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Family Influences on Adolescent Development in Non-Problematic L.D.S. Families

Thomas R. Lee
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Gerald R. Adams
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Abstract

We hypothesized that balanced family cohesion and adaptability are related to positive adolescent identity development. These variables were measured using Olson's FACES II and Adams's EOM-EIS in a sample of 61 Mormon, non-problematic families with a high school sophomore age son or daughter, living in urban and rural counties of Utah. Initial analyses using Olson's FACES II adaptability and cohesion subscales failed to show any relationship between these measures of family functioning and identity status as measured by Adams's EOM-EIS. We found that four subscales derived from factor analysis of FACES II did prove more predictive with this particular sample. Two of these measures, labeled Family Boundaries and Democratic Problem Solving, were related to positive identity achievement.

The adolescent years are a time of tremendous change, both for youth and their families. It is a time of finding one’s identity as manifested by trying new ways of walking, styling hair, handwriting, or dancing. More significantly, it is a time of deciding who one is and what one stands for. This search for identity, and the new and different behaviors that accompany it, also creates changes and stresses in adolescents’ families.

Most popular attention, and even most research, on adolescents has concentrated on these stresses in families. The problems of adolescents—accidents, drug use, and sexual activity—also receive the most interest. These are real concerns. But for the majority of families, the changes due to the onset of adolescence are not necessarily for the worse. The purpose of this research was to
study families that seemed capable of helping their adolescents go through this period of searching for identity in a constructive manner.

Adolescent Identity Development

Erik Erikson (1959, 1963, 1968) was the first to identify the individual’s search for identity as the central task of adolescence. Erikson proposed that human psychosocial development progressed in stages, with each stage building on the last one. Erikson’s fifth stage of development corresponds with the adolescent years (see Table 1). He called this stage “Identity Achievement vs. Role Diffusion.” According to Erikson, if adolescents fail to successfully resolve this task, their ability to meet the succeeding tasks in adulthood is impaired.

Table 1

Erikson’s Eight Stages of Psychosocial Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Developmental Stage</th>
<th>Psychosocial Task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Infancy</td>
<td>Trust vs. Mistrust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Early childhood</td>
<td>Autonomy vs. Shame, doubt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Preschool</td>
<td>Initiative vs. Guilt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Middle childhood</td>
<td>Industry vs. Inferiority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Adolescence</td>
<td>Identity vs. Role Diffusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Young adulthood</td>
<td>Intimacy vs. Isolation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Adulthood</td>
<td>Generativity vs. Stagnation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Later life</td>
<td>Integrity vs. Despair</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Others since Erikson have recognized identity formation as the major developmental task facing adolescents (Bosma & Gerrits, 1985; Conger, 1975; Grotevant & Cooper, 1985; Josselson, 1980; La Voie, 1976; Powers, Hauser, Schwartz, Noam, & Jacobson, 1983). This emphasis is warranted in contemporary society where,
without some sense of who one is and where one is going, an adolescent is inadequately prepared to face the numerous pressures of life (Adams, 1976). As Newman and Murray (1983) have stated:

Young people are faced with an adulthood of expanding choices. . . . There is increasing social acceptance of the choices of singlehood, premarital sex, childlessness, and a variety of career-family configurations. As the society's expectations for entry into adulthood roles becomes more flexible, a greater burden falls on the strength of personal identity to select and direct the course of adult life. We must begin to understand the family processes that contribute to the sense of agency and the commitment to goals that would allow a young person to take hold of the direction of his or her future (p. 294).

James Marcia (1966) was among the first to operationalize Erikson's theory of identity development so that it could be tested. Based on identifying the presence or absence of an individual's experience with crisis and commitment, Marcia proposed four identity statuses (as shown in Table 2). These four statuses may be viewed as different degrees along a continuum of identity formation.

Table 2

Criteria for the Identity Statuses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID Status</th>
<th>Diffusion</th>
<th>Foreclosure</th>
<th>Moratorium</th>
<th>Achievement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crisis</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>in crisis</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes (vague)</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the identity diffusion status, the adolescent has experienced little crisis over identity issues and has made no commitment to any goals. The individual's energies are unfocused and diffused in many directions. Further, the diffused person has no particular concern over this lack of direction. In the foreclosure status, identity has been "obtained" through assimilation of the parents' standards, values, and ideology with little individual searching or crisis. Rather than going through a process of searching themselves, adolescents in this category have adopted the values of parents,
school, and church without questioning them. As the name of the *moratorium* status implies, the adolescent is currently in a state of searching or crisis, trying out different identities like parts in a play. This individual realizes the important decisions to be made, but is not making any commitments yet. An adolescent who has decided on values, beliefs, and goals based on his/her own searching, is considered to be in the *identity achievement* status. This is goal of identity development according to Erikson in that the adolescent has decided after independent thought and exploration. As Table 2 indicates, the identity achieved status is the only one combining both crisis or searching with decision and commitment.

