

Identity Styles, Positive Youth Development, and Civic Engagement in Adolescence

Elisabetta Crocetti · Rasa Erentaitė ·
Rita Žukauskienė

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Abstract Identity formation is a core developmental task of adolescence. Adolescents can rely on different social-cognitive styles to seek, process, and encode self-relevant information: information-oriented, normative, and diffuse-avoidant identity styles. The reliance on different styles might impact adolescents' adjustment and their active involvement in the society. The purpose of this study was to examine whether adolescents with different identity styles report differences in positive youth development (analyzed with the Five Cs—Competence, Confidence, Character, Connection, and Caring—model) and in various forms of civic engagement (i.e., involvement in school self-government activities, volunteering activities, youth political organizations, and youth non-political organizations). The participants were 1,633 (54.1 % female) 14–19 years old adolescents ($M_{age} = 16.56$, $SD_{age} = 1.22$). The findings indicated that adolescents with different identity styles differed significantly on all the Five Cs and on two (i.e., involvement in volunteering activities and in youth non-political organizations) forms of civic engagement. Briefly, adolescents with an information-oriented style reported high levels of both the Five Cs and civic engagement; participants with a normative style reported moderate to

high scores on the Five Cs but low rates of civic engagement; diffuse-avoidant respondents scored low both on the Five Cs and on civic engagement. These findings suggest that the information-oriented style, contrary to the diffuse-avoidant one, has beneficial effects for both the individual and the community, while the normative style has quite beneficial effects for the individual but not for his/her community. Concluding, adolescents with different identity styles display meaningful differences in positive youth development and in rates of civic engagement.

Keywords Identity styles · Positive youth development · Five Cs · Civic engagement · Gender

Introduction

In adolescence, identity formation becomes a core developmental task (Erikson 1968). In fact, the biological (the experience of puberty), cognitive (the acquisition of the formal-abstract reasoning), and social (the starting of new interactions with peers and re-negotiations of parent-adolescent relationships) development that characterizes this period stimulate identity work. Thus, adolescents start to address key questions, such as “Who am I?”, “What are my life goals?”, and “What is my place in the world?” (Kroger 2004).

Adolescents can use various strategies to address these identity questions or to avoid them (Berzonsky 1989). The preference for different strategies impacts the extent to which adolescents are successful in finding their own uniqueness and self-definition (Berzonsky 2011). In this study, we sought to improve our understanding of how adolescents' stylistic differences in facing the identity task affect psychosocial development. Specifically, we

E. Crocetti (✉)
Research Centre Adolescent Development, Utrecht University,
Martinus J. Langeveldgebouw, Heidelberglaan 1,
3584 CS Utrecht, The Netherlands
e-mail: e.crocetti@uu.nl

R. Erentaitė · R. Žukauskienė
Institute of Psychology, Mykolas Romeris University,
Ateities Str 20, 08303 Vilnius, Lithuania
e-mail: rasae@mrni.eu

R. Žukauskienė
e-mail: rzukausk@mrni.eu

studied for the first time differences reported by adolescents with various identity styles on positive youth development and civic engagement, paying attention to gender effects. Unravelling connections between identity styles, positive youth development, and civic engagement has strong practical implications for future interventions aimed at promoting adolescents' well-being and active citizenships.

Identity Processing Styles

The theoretical framework of this study is rooted in Berzonsky's (1989) identity processing style model. *Identity styles* refer to the social-cognitive strategies that individuals prefer to adopt in processing, structuring, utilizing, and revising self-relevant information. Berzonsky (1989, 2011) distinguished three identity styles: information-oriented, normative, and diffuse-avoidant styles.

Adolescents with an *information-oriented style* are self-reflective and actively seek out and evaluate self-relevant information (Berzonsky 1989). They are likely to actively explore identity alternatives before making their own commitments (i.e., they are often in the identity statuses of moratorium and achievement; Krettenauer 2005; Streitmatter 1993), and they define themselves by means of personal attributes, like "my values," "my goals," and "my standards" (Berzonsky 1994; Berzonsky et al. 2003). These individuals are characterized by high openness to experience (Dollinger 1995; Duriez et al. 2004), need for cognition (Berzonsky and Sullivan 1992), adoption of active coping (Soenens et al. 2005) and effortful and vigilant decisional strategies (Berzonsky and Ferrari 1996). Additionally, they exhibit positive interpersonal relationships (Crocetti et al. 2011), empathy, and prosocial behaviors (Smits et al. 2011; Soenens et al. 2005).

