

## The Relations between Personal Growth Initiative and Identity Styles among Youth

Ümit MORSÜNBÜL

*Aksaray University, Aksaray, Turkey  
e-mail: morsunbulumit@gmail.com*

### Abstract

Adolescence and emerging adulthood are crucial periods for identity development. A lot of models have been proposed to operationalize some of Erikson's ideas on identity formation. One of these models was Berzonsky's social-cognitive perspective. A great number of contributions have been made to explain which factors facilitate optimal identity development. The present study focused on personal growth initiative. The aim of this study is to examine the contribution of personal growth initiative on identity styles. Participants were 208 (54.8% females, 45.2% males) university students aged between 18 and 22 years ( $M_{age} = 19.36$  years,  $SD_{age} = 0.94$ ). In order to collect data Identity Style Inventory and Personal Growth Initiative Scale-II were used. Findings indicated that personal growth initiative's cognitive and behavioral components were associated with identity styles.

**Keywords:** Identity styles, personal growth initiative, adolescence, emerging adulthood

## Introduction

Adolescence and emerging adulthood are crucial periods for identity development (Arnett, 2000; Erikson, 1968). In both periods individuals strive to establish a coherent sense of identity (Arnett, 2000; Erikson, 1968). A coherent and stable sense of identity provides a frame to interpret their experience and self-relevant information (Berzonsky, 2010; Erikson, 1968). A lot of models have been proposed to operationalize some of Erikson's (1968) ideas on identity formation. One of these models was Berzonsky's (1992) social-cognitive perspective. Social-cognitive perspective focused on stylistic differences that individuals use to construct and maintain a sense of identity (Berzonsky, 2010). Berzonsky (1992) defined three identity styles based on how individuals process and deal with identity-relevant information and issues. Individuals with *informational identity processing style* intentionally seek out, process, and evaluate self-relevant information. They are self-reflective, skeptical about self-views, open to new information, and willing to examine and revise aspects of their identity when faced with dissonant feedback. Individuals who have a *normative identity processing style* automatically internalize and conform to the expectations and values of significant others. They mainly try to protect and conserve their existing identity structure. Finally, the last is diffuse-avoidant identity style. Individuals with *diffuse-avoidant processing style* procrastinate and delay dealing with identity issues as long as possible. They are reluctant to confront and actively engage personal problems, identity conflicts.

A great number of contributions have been made to explain which factors facilitate optimal identity development (Luyckx & Robitschek, 2014). For instance, previous studies examined such as agency (Schwartz, Cote & Arnett, 2005), positive psychosocial functioning (Morsünbül, Crocetti, Çok & Meeus, 2014, 2016; Schwartz, Beyers, Luyckx, Soenens, Zamboanga, & Forthun, 2011), personality traits (Morsünbül et al., 2014, 2016; Klimstra, Luyckx, Germeijs, Meeus, & Goossens, 2012), coping strategies (Luyckx, Klimstra, Duriez, Schwartz, & Vanhalst, 2012). The present study focused on personal growth initiative (PGI; Robitschek, 1998).

Robitschek (1998) defined PGI as active and intentional engagement in the process of personal growth. Young people with PGI not only are aware that they have developed over time, but also are proactive about the change process, intentionally seeking out or capitalizing on opportunities for development (Robitschek & Cook, 1999). PGI has two crucial aspects: First, personal growth is intra-individual change that is subjectively being experienced as positive. Second, this personal growth is intentional or purposeful in nature, that is, the

individual invests in this growth process to improve one's sense of self, which makes PGI qualitatively different from unintentional change (Luyckx & Robitschek, 2014). According to Robitschek (1998) PGI has both cognitive components, such as knowing how to change and believing that change is possible and behavioral components, such as taking the initiative to actually enact the change process. In order to determine PGI, Personal Growth Initiative Scale I (PGIS-I; Robitschek, 1998; Akın & Anlı, 2011) was developed but PGIS-I failed to distinguish between such components. Thus, Robitschek, Ashton, Spering, Geiger, Byers et al. (2012) developed PGIS-II to determine such components.

PGI is positively associated with psychological well-being (Robitschek, 1998), emotional well-being (Robitschek & Kashubeck, 1999), career exploration and vocational identity (Robitschek & Cook, 1999) and identity dimensions (Luyckx & Robitschek, 2014).

In the light of the knowledge summarized above the aim of this study is to examine the contribution of PGI on identity styles.

In the present study it is hypothesized that;

*Hypothesis 1.* PGI's components would positively predict informational identity style.

*Hypothesis 2.* PGI's components would not significantly predict normative identity style.

*Hypothesis 3.* PGI's components would negatively predict diffuse-avoidant identity style.

## Method

### *Participants.*

Participants were 208 (54.8% females, 45.2% males) university students aged between 18 and 22 years ( $M_{\text{age}} = 19.36$  years,  $SD_{\text{age}} = 0.94$ ).

