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**Identity Processes in Ladakhi Emerging Adults: Testing the Dimensions of Identity
Development Scale in an Indigenous Himalayan Population**

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Abstract

Identity research has flourished in recent years based on the theoretical foundation proposed by Erikson (1950). Identity development is generally conceptualized as a process occurring through an interplay between the individual and her/his social context. Consequently, one of the challenges facing identity research is to become more culturally sensitive – that is, to examine whether models and theories of identity work as expected in various cultural contexts. Luyckx et al.'s (2008) identity model proposes five identity exploration and commitment processes, and a survey instrument was developed to assess these processes. The current study test this Dimensions of Identity Development Scale (DIDS) in an indigenous population of emerging adults from Ladakh. Results confirm the central dimensions of identity exploration and commitment. However, the original DIDS structure was not identically replicated in this population, suggesting that identity models should be developed or adapted to the specific sociocultural context.

Identity Processes in Ladakhi Emerging Adults: Testing the Dimensions of Identity Development Scale in an Indigenous Himalayan Population

Identity has globally emerged as a central field of research within developmental psychology (Schwartz, Zamboanga, Meca, & Ritchie, 2012). The understanding of a sense of self and identity as providing a sense of purpose and direction in life has been emphasized through processes of individualization and sociocultural change that determine the identity paths that are possible for a given individual or group (Côté & Levine, 2002). However, identity research was founded on studies of Western populations. This focus has limited our understanding of cross-cultural variations in identity development, as well as our understanding of what is “universal” and what is “culturally specific” about identity (Schwartz, 2016). Recent developments within the identity literature have focused on dynamic, process-oriented approaches (Schwartz, Luyckx, & Crocetti, 2014) – which may facilitate cross-cultural comparisons in terms of differences and uniqueness in the structure of these processes within and across cultural contexts. Indeed, in the current study, we tested a Western-based operationalization of personal identity development in two samples of Ladakhi emerging adults exposed to various degrees of cultural globalization in either the regional capital Leh or in the national capital Delhi.

Theories of Identity Development

Increased individualization, and a decrease in socioculturally prescribed roles, have made identity an especially important process to examine among adolescents and emerging adults in contemporary globalized contexts (Côté & Levine, 2002). Erikson (1950, 1968) framed identity development as a crucial process during the transition to adulthood. This transition represents a time where the individual can select from among various identity elements across several life domains. Erikson’s work on identity was later operationalized within Marcia’s identity status paradigm (Kroger & Marcia, 2011), which framed identity development as occurring through the two

independent dimensions of exploration (i.e., search for an updated and revised sense of self) and commitment (i.e., adherence to a self-selected specific set of goals, values, and beliefs) (Marcia, 1966).

The dual-cycle model (Luyckx et al., 2008) both complemented and moved beyond Marcia's (1966) identity status model in an effort to be more consistent with Erikson's original understanding of identity development (Schwartz et al., 2014). Specifically, the dual-cycle model and the corresponding measure, the Dimensions of Identity Development Scale (DIDS; Luyckx et al., 2008), adds reflexive dimensions to the process of identity exploration and commitment. Within this five-dimensional dual-cycle model, identity exploration is subdivided into "exploration in breadth," referring to Marcia's conception of exploring various alternatives; and "exploration in depth," referring to reevaluating one's current identity commitments. Furthermore, identity commitment is subdivided into "commitment making," referring to making specific identity choices; and "identification with commitment," the process of evaluating existing identity commitments in relation to one's sense of self and – if these commitments are consistent with one's self – integrating them into one's self-conception. Within this model, identity development is operationalized as an iterative process, in which individuals are both constructing and revising their identities (Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens, & Beyers, 2006). Finally, the dimension of "ruminative exploration" was included to refer to a sense of being overly self-critical and "stuck" in the identity development process (Luyckx et al., 2008).

This expanded identity model has been used in a number of countries. However, this model has so far not been used with indigenous individuals from a non-Western context with limited direct and continuous exposure to Western cultures.

