

Comparative Study of Identity Crisis in Students based on Age, Sex, and Level of Education

Simin Gholamrezaei

Assistant Professor of Lorestan University, Faculty Member of Literature and Humanities,
Department of Psychology, Lorestan University

Doi:10.5901/mjss.2016.v7n3s3p202

Abstract

Identity crisis means uncertainty and ambiguity in a person's definition of self and his or her being, and it prevents him or her to have an integrated character. This research aims to study the identity crisis in students comparatively based on age, sex, and level of education. The study is descriptive and correlation type. The statistical population includes all students of Lorestan University in educational year of 2014-2015. 196 students (100 men and 96 women) were selected as sample. The research tool was the scale of Ahmadi Personal Identity Questionnaire (1996). This scale measures 10 factors through 10 items. ANOVA test and Tukey's post-hoc test were used to measure identity crisis of students of both sexes, and Pearson Correlation test was used for studying the correlation between identity crisis and age. The results showed that there is a significant difference in identity crisis among students of bachelor, master, and Ph.D levels ($p < 0.01$ and $F=30.940$). The averages of identity crisis were 7.026 in men and 10.01 in women. This difference was significant. Moreover, there was a significant negative relationship between age and identity crisis ($p < 0.01$) so that in this study, identity crisis decreased by increasing the age. These findings was consistent to some researches and inconsistent to some others. The inconsistency can be due to the difference between environments of participants in different societies. The results showed that factors like age, level of education, and sex could influence on people's identity crisis.

Keywords: identity crisis, age, level of education, sex, university students

1. Introduction

Identity is the distinction that a person believes to exist between self and the others. Personal identity is a mental-social structure that includes person's ideas, beliefs, and way of interaction with others. In scientific discussions, Erickson firstly used the word "identity crisis". In the second world war, he observed a group of soldiers who were not able to adapt their activities and views as a soldier with their previous activities and views as a citizen. Erickson used the term "identity disorder" or identity crisis (Sharafi, 2001).

According to Erickson's theory (1968), if an adult's identity is formed throughout time and based on experiences resulted from appropriate social interactions, and he/she could know himself/herself and could separate himself/herself from the others, his/her mental balance is guaranteed, but if an ambiguity of role happens instead of self-awareness and forming positive identity, his/her mental balance breaks down and the result is identity crisis. Therefore, the adult's growth and evolution depends on finding a solution for this crisis (Markstrom et al., 2003).

Identity crisis means an uncertainty and ambiguity in the person's definition of self and his/her being, and it prevents him/her to have an integrated character and answer to questions such as "who am I" and "what do I want" (Sharafi, 2011).

According to Erickson, crisis identity happens in the fifth stage of growth, i.e. adolescence period. However, the meaning of crisis in his theory also includes both negative and positive effects; because he considers "crisis" as inseparable part of the identity. As a normative event of life, he defines the identity crisis as: one stage of change, a certain moment when growing must progress in a way that leads to integrity of resources of growth and improvement".

In Erikson's discussion of identity, two processes of "searching" and "commitment" make the person's identity. "Crisis" starts when a person cannot achieve integration and form commitment after the stage of searching and distinguishing (MacBrayer et al., 2012).

What mentioned generally means identity formation is a successful solution of what is called identity crisis, which is manifested in Erikson's mental-social theory. In Erickson's theory success or failure of solving every crisis influences on the success of failure of solving next crisis (this principle is called epigenetic) (Erickson, 1980; Valoras and Basma, 2005).

According to what has mentioned about above theories, the solution of identity crisis happens in adolescence and youth periods. Within last five years, the average of beginning of the maturity period has been decreased. On the other hand, by professionalization of the occupations, prolonging education time, and a delay in making families, the end of adolescence is prolonged more. This process is seen more in industrial societies and high-class families than the small cities, villages and lower class families (Heidari Bigvand, 2000). These changes show that the age is not a good criterion for determining the beginning and the end of adolescence period, and it is better to define the adolescence by its characteristics. These characteristics include 1. The formation of emotional growth at the beginning of maturity, which leads to more attention to the opposite sex; 2. Social growth that is possible by getting free from dependencies and control of family and experiences of membership in peers groups; 3. Cognitive growth that is accompanied by searching philosophy of life, religious commitment, and system of values; 4. Developing interactions with environment that is accompanied by programming for choosing a job, leisure time, and education.

Naturally, with a relationship that exists between adolescence period and solving the identity crisis, the identity crisis is also under the effect of several factors. Various studies have also shown this matter.

In his research, Mohammad Ali Zekki (2002) has shown that family and educational factors (such as the level of education) is among effective factors of the process of finding identity in people. Additionally, finding identity in girls happens more than boys.

Tahere Ghaffari (2014) has also shown in her research that there is a relationship between religious beliefs and identity crisis.

In her research, Fahime Mohammad Pour (2014) has founded out that there is a reverse and significant relationship between family solidarity and identity crisis.

