

Sex Differences in Identity and Intimacy Development in College Youth¹

James W. Hodgson² and Judith L. Fischer³

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This study examined sex differences in the processes of identity and intimacy development among college youth. Fifty males, and 50 females were given measures of identity status, intimacy status, and self-esteem. Males were found to focus on intrapersonal aspects of identity status, intimacy status, and self-esteem. Males were found to focus on intrapersonal aspects of identity, females on interpersonal aspects. The pursuit of various identity development pathways affected self-esteem differentially for the two sexes. More females than males were found to be intimate and the achievement of intimacy seemed more closely related to identity in males than in females. The findings were interpreted in the context of Eriksonian theory, which seemed more adequate in explaining male than female development.

INTRODUCTION

In the last decade there has been an upsurge of popular and professional concern with the concept of "identity." Both theoretical and empirical attention

¹ This article is based in part on the doctoral dissertation by James W. Hodgson in partial fulfillment of the Doctor of Philosophy degree, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania.

² Associate Psychologist, Hutchings Psychiatric Center, Syracuse, New York. Received his Ph.D. in human development and family studies from The Pennsylvania State University. Current research interests include normative and dysfunctional development of late adolescence.

³ Assistant Professor of Human Development at The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania. Received her Ph.D. in social personality psychology from the University of Colorado. Current research interests include the developments of friendships and sex roles in adolescence. Correspondence regarding this article may be sent to Judith L. Fischer, Ph.D., Individual and Family Consultation Center, Catherine Beecher House, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania 16802.

on the subject have focused primarily on male identity development, while female identity development has been comparatively neglected. It has been argued, for instance, that Erikson's descriptions (1968) of identity and intimacy development are normative for males but not females (Gallatin, 1975; Matteson, 1975). The heuristic nature of Erikson's theoretical groundwork in these areas cannot be doubted, but questions have arisen concerning the adequacy with which his theory can accommodate specific aspects of identity and intimacy development. A note of caution was sounded a decade ago that male and female identity development may be significantly different processes underplayed by Erikson. Douvan and Adelson (1966) suggested that the order of Erikson's developmental tasks of adolescence and young adulthood – identity and intimacy, respectively – may actually be confronted in reverse order by women. Research aimed specifically at identity development in women (Marcia and Friedman, 1970; Schenkel and Marcia, 1972; Toder and Marcia, 1973) has yielded inconsistent findings, perhaps a reflection of shortcomings in their Eriksonian theoretical underpinnings.

Relatively little is known about either identity development processes or the relative salience of identity and intimacy issues in women. For men, the process of identity development seems fairly well understood, but with the exception of Orlofsky (Orlofsky *et al.*, 1973), the relationship between identity and intimacy remains largely unexplored. The present effort therefore posed two general questions: (1) Are there sex differences in the processes by which the identity task is confronted? (2) Are there sex differences in the salience of identity and intimacy issues in late adolescence and early adulthood? As such questions are explored, they may yield insight into how well Erikson's theories "explain" male and female development in late adolescence and early adulthood.

ERIKSON'S THEORY OF IDENTITY AND INTIMACY DEVELOPMENT

Erikson (1950, 1968) proposed that ego growth follows a series of stages through eight psychosocial crises experienced during the life cycle. Each of these eight normative crises presents the individual with a challenge, which the person will meet for better or worse depending on the current maturity of the person's ego functions and the support received from society. Identity and intimacy are the normative crises said to be confronted by individuals in late adolescence and early adulthood.

Erikson was particularly interested in identity. The adolescent's primary task, as described in Erikson's "eight ages of man" (1968), is to develop a sense of personal identity or to risk identity confusion. Actually, however, Erikson is clear that the two polar outcomes he describes are opposite ends of a range of possible resolutions. It is more likely, he claims, that an adolescent would fall

somewhere in between, resolving some but not all of the *part conflicts* which comprise the identity conflict. Part conflicts are associated with each of the eight psychosocial crises, and each conflict must be achieved and integrated during the identity crisis. To the extent that the person achieves resolution of the part conflicts, the person progresses in the achievement of identity. Two examples of part conflicts of the identity crisis are ideological commitment versus confusion of values (associated with integrity versus despair) and apprenticeship versus work paralysis (associated with industry versus inferiority). These part conflicts are represented respectively in the adolescent's attempts to come to terms with political/religious ideology and occupational plans.