Identity Processes in the Ladakhi Context

New identity literature has challenged the assumption of a universal normative understanding of identity development based on Western theories (Cheng & Berman, 2012; Schwartz, 2016). In Asian contexts, empirical support for framing identity development in terms of exploration and commitment has been limited – such support appears to vary according to the degree to which the specific national or local context has been influenced by globalization (Berman et al., 2011). This pattern may reflect the increased prominence of emerging adulthood in globalized and urban contexts (Arnett, 2015; Seiter & Nelson, 2011).

Ladakh provides an important context for exploring identity processes, as this North Indian Himalayan region has been increasingly influenced by globalization-based acculturation in terms of intersections among local Ladakhi, national Indian, and global Western cultural streams (Ozer & Schwartz, 2016). These new cultural influences have been both locally and globally understood as prompting a greater orientation toward individualism and challenging young Ladakhis to actively consider who they are (Ozer, 2012). Similar to other non-Western contexts, many young Ladakhis currently engage in exploration of new cultural elements and new lifestyle opportunities as the prevalence of traditional identity commitments and prescribed identities has diminished. In particular, the large group of Ladakhis studying elsewhere in India are likely to explore identity possibilities associated with being away from home and from Ladakhi sociocultural constraints (Ozer, Bertelsen, Singla, & Schwartz, 2017) indicating the importance of examining whether a measure of identity processes is applicable in non-Western settings that are differentially affected by globalization.

The Current Study

Given these identity challenges among Ladakhi emerging adults, and the limited identity research conducted among indigenous non-Western youth (Cheng & Berman, 2012; Schwartz, 2016), we sought to examine and test the dual-cycle identity model (Luyckx et al., 2008) among

Ladakhis. First, we sought to test the factor structure of the Dimensions of Identity Development Scale (DIDS; Luyckx et al., 2008) in a Ladakhi sample. Second, we sought to evaluate measurement invariance across Leh (the largest town in Ladakh) and Delhi cultural contexts. These contexts differ greatly in terms of globalization-based influences. Towards this end, we would be able to address whether the structure of personal identity processes is consistent across two cultural contexts influenced by dissimilar degrees of globalization and individualization (Ozer et al., 2017).

Methods

Participants

Participants in the study were 487 Ladakhi college students studying in either Leh ($n=291$) or Delhi ($n=196$). Participants were recruited through convenience sampling (see Table 1 for descriptive statistics). In Delhi, Ladakhi students come from high SES backgrounds, have access to a great range of life possibilities, and experience less influence and social constraints from family as compared with students in Leh (Ozer et al., 2017).

Procedures

Data for this study were collected through English self-report questionnaires in 2014 and 2015 at Eliezer Joldan Memorial College in Leh, Ladakh, and by executive members of the Ladakhi student organizations in Delhi. English is taught in primary school within Ladakh and at all colleges in Delhi. In Leh, an English-proficient Ladakhi research assistant was available to help the students with understanding the questions. To reach as many Ladakhi students in Delhi as possible, questionnaires were also available online (27 participants completed the questionnaires online).

Measures

Participants answered questions about their demographic background and completed the Dimensions of Identity Development Scale (DIDS; Luyckx et al., 2008). DIDS measures personal identity development through five subscales with each five items assessing commitment making,

identification with commitment, exploration in breadth, exploration in depth, and ruminative exploration. DIDS is answered through a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “Strongly disagree” to “Strongly agree”.

Results

Data Analytic Plan

All analyses were conducted in SPSS 24 or Mplus 8 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2011), employing maximum likelihood estimation with robust standard errors. As guidelines for evaluating model fit, Kline (2012) suggests that the chi-square statistic should be non-significant ($p > .05$), Comparative Fit Index (CFI) $\geq .90$, Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) $\leq .08$, and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) $\leq .08$. Although we report the χ^2 value, we did not use it to gauge model fit because it tests a null hypothesis of perfect fit, which is rarely plausible with large samples or complex models (Davey & Savla, 2009). The analytic process consisted of four steps. First, we tested the original DIDS structure through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). Second, if the DIDS scoring algorithm did not fit the data adequately, we examined the DIDS factor structure in the Ladakhi context employing Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) using half of the sample to inspect the factor structure without any presumptions of the scale structure. Third, we used CFA with the other half of the sample to validate the structure extracted from the EFA. Fourth, we sought to establish measurement equivalence across the Leh and Delhi cultural contexts by comparing constrained and unconstrained models.