The findings of Zare Shah Abadi and Ebrahim Abadi's research (2011) about cultural identity crisis shows that the variables of influence of friends and peers, person's education, sex, and influence of satellite programs have respectively the highest impact in explaining the dependent variable, i.e. cultural identity crisis, and they can explain about 41 percent of the variance of cultural identity crisis.

In her research, Daneshvar (1996) has shown that many factors including education, family, society, and economic have a positive relationship with the identity crisis. It means that whenever these factors are negative more, identity crisis increases. This matter was so considerable in educational issues. Moreover, generally, girls suffer from identity crisis more than boys do. According to this research, it can be concluded that when people have higher education, they suffer from identity crisis less due to both higher education and probably higher economic level, and older age.

It is natural that when the adolescence period is prolonged, the process of identity finding is also delayed, and the process can be taken to the youth period. Even in some extreme cases, the identity crisis is not solved in youth period and the person suffers from confusion and disorientation in adulthood. Therefore, it can be said that age is one of the effective factors of the process of identity finding, and in fact, with respect to person's growth and mental maturity in adolescence and youth periods, people with older ages suffers less from the identity crisis.

Age is one of the demographic factors that can effect on the identity crisis. In different researches that have been mentioned, other factors, which could be effective in the identity crisis, have been also considered. For example, the sex of adolescences and youths and also their educational level are among other factors which can influence on the people's identity crisis. Therefore, it can be mentioned that, regarding the theoretical bases and conducted researches, factors like sex, age, and education level (the level is a criterion) can affect the identity crisis in adolescence. As such, the identity crisis is traceable and predictable in each group of age and sex with respect to these factors, and it can be solved in an educational and treatment process.

Regarding the importance of the issue, and since it has been studied sporadically and scattered, we aim to predict and study the relationship of identity crisis and variables like age, sex, and education level centrally and precisely in our research. Therefore, in this study, it is assumed that first, the identity crisis is different in two sexes, second, the identity crisis is different in different ages, and third, the identity crisis is different in student of different levels.

2. Research Methodology

It is a descriptive and correlation research. The statistical population includes all students of Lorestan University in educational year of 2014-2015. 196 students (100 men and 96 women) of three levels including bachelor, master, and Ph.D. were selected by availability method, and they completed the identity crisis questionnaire. Finally the gathered data were analyzed by SPSS 19 software and ANOVA tests were used to compare identity crisis in different educational level and also the comparison of identity crisis in two sexes. Tukey's test, as a post-hoc test, was used to compare identity crisis in different levels, and also Pearson Correlation test was used to study the correlation between the identity crisis

and age.

2.1 Research tool

Personal identity questionnaire: in order to evaluate the identity crisis, Ahmadi's identity crisis questionnaire, which is a 10-questions questionnaire (including four sections), was used. Individual and group implementation and quick answering to it (between 5 to 10 minutes) are among the advantages of the test, which can be used for both sexes as well. Ahmadi (1996) has made this questionnaire according to diagnosis criteria of DSM-IV. These criteria include 1. Problems in long-term goals; 2. Doubt in choosing occupation; 3. Lack of an appropriate model for friendship; 4. Inappropriateness of sexual behavior; 5. Problem in religious understanding; 6. Lack of attention to moral values; 7. Not following group commitment; 8. Disruption in timing; 9. Lack of an appropriate model for making a family; 10. Having a negative view toward self.

Validity coefficient of this questionnaire is measured 0.92 by the creator of the questionnaire and using Cronbach's alpha among a sample of student in Isfahan.

3. Findings

In table 1, descriptive analysis of identity crisis is different levels of education is shown.

Table 1. descriptive analysis of the identity crisis variable

Level of education	Average	Standard Deviation	Sample Size
Bachelor	10.39	6.231	128
Master	6/35	3.272	43
Ph.D.	2/47	1.849	25

Regarding the results of the above table, the lowest average of the identity crisis was related to Ph.D. level (by an average of 2.47 and standard deviation of 1.849), and the highest average was associated with bachelor (with an average of 10.39 and standard deviation of 6.231).

Moreover, the results of variance analysis of groups in the variable of identity crisis according to different educational level are in table 2.

Table 2. Variance analysis of identity crisis in educational levels

	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Between groups	1773.547	2	886.774		
Inside groups	5474.211	191	28.661	30.940	0.000
Total	7247.758	193			

According to the results of table 2, it is clear that there is a significant relationship in terms of the identity crisis between the groups (students of different levels) in the level of 0.01.

In table 3, the difference of identity crisis of groups is studied by Tokey's test.

Table 3. Comparison of the identity crisis of groups through Tokey's test.

Groups	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.
1 and 2	4.34	1.069	0.001
1 and 3	7.921	1.056	0.000
2 and 3	3.886	1.349	0.012
Group 1: Bachelor		Group 2: Master	Group 3: Ph.D.

The results in table 3 indicate that there is a significant relationship of 0.01 between bachelor and master groups, and bachelor and Ph.D. groups. There is a significant difference of 0.05 between master and Ph.D groups.

In table 4, descriptive analysis of identity crisis in men and women is shown.

