Identity style, psychosocial maturity, and academic performance

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Abstract

The present study investigated the role that differences in identity processing style may play in how effectively students adapt to a college context. Identity style refers to relatively stable differences in how students make decisions, solve personal problems, and process identity-relevant information. Measures of student psychosocial developmental tasks, identity style, and identity commitment were administered to 460 university freshmen (mean age = 18.3; 60% women); SAT scores and measures of academic performance were also obtained. Results indicated that students who entered college with an informational identity style were best prepared to function successfully in a university setting: they possessed high levels of academic autonomy, had a clear sense of educational purpose, were socially skilled, and tended to perform well academically. In contrast, students with a diffuse-avoidant style were at relative disadvantage on these dimensions. Students with a normative identity style also had a clear sense of academic direction. However, they were significantly less tolerant, and less academically and emotionally autonomous than their informational counterparts.

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1. Introduction

For many late adolescents going to a university can be difficult transition. Not only are they leaving a familiar home environment, they face major challenges like establishing new social networks and dealing with more rigorous academic demands and expectations. A number of investigators have suggested that individual differences along personality dimensions may play a role in how well students negotiate this transition (see Adams, Ryan, & Keating, 2000; Chickering, 1969; Pratt, 2000). Identity processes, in particular, may play a relevant role. According to Erikson’s (1968) life-span theory of psychosocial development, a university setting provides the opportunity for an institutionalized moratorium: A time when youth can actively explore life options and attempt to form a stable and coherent sense of personal identity. A coherent, well-integrated identity structure provides individuals with a sense of direction and purpose and it serves as a conceptual frame within which they make decisions, solve problems and deal with the demands of everyday life. The purpose of the present study was to investigate whether differences in identity processing orientations play a role in how well late adolescents negotiate the transition to a university context.

For almost four decades, much research on identity formation has utilized Marcia’s (1966) operational definition of identity formation. According to Marcia (1966), four identity statuses can be distinguished in terms of the presence or absence of identity commitments and active self-exploration: achievers, moratoriums, foreclosures, and diffusions. This classification scheme has inspired a vibrant research literature that has demonstrated theoretically consistent status differences on numerous personality, social–psychological, and cognitive dimensions (for reviews see Berzonsky & Adams, 1999; Marcia, 1993).

Although identity statuses have typically been viewed as differential personality outcomes, process interpretations have also been advanced (see Berzonsky, 1988; Grotevant, 1987; Kerpelman, Pittman, & Lamke, 1997). Berzonsky (1988, 1990), for example, proposed a social-cognitive view that highlights differences in the processes individuals within the statuses use to make decisions, resolve problems, and process self-relevant information. Three identity processing orientations or styles are emphasized: informational, normative, and diffuse-avoidant.

Information-oriented individuals are skeptical about their self-views and they are willing to suspend judgment until they can process and evaluate relevant information (Berzonsky, 1990). An informational identity orientation has been found to be positively associated with self-reflection, problem-focused coping efforts, a rational epistemic style, a high need for cognition, cognitive complexity, planful decision making, conscientiousness, experiential openness, and identity achievement (Berzonsky, 1990; Berzonsky & Kuk, 2000; Berzonsky & Neimeyer, 1994; Berzonsky & Sullivan, 1992; Dollinger, 1995; Streitmatter, 1993).

Students with a normative identity style deal with identity conflicts by conforming to expectations and prescriptions of significant others in a relatively automatic manner (Berzonsky, 1990). Research indicates that they are agreeable and conscientious and they possess stable, foreclosed self-concepts (Berzonsky, 1990; Berzonsky & Kuk, 2000; Dollinger, 1995; Nurmi, Berzonsky, Tammi, & Kinney, 1997). They have also been found to be highly defensive and intolerant of ambiguity, possessing a strong need for structure and cognitive closure (Berzonsky & Kinney, 1995; Berzonsky & Sullivan, 1992; Dollinger, 1995).
Students with a diffuse-avoidant identity style procrastinate and are reluctant to confront and deal with personal conflicts and decisions; their behavior tends to be dictated and controlled by situational demands and incentives (Berzonsky, 1990). A diffuse-avoidant identity style has been found to be associated with low levels of self-awareness, conscientiousness, and cognitive persistence and high levels of maladaptive decisional strategies, dysfunctional cognitive strategies, self-handicapping, emotion-focused coping, and identity diffusion (Berzonsky, 1994a; Berzonsky & Ferrari, 1996; Berzonsky & Kuk, 2000; Dollinger, 1995; Nurmi et al., 1997).