Testing the original DIDS structure

Testing the original DIDS structure in the Ladakhi sample through CFA did not yield satisfactory model fit: $\chi^2(265)=577.937, p < .001$; CFI=.868; SRMR=.07; RMSEA=.05. Loadings ranged from .35 to .80. This unacceptable fit suggests the need to examine an alternative factor structure for the DIDS within the Ladakhi context.

Aim 1 – Establishing the Factor Structure of the DIDS-Ladakh

Exploratory Factor Analysis. The full sample of Ladakhi students was divided randomly into two groups that did not differ significantly with regard to study location, $t(478.47)=1.22, p=.22, d=.10$. For the first subsample, we initially analyzed for low communalities ($<.30$; Gordon, Juang, & Syed, 2007), and as a result we removed items 6 and 24. We then used principal axis factoring, employing promax rotation ($Kappa=4$), to examine the factor structure of the DIDS. Parallel analysis (O'Connor, 2000) was applied to determine the number of factors to be extracted. Parallel analysis compares the factors generated using the real dataset against corresponding factors extracted from a random-number dataset with the same number of cases and variables. This approach ensures that the real data provide larger eigenvalues than would be expected by chance. Results indicated a seven-factor solution as the best fit for the data. This solution yielded an acceptable Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy ($KMO=.78$). Dropping items loading below .40 and with high cross-loadings (below a .20 difference between item loadings) produced a solution with 20 items distributed across six factors. The first factor included five items pertaining to commitment making. The second factor included four items for exploration in breadth. Four items for exploration in depth loaded onto the third factor, and the fourth and fifth factors were each represented by two ruminative exploration items – one referring to current direction in life (items 13 and 14) and the other to future achievement (items 11 and 12). The sixth factor included three items relating to identification with commitment (items 16, 17 and 20). The seventh factor consisted of only one acceptably loading items and was therefore dropped. All loadings ranged from .42 to .90 (see Tables 2).

Confirmatory Factor Analysis. CFA was conducted on the second randomly selected subsample. Fit indices for the six-factor structure suggested mediocre fit, $\chi^2(155)=268.45, p<.001$; $CFI=.88$; $SRMR=.07$; $RMSEA=.05$. Item 22 on the Exploration in Depth subscale loaded poorly

and was subsequently dropped. Rerunning the analysis indicated that item 25 and 23 loaded poorly, and consequently the Exploration in Depth subscale was dropped, as there were not enough remaining items to constitute a meaningful independent factor. These modifications resulted in a good fit $\chi^2(80)=106.97, p=.025$; CFI=.96; SRMR=.05; RMSEA=.04 with all loadings ranging between .54 and .78.

Aim 2 – Establishing Measurement Equivalence

Next, measurement equivalence was established across the Leh and Delhi contexts using the full sample. The unconstrained model provided an acceptable fit, $\chi^2(219)=360.69, p<.001$; CFI=.91; SRMR=.06; RMSEA=.05, with item 1 loading marginally poorly (<.40) in the Leh sample. Thus, item 1 was removed, improving model fit, $\chi^2(170)=252.29, p<.001$; CFI=.94; SRMR=.05; RMSEA=.05; with all loadings above .40 in both samples (see Table 3). Comparing this model against a constrained model with factor loadings set equal across locations (metric invariance) did not yield significant differences in fit indices, $\Delta\chi^2(15)=24.03, p>.05, \Delta CFI=.006; \Delta RMSEA<.001$. However, comparing the equal-factor-loadings model against a constrained model with both factor loadings and intercepts constrained equal (scalar invariance) did yield significant differences in fit indices, $\Delta\chi^2(15)=91.89, p<.01, \Delta CFI=.050; \Delta RMSEA=.013$. Consequently, we examined each item for invariance across site by constraining one intercept at a time and examining the change in the CFI and RMSEA. However, none of the paths were found to violate the assumption of invariance (ΔCFI & $\Delta RMSEA>.01$). Thus, the final version of the DIDS-Ladakh consists of five subscales (see Table 4 and 5 for correlations, means, and indices of reliability).