Adolescents with a *normative style* more automatically adopt prescriptions and values from significant others and conform to their expectations (Berzonsky 1989). Since these adolescents tend to enact commitments in a more automatic fashion, without much exploration of identity alternatives, they are likely to be classified in the identity status of foreclosure (Krettenauer 2005; Streitmatter 1993). Furthermore, they exhibit high need for closure (Soenens et al. 2005) and they mainly rely on collective self-attributes, such as "my family," "my religion," and "my ethnicity" to define themselves (Berzonsky 1994; Berzonsky et al. 2003). Related to this strong focus on collective attributes, adolescents with a normative style report very close and supportive family relationships (Crocetti et al. 2011; Dunkel et al. 2008; Matheis and Adams 2004). Finally, the normative style is unrelated to empathy and prosocial behaviors (Smits et al. 2011; Soenens et al. 2005).

Young people with a *diffuse-avoidant style* procrastinate and delay dealing with identity issues for as long as possible (Berzonsky 1989). These adolescents are not likely to explore identity alternatives or to enact meaningful commitments (i.e., they are often in the identity status of diffusion; Krettenauer 2005; Streitmatter 1993) and they have a propensity to emphasize contingent social aspects of their self-elements, like "my reputation," "my popularity," and "the impression I make on others" (Berzonsky 1994; Berzonsky et al. 2003). They also display low levels of conscientiousness, openness to experience (Dollinger 1995; Duriez et al. 2004), and need for cognition (Berzonsky and Sullivan 1992) and they report maladaptive coping strategies (Soenens et al. 2005), pre-decisional anxiety, procrastination, and avoidance (Berzonsky and Ferrari 1996). Adolescents with a diffuse-avoidant style also display a cluster of family relational problems (Crocetti et al. 2011; Matheis and Adams 2004; Passmore et al. 2005), low levels of empathy, and are not likely to endorse prosocial behaviors (Smits et al. 2011; Soenens et al. 2005).

The three identity styles have been found to be strongly related also to adolescent adjustment (Berzonsky 2003). Initially, the identity style literature has been mainly focused on how the identity styles are related to internalizing and externalizing problem behaviors. In this respect, convergent evidence has shown that the diffuse-avoidant style, differently from the information-oriented and normative styles, is associated with a cluster of problem behaviors including conduct and hyperactivity disorder behaviors (Adams et al. 2001), delinquency (Adams et al. 2005; White and Jones 1996), disordered eating (Wheeler et al. 2001), depressive symptomatology (Nurmi et al. 1997), neuroticism (Dollinger 1995), and hopelessness (Phillips and Pittman 2007).

More recently, an increasing interest on positive correlates of identity styles has emerged (Seaton and Beaumont 2008). Extant studies highlighted that adolescents with information-oriented and normative styles report high levels of optimism and self-esteem (Phillips and Pittman 2007). Additionally, that normative style, and to a stronger extent the informational style, were positively related to perception of psychological well-being (Crocetti and Shokri 2010; Vleioras and Bosma 2005). In line with these recent developments of the identity style literature, in this study we sought to further unravel the positive correlates of the identity styles by examining for the first time associations between identity styles, positive youth development, and civic engagement in adolescence.

Positive Youth Development

The positive youth development perspective has emerged over the past 20 years mainly as a response to a dominant

“deficit perspective” on adolescence (Damon 2004). More specifically, the positive youth development perspective shifted from a view of adolescence as a problematic and critical period to a view of the strengths of youth (Lerner et al. 2009; Porter 2010). Doing so, the positive youth development perspective increased the attention on the positive qualities and outcomes that adolescents can achieve in this period of their lives (Geldhof et al. 2013; Lerner et al. 2009; Porter 2010).