As the individual struggles with such issues, it is possible to identify developmental progress in one of four statuses, ranging from lower to higher ego maturity: diffusion (where there is no commitment to or search for values or plans); foreclosure (premature closure of the search for one's own identity, generally because of overidentification with a parent's identity); moratorium (a stage of struggling toward identity, in which a number of alternatives remain viable); and, finally, identity achievement (in which a unique sense of personal identity has been successfully fashioned).

An indication of the degree of identity development achieved in a given case can be gleaned from the manner in which the adolescent or young adult deals with the next critical developmental issue, intimacy. To the extent that the ego is differentiated from earlier identifications and a secure individual sense of identity has taken their place, true intimacy with others becomes possible.

ERIKSON'S THEORY OF SEX DIFFERENCES

Sex differences are of relatively little concern to Erikson, and are definitely subordinate in his thinking to the far more important commonalities he ascribes to people of different eras, cultures, and sexes; one effect of this disinterest is that Erikson is generally unclear about how sex differences may alter his theories of development. In his essay on the development of identity in women, Erikson (1968) attributes basic personality differences between the sexes to their anatomical differences. A woman's "inner space," he argues, predisposes her to activities marked by harmony, relative passivity, and union, while males, in keeping with anatomical design, incline toward more independent and assertive activity. The manner in which a sense of identity is gained accordingly is said to differ between the sexes. The male adolescent tests out "who he is" by what he can accomplish according to objective yardsticks in traditional competitive pursuits, while the adolescent girl defines her identity by determining with whom she will share her life. While asserting that certain kinds of differences exist between the sexes in the identity development process, Erikson makes no reference either to how such differences might affect the

intimacy-isolation crisis, or how they might alter the epigenetic chart which he has offered as the universal blueprint for human development.

RESEARCH ON IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

The preponderance of research on identity development has adhered to a methodology developed by Marcia (1966), who developed a semistructured interview by which respondents could be designated as identity achieved, moratorium, foreclosed, or diffuse, depending on their mode of confronting occupational, political, and religious issues. When the interview was extended to women (Schenkel and Marcia, 1972), for women only a fourth topic was added – sexual ideology.

A long series of studies have supported the validity of Marcia's approach to the study of identity development in males. Self-esteem was found to be higher in the more advanced identity statuses, while it was high yet vulnerable to stress among the moratorium subjects (Marcia, 1966, 1967). Foreclosure subjects were highly approval oriented, had an externally based sense of self-esteem, and endorsed authoritarian values (Marcia, 1966, 1967). Achievement subjects were more likely than those in other statuses to be high in moral reasoning; diffusion subjects were most commonly low moral reasoners; and moratorium subjects were, as predicted, most variable (Podd, 1972). A series of developmental studies has found a clear progressive pattern of identity status change as predicted over a four-year period; subjects initially rated as moratorium were most likely to change statuses, those in the foreclosed status were least likely to change (A. S. Waterman and Waterman, 1971; A. S. Waterman *et al.*, 1974; A. S. Waterman and Goldman, 1976). Taken together, the empirical evidence for males seems to provide consistent support both for Erikson's theory of identity development and Marcia's operationalization of it.

Studies of female identity development have been fewer and more ambiguous in their findings. There seems to be agreement that the moratorium stage of identity development is especially stressful for women, so that, unlike male subjects, female moratorium and diffusion subjects perform similarly on various tasks, while achievement and foreclosure women are comparable (Toder and Marcia, 1973; Schenkel, 1974). These results are in striking contrast to Eriksonian theory and the findings for male subjects, but may be largely attributable to methodological problems associated with extending a measure of identity developed for males to female subjects.

THE MEASUREMENT OF IDENTITY

Marcia's Identity Status Interview (1966) has stimulated considerable research into identity, and its value in delineating aspects of male identity devel-

opment cannot be overstated. Its value when extended to women seems more limited. An early study (Schenkel and Marcia, 1972) found that sexual ideology was a better predictor of identity status for women than were occupation or political/religious ideology. The authors therefore recommended emphasizing this area more strongly in assigning female subjects an identity status, but they advocated the use of clinical intuition in making the decision. This may have accounted for the variable results found in investigations of female identity development using this measure.

