

An Investigation of The Relationships Between Agency, Identity Formation and Life Satisfaction in Adolescence Period

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ABSTRACT

An investigation of the relationships between agency, identity formation and life satisfaction in adolescence period

Objective: Life satisfaction is one of the most important variables in adolescents' life. The purpose of the study is to determine the relationship between agency and identity dimensions and the effect of this relationship on adolescents' life satisfaction.

Methods: A total of 302 university students participated in the study. Of these, 142 were male and 160 were female. Their ages ranged from 18 to 23 and the mean age was 20.26 (Sd=1.31). Dimensions of Identity Development Scale, Multi-Measure Agentic Personality Scale-Short Form and Satisfaction with Life Scale were administered to collect data. Pearson correlation, descriptive statistics and path analysis method were used to analyze the data.

Results: The results revealed that identity dimensions mediated the relationship between agency and life satisfaction. According to the results of this study, agency was negatively related to ruminative exploration and positively related to other identity dimensions. According to identity dimensions, except from ruminative exploration, other identity dimensions were positively related to life satisfaction.

Conclusion: The more agency improves, the healthier identity development becomes and healthy identity development increases life satisfaction. Based on this result, it can be useful for the specialists who work with adolescents to consider identity development and agency in the evaluation of problems related to life satisfaction.

Key words: Agency, identity formation, life satisfaction



ÖZET

Ergenlik döneminde eylemlilik, kimlik biçimlenmesi ve yaşam doyumu arasındaki ilişkilerin incelenmesi

Amaç: Yaşam doyumu, ergenlerin hayatlarında en önemli değişkenlerden biridir. Bu çalışmanın amacı, eylemliliğin kimlik boyutları ile olan ilişkisinin ve bu ilişkinin ergenlerin yaşam doyumlarına olan etkisinin belirlenmesidir.

Yöntem: Çalışmaya toplam 302 üniversite öğrencisi katılmıştır. Katılımcıların 142'si erkek, 160'i ise kadındır. Katılımcıların yaşları 18-23 arasında değişmektedir ve yaş ortalaması 20.26'dır (SS=1.31). Veri toplamak amacıyla Kimlik Gelişiminin Boyutları Ölçeği, Çok Yönlü Eylemli Kişilik Ölçeği Kısa Formu ve Yaşam Doyumu Ölçeği uygulanmıştır. Verilerin analizinde Pearson momentler çarpımı korelasyonu, betimsel istatistikler ve path analizi yöntemi kullanılmıştır.

Bulgular: Çalışmanın sonuçları, kimlik boyutlarının eylemlilikle yaşam doyumu arasındaki ilişkiye aracılık ettiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Bu çalışmanın sonuçlarına göre eylemlilik, seçeneklerin saplantılı araştırılmasıyla negatif, diğer kimlik boyutlarıyla da pozitif yönde ilişkilidir. Kimlik boyutlarına göre seçeneklerin saplantılı araştırılması dışında, diğer kimlik boyutları yaşam doyumuyla pozitif yönde ilişkilidir.

Sonuç: Eylemlilik düzeyi arttıkça sağlıklı kimlik gelişimi artmakta ve sağlıklı kimlik gelişimi de yaşam doyumunu artırmaktadır. Bu sonuca dayanarak, ergenlerle çalışan uzmanların yaşam doyumuna ilişkin problemlerde kimlik gelişimini ve eylemliliği göz önünde bulundurmaları yararlı olabilir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Eylemlilik, kimlik biçimlenmesi, yaşam doyumu

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INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a period in which physical and emotional changes are experienced intensively. These intense experiences affect individuals'

consideration of their lives as positive or negative. Satisfaction with life, which is a cognitive subdimension of subjective well being, can be described as an individual's assessment and reasoning of his life (1,2), appears to be the most important issue both in

adolescence and in other periods of life. Several variables affect life satisfaction during adolescence. However, the most important of these variables are identity formation and agency. Therefore, this study focused on identity formation and agency variables which may affect life satisfaction during adolescence period.