Table 4. Descriptive analysis of identity crisis based on sex

Sex	Average	Standard Deviation	Sample size
Man	7.026	6.040	100
Woman	10.01	5.921	96

Based on the results in table 4, the average of identity crisis in men and women are 7.026 and 10.01 respectively. In table 5, the results of variance analysis associated with the identity crisis in women and men are shown.

Table 5. Variance analysis of identity crisis in two sexes

	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Between groups	359.346	1	359.346		
Inside groups	6888.411	192	35.877	10.016	0.002
Total	7247.758	193			

According to the results of the above table, it is clear that there is a significant relationship between groups (female and male students) in terms of identity crisis.

Additionally, in table 6, the relationship of age and identity crisis is presented.

Table 6. Relationship of age and identity crisis

	Correlation coefficient	Significant level
Identity crisis and age	-0.245	0.001

According to the results of the above table, the relationship of identity crisis and age is -0.245 , which is significant in the level 0.01.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

In this research, we sought to study the significance or insignificance relationship of identity crisis and variable like age, sex, and educational level. As it was shown in the finding section, the identity crisis is significant among female and male students. There are various studies with different results about the effect of sex on the identity crisis. In their studies, Najafi et al. (2005) and Ramezani et al. (2010) have found out that there is not any significant relationship between identity crisis among girls and boys. On the other hand, the researches that indicate the significance relationship are divided into two groups per se. The researches of Dehshiri (2005) and Daneshvar (2006) indicate that the girls suffer from identity crisis more than boys do. But Zeki's study (2002) show that identity finding is formed more in girls than in boys, i.e. girls have less identity crisis. The result of the present research is in accordance with the results of Zaki's study (2002), and according to our research, girls experience identity crisis less than boys do. This finding is more justifiable than the findings of other researches, and the justification is associated with the differences of boys and girls in growth and mental maturity. Mental maturation happens sooner in girls, and when we choose girls and boys of the same age group, it is highly probable that the mental maturity of girl group is higher. Since the solution of identity crisis is mostly associated with mental maturity, it is natural that the identity crisis decreases by a mental maturation in a higher level; although a part of different models in boys and girls may be due to different sexual behavior of parents (Feyz Dargah, 1995).

One of the other assumptions that are studied in this research was the difference of identity crisis in the students of different levels. The findings of the present research were in accordance with the findings of other researches such as the research of Shah Abadi and Ebrahim Abadi (2011), and it has been shown that the problem of identity crisis is decreased when the educational level is higher. In fact, educational environments, like the university, are an appropriate place for people to find an identity, and if a person passes longer time in these places, it is more probable that he/ she could solve the problem of identity crisis. Meanwhile, the person gets older and, as we have shown in our research, the identity crisis is also decreased by getting old. This research shows a negative and significant relationship between age and identity crisis, and it is in accordance with the results that Waterman et al. (1974, quoted by Raeesi 1997) have obtained. It is natural that when a person gets older, it is more probable that he/she obtains mental maturity, and this mental maturity

can be the main solution of the identity crisis through time.

References

- Ahmadi, A. (1996). Psychology of adolescents and young adults. Mashal Pub. Tehran.
- Dehshiri, Gh. (2005). Investigate the relationship between religion and identity crisis among high school students in Yazd city. *Journal of Education*, 21. P 78-98.
- Ghafari, T. (2014). The relationship between the fundamental religious beliefs and psychological well-being in adolescents with identity crisis. Sixth International Congress of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. Tabriz University of Medical Sciences and Health Services.
- Heidary, D. (2000). The youth's identity crisis, *Journal of Iranian Sociological Association*, 4, page 102-111. Daneshvar, Ahmadi. (1996). Identity and its influencing factors in students of Shiraz. MA thesis. Azad university. P 70-80.
- Kakya, L. (2010). Effects of reality therapy group counseling based on identity crisis in students' academic guidance. *Journal of Mental Health*, 12, 1-7. (Persian)
- Markstrom Adams C, Ascione FR, Braegger D, Adams JR. (2003) Promotion of ego identity development: can shortterm intervention facilitates growth? *J Adolescent*. 16: 217-224.
- McBrayer, Rachel H; Chibbaro, Julia S. (2012). Integrating Sand Tray and Solution Focused Brief Counseling as a Model for Working with Middle School Students. *Georgia School Counselors Association Journal*, v19 n1 p124-132 Nov 2012.
- Mohammadpour, F. (2014). The Relationship between Family Cohesion and identity crisis in teenagers. Sixth International Congress of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. Tabriz University of Medical Sciences and Health Services.
- Najafi, M, Ahadi, H, Delavar, A. (2006). The relationship between family function and religiosity with identity crisis. *Journal of Knowledge and Behavior*. 13, p 17-26.
- Sharafi. (2001). Young and identity crisis. Tehran, Soroush.
- Zaki, M. (2003). Construct and validate a scale of socialization and its effect on students' identity formation. *Journal of Education and Psychology*, University of Mashhad. Volume 4. P 281-306.
- Zare shah abadi, A, Ebrahim abadi, M. (1390). Social factors related to the crisis of cultural identity among high school students in Tabriz. *Journal of cultural research*. 4, 4.