The present study was designed to investigate the role that identity style may play in explaining variation in how effectively students cope and adapt within a university context. Specifically, the Student Developmental Task and Lifestyle Inventory (Winston & Miller, 1987) was used to assess the psychosocial progress students have made in becoming independent, self-regulated learners, formulating realistic career goals and a sense of purpose, and developing mature interpersonal relationships. Boyd, Hunt, Kandell, and Lucas (2003) found that that a diffuse-avoidant identity style was associated with negative expectations about academic success and performance, whereas the informational and normative styles were positively correlated with these dimensions. However, Boyd et al. only used single item indicators of student expectations. Berzonsky and Kuk (2000) found that an informational identity style was uniquely positively correlated with the three student-developmental tasks assessed by the Winston and Miller (1987) inventory: establishing educational purpose, developing academic autonomy, and developing mature interpersonal relationships. Relationships between a diffuse-avoidant style and performance on all three tasks was negative; a normative style correlated positively with educational purpose (Berzonsky & Kuk, 2000). The present study sought to replicate and extend these findings by categorizing students according to their identity style and evaluating differences on the specific scales that constitute each of the three developmental tasks. Based on previous research, it was hypothesized that students with an informational style would perform better than their normative and diffuse-avoidant counterparts on measures involving openness (e.g., tolerance of others, cultural participation) and independent self-regulation (e.g., academic autonomy and emotional autonomy, and life management). Students with a normative identity style and those with an informational style were expected to score higher than diffuse-avoiders on measures of developing a sense of purpose and direction (e.g., career planning, identity commitment, educational involvement) and forming conventional social relations (peer relations). Students with a diffuse-avoidant style were expected to score the lowest on all of the psychosocial scales.

A second objective was to examine the relationship between identity style and academic performance during their first year at university. A direct linkage between identity style and academic performance has not been established. Academic performance has been found to be positively associated with personality dimensions—i.e., identity achievement (Cross & Allen, 1970), conscientiousness (Chamorro-Premuzic & Furnham, 2003), and openness to experience (Farsides & Woodfield, 2003)—that are positively associated with an informational identity style and negatively correlated with diffuse-avoidance (Berzonsky, 1990; Berzonsky & Sullivan, 1992; Dollinger, 1995). Consequently, it was hypothesized that academic performance would correlate positively with an informational style and negatively with diffuse-avoidance. Because a normative style is associated with high levels of conscientiousness (Dollinger, 1995) but low levels of openness (Berzonsky & Sullivan, 1992), no specific predictions about relationships between a normative style and academic performance were advanced.
2. Method

2.1. Participants

The participants were first-term freshmen attending a medium-sized college in upstate New York. They were recruited during an orientation session when new students were being advised and registered for the fall term. Approximately 50% (504) of the class volunteered (mean age = 18.3 years); complete survey information was available for 460 (276 female and 184 male) students. Testing was completed within the first two weeks of the students’ first term. Consistent with the composition of the freshmen class at the college, the sample was predominantly Caucasian (87%): approximately 7% identified themselves as African American; 3% as Hispanic; and 3% as Asian American, Native American or other.

3. Measures

3.1. Identity measures

Identity processing styles were assessed with the Identity Style Inventory (ISI; Berzonsky, 1992b). On a 1 (not at all like me) to 5 (very much like me) Likert scale, students rated the extent to which they considered 40 statements to be self-descriptive. The ISI contains three continuous style scales:

(1) The informational-style scale (11 items: e.g., “I’ve spent a great deal of time thinking seriously about what I should do with my life”): coefficient alpha was = .74. (2) The diffuse-avoidant-style scale (10 items: e.g., “I’m not really thinking about my future now; it’s still a long way off”): coefficient alpha = .79. (3) The normative-style scale (9 items: e.g., “I prefer to deal with situations where I can rely on social norms and standards”): coefficient alpha = .67. The ISI also contains an identity commitment scale (10 items: e.g., “Regarding religious beliefs, I know basically what I believe and don’t believe”): coefficient alpha = .81. Test–retest reliabilities (Berzonsky, 2003) over a two-week interval were found to be informational (.87), normative (.87), diffuse-avoidant (.83), and commitment (.89). Convergent validity and psychometric data are provided in Berzonsky (1989, 1990, 2003).