These statuses were originally thought by Marcia to apply mainly to issues of occupation, politics, and religion. Others have argued that identity development is important in other areas, and that these issues may not be equally applicable to males and females (Douvan & Adelson, 1966; Josselson, Greenberger, & McConochie, 1977; Thorbecke & Grotevant, 1982). Recently, Grotevant and Adams (1984) have expanded on Marcia’s model to include two broad domains: ideological (occupation, politics, religion, and philosophical lifestyle); and interpersonal (dating, friendship, recreation, and sex role). Identity development is thought to occur in each of these areas, though not necessarily at the same rate in each.

**Influences on Identity Development**

The bulk of earlier research on adolescent identity development has drawn the conclusion that peers, and not family or parents, have the most influence on identity development (Coleman, 1980). The emphasis placed on the “generation gap” diverted attention away from the possibility that parental and familial influence remained important. Due to these assumptions, and the prevailing “storm and stress” view of adolescence, limited research has been done to assess the extent to which parents facilitate or retard normative growth toward maturity.

In assessing the influence of parent relationships, it is also important to understand that in the search for identity, adolescents may turn to parents on some issues, peers on others, and parents on still others (Young & Ferguson, 1979). In addition, concern for different issues reaches a peak at different stages in the adolescent process (Coleman, 1978).

The studies on the role of family influences on adolescent development that have been done have employed a deficit model
to examine correlates of social and behavioral problems of adolescents (Rutter, 1980). Few have looked at the features of functional family relationships.

"Normal" families have primarily been used as control groups in most studies and have not been the focus of research in their own right. As a result, we now know a great deal more about the characteristics of problem families and can only assume that normal families are simply lacking those characteristics. What we do not know are the positive aspects of families that help them function more effectively (Olson, McCubbin, Barnes, Larsen, Muxen, & Wilson, 1983, p. 19).

**Parent-Adolescent Interaction**

Some research does exist (Conger, 1975; Jordan, 1971; Josselson, 1980; La Voie, 1976) which shows that different parental socialization styles may either enhance or hinder the ego-identity process. Ego-identity development will be enhanced greatly if a warm, positive relationship exists between both parents and the adolescent. Adams and Jones (1983) and Conger (1975) defined a warm, positive relationship as one which includes democratic parenting styles, minimal restrictiveness, openness to discussions, general psychological support, and the same-sex parent as a salient model. Moreover, research evidence and clinical experience also suggest that the family's ability to adapt to the changes brought on by the adolescent's development has implications for the process of identity formation (Grotevant, 1983; Grotevant & Cooper, 1986; Thorbecke & Grotevant, 1982).

The recent development of the circumplex model (Olson, Portner, & Bell, 1982) of family adaptability and cohesion provides a systematic way of categorizing these two important aspects of family functioning: cohesion (closeness, unity) and adaptability (flexibility). As Figure 1 (on the next page) shows, these two dimensions can differentiate four broad family types. These family types represent interaction patterns that may influence the well-being and development of family members. In this study, the purpose was to investigate the influence of these two dimensions of family functioning on the development of adolescent identity.

**Methodology**

The data for this study is a subset of the data collected in conjunction with the Utah Parent Teen Relationship Project funded by the Agricultural Experiment Station at Utah State University. They were collected in the first of three years of planned data collection.
Subjects

The sample for this study consisted of 61 intact families. Thirty-one of these families reside in cities along Utah’s Wasatch Front, which is the most densely populated and most metropolitan area in Utah. The remaining 30 families live in Beaver and Millard counties, which are rural areas of Utah.

The families were identified and recruited by the local County Extension Agent in each participating county. A letter describing the Parent-Teen Relationship Project and requesting volunteer families was mailed to eligible 4-H families. Identified families were non-problematic, in the parents’ first marriage, L.D.S., with a high-school sophomore-age adolescent.
**Instruments**

Two instruments were used to gather data for this study. The Revised Version of the Extended Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status (EOM-EIS, Bennion & Adams, 1986) was used to assess each adolescent's identity status in the ideological and interpersonal domains. A second instrument, the Family Adaptability & Cohesion Evaluation Scale II (FACES II, Olson, et al. 1982), was used to measure the independent variables of family cohesion and adaptability.