Discussion and limitations

Results suggest that identity development among Ladakhi emerging adults occurs along various dimensions of commitment and exploration. These dimensions are similar, but not identical, to those by Luyckx et al. (2008). The identity status model has previously been questioned in Asian

contexts, especially regarding the process of identity exploration, which might be replaced by processes of imitation and identification (Berman et al., 2011; Schwartz, 2016). However, the traditional Asian collectivist cultural orientation may be transforming as a result of globalization, urbanization, and individualization (Greenfield, 2013). Nonetheless, many emerging adults in non-Western countries experience restrictions on their individualized identity exploration as a result of strong collectivist values and family obligations (Arnett, 2011). In many such countries, there are “mixed messages” from traditional elders versus globalized media and changing cultural expectations (e.g., Tomasik & Silbereisen, 2012). Despite this, we were able to identify a DIDS factor solution that was applicable to Ladakhis living in two very different types of settings.

The DIDS has previously been examined in other non-Western contexts with emerging adults. In a Philippine study (Pesigan, Luyckx, & Alampay, 2014), the DIDS factor structure was verified using CFA, yielding acceptable fit and reliability in its original form. In another study in the Republic of Georgia (Skhirtladze, Javakhishvili, Schwartz, Beyers, & Luyckx, 2016), the DIDS was tested using CFA, comparing the original five-factor structure with a previously proposed six-factor structure and alternative four factor structures. Results favored a six factor structure, subdividing the exploration in depth into two components termed (a) reflective exploration and (b) reconsideration of commitment. Together with our results, these findings suggests that the original operationalization of the exploration in depth subscale may, in some cases, be different between Western and non-Western populations. Finally, the ruminative exploration scale in our study was subdivided into two separate components referring separately to life direction and to life achievements. This suggests that the concept of ruminative exploration might not be applicable in its original form within indigenous non-Western contexts. Together with the current results, these patterns suggest that the DIDS has provided mixed findings in non-Western settings.

Limitations

There are some highly significant limitations to the current study. First, the sample is not representative of Ladakh, as it does not include non-students and rural individuals whose identity processes might be configured differently than the current sample. Second, an important limitation relates to participants' English proficiency and the degree to which participants were able to understand the DIDS items. Future research should further investigate the influential processes of cultural globalization in relation to personal identity processes to examine how these processes are shaped and might be changing through interaction with a dynamic context. Furthermore, qualitative studies are needed to examine not just how non-Western identity processes are dissimilar from Western conceptions but, furthermore, how they are characterized within an indigenous population.

Conclusion

The current study contributes to the understanding of cross-cultural differences within the identity research. Examining a new and promising personal identity scale in an indigenous Ladakhi sample did not identically replicate the factor structure implied by the dual-cycle identity model. These findings suggest that caution should be exercised when transferring Western identity concepts to non-Western contexts. Our findings suggest an alternative structure of the DIDS scale for use in the specific Ladakhi context and calls for future qualitative research to examine local understandings of identity development.

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Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the Leh and Delhi sample

	Leh sample	Delhi sample
Participants:	291	196
Gender:		
Female	72.9%	48%
Religion:		
Buddhist	74.2%	70.4%
Muslim	25.1%	28.6%
Hindu	0.7%	0%
Christian	0%	1%
Origin:		
Kargil town	1%	11.2%
Village in Kargil district	4.1%	16.3%
Leh town	19.3%	33.2%
Village in Leh district	75.5%	38.8%
Year of college:		
First	50.5%	31.1%
Second	22.6%	30.5%
Third	26.9%	38.4%
SES:		
Low	94.1%	45%
Medium	4.2%	41.8%
High	1.7%	13.2%
Age	Range: 17–26 years, $M = 20.47$, $SD = 1.67$	Range: 17–28 years, $M = 21.00$, $SD = 2.61$

Note. SES = socioeconomic status assessed through yearly household income: low = below 160000 rupees (2466 US dollars), medium = 160000 to 320000 rupees (4932 US dollars), and high = 320000 rupees and above.