The principal mission of life during adolescence period is to seek an answer to the question "Who am I?". In another saying, identity related processes take a structure during the adolescence period. Most of the studies on identity development rely on Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory and Marcia's Identity Status Model, which was build on the principal arguments of the former theory. Marcia conceptualized identity as a formation of ego, and described four principal identity statuses based on exploration and commitment processes (3-7). These are; identity achievement, foreclosure, moratorium and identity diffusion.

Although this model is used frequently, it has been criticised by some researchers (8,9) for being limited or not totally reflecting Erikson's approach. Therefore, new models have been developed to investigate identity formation during adolescence in recent years.

In their approach to identity formation, Luyckx and

associates (10-14) described subdimensions of exploration and commitment processes used by Marcia (3,4) to define identity statuses. Exploration was divided into three; exploration in breadth, exploration in depth, and ruminative exploration. Exploration in breadth refers to adolescents level of exploring different identity options before commitment; exploration in depth refers to in depth exploration of appropriateness of adolescent's commitments to self at that moment; and ruminative exploration refers to level of rumination to exploration and experiencing processes which make coherent commitment more difficult. Commitment is also divided into two; commitment making and identification with commitment. Commitment making refers to level of an individual's decision making in terms of identity, and identification with commitment refers to individual's level of identification with emotions after commitment. The principal advantage of this model is that it enables exploration of identity processes.

Agency has an important role in development of identity. Agency is defined as an individual's taking responsibility of one's direction of life and taking decision on his/her life (15,16). Agency is seen as a structure which consists of self-esteem, life goals, self-

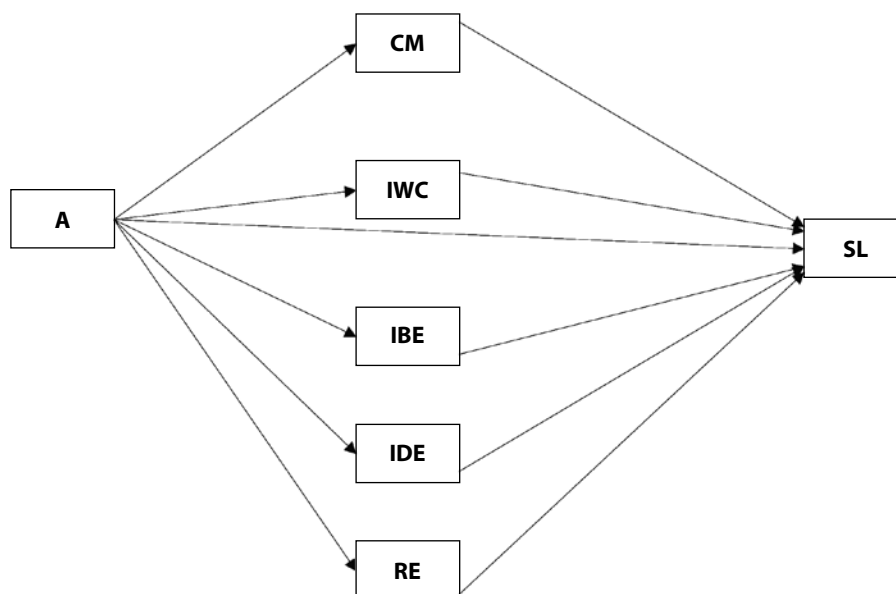


Figure 1: Hypothesis Model

Note: A: Agency, CM: Commitment Making, IWC: Identification with Commitment, IBE: In Breadth Exploration, IDE: In Depth Exploration, RE: Ruminative Exploration, SL: Satisfaction with Life

sufficiency and internal focus of control (17).

According to Erikson (18), formation of a sustained and coherent identity is affected by agency. Study results (15,19) show that individuals with a high level of agency have healthier identity development and that adolescents with a healthy and coherent identity have a higher level of life satisfaction (10-14).

The aim of the study, which relies on the above mentioned literature, is to investigate the relationship between agency and identity dimensions and to explore the contribution of this relationship to adolescent's life satisfaction.

In line with this aim, the following hypotheses are tested:

1-Agency predicts life satisfaction directly.

2-Agency predicts life satisfaction via identity dimensions.

The "path" model suggested and tested is provided in Figure 1.

