56,382	1,817	,127
foreclosure	180,408	4	45,102	1,266	,285
moratorium	89,093	4	22,273	,863	,487
achievement	91,843	4	22,961	,646	,630
INTERPERSONAL					
diffusion	194,830	4	48,708	2,020	,093
foreclosure	425,193	4	106,298	4,060	,004**
moratorium	207,678	4	51,920	1,890	,114
achievement	26,309	4	6,577	,237	,917

* difference between group in statistical significant ($p < ,05$)

** difference between group in statistical significant ($p < ,01$)

*** difference between group in statistical significant ($p < ,001$)

Alternatively these results may be explained by another Marcia's finding. It is our opinion that the school system encourages the development of foreclosed identity status, so we would expect the majority of highly proficient students from our research to exhibit that status. If we follow Marcia's explanations, it is possible to conclude that our school system is not significantly different from other school systems, especially those of Canadian and American high schools, which also encourage diligence, submissiveness to authorities, non-autonomy in decision making, etc.

The school appears to be the factor which hinders the development of a stable, mature and lucid student identity. Learning by heart and struggling for good grades - combined in recent years with submission to the one goal of the graduation examination and standardised examinations connected to this, which are far from recognising, let alone considering individual differences between students - direct students away from answers to the questions concerning their own identity. The current approach of the Slovene school system does not represent a good predisposition for accession to the European Community and for forming the European identity of today's adolescents.

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