A number of variations were made in using the Identity Status Interview in the present effort. First, since the study was an attempt to directly compare part conflicts of the identity crisis, it was decided to administer identical interviews to subjects of each sex (rather than limiting the male interview to three issues only). When C. K. Waterman and Nevid (1977) used such an approach they reported more females in advanced statuses on sexual identity than males. Second, an additional issue – sex-role thinking – was added to the interview. Erikson (1968) is clear that the part conflict of sexual polarization versus bisexual confusion (associated with the intimacy-isolation crisis) embraces attempts of the individual to face what it means to be male or female, to learn and be comfortable with particular sex roles while rejecting others. The addition of this part conflict should yield a “fuller” picture of current identity development. Matteson’s recent research (1977) on Danish youth independently reached the same conclusion that sex-role thinking is a potentially salient aspect of identity achievement. Third, in previous administrations of the measure, an overall identity status score has been assigned according to overall performance on the various part conflicts explored in the interview, according to nonspecific qualitative criteria. In the present effort, an overall identity status was not determined, but specific part conflict scores were assigned based on a concrete rating system specifically developed for this purpose. These part conflict scores, rather than an overall identity status score, were the main variables of this effort.

HYPOTHESES

Four hypotheses were investigated. First, it was expected that there would be characteristic “male” and “female” patterns or pathways of identity development, with males more commonly being in advanced stages (achievement, moratorium) of identity development in occupation and political/religious ideology, and females more commonly being in advanced stages of identity development in sexual ideology and sex roles. Second, self-esteem was predicted to be highest for subjects of each sex who achieved in both the “male” and “female” patterns (hereafter called “androgynous” subjects) and would be lowest for subjects of each sex who followed the “female” identified pattern only (based on societal devaluations of feminine traits identified by Rosenkrantz *et al.*, 1968, and based on injunctions against “sex-inappropriate” behavior among males, Heilbrun,

1964). Third, more women than men would be rated achieved in intimacy. Fourth, regardless of identity level, more women than men were expected to be rated high in intimacy (Douvan and Adelson, 1966). But men's intimacy achievement should be related to identity achievement (Orlofsky *et al.*, 1973).

METHOD

Participants

Interviewees were 50 male and 50 female undergraduates at the Pennsylvania State University, all of whom were between the ages 18-21. They were volunteers who responded to an announcement made in classes throughout the university requesting participants "for a study designed to examine the processes by which normal college students develop sets of values about issues that are important to them." Participants of each sex were roughly equivalent in age and class standing and were representative of the undergraduate population in terms of undergraduate major. The volunteers were randomly assigned to one of the two interviewers of the same sex, and the interviews took place at the participant's convenience.

Measures

Identity Status Interview (Revised)

This interview, developed by Marcia (1966) and amended by Schenkel and Marcia (1972) for female subjects, places subjects in one of four statuses (achievement, moratorium, foreclosure, diffusion) on the basis of two criteria – crisis and commitment – in the areas of occupational choice, political ideology, religious ideology, and sexual ideology. A section on sex-role thinking was added in the present effort. Therefore, each interviewee was rated for identity status in each of five areas. When combined, the political ideology and religious ideology statuses constituted an overall ideology status, and the sex values and sex-role statuses made up an overall sex ideology status.

Intimacy Status Interview

Developed by Orlofsky, Marcia, and Lesser (1973), this interview is intended to place subjects at one of five levels of capacity for intimacy: isolate, stereotyped relationships, pseudointimate, preintimate, and intimate. Placement

into a given status is made on the basis of several criteria interpreted by trained raters: openness, care/concern, responsibility, commitment, mutuality, and sexual maturity. The statuses have been found to correlate as predicted with an interval scale of intimacy (Orlofsky *et al.*, 1973) and to consistently discriminate into three categories (intimate plus preintimate, pseudointimate plus stereotyped, and isolate) according to depth of intimacy on a number of behavioral and self-report measures (Orlofsky, 1976; Orlofsky and Ginsberg, in press; Orlofsky *et al.*, 1973).