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Village in Leh district	75.5%	38.8%
Year of college:		
First	50.5%	31.1%
Second	22.6%	30.5%
Third	26.9%	38.4%
SES:		
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Table 2. Factor loadings from the explorative factor analysis (EFA)

Dimensions of DIDS	Item number and statement	Loadings						
		1.	2.	3.	4.	.5	6.	7.
Commitment making	3. I know which direction I am going to follow in my life.	.90						
	2. I have plans for what I am going to do in the future.	.69						
	4. I have an image about what I am going to do in the future.	.59						
	1. I have decided on the direction I am going to follow in my life.	.54						
	5. I have made a choice on what I am going to do with my life.	.52						
Exploration in breadth	9. I think about different goals that I might pursue.		.82					
	10. I am thinking about different lifestyles that might be good for me.		.60					
	8. I am considering a number of different lifestyles that might suit me.		.55					
	7. I think about different things I might do in the future.		.51					
Exploration in depth	21. I think about the future plans I already made.			.69				
	23. I think about whether the aims I already have for life really suit me.			.69				
	25. I think about whether my future plans match with what I really want			.55				
	22. I talk with other people about my plans for the future.			.47				
Ruminative exploration	12. I worry about what I want to do with my future.				.83			
	11. I am doubtful about what I really want to achieve in life.				.75			
Identification with commitment	16. My plans for the future match with my true interests and values.					.64		
	17. My future plans give me self-confidence.					.57		
	20. I am sure that my plans for the future are the right ones for me.					.51		
Ruminative exploration	14. I keep wondering which direction my life has to take.						.82	
	15. It is hard for me to stop thinking about the direction I want to follow in my life.						.50	
	13. I keep looking for the direction I want to take in my life.						.42	
Identification with commitment	18. Because of my future plans, I feel certain about myself.							.99
	19. I sense that the direction I want to take in my life will really suit me.							

Note. Factor loadings below |.4| are not included. Items marked in bold were retained for the subsequent confirmative factor analysis.

Table 3. Factor loadings from the multi-group confirmative factor analysis (CFA)

Dimensions of DIDS-Ladakh	Item number	Leh					Delhi				
		1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1. Commitment making	2	.55					.72				
	3	.62					.81				
	4	.67					.75				
	5	.54					.73				
2. Exploration in breadth	7		.58					.60			
	8		.51					.70			
	9		.65					.76			
	10		.54					.68			
3. Ruminative exploration – future achievement	11			.81					.73		
	12			.80					.75		
4. Ruminative exploration – direction in life	13				.50					.76	
	14				.50					.63	
5. Identification with commitment	16					.61					.55
	17					.75					.71
	20					.61					.77

Table 4. Subscale correlations

	2.	3.	4.	5.
1. DIDS Ladakh Commitment making	.56**	.25**	-.10*	.18**
2. DIDS-Ladakh Identification with commitment		.26**	-.06	.13**
3. DIDS-Ladakh Exploration in breadth			.27**	.26**
4. DIDS-Ladakh Ruminative exploration: future achievement				.36**
5. DIDS-Ladakh Ruminative exploration: life direction				

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table 5. Reliability, means, standard deviations, and statistical comparisons for the DIDS-Ladakh dimensions divided by the two Ladakhi student samples

	Reliability	Leh <i>M (SD)</i>	Delhi <i>M (SD)</i>	Statistical comparison
DIDS Ladakh Commitment making	$\alpha = .78$	4.07 (0.55)	3.70 (0.69)	$p < .001^*$, $d = 0.60$
DIDS-Ladakh Identification with commitment	$\alpha = .71$	4.04 (0.74)	3.65 (0.76)	$p < .001^*$, $d = 0.53$
DIDS-Ladakh Exploration in breadth	$\alpha = .71$	3.71 (0.69)	3.61 (0.71)	$p = .177$, $d = 0.13$
DIDS-Ladakh Ruminative exploration: future achievement	$r = .62$	3.40 (1.11)	3.07 (1.00)	$p < .001^*$, $d = 0.31$
DIDS-Ladakh Ruminative exploration: life direction	$r = .37$	3.74 (0.77)	3.32 (0.90)	$p = .001^*$, $d = 0.52$

Note. Cronbach's alpha (α) was reported for subscales comprising three items or more while Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) was calculated for subscales containing only two items. *marking statistical significance controlling for familywise error rate employing Bonferroni corrections.