3.2. Psychosocial development measures

The Student Developmental Task and Lifestyle Inventory (SDTLI) developed by Winston and Miller (1987) was used to assess student psychosocial development. The items in the inventory represent the psychosocial tasks students need to master and the attitudes and resources they need to possess in order to function successfully within an academic context. The inventory contains 11 separate scales: (1) Academic Autonomy (10 items: e.g., “I have difficulty disciplining myself to study when I should”); (2) Educational Involvement (16 items: e.g., “I have declared my academic major/field of academic concentration”); (3) Career Planning (19 items: e.g., “I have formulated a clear plan for getting a job after college”); (4) Lifestyle Planning (11 items: e.g., “I have one or more goals that I am committed to accomplishing and have been working on for over a year”);
(5) Life Management (16 items: e.g., “I keep accurate records of the money I spend”); (6) Cultural Participation (6 items: e.g., “I have attended a play or classical music concert within the past year when not required for a class”); (7) Emotional Autonomy (8 items: e.g., “I seldom express my opinion in groups if I think they will be controversial or different from what others believe”); (8) Tolerance (9 items: e.g., “There are some topics that should never be discussed in college classrooms”); (9) Peer Relationships (13 items: e.g., “It is important to me that I meet the standards of behavior set by my friends”); (10) Intimacy (19 items: e.g., “Sharing my innermost thoughts with my partner is the thing I value most in our relationship”); (11) Salubrious Lifestyle (8 items: e.g., “I am generally satisfied with my physical appearance”).

Nine of these scales measure what Winston and Miller (1987) refer to as three student developmental tasks: Academic Autonomy (scale 1); Establishing and Clarifying Purpose (scales 2–6); and Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships (scales 7–9). Reported test–retest reliability for the individual scales ranged from .78 to .87 over two weeks (Winston, 1990) and .70 to .88 over a four-week interval (Winston & Miller, 1987). The convergent validity of the SDTLI has been evaluated in a number of studies. Examples of findings include the following: (1) need for independence, effective study habits and management of time, and personal confidence are associated with academic-autonomy; (2) effective career exploration and planning, self-assuredness, and successful study habits are correlated with scales that reflect educational purpose and involvement; (3) social extroversion, altruism, family independence, and not being emotionally dependent on peers are associated with interpersonal-relationships scales such as emotional autonomy, tolerance, and intimacy (for reviews see Winston, 1990; Winston & Miller, 1987).

3.3. Academic performance

Information about the students’ Scholastic Aptitude Test scores (SAT) and academic performance during their freshman year was obtained from college records. Freshman grade point averages (GPA) for their first two terms were obtained. Since individual grade point averages are based on different combinations of courses taken in different academic departments, actual performance in five specific freshmen courses was also obtained. (The number of students for whom specific grades were available varied across courses and semesters.)

4. Results

Style scores were standardized and used to classify students according to their dominant identity processing style (see Berzonsky & Sullivan, 1992). Because some recent research (Boyd et al., 2003) suggests the possibility that relationships between identity style and other variables may in some cases at least be moderated by sex, a 3 (Identity Styles) × 2 (Sex) multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed on all of the dependent measures (the Winston psychosocial scales and commitment). The MANOVA revealed only significant main effects of identity style ($F_{[24,886]} = 4.37, \ p < .01$) and sex ($F_{[12,443]} = 4.29, \ p < .01$). The Style × Sex interaction ($F = .94, \ ns$) was not significant, indicating that male and female students with the same identity styles did not differ along these psychosocial dimensions. Univariate analyses revealed that female students reported being more tolerant of others ($Ms = 6.42$ vs. $5.51, \ p < .01$), and having more
intimate interpersonal relationships ($M_s = 13.32$ vs. $11.78$, $p < .01$), but having a less salubrious (healthful) lifestyle ($M_s = 5.57$ vs. $6.45$, $p < .01$) than their male counterparts.