Self-Esteem Scale

Developed for an adolescent population by Rosenberg (1965), this scale is brief and easy to administer, consisting of 10 items with which the respondent is asked to "strongly agree," "agree," "disagree," or "strongly disagree" as they pertain to him or her. The measure boasts strong evidence of convergent and discriminant validity and satisfactory test-retest reliability (Kahle, 1976; Robinson and Shaver, 1973; Silber and Tippett, 1965). It can be scored in Guttman or Likert versions, but seems to have greater validity when used as a Likert scale (Kahle, 1976) and was scored accordingly in that fashion here.

Interviewers and Raters

Four advanced undergraduates were selected to conduct the interviews and rate the resulting taped protocols. Prospective interviewer/raters were screened by an administration of the Identity Status Interview by the senior author, and the four individuals chosen were selected in part on the basis of high identity status scores. Two males and two females were selected, the males to interview male participants and the females to interview female participants. Each interviewer conducted 25 interviews and rated 50 interview protocols (but not his or her own). Each tape, consisting of the Identity Status Interview and the Intimacy Status Interview (respectively), was rated by one male and one female (in an attempt to avoid sex-biased ratings). In cases in which two raters differed on a given part conflict rating or on the overall Intimacy Status rating, a third rater's judgment was obtained and the final rating was based on the agreement of two of the three raters. Reliability was 78.8% for identity status ratings and 82.3% for intimacy ratings. There was 100% agreement when a criterion of two out of three raters was used.

Throughout the conduct of the study the interviewers/raters were blind to the hypotheses of the study. The tapes were rated without knowledge of the interviewee's name, age, or self-esteem score. The latter were scored by the senior author.

RESULTS

Sex Differences in Pathways of Identity Development

When subjects were grouped according to high (achievement or moratorium) versus low (foreclosure or diffusion) identity status, sex differences in identity pathway were clearly outlined, as predicted in hypothesis 1. As seen in Table I, significantly more males than females were developmentally advanced in the part conflicts of occupation, politics, religion and overall (political/religious) ideology, while more females than males were developmentally advanced in sex roles and in overall (sex values plus sex roles) sexual ideology. Only in sex values was there no difference.

Relationship of Identity Development Pathways and Self-Esteem

Hypothesis 2 proposed that subjects of each sex would be highest in self-esteem if they followed the androgynous developmental path (i.e., were rated achieved in both the "male" and "female" spheres), and that subjects following the male pathway (i.e., achieved in occupation, politics, or religion) would have higher self-esteem than those following the female path (i.e., achieved in sex roles or sex values).

Table I. Sex Differences in Identity Part Conflicts

Part conflict	Identity status ^a		Chi square (df = 1)
	Males	Females	
Occupation	High	28	8.09 ^c
	Low	22	
Overall ideology	Males	33	9.04 ^c
	Females	17	
Religion	Males	18	5.13 ^c
	Females	32	
Politics	Males	25	6.51 ^b
	Females	25	
Overall sex ideology	Males	14	5.13 ^b
	Females	36	
Sex values	Males	20	1.05
	Females	30	
Sex roles	Males	25	8.00 ^c
	Females	25	

^aHigh represents numbers of interviewees scored either achieved or moratorium, low represents number scored foreclosed or diffusion.

^b $p < 0.05$.

^c $p < 0.005$.

Table II. Self-Esteem of Men and Women According to Identity Pathway Achievement

Pathway ^a	Males		Females	
	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>
Androgynous	13	32.8	5	31.0
Male	18	30.3	6	28.5
Female	0	—	10	33.0

^aMale pathway includes achievement in occupation, politics, or religion. Female pathway includes achievement in sex values or sex roles. Androgynous pathway includes achievement in both male and female paths.

Not a single male subject was found to follow the female identity development path only. The prediction that following this pathway would be costly for males in terms of self-esteem seems to be supported indirectly by the absence of males in this category. Differences between means for males in the male pathway compared with the androgynous pathway approached significance ($t(29) = 2.6$, $p < 0.10$), suggesting a tendency in the predicted direction for males who were successfully resolving part conflicts of both an intrapersonal (occupation and political/religious ideology) and interpersonal (sexual ideology) nature to have higher self-esteem than those achieving a sense of identity in intrapersonal matters only (as shown in Table II).