Within this positive youth development perspective, the “Five Cs” model (Lerner et al. 2005) has been proposed. This model posits that the positive development that can be achieved when youth strengths find a fit in their developmental context can be operationalized by Five Cs: Competence, Confidence, Connection, Character, and Caring (Bowers et al. 2010). *Competence* refers to positive view of one’s actions in domain specific areas including social, academic, cognitive, and vocational realms. *Confidence* indicates an internal sense of overall positive self-worth and self-efficacy. *Connection* denotes positive and reciprocal bonds with people and institutions with which adolescents interact. *Character* refers to respect for societal and cultural rules, possession of standards for correct behaviors, a sense of right and wrong (morality), and integrity. *Caring* indicates a sense of sympathy and empathy for others. Thus, a priority in the researchers’ and policy makers’ agenda is to find which factors can promote these Five Cs (Roth and Brooks-Gunn 2003). In this study, we sought to examine if adolescents with different identity styles display differences in the Five Cs.

Civic Engagement

A further expression of positive youth development is represented by civic engagement (e.g., Sherrod 2007). In fact, young people’s willingness to become civically engaged is strongly intertwined with their sense of competence, confidence, connection, caring, and character. More specifically, youth are likely to become civically engaged when they perceive they have the competence to contribute to their society and the confidence that their actions are worthwhile, when they feel connected to other people around them and they are careful in recognizing social injustices and taking actions to correct them, and when they hold a set of values that guide their community involvement (Sherrod et al. 2005). Thus, when adolescents manifest these Five Cs they are more likely to pursue a life trajectory marked by mutually beneficial person-context relationships that contribute to community and civil society (i.e., leading to a sense of Contribution, which has been proposed as the sixth C; Lerner 2004).

Adolescence is a particularly important time for defining one’s role as a member of the society (Erikson 1968;

Havighurst 1952). Adolescents’ awareness of their position in the society is behaviorally expressed through civic engagement in different forms of activities and organizations (Adler and Goggin 2005; Cicognani et al. 2008). These include voluntary activities, participation in school governing activities, engagement in youth organizations, and in political groups.

However, in many countries around the world, youth’s low levels of civic engagement are a matter of concern. Although cross-cultural studies (e.g., Cicognani et al. 2008; Esser and de Vreese 2007; Jahromi et al. 2012) have shown that overall rates of youth civic engagement differ across societies, some common patterns can be identified. Specifically, youth are rarely engaged in political organizations while they are more likely to participate in youth non-political organizations and in volunteer activities.

Recently, growing attention has been devoted to investigating associations between identity and civic engagement. However, available studies conceptualized identity in terms of identity statuses and/or identity commitment and exploration (e.g., Cicognani et al. 2013; Crocetti et al. 2012), while there are no studies unravelling associations between identity styles and civic engagement. Prior studies on identity statuses and civic engagement revealed that adolescents who have achieved a mature identity are more prone to be civically engaged. For instance, Pancer et al. (2007) compared four groups of adolescents: Activists (who had high levels of involvement in a wide range of political and community activities); Helpers (who were involved in helping individuals from their communities but not in political activities); Responders (who responded to but did not initiate helping or political activities); and Uninvolved adolescents. The Activists and Helpers reported higher scores on identity achievement and lower scores on identity diffusion than the Responders and Uninvolved adolescents. Similarly, Hardy et al. (2010) highlighted reciprocal relationships between identity statuses and community involvement. Additionally, Crocetti et al. (2012) found that adolescents in the achievement status were more involved in volunteer activities, reported higher civic efficacy, and had stronger aspirations to contribute to their communities than their diffused counterparts. On the contrary, identity statuses did not relate differently to political engagement. Taken together, these findings suggest that identity statuses are meaningfully related to volunteer and community-oriented activities, whereas associations between identity statuses and political involvement are weaker or even non-significant.