The EOM-EIS is a self-report measure which was designed to measure Marcia's (1966) ideological domain and interpersonal issues in identity development. Ideological dimensions of identity assessed include occupational, political, religious, and philosophical commitment and exploration. Interpersonal dimensions assessed include friendship, dating, sex role, recreational commitments and exploration. There are two questions for each dimension of each of the four identity statuses (diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, achievement) making a total of 64 questions. The EOM-EIS employs a Likert scale format ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 6 (strongly disagree). Scoring results in an identity status scale score for both the Ideological and the Interpersonal domains. Reliability based on estimates of internal consistency was measured by Cronbach's alpha. The alphas ranged from .58 to .80 for the eight ideological and interpersonal subscales, indicating moderate to good internal consistency.

FACES II was constructed to specifically measure the two major dimensions of cohesion and adaptability in the Circumplex Model and to overcome limitations of the original FACES. FACES II enables the researcher to classify individual families within the Circumplex Model. Also a self-report measure, this instrument permits individual family members to describe how they perceive their family. Olson, Portner, and Bell (1982) tested and reported reliability based on estimates of internal consistency measured by Cronbach's alphas. The alphas averaged .87 for cohesion and .78 for adaptability. The total scale alpha was .90. In the present study, the overall alpha of .90 for FACES II was identical to Olson's. The cohesion and adaptability subscale alphas of .89 and .80, respectively, were higher in this study than Olson, et al., in their study (1982).
Data Collection

Eleven interviewers were screened, trained and hired to collect the data for the larger project from which these data were taken. Three interviewers met with each family which included the mother, father, and their adolescent, during the winter through spring of 1987. The interview session required approximately three hours with a combination of individual interviews, self-report questionnaires, and family interaction sequences. For this study, only the adolescent’s responses to the FACES II and EOM-EIS were used. Mothers provided family background information by completing an additional form. Confidentiality of each subject’s responses has been maintained throughout the study.

Data Analysis

The influence of family adaptability and cohesion on adolescent identity development was assessed using Analysis of Variance. Adolescents were grouped by their scores on the EOM-EIS into the four identity statuses: (1) Diffused, (2) Foreclosed, (3) Moratorium, and (4) Achieved. Mean scores on the FACES II subscales were compared by identity status for significant differences.

Results

As we would expect for this middle-adolescence age group, the largest percentage of adolescent subjects were in the foreclosure status (simply adopting parent’s values), with the next largest group in the moratorium status (searching and undecided). As Table 3 shows, a higher percentage of males than females was in the foreclosure status for both the ideological and interpersonal domains. Relatively few were in the diffused (undecided and unconcerned) or achieved (own decision after searching) statuses.

Comparing mean scores on Olson’s FACES II for each identity status group using ANOVA failed to show any significant effects. Through further factor analysis Olson’s two scales were each broken into two subscales (four total) referred to as: Cohesion Subscale I, which was named “Family Bonding;” Cohesion Subscale II, which was named “Family Boundaries;” Adaptability Subscale I, which was named “Respect for Individual Expression;” and Adaptability Subscale II, which was named “Democratic Problem Solving.” Utilizing these factors as separate scales, at the $p < .05$ level of significance, differences between the four identity statuses on the regrouped family subscales became evident.
Table 3

Frequencies of Adolescent Males & Females in the Identity Statuses as measured by EOM-EIS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ideological Identity Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diffusion</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreclosure</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moratorium</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interpersonal Identity Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diffusion</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreclosure</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moratorium</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. EOM-EIS is the Extended Version of Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status revised by Bennion and Adams, 1986.

The names of these scales were an attempt to reflect what the scale seemed to be assessing. The items in the “Family Bonding” subscale grouped around the concepts of emotional closeness and support. The “Family Boundaries” subscale assessed the family’s sense of unity within itself and its separateness from others outside the family. The subscale named “Respect for Individual Expression” dealt with the freedom of family members to express their feelings and to hold differing opinions. The fourth subscale, “Democratic Problem-Solving,” assesses the extent to which all family members participate in making rules and solving problems.
The factors of Family Boundaries and Democratic Problem Solving were related to identity development in the ideological domain (occupation, religion, politics, and philosophical lifestyle). As Table 4 shows, adolescents in the foreclosure, moratorium, and achievement status each perceived their family boundaries to be significantly more distinct than youth in the diffusion status. Foreclosure and achievement youth perceived their families to be more democratic than youth in the diffusion status.