For females, a one-way analysis of variance was used to test for overall differences in self-esteem among the three identity development pathways. Although the result ($F(2, 18) = 2.94$, $p < 0.10$) approached significance, individual comparisons of means were carried out, since the hypotheses *a priori* called for such comparisons. Individual comparisons of means were computed by the Tukey WSD test. Table II presents these means. No differences were found between subjects following the androgynous path and those in either male or female paths. Women in the female path, however, scored higher in self-esteem than women following the male path, a result opposite the expectation ($t(14) = 2.42$, $p < 0.05$).

Sex Differences in Intimacy

Consistent with the prediction of hypothesis 3, more women (33 of 50) than men (21 of 50) scored in the two highest intimacy statuses (intimate plus preintimate), $\chi^2(1) = 5.84$, $p < 0.05$. None of the interviewees in this study were scored isolates. Thus the remaining men and women fell in the low intimacy statuses of stereotyped and pseudointimate.

Table III. Relationship of Intimacy Status to Identity Development Pathway of Men and Women

Pathway	Intimacy status ^a			
	Males		Females	
	Number high	Number low	Number high	Number low
Androgynous	11	2	5	0
Male	7	11	5	1
Female	0	0	9	1
None ^b	3	16	14	15

^aHigh represents number of interviewees scored either intimate or preintimate, low represents number scored stereotyped or pseudo-intimate.

^bRepresents subjects not achieved in any part conflict.

Relationship of Intimacy Status and Identity Development Pathways

Table III summarizes the results of comparisons of intimacy and identity pathways for each sex (a fourth category, no pathway, was added to denote subjects who were not achieved in any part conflict). As predicted in hypothesis 4, more androgynous males were rated high in intimacy than were males following the male path ($\chi^2(1) = 6.67, p < 0.01$) or no path (Fisher exact test $p < 0.0002$). No differences in intimacy were found for male subjects following the male path or no path ($\chi^2(1) = 1, 53, n.s.$).

The intimacy/identity pathway pattern is somewhat different for females. Women tended to be rated high in intimacy if they were following *any* identity pathway, and it seemed to matter little which pathway was being pursued. Women who were in no pathway tended to be rated low in intimacy. No differences in intimacy were obtained for females following androgynous, female, or male pathways. However, more androgynous and female pathway subjects were high in intimacy than those in no pathway (Fisher's exact text, $p < 0.05$ and $\chi^2(1) = 6.42, p < 0.02$, respectively). Differences in intimacy approached significance for females in the male pathway versus those in no pathway ($\chi^2(1) = 3.18, p < 0.10$).

DISCUSSION

It seems clear, as the study proposed, that males and females follow identity development pathways discriminably different from each other, choosing to seek the nature of self by confronting very different questions. Before describing such pathways, however, we must qualify the use of developmental terms in

the present context. Certain reservations must be attached to any cross-sectional attempt to measure developmental phenomena. In the current study, for instance, identity issues were examined at one point in time, which allows for the conclusion that at the time of late adolescence men and women are confronting different issues, but we do not know what went on before nor what will happen later. However, our effort provides additional evidence by which patterns of adolescent development are suggested. Such suggestions of developmental patterns must await longitudinal evidence before being considered as established findings. Furthermore, the future may see culturally changing expectations in the roles of men and women, altering the normative pathways described in the present study. These reservations accompany the discussion to follow.

According to the data concerning the sexes' respective focus on part conflicts, the late adolescent male tests out who he is via issues of *competence* and *knowledge* – competence, as manifested by settling on a career pathway and thereby projecting both for himself and others a stable sense of his future role in society; and knowledge, as he comes to develop a sense of ideology, or a firmly held belief about the nature of the world. He understands, or assures himself he understands, the world in which he is beginning to shape a concept of himself as a contributing adult member.