As displayed in Table 1, identity style differences were found along all of the dependent measures. In general, students with an informational identity orientation tended to perform the best on all of the student developmental scales, diffuse-avoidant students fared the worst. Information-oriented students scored significantly higher than both their normative and diffuse-avoidant counterparts on scales that assessed being academically independent and self-sufficient; possessing effective life-management skills; taking part in a variety of cultural activities; respecting and being tolerant of individuals who differed from themselves; forming intimate relations; and being emotionally independent and self-assured (Table 1). Compared to diffuse-avoidant students, both informational and normative students scored significantly higher on scales that reflected the possession of realistic vocational information and career plans; clear educational objectives and goals; realistic, long-term life plans and goals; and stable peer relationships. Informational students indicated that they took better care of themselves and had a more salubrious, healthful lifestyle than diffuse-avoiders. Normative students, however, held significantly stronger identity commitments than informational students.

According to Winston and Miller (1987), in addition to developing academic autonomy, performance on eight of the dependent variables mark two common student developmental tasks: Establishing Educational Purpose (five scales) and Forming Mature Interpersonal Relationships (three scales). In an attempt to further clarify the findings, student scores on these eight Winston scales and the commitment scale were factor analyzed. Consistent with Winston and Miller (1987) two factors, accounting for 68% of the matrix variance, emerged. Establishing a Sense of Purpose was marked by six variables: Educational Involvement (.82); Career Planning (.79); Lifestyle Planning (.79); Lifestyle Management (.67); Identity Commitment (.66); and Cultural Participation (.59). The second factor labeled Forming Mature Interpersonal Relationships was marked by

<table>
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<th>Comparisons of identity style groups on the dependent variables</th>
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<td><strong>Dependent measures</strong></td>
<td><strong>Identity processing styles</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Academic autonomy</td>
<td>5.63$^A$</td>
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<tr>
<td>Life management</td>
<td>9.28$^A$</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural participation</td>
<td>3.54$^A$</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tolerance</td>
<td>6.79$^A$</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emotional autonomy</td>
<td>5.00$^A$</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intimacy</td>
<td>13.94$^A$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career planning</td>
<td>8.54$^A$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational involvement</td>
<td>8.07$^A$</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lifestyle planning</td>
<td>6.16$^A$</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peer relations</td>
<td>8.32$^A$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salubrious lifestyle</td>
<td>6.19$^A$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>37.67$^A$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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*Info = Informational style; Norm = Normative style; Diff = Diffuse-Avoidant style. Means with different superscripts differ by at least $p < .05$. *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$. 
significant loadings on three variables: Emotional Autonomy (.81); Peer Relations (.80); and Tolerance of Others (.71).

A 3 (Style) x 2 (Sex) MANOVA of the students’ scores on these two factors revealed only a significant main effect of identity style, $F(4,908) = 13.61, p < .01$. Neither the main effect of sex ($F = 2.54$, ns) nor the Style x Sex interaction ($F = 1.35$, ns) was significant. Significant style differences were found on both factors. Students with an informational style ($M = +.40$) indicated that they had significantly more mature interpersonal relationships than both normative ($M = -.13$) and diffuse-avoidant ($M = -.26$) students, who did not differ. Both normative ($M = +.35$) and informational ($M = +.25$) students had established a more stable and well-defined sense of educational purpose and direction than diffuse-avoiders ($M = -.49$).

### 4.1. Academic performance

We also examined the extent to which identity processing styles accounted for variation in academic performance. First, style differences in SAT scores were examined. Separate 3 (Style) x 2 (Sex) analyses of variance on Math and Verbal SAT scores revealed no significant main effect or interaction with identity style. The Verbal SAT means were Informational = 451; normative = 440; and diffuse-avoidant = 448, $F = 1.11$, ns. Math SAT means were Informational = 519; normative = 521; and diffuse-avoidant = 523, $F = .89$, ns. The failure to find style differences in SAT scores is consistent with previous research (Berzonsky & Ferrari, 1996) suggesting that by late adolescence most normal individuals are intellectually capable of utilizing all three social-cognitive strategies (Berzonsky, 1990). Male students ($M = 534$) were found to have significantly higher Math SAT scores than their female counterparts ($M = 510$), $t(458) = 4.18$, $p < .01$. No significant effects were found for Verbal SAT scores.

To evaluate the role that identity style played in academic performance, correlations were computed between the students’ continuous identity-style scores and their academic performance operationalized by first- and second-semester grade point averages (GPA) and performance in five specific freshmen courses. To control for differences in academic ability, the effects of verbal and math SAT scores were statistically controlled. The partial correlations (controlling for SAT scores) are presented in Table 2. A number of modest but reliable correlations suggested that academic success was positively associated with utilization of an informational identity style and negatively associated with diffuse-avoidance.