The Current Study

The literature reviewed so far clearly indicated that adolescents’ preference for one of the three identity styles

(information-oriented, normative, or diffuse-avoidant) proposed by Berzonsky (1989) to capture stylistic differences in how individuals approach the identity task has a strong impact on individual adjustment. However, prior studies have mainly uncovered associations between identity styles and various forms of problem behaviors (e.g., Adams et al. 2001, 2005; Wheeler et al. 2001) and less is known about identity styles and positive well-being (Seaton and Beaumont 2008). In line with these considerations, the purpose of the present study was to unravel whether adolescents relying on distinct identity styles report differences on positive youth development and civic engagement.

The first aim of this study was to examine if adolescents with different identity styles display differences in the Five Cs (Lerner et al. 2005). On the basis of identity style theoretical assumptions and empirical evidence (Berzonsky 1989, 2011), we expected that adolescents with an information-oriented style would report the highest levels of competence, character, and caring.

We also expected that adolescents with a normative style would report intermediate scores on these Cs and that adolescents with a diffuse-avoidant style would score the lowest on these dimensions. These hypotheses are grounded in previous studies showing that information-oriented individuals reported the best profile in terms of active coping strategies, ability of moral reasoning, empathy, and prosocial behaviors (e.g., Smits et al. 2011; Soenens et al. 2005). Additionally, we expected that adolescents with information-oriented and normative styles would both score higher than their peers with a diffuse-avoidant style on confidence and connection. In fact, previous studies indicated that adolescents with an information-oriented style as well as those with a normative style have comparable high levels of self-esteem (e.g., Phillips and Pittman 2007; Seabi 2009). Furthermore, consistent evidence indicated that adolescents with a normative style reported interpersonal relationships as close and warm or even more supportive than those reported by their peers with an information-oriented style (e.g., Crocetti et al. 2011; Dunkel et al. 2008; Matheis and Adams 2004).

The second purpose of this study was to test whether adolescents with different identity styles report different rates of various forms of civic engagement (i.e., participation in school self-government activities, volunteering activities, youth political organizations, youth non-political organizations). Although identity styles have never been related to civic participation, prior studies linking civic involvement to identity statuses and identity processes of exploration and commitment (Crocetti et al. 2012; Hardy et al. 2010; Pancer et al. 2007) can provide a basis for our hypotheses. Consistently with these studies, we expected that identity styles would be related to civic engagement, in

particular to volunteer and community-oriented activities (since associations between identity and political participation has generally been found to be weaker or even non-significant; Crocetti et al. 2012). More specifically, main differences were expected between the information-oriented and the diffuse-avoidant style, with the first associated with higher levels of civic engagement.

In addressing these two research questions, we paid close attention to gender effects. Gender differences in identity styles have generally been found to be small or non-significant (e.g., Beaumont 2009; Crocetti et al. 2013). A recent meta-analysis (Bosch and Card 2012) highlighted no significant gender differences for the information-oriented style, a trivial gender difference for the normative style with females scoring slightly higher than males, and a small gender difference for the diffuse-avoidant style with males scoring higher than females. However, studies summarized in this meta-analysis were mainly based on college students. Interestingly, analyses of the heterogeneity suggested that females scored higher than males in the information-oriented style in high school samples but not in college samples (Bosch and Card 2012). This evidence suggests that females may begin exploring sooner than males (i.e., in middle adolescence) but that by late adolescence and emerging adulthood, males may catch up (Klimstra et al. 2010). Furthermore, some authors (e.g., Boyd et al. 2003) have suggested that gender might moderate the relationship between identity styles and various correlates. Thus, it is recommended to test if differences in correlates are qualified by Styles X gender interactions (Berzonsky and Kuk 2005). In line with these considerations, in the presented study we (a) examined gender differences in adolescent identity styles, and (b) tested whether gender moderated relationships between identity styles, positive youth development, and civic engagement.