### *Measures.*

*Identity styles.* Identity Style Inventory (ISI; Berzonsky, 1992; Derelioğlu ve Demir, 2007) was used to determine identity styles. This scale has 30 items and three subscales: informational identity style (11 items), normative identity style (9 items) and diffuse-avoidant identity style (10 items). Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale that ranges from 1 (*not at all like me*) to 5 (*very much like me*). According to data of the study, Cronbach's alpha values: informational identity style .74, normative identity style .69, diffuse-avoidant .76.

*Personal growth initiative.* Personal Growth Initiative Scale-II (PGI-II; Robitschek et al., 2012; Yalçın & Malkoç, 2013) was used to determine personal growth components. This scale has 16 items and four subscales: readiness for change (4 items), planfulness (5 items), using resources (3 items), and intentional behavior (4 items). Each item is rated on a 6-point Likert scale that ranges from 0 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).). According to data of the study, Cronbach's alpha values: readiness for change .91, planfulness .82, using resources .70, and intentional behavior .85.

#### *Procedure*

Data were collected voluntarily from participants. The aim of the study was explained to the participants before the application of the instruments. Completion of scales took approximately 25-30 minutes.

#### *Data Analysis*

To analyze participants' demographic features, descriptive statistics were used. Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to determine correlations between the variables. Hierarchical regression analysis was performed to examine the contribution of PGI's components on identity styles.

### Results

Table 1 presents the correlations among the variables. Consistent with expectations, readiness for change ( $r = 0.10, p < 0.05$ ), planfulness ( $r = 0.18, p < 0.01$ ), using resources ( $r = 0.29, p < 0.01$ ), and intentional behavior ( $r = 0.36, p < 0.01$ ) were positively associated with informational style. Consistent with expectations, planfulness ( $r = 0.03, p > 0.05$ ), using resources ( $r = 0.00, p > 0.05$ ), and intentional behavior ( $r = -0.03, p > 0.05$ ) were not significantly associated with normative style. Inconsistent with expectations, readiness for change ( $r = 0.26, p > 0.01$ ) was positively related to normative style. On the other hand, consistent with expectations, planfulness ( $r = -0.14, p < 0.01$ ), using resources ( $r = -0.26, p < 0.01$ ), and intentional behavior ( $r = -0.14, p < 0.01$ ) were negatively associated with diffuse-avoidant style. Inconsistent with expectations, readiness for change ( $r = 0.09, p > 0.05$ ) was not significantly associated with diffuse-avoidant style.

*Table 1*  
Correlations among the Variables

	M	SD	2	3	4	5	6	7
1.Readiness for change	3.53	0.85	0.57**	0.25**	0.39**	0.10*	0.26**	0.09
2.Planfulness	3.46	0.68		0.22**	0.58**	0.18**	0.03	-0.14*
3.Using resources	3.13	0.95			0.37**	0.29**	0.00	-0.26**
4.Intentional behavior	3.59	0.74				0.36**	-0.03	-0.14*
5.Informational style	3.60	0.37					0.07	-0.22**
6. Normative style	3.41	0.43						-0.02
7.Diffuse-avoidant style	2.70	0.56						

\* p<0.05, \*\*p<0.01

A hierarchical regression analysis was conducted how well PGI components predict identity styles. As can be seen Table 2 while using resources and intentional behavior were significant predictor of informational style, readiness for change and planfulness were not significant predictor of informational style. All predictor accounted for 17% variance of the informational identity style. According to normative style, while readiness for change was significant predictor of normative style, planfulness, using resources and intentional behavior were not significant predictor of normative style. All predictor accounted for 9% variance of the normative identity style. Finally, in terms of diffuse-avoidant style, while readiness for change, planfulness and using resources were significant predictor of diffuse-avoidant style, intentional behavior was not significant predictor of normative style. All predictor accounted for 14% variance of the diffuse-avoidant identity style.

*Table 2*  
Hierarchical Regression Analysis Results

	Informational style		Normative Style		Diffuse-avoidant style	
	$\beta$	t	B	t	$\beta$	t
Readiness for change	0.07	2.76	0.37	4.51**	0.31	3.84**
Planfulness	0.00	0.00	-0.10	-1.13	-0.24	-2.70*
Using resources	0.19	2.84**	-0.02	-0.29	-0.28	-4.03**
Intentional behavior	0.32	3.89**	-0.11	-1.32	-0.01	-0.22
R <sup>2</sup> / F for R <sup>2</sup> Δ	0.17**	10.35**	0.09**	5.49**	0.14**	8.37**

\* p<0.05, \*\*p<0.01

## Discussion

The present study aimed to examine the contribution of PGI's cognitive (i.e., planfulness and readiness for change) and behavioral (i.e., intentional behavior and using

resources) components on positive identity development by using identity style perspective. Findings indicated that PGI's cognitive and behavioral components were associated with identity. This is consistent results of previous studies (Luyckx & Robitschek, 2014; Robitschek & Cook, 1999). Specifically, correlation analysis results totally but regression analysis partially supported first hypothesis. All PGI's components were positively related to informational identity style suggests that active and intentional engagement for personal growth facilitates positive identity development. Findings of this study partially supported second hypothesis. All PGI's components were not significantly associated with normative style, except for readiness for change. Interestingly, readiness for change was positively related to normative identity style, suggests that individuals with normative styles consider changing but it doesn't become behavior. Furthermore, findings indicated that all PGI's components were negatively related to diffuse-avoidant identity style, except for readiness for change. This result suggests that individuals with diffuse-avoidant identity style are not interested in their personal growth.