Partial correlations (controlling for verbal and math SAT) between the developmental-task scores (academic autonomy and the two factor scores: Sense of Purpose and Mature Interpersonal Relations) and academic performance revealed only significant correlations with academic autonomy. As indicated in Table 2 Academic autonomy was significantly correlated with six of the academic performance measures.

Because academic autonomy was significantly related to informational ($r = .32$, $p < .01$) and diffuse-avoidant ($r = -.32$, $p < .01$) scores, partial Style x Academic Performance correlations were re-computed with academic autonomy as well as Verbal and Math SAT statistically controlled, see Table 3. Only the Diffuse-Avoidant x Anthropology Grade partial correlation remained significant, suggesting that relationships between an informational identity style and academic performance were mediated by academic autonomy. (Normative scores were not correlated with academic autonomy, $r = .06$, ns.)
5. Discussion

The findings indicated that students who enter university with an informational identity style may be relatively well prepared to deal effectively with the academic, social, and personal challenges that they will face. Information-oriented students indicated that they possessed the resources and attitudes required to successfully manage their time and organize their lives in a responsible, self-governing fashion. They were the highest in emotional autonomy, indicating that they saw themselves as being able to operate in a self-regulated manner without constantly looking to others for reassurance and approval. They described themselves as being open to diverse views and beliefs and they indicated that they were tolerant of and able to relate to others whose backgrounds and opinions differed from their own. In addition, previous research indicates that students with an informational identity style tend to rely on active, problem-focused coping strat-
Strategies (Berzonsky, 1992a), which have been found to predict college adjustment (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1992).

Students with a normative identity style were also found to have a clear sense of purpose and direction; they possessed stable commitments and well-articulated career plans and educational goals. In fact, they had a significantly higher level of commitment than information-oriented students. These findings are consistent with previous research indicating that normative students are conscientious, focused, and goal-oriented (Berzonsky & Kinney, 1995; Dollinger, 1995). However, students with a normative style were found to differ significantly from information-oriented ones on two major student developmental tasks: Establishing academic autonomy and forming mature interpersonal relationships. Although students with a normative style may do well in well-structured educational settings their relative lack of academic autonomy may place them at a disadvantage in more open-ended situations where they need to manage their time and monitor and regulate their behavior in a relatively independent fashion.

Normative students also scored significantly lower than information-oriented students on the task of establishing mature interpersonal relationships. At first blush, this finding may appear to be at odds with the tendency of normative students to focus on social or collective expectations and prescriptions (Berzonsky, 1994b). The interpersonal factor assessed in the present study, however, was marked by emotional autonomy and tolerance of diversity as well as social connections. As indicated in Table 1, although normative students were comparable to information-oriented students on peer-relations, they scored significantly lower on tolerance and emotional autonomy. Thus, normative students, lacking emotional autonomy, may internalize values and goals in order to avoid guilt and gain approval from significant others (Deci & Ryan, 1991). In contrast, values and goals internalized by informed, self-reflection have been found to be associated with self-determined behaviors for which individuals assume personal responsibility (Deci & Ryan, 1991).

Students who enter college with a diffuse-avoidant identity style appear to be least prepared to handle the demands they will encounter. First, they were found to lack a clear sense of personal and academic purpose; they scored the lowest on measures of commitment, life planning, career planning, and educational involvement. Also, they scored lower than their informational and normative counterparts on measures of academic autonomy and life management skills. Consistent with the present findings, Boyd et al. (2003) found that students with a diffuse-avoidant style reported that they lacked clear academic goals and that they expected to have difficulty meeting academic demands and regulating and scheduling their time on their own. Their lack of direction and autonomy coupled with their use of maladaptive cognitive and coping strategies (Berzonsky, 1992a, 1994a; Nurmi et al., 1997), appears to place diffuse-avoiders at increased risk for academic and adjustment difficulties.

The present findings also suggest that students with a diffuse-avoidant identity style may experience social problems and have difficulty forming friendships and maintaining a network of social support. They reported having poor relationships with their peers and they characterized their social relationships as relatively low in intimacy, openness, tolerance, and trust.