METHODS

Study sample consisted of 302 students from Aksaray University Faculty of Education. 160 of the participants were female (53%), and 142 were male (47%). Mean age of the participants were 20.26 (SD=1.31) and age range was 18-23. Before filling out the scales, study group was informed on the study and scales. Participation was voluntary and consent was obtained. The scales were administered in the class and took almost 30 minutes.

Measures of Data Collection

Sociodemographic data form: Sociodemographic data such as age and gender were collected with a form which was developed by the author.

The Dimensions of Identity Development Scale (DIDS); DIDS, which is developed by Lucykx and associates (10) and adapted to Turkish by Morsünbül (20) is used to measure identity dimensions. This scale involves a total of 25 items and 5 subfactors: 5 items to measure exploration in breadth, 5 items to measure

exploration in depth, 5 items to measure ruminative exploration, 5 items to measure commitment making and 5 items to measure identification with commitment. Items are rated from "absolutely agree" (5 points) to "absolutely disagree" (1 point). Possible score from each subscale changes from 5 to 25. When the scale is scored, each sub dimension is assessed separately and total score of each sub dimension is obtained.

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used while the original scale was developed. According to CFA results of the original study the values are as follows; Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)=0.07, and Comparative Fitness Index (CFI)=0.94. Cronbach alpha values for sub scales change between 0.79 and 0.86. Analysis in this study revealed internal consistency coefficients between 0.78 and 0.88.

Multi-Measure Agentic Personality Scale - Short Form (MAPS): MAPS, developed by Côté (17) and adapted to Turkish by Atak (21), is used to measure agency. This is a Likert type scale consisting of a total of 20 items and 4 subfactors; 5 items measuring self-esteem, 5 items measuring purpose in life, 5 items measuring internal focus of control and 5 items measuring self-sufficiency. Scale explains the 42% of the variance. Cronbach alpha values for the whole scale and subscales change between 0.58 and 0.86 (mean 0.76). Higher scores refer to high agency and lower scores refer to low agency. Analysis in the context of this study revealed internal consistency coefficients between 0.59 and 0.84.

Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS): It is developed by Diener and associates (2) to measure subjective well being and adapted to Turkish by Durak and colleagues (22). This scale consists of 5 items measuring a single dimension. Each item is scored from 1 point "Absolutely disagree" to 7 point "Absolutely agree". Possible range of scores are from 5 to 35.

When the scale is scored, total score is obtained by adding the score of each item. Arithmetic mean of the group is used to detect individuals with low and high satisfaction with life in scoring of the original scale. People with scores above the arithmetic mean have high

satisfaction with life and those with scores below the arithmetic mean have low satisfaction with life. Cronbach alpha of the scale is 0.89. Cronbach alpha of the scale in this study group is 0.91.

Statistical Analysis

SPSS 15 and Lisrel 8.7 programs are used for statistical analysis. Frequency and percentage analysis were used for demographical features and measures mean scores, Pearson moments product correlation was used to calculate correlation between variables, and path analysis was used to test the model developed for the study. Significance level of at least 0.05 is taken.

RESULTS

In this section, first of all descriptive statistics, correlation coefficients followed by path model results are conveyed.

Descriptive Statistics

Mean and standard deviation of agency, exploration in breadth, exploration in depth, ruminative exploration,

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics (n=302)

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Agency	52.41	5.58
Making commitment	19.55	2.99
Identification with commitment	19.21	3.17
In breadth exploration	19.30	2.86
In depth exploration	18.75	2.76
Ruminative exploration	13.81	3.64
Satisfaction with life	23.06	5.58

Table 2: Correlation Coefficients Among Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Agency	-					
2. Making commitment	0.38**	-				
3. Identification with commitment	0.30**	0.64**	-			
4. In breadth exploration	0.22**	0.33**	0.42**	-		
5. In depth exploration	0.15**	0.25**	0.41**	0.42**	-	
6. Ruminative exploration	-0.32**	-0.53**	-0.50**	-0.12*	-0.04	-
7. Satisfaction with life	0.26**	0.45**	0.40**	0.18**	0.23**	-0.45**

** p<0.01, * p<0.05

commitment making and identification with commitment scores are summarized in Table 1 (Table 1).