As a result, young people with informational identity style intentionally seek out, process, and evaluate self-relevant information (Berzonsky, 1992, 2010) because they are actively interested in their personal growth. Conversely, young people with diffuse-avoidant identity style procrastinate and delay dealing with identity issues (Berzonsky, 1992, 2010) because they are not actively interested in their personal growth.

Results of this study indicated that specialist who worked with adolescents and emerging adulthood should be considering PGI's components in order to improve positive identity development.

#### References

- Akın, A. & Anlı, G. (2011). Adaptation of the Personal Growth Initiative Scale: Study of validity and reliability. *Mersin University Journal of the Faculty of Education*, 7:42-49.
- Arnett, J.J. (2000). Emerging adulthood: A theory of development from the late teens through the twenties. *American Psychologist*, 55, 469–480.
- Berzonsky, M.D. (1992). A process perspective on identity and stress management. GR Adams, R.M. Montemarory (Eds.), *Adolescent Identity Formation*, Newbury: Park Sage, s.193-215.

- Berzonsky, M.D. (1992). Identity style inventory (ISI3) revised version. Unpublished manuscript.
- Berzonsky, M. D. (2010). Cognitive processes and identity formation: The mediating role identity processing style. *Psychologia Rozwojowa*, 14, 13-27.
- Derelioğlu, Y. & Demir, İ. (2007). Kimlik stili envanteri (Gözden geçirilmiş formu): Türkçe geçerlik ve güvenirlik çalışması. VI. Türk-Alman Psikiyatri Kongresi, 12-15 Eylül, Boğaziçi Üniversitesi, İstanbul.
- Erikson, E. (1968). *Identity, youth and crisis*. New York: Norton.
- Klimstra, T. A., Luyckx, K., Germeijs, V., Meeus, W., & Goossens, L. (2012). Personality traits and educational identity formation in late adolescents: longitudinal associations and academic progress. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 41, 346-361.
- Luyckx, K., Klimstra, T. A., Duriez, B., Schwartz, S. J., & Vanhalst, J. (2012). Identity processes and coping strategies in college students: short-term longitudinal dynamics and the role of personality. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 41, 1226e1239.
- Luyckx, K. & Robitschek, C. (2014). Personal growth initiative and identity formation in adolescence through young adulthood: Mediating processes on the pathway to well-being. *Journal of Adolescence*, 37, 973-981.
- Morsünbül, Ü, Crocetti, E, Çok, F., & Meeus, W. (2014). The Utrecht Management of Identity Commitment Scale (U-MICS): Gender and age measurement invariance and convergent validity of the Turkish version. *Journal of Adolescence*, 37, 799-805.
- Morsünbül, Ü., Crocetti, E., Çok, F., & Meeus, W. (2016). Identity Formation in Turkish Youth: A Person Centered Approach. *Journal of Adolescence*, 47, 145-155.
- Robitschek, C. (1998). Personal growth initiative: the construct and its measure. *Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling and Development*, 30, 183-198.
- Robitschek, C., & Cook, S. W. (1999). The influence of personal growth initiative and coping styles on career exploration and vocational identity. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 54, 127-141.
- Robitschek, C. & Kashubeck, S. (1999). A structural model of parental alcoholism, family functioning, and psychological health: The mediating effects of hardiness and personal growth orientation. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 46, 159-172.

- Robitschek, C., Ashton, M. W., Spring, C. C., Geiger, N., Byers, D., Schotts, G. C., et al. (2012). Development and psychometric evaluation of the personal growth initiative scale e II. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 59, 274-287.
- Schwartz, S. J., Côté, J. E. & Arnett, J. J. (2005). Identity and agency in emerging adulthood: Two developmental routes in the individualization process. *Youth & Society*. 37, 201-229.
- Schwartz, S. J., Beyers, W., Luyckx, K., Soenens, B., Zamboanga, B. L., & Forthun, L. F., ...Waterman, A. S. (2011). Examining the light and dark sides of emerging adults' identity: A study of identity status differences in positive and negative psychosocial functioning. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 40, 839-859.
- Yalçın, İ. & Malkoç, A. (2013). Adaptation of Personal Growth Initiative Scale-II Turkish and investigation of psychometric. *The Journal of Psychiatry and Neurological Sciences*, 26, 258-266.