5.1. Academic performance

Consistent with previous research (Berzonsky & Ferrari, 1996), no significant differences in the intellectual competency (operationalized by SAT scores) of students with different identity styles...
were found. These findings support the assertion that by age 18 at the latest, virtually all normal late adolescents are capable of utilizing the social-cognitive strategies associated with the three processing orientations (Berzonsky, 1990). Identity style refers to the strategy that a person characteristically uses or would prefer to utilize in decisional and problem-solving situations. The question as to why individuals develop different styles has yet to be answered. Some possible factors that need to be investigated include family processes, temperament, early experiences, and personality dispositions.

Likewise, no style differences in grade point averages (GPA) were found. Since students may take different courses (and instructors), GPAs may not be comparable across students. When academic performance within the same courses was examined, students with high informational scores tended to do better, whereas students with high diffuse-avoidant scores tended to do worse. This finding supports the view that students with a diffuse-avoidant identity style are at an increased risk for academic problems and difficulty and that they may benefit from interventions designed to improve academic skills and strategies. Moreover, these relationships obtained when differences in academic ability (as operationalized by SAT) were statistically controlled. Normative scores were not found to be related with any of the academic-performance measures. The significant relationships that were found, however, did not account for a large percentage of the variation in academic performance: only 1–6% of the variance was explained. In addition, all of the Informational Style × Academic Performance relationships were found to be nonsignificant when the effects associated with academic autonomy were controlled. Thus, it appears that relationships between identity style and academic performance may be mediated, at least in part, by the ability to exercise self-discipline, plan effectively, and handle uncertainty by engaging in self-regulated learning. Soenens, Berzonsky, Vansteenkiste, Beyers, and Goossens (in press) also found that an informational identity style was positively associated with an autonomous causal orientation: Students with high informational scores attempted to initiate and regulate their actions in terms of personal goals and standards. In contrast, students with high diffuse-avoidant scores adopted an impersonal causal orientation; they experienced a sense of helplessness and believed they could not effectively control and regulate their actions (Soenens et al., in press).

Several cautionary notes need to be sounded. All of the participants were attending one college and the sample was relatively homogeneous with regard to ethnicity and race. Students attending other colleges may encounter somewhat different demands, expectations, and peer pressures, which may limit the generalizability of the present findings. Second, since the identity and developmental-task measures were administered concurrently, it is possible that progress along the developmental tasks contributed to differences in identity style. Although academic performance was assessed longitudinally, changes along the identity or developmental task dimensions were not examined. Finally, the findings may have been influenced by factors other than those measured in the present investigation—e.g., parental practices, motivational factors, and so forth.

In conclusion, the findings indicated that students who enter college with an informational identity style possessed the psychosocial resources to function in a relatively effective and adaptive fashion. They had a definite sense of direction and educational purpose, a high level of academic autonomy, and a high level of academic success. Further, relationships between an informational style and academic performance were mediated by levels of academic autonomy. Linkages
between academic autonomy, as operationalized by the SDTLI, and academic performance do not appear to be well established (see Winston, 1990; Winston & Miller, 1987). One study did report a positive correlation between academic autonomy and the grade point averages of student athletes (Mickle, 2001). The present findings provide additional evidence for the linkage within a more representative sample of college freshmen.

Although students with a normative style scored significantly lower than informational students on psychosocial dimensions involving autonomy, tolerance, and openness to experiences (cultural participation), they were found to possess a clear sense of academic purpose and direction. In well-structured learning environments, therefore, it is likely that students with informational and normative styles will be adaptive and successful. Differences may be most pronounced in situations where independence and self-regulated learning are emphasized.

Students with a diffuse-avoidant identity style scored the lowest on most of the psychosocial scales; they did not differ significantly from normative students in tolerance, emotional autonomy, intimacy, and having a salubrious life style. Diffuse-avoidance was also negatively associated with academic performance in a number of courses; a low level of academic autonomy appeared to contribute to their poor performance. These findings add to a growing body of research indicating that students with a diffuse-avoidant identity style are at increased risk for a variety of difficulties and problem behaviors including eating disorders (Wheeler, Adams, & Keating, 2001), conduct disorders (Adams et al., 2001), delinquency (White & Jones, 1996), depressive reactions (Nurmi et al., 1997), neuroticism (Dollinger, 1995), and work and alcohol-related problems (Jones, Ross, & Hartmann, 1992).

References