Correlations Between the Variables

Correlations between the study variables are summarized in Table 2. When the correlations in Table 2 are examined, it is evident that satisfaction with life is positively correlated with all other variables except ruminative exploration. Likewise, agency is positively correlated with all other variables except ruminative exploration.

Path Model Findings

Path model of the study was tested by Lisrel program. Path model analysis results indicated that suggested path model produced a good level of goodness of fit values [χ^2 (SD=5, N=302)=16.23, p<0.001, Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)=0.97, Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI)=0.96, CFI=0.97, RMSEA=0.075, Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR)=0.055].

Results showed that, agency did not predict satisfaction with life directly ($\beta=0.06$, $t=0.93$, $p>0.05$), however, that identity dimensions fully mediated the association between agency of satisfaction with life (Figure 2). Results indicated that defined paths from agency to making commitment ($\beta=0.38$, $t=7.18$, $p<0.01$) and from making commitment to satisfaction with life ($\beta=0.22$, $t=3.93$, $p<0.01$); from agency to identification with commitment ($\beta=0.31$, $t=5.58$, $p<0.01$) and from identification to commitment to satisfaction with life ($\beta=0.33$, $t=3.22$, $p<0.01$); from agency to exploration in

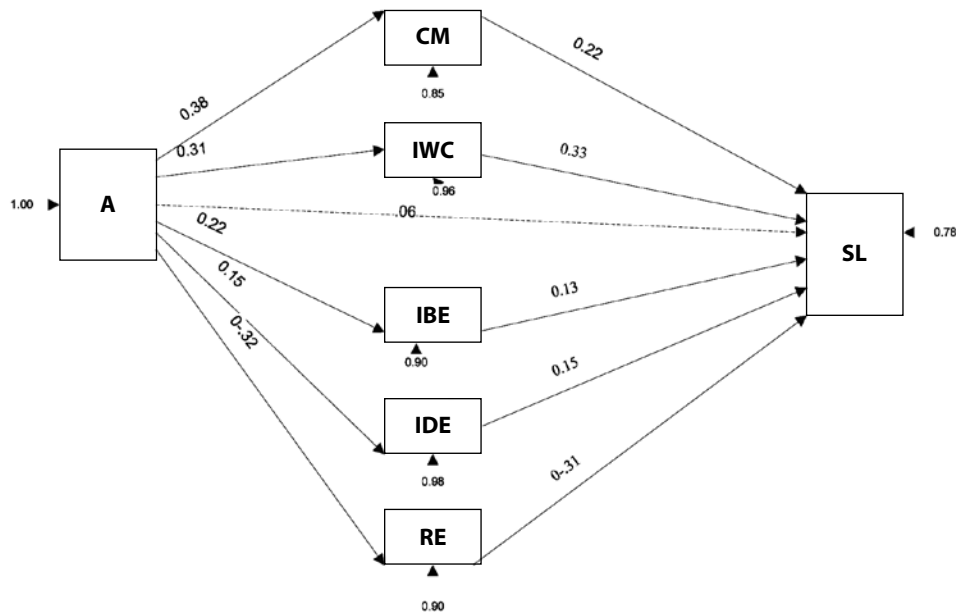


Figure 2: Standardized Parameters for Path Model

Note: A: Agency, CM: Commitment Making, IWC: Identification with Commitment, IBE: In Breadth Exploration, IDE: In Depth Exploration, RE: Ruminative Exploration, SL: Satisfaction with Life

breadth ($\beta=0.22$, $t=4.03$, $p<0.01$) and from exploration in breadth to satisfaction with life ($\beta=0.13$, $t=3.87$, $p<0.01$); from agency to exploration in depth ($\beta=0.15$, $t=2.91$, $p<0.01$) and from exploration in depth to satisfaction with life ($\beta=0.15$, $t=3.11$, $p<0.01$); from agency to ruminative exploration ($\beta=-0.32$, $t=-5.92$, $p<0.01$) and from ruminative exploration to satisfaction with life ($\beta=-0.31$, $t=-5.81$, $p<0.01$) are significant. In another saying, when the effects of identity dimensions are controlled in this path model in which identity dimensions are defined as mediating factors, the path from agency to satisfaction with life is not significant (Figure 2). It is seen that effect of agency on satisfaction with life is totally mediated by identity dimension variables.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to test the path model developed on agency, identity dimensions and satisfaction with life. Results of the analysis showed that agency predicted satisfaction with life via identity dimensions in adolescents. This result is similar to other studies which showed that agency is associated with identity development (15,19,21), and identity

dimensions are associated with satisfaction with life (10-14,20).