The focus for the female is not so clear. The evidence suggests, however, that the woman's task in response to "Who am I?" revolves around who she can be in relation to others. Specifically, she confronts questions such as "What is a woman's (my) role in society and in relation to others?" and "What does my sexuality mean and how does it relate to issues of getting close to another person?" Her identity issues therefore seem to be based on *relating*, as if her sense of self rests on the success with which she can resolve issues of getting along with others in ways that satisfy both herself and those important to her.

The choice of identity pathway appears to be more ambiguous for women than for men. Not a single male subject out of 50 was found to be pursuing the prototypic female identity pathway. Women were more evenly distributed among alternative identity pathways, and thus seem to be confronted with several viable choices in developing an identity. Given the associations often noted between high self-esteem and both androgyny (Bem, 1975) and masculinity (Rosenkrantz *et al.*, 1968), it was expected that women following the identity pathway prototypic of males would have higher self-esteem; but in fact women who were pursuing the traditional female identity pathway had the highest self-esteem. Perhaps the role strain associated with breaking from a traditional female developmental pattern is injurious to self-esteem.

Women were found to have greater capacities than men for experiencing high levels of intimacy. This sex difference seems attributable to females' apparently greater facility to be intimate regardless of identity status or identity pathway. Evidently, a certain level of identity development must precede a

readiness for intimacy among males, whereas such "readiness" in females either precedes or coexists with the first gropings toward identity.

Although the findings reported in this study tend to support Erikson's outline for male adolescent and young adult development, some evidence seems to criticize his version of female development. Erikson correctly, it seems, recognized the interpersonal nature of female identity concerns. More open to challenge, however, is his position that the formation of female identity lies in how the woman uses her interpersonal abilities to find a mate: "I think that much of a young woman's identity is already defined in her kind of attractiveness and in the selective nature of her search for the man (or men) by whom she wishes to be sought" (Erikson, 1968, p. 283). Moreover, her identity, in this view, remains in moratorium until she merges with a man: "A true moratorium must have a term and a conclusion: womanhood arrives when attractiveness and experience have succeeded in selecting what is to be admitted to the welcome of the inner space 'for keeps'" (Erikson, 1968, p. 283).

By the criterion that resolution of most or all of the identity part conflicts is necessary for identity achievement, Erikson's assertion that males complete their search for identity earlier than females is supported. However, if one follows the common criticism (Gallatin, 1975; Matteson, 1975; Roazen, 1976) that Erikson's description of part conflicts and in fact, his entire epigenetic chart, are biased toward a description of male rather than female development, the overall comparisons are meaningless, and only individual part conflict comparisons are valid. On this basis, men tend to resolve *certain* part conflicts earlier (i.e., occupation and political/religious ideology), but do not resolve the sexual ideology part conflict sooner than women.

There is also evidence for and against Erikson's assertion that women remain in identity moratorium until marriage. In support, a considerable number of women in the sample (22 out of 50) were found to be in moratorium in overall sex ideology. Despite evidence that moratorium is especially costly for women (Schenkel, 1974; Toder and Marcia, 1973), this rate of incidence for women in moratorium is much higher than it was for males in any part conflict, and, especially given that Erikson contended that women's moratorium would be interpersonal, provides support for his general position.

However, more than one-fourth (14 out of 50) of the women in the sample were achieved in the overall sex ideology part conflict, a finding which, given the unmarried status of the subjects, would not have been predicted by Erikson. Moreover, the relatively low overall identity status ratings for women which would be derived from combining all part conflict scores would be attributable to relatively low scores in noninterpersonal part conflicts (occupation, political/religious ideology) rather than in the interpersonal sphere. The tendency for women to remain in identity moratorium longer than males, then, does *not* seem to be entirely based, as Erikson contended, on a female inclination to remain in interpersonal moratorium until marriage. Rather, it seems based on

lack of development in other part conflicts, part conflicts which may in fact be tangential to the identity concerns of many females in late adolescence.

The most judicious conclusion, then, is not that female identity development is necessarily delayed, as Erikson has suggested, but that it follows different pathways. Moreover, the data suggest that, compared to male development, these pathways for women are both more complex and more conflicted (as has been noted elsewhere; see Josselson *et al.*, 1977), and that issues of intimacy are intertwined in female identity development in ways not adequately recognized by Erikson. The Eriksonian framework can be applied to women only with caution and appropriate qualification.

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