Method

Participants

Data for this study were drawn from the first available wave of an ongoing longitudinal research project, “Mechanisms of promoting positive youth development in the context of socio-economical transformations (POSIDEV)”, conducted in Lithuania. Student participants were drawn from five high schools in Utena district municipality (in Northeastern Lithuania). There were 1,787 students (9–12 grades) in the first assessment (participation rate—98.9 %). For this current study, only the participants who filled in at least 85 % of all relevant measures were included in the analyses. Thus, the sample size for this study was $N = 1,633$ (54.1 % girls and 45.9 % boys). The

age of participants ranged from 14 to 19 ($M_{age} = 16.56$, $SD_{age} = 1.22$). The sample was diverse in terms of family and socio-economic backgrounds. Among the participants, 65.9 % lived with two parents, the rest had a range of other family situations due to either parental divorce (18.7 %), loss (5.1 %), migration (3.7 %), or other reasons. With regard to the socio-economic status, 22.8 % received state economic support (free nutrition at school), and in 21.7 % of cases at least one of the parents was jobless. The sample was homogeneous in terms of ethnic background (i.e., absolute majority of the participants were Lithuanian).

Procedure

The first assessment took place in February–May, 2013. All the high schools in Utena district municipality (North-eastern Lithuania) were selected for participation in the POSIDEV project. Each school was visited before the first assessment took place in order to inform school administration and prospective participants about the date and time of the assessment. During the introductory meeting the adolescents were informed about the purpose of the study and that participation was voluntary. The parents were informed about the study through a written letter and asked to contact the school or the investigators if they did not want their children to participate. The questionnaires were administered by the researchers and several trained research assistants at the schools and were completed in classes during regular class hours. The students who were absent on the day of data collection were contacted the following week by the research assistants. The adolescents were not paid for participation, but all students who completed the questionnaires were eligible for a lottery reward.

Measures

Identity Styles

Identity styles were measured with the *Identity Style Inventory* (ISI-4¹; Luyckx et al. 2010; Smits et al. 2009). Items were scored on a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all like me*) to 5 (*very much like me*). Cronbach's alphas were .82 for the information-oriented style (7 items; e.g., "When facing a life decision, I take into account different points of view before making a choice"); .61 for the normative style (8 items; e.g., "I prefer to deal with situations where I can rely on social norms and standards"); and .70 for the diffuse-

avoidant style (9 items; e.g., "I'm not really thinking about my future now; it's still a long way off").

The Lithuanian version of the questionnaire was prepared by two researchers from the team project in 2010 with permission from Michael Berzonsky. The comparison of translated Lithuanian version with the back-translation to the original did not reveal any inconsistencies. The Lithuanian version was also piloted with a group of 15 students, which led to additional clarification of some items.

In the current study, we performed Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) with the Maximum Likelihood estimation in *Mplus* 7.11 (Muthén and Muthén 1998–2012) to check the factor structure of the Lithuanian version of the ISI-4. In line with previous validation studies of the ISI (e.g., Crocetti et al. 2009; Luyckx et al. 2010), three parcels of items (created in a random fashion) served as indicators of each latent variable (information-oriented, normative, and diffuse-avoidant styles). Model fit was ascertained using various indices (Byrne 2012): the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) should exceed .90, and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) should be less than .08. Results indicated that the three-factor structure provided a good fit to the data, $\chi^2 = 197.332$, $df = 24$; CFI = .952, TLI = .928; RMSEA = .067 [.058; .075].

Positive Youth Development

The Five Cs were assessed with the *Measure of Positive Youth Development* (Lerner 2010; Lithuanian validation by Erentaitė and Raiziene 2013). The scoring of the items differed across the instrument, but for data analyses all the items were transformed to uniformly range from 0 to 12, based on the Scoring Protocol (Lerner 2010). The measure is based on the Five Cs model (Lerner et al. 2005) and enables to assess character, competence, caring, connection, and confidence aspects of positive youth development. Erentaitė and Raiziene (2013) provided preliminary results suggesting that the Lithuanian version of the Measure of Positive Youth Development can be used to assess the Five Cs. In the current study, Cronbach's alphas were .76 for competence (11 items; e.g., "What grades do you earn at school?"); .91 for confidence (16 items; e.g., "On the whole, I like myself"); .87 for character (20 items; e.g., "How important is in your life helping to make sure all people are treated fairly?"); .88 for connection (22 items; e.g., "I get along with my parents"); and .82 for caring (9 items; e.g., "It bothers me when bad things happen to any person").