When the results are examined in detail, it was evident that, agency positively supported all identity dimensions except ruminative exploration. This shows that, in identity development, agency leads adolescents to active exploration of choices on identity fields and, as a result of these explorations, to cohesive commitments. From an identity statutes point of view, agency leads to successful emergence of an identity statute. Erikson (18) mentioned that agency is necessary for a healthy sense of identity. Results of this study supported Erikson's findings. Ruminative exploration dimension is negatively associated with agency. Ruminative exploration refers to the level of rumination on exploration process, to the degree that it makes achieving strong commitments more difficult for an individual. Individual's ruminating on exploration process repeats exploration processes over and over again without achieving any commitment. Exploration is necessary for healthy development of identity, however, prolongation of this process prevents the healthy emergence of identity. In Erikson's theory (18), moratorium process before transition to adulthood has

a very important place in healthy development of identity. In this period, particularly during advanced adolescence period, individuals experience different roles in several areas of life. Moratorium is particularly during university years and it is like a prerequisite for the emergence of a successful identity. Some of the principal reasons of prolongation of this period is too many choices offered to the adolescents by the society, social pressure on the adolescents to form their identity alone and lack of adequate guidance and support to the adolescents during this period. Results of this study showed that ruminative exploration might be lower in individuals with high agency.

Another finding of this study is that identity dimensions contribute to satisfaction with life. Except ruminative exploration, all other dimensions seem to contribute positively to life satisfaction. Particularly commitment processes are the most important variables that increase satisfaction with life. However, the processes with highest effects on satisfaction with life are making commitment and particularly identification with commitment processes. During identification with commitment process, the individual feels that the commitment he made completely reflects himself and that it is compatible with his values and beliefs (10). In Five Factor Identity Formation Model, adolescent make commitment after in depth exploration of life. However, later, they make an in-depth re-evaluation of their commitment. They identify with their identity components when the results of this re-evaluation is positive. This, in turn, leads to internal sense of consistency and coherence in Erikson's terms (18). When the recent studies on identity formation and associations with satisfaction with life are examined (23,24), it is evident that most of the studies have not investigated exploration and commitment processes together but focused only on commitment processes. This is mainly because commitment leads adolescents

to interpretation of personal experiences, and to giving meaning and direction to life (23). One of the findings of this study is the effect of ruminative exploration on satisfaction with life. Results indicate that ruminative exploration makes a negative impact on satisfaction with life. This is consistent with results of previous studies (10-14). In ruminative exploration process, continuous attempts to solve identity problems and ambiguous and inadequate results of these attempts lead to stress and a low level of well being. Individuals in a permanent exploration process form their identity on consumption culture, by keeping in step with quick changes and by obtaining other's contentment. This exploration does not lead to commitment. These individuals experience problems like depression and anxiety during this permanent and aimless exploration. Lack of commitment prevents an adolescent to make a positive evaluation of himself and his identity (25-27).

Another important finding of the study is that agency does not predict satisfaction with life directly but via identity dimensions. The suggested path model indicated that direct path from agency to satisfaction with life was not significant but identity dimensions were mediators between agency and life satisfaction. Identity dimensions are found to be totally mediating the association between agency and satisfaction of life. This result suggests that agency does not have a direct impact on increasing satisfaction with life but effects life satisfaction by contributing positively to identity formation of adolescents.

Based on the results of this study, it can be suggested that, specialists who are working with adolescents who have problems with satisfaction of life shall take identity development and particularly agency, which has a great impact on it, into account. Besides, developing intervention services for individuals who can not build commitment and who has ruminative exploration can be very helpful.

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