Table 4

One-Way ANOVA
For Revised Cohesion & Adaptability Factors by Identity Status: IDEOLOGICAL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean for Identity Statuses</th>
<th>Diffusion n=10</th>
<th>Foreclosure n=29</th>
<th>Moratorium n=16</th>
<th>Achievement n=8</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Prob</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cohesion 1 Family Bonding</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohesion 2 Family Boundaries</td>
<td></td>
<td>-1.27</td>
<td>.256</td>
<td>-.086</td>
<td>.233</td>
<td>.005*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptability 1 Respect for Individual Expression</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.623</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptability 2 Democratic Problem Solving</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.852</td>
<td>.085</td>
<td>-.140</td>
<td>.623</td>
<td>.042*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p = <.05

a) Cohesion 2: Family Boundaries
   Significant difference between Ideology, Diffusion, and Foreclosure; Ideology, Diffusion and Moratorium; and, Ideology, Diffusion and Achievement.

b) Adaptability 2: Democratic Problem Solving
   Significant difference between Ideology, Diffusion and Foreclosure; and Ideology, Diffusion and Achievement.
In the interpersonal domain, the same two factors of Family Boundaries and Democratic Problem Solving proved significant, but in different patterns. As Table 5 shows, adolescents in the moratorium and achievement status perceived their family as having less definite boundaries than youths in the foreclosure status. On the democratic problem solving variable, youth in the achievement and moratorium statuses perceived their families as less democratic than youth in the diffusion status. Achievement status youth also differed from foreclosure youth on this variable.

Table 5

One-Way ANOVA
For Revised Cohesion & Adaptability Factors
by Identity Status: INTERPERSONAL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean for Identity Statuses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diffusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohesion 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Bonding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohesion 2</td>
<td>.131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Boundaries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptability 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect for Individual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expression</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptability 2</td>
<td>.573</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Problem Solving</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* $p < .05$

C Content, 2
Significant difference between Interpersonal, Foreclosure and Moratorium; and, Interpersonal, Foreclosure and Achievement.

D Content, 2
Significant difference between Interpersonal, Diffusion and Achievement; Interpersonal, Diffusion and Moratorium; and, Interpersonal, Foreclosure and Achievement.
In this study, the aspects of cohesion and adaptability represented by the Family Boundaries and Democratic Problem Solving scales were significantly related to identity status, although the direction of the relationship differed for the ideological and interpersonal domains. The other two factors, Family Bonding and Respect for Individual Expression, were not significant. This does not imply that these latter variables are not important in families. In this study's homogeneous sample, there was not enough variability on these responses for these scales to differentiate between families. These non-problematic families probably were high on these scales due to actual behavior. This was probably made greater, though, because of a social expectation that they "should" be high as Mormon families.

The most interesting finding of this study is in the contrasting relationship between Family Boundaries, Democratic Problem Solving, and adolescent identity development depending on the identity issues in question. The variables were positively related to identity development in the ideological domain, but negatively related in the interpersonal domain. This is perhaps explained by the focal theory (Coleman, 1978) which proposes that different issues come into focus at different times during adolescence.

Ideological values of occupation, religion, and politics are ones that adolescents turn to parents as referents on more so than they do to peers (Young & Ferguson, 1979). For interpersonal issues, however, such as dating, friendship, sex roles, and recreation, adolescents refer more to peers and popular culture than parents.

Depending on how adolescents perceive their family boundaries and decision making, determines whether they are more influenced by parents or by peers. Based on which referent they look to, they will be more likely to be dealing with ideological issues or interpersonal issues.

Based on this study, it appears that if adolescents are looking to parents as their referents because of a sense of strong family boundaries and democratic treatment within their family system, they are more likely to have done exploration within the ideological domain. By the same token, they are less likely to have done exploration in the issues related to interpersonal identity.

Those adolescents who perceive their family boundaries as being less strong and their decision making processes as being less democratic are more likely to look to their peers as their referents. Consequently, they will have done more exploration in the interpersonal issues and less in the ideological issues.
For parents and practitioners who are concerned that adolescents make decisions about their interpersonal relationships based on goals and values that fall in the ideological domain, this has important implications. It seems desirable for adolescents to decide some of the identity issues related to the interpersonal domain after having resolved some of the identity issues related to the ideological domain. That being the case, professionals need to help parents and their families develop the clear family boundaries and democratic decision making patterns that facilitate identification with parents and focus on the ideological identity issues.

Although the data in this study don't directly demonstrate it, adolescents in families with strong boundaries but non-democratic patterns are likely to perceive the family's boundaries more negatively. Additionally, adolescents whose families have very loose boundaries with democratic styles may perceive their families positively, but have less clarity over expectations. For the purposes of developing an ideological foundation on which to base later interpersonal decisions, it may be that the combination of strong boundaries and democratic decision-making patterns that include the participation of adolescents may be necessary.

The findings of this study reflect the small, homogeneous, and non-problematic sample used. Future research that uses larger, more diverse samples of mid-adolescence age youth could further clarify the influence of family socialization on identity development. As the Utah Parent Teen Relationship Project continues to follow these adolescents over time, it will be possible to determine more clearly how the focus of their attention shifts from interpersonal to ideological issues, or vice-versa, based on age and family interaction. Considering previous research, and the findings reported here, it seems important to further study the factors in the family environment that promote the positive development of identity in adolescence.

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