Civic Engagement

This construct was measured asking respondents how many times per month they participate in school self-government activities, volunteering activities, youth

¹ Recently, a new version of the *Identity Style Inventory*, the ISI-5, has been developed (Berzonsky et al. 2013). However, the ISI-4 and the ISI-5 are largely overlapping. In fact, 22 out of 24 items of the ISI-4 are also included in the ISI-5. Differences between the two versions are limited to few items: two items of the ISI-4 are not included in the ISI-5 and the ISI-5 contains five additional items.

Table 1 Percentages of participants in the identity style groups by gender

	Information-oriented	Normative	Diffuse-avoidant
Males	23 (–)	30.7	46.3 (+)
Females	46.5 (+)	23.6	29.9 (–)

In each row the total is 100 %. Observed values indicated in bold are significantly different from expected values: (+) indicates that the observed value is higher than the expected value; (–) indicates that the observed value is lower than the expected value

political organizations, youth (non-political) organizations. The response scale included the options: 1 (*never*), 2 (*once a month or less frequently*), 3 (*a couple of times per month*), 4 (*once a week*), 5 (*several times a week*), and 6 (*usually daily*). The level of civic engagement in our sample was the following: 21.1 % of participants reported at least some involvement in school self-government activities, 34 % indicated engagement in volunteering activities, 14.8 % were involved in youth political organizations, and 18.5 % in youth (non-political) organizations. Most of those, who reported some form of civic engagement, were involved in the activities once per month or less frequently. The part of the sample who reported weekly (from once per week to usually daily) engagement in civic activities was the following: 8.2 % for school self-government activities, 12.4 % for volunteering, 5.4 % for youth political organizations, and 8.7 % for youth (non-political) organizations.

Results

Classification of Participants into Identity Style Groups

Following Berzonsky and Sullivan's (1992) classification method, identity style scores were standardized and used to classify participants according to their dominant identity processing style. Based on this criterion, 583 (35.7 %) participants reported a preference for the information-oriented style, 439 (26.9 %) for the normative style, and 611 (37.4 %) for the diffuse-avoidant style. We performed a Chi Square test to examine gender differences in the distribution of respondents across the three style groups. Results indicated significant gender differences, $\chi^2(2, 1,633) = 99.78$, $p < .001$, Cramér's $V = .25$. As reported in Table 1, females were overrepresented in the information-oriented group and underrepresented in the diffuse-avoidant group, whereas the opposite pattern was found for males.

Identity Styles and Positive Youth Development

Our first aim was to examine if identity styles were related to positive youth development. In order to reach this goal,

we performed a Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) with identity style groups and gender as the independent variables and the Five Cs as the dependent variables. Results indicated an overall main effect of identity styles, Wilks' $\lambda = .86$; $F(10, 3,246) = 26.17$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .08$, and gender, Wilks' $\lambda = .87$; $F(5, 1,623) = 48.50$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .13$, while the Style X Gender interaction was not statistically significant, Wilks' $\lambda = .99$; $F(10, 3,246) = 1.40$, $p = .18$, $\eta^2 = .00$.

Follow-up univariate analyses and post hoc comparisons among identity styles conducted using Tukey's Honestly Significant Difference (HSD) tests are reported in Table 2. Findings indicated that the effect of identity styles was significant on all the Five Cs. Specifically, on three out of Five Cs (competence, character, and caring) the three style groups scored differently from each other: adolescents with an information-oriented style scoring the highest, those with a normative style scored in the middle, and those with a diffuse-avoidant style scoring the lowest. On the other two Cs (confidence and connection) adolescents with information-oriented and normative styles scored higher than their diffuse-avoidant counterparts.

Identity Styles and Civic Engagement

Our second aim was to analyze if identity styles were related to various forms of civic engagement: participation in school self-government activities, volunteering activities, youth political organizations, youth (non-political) organizations. Thus, we performed a MANOVA with identity style groups and gender as the independent variables and these forms of civic engagement as the dependent variables. Results indicated an overall main effect of identity styles, Wilks' $\lambda = .98$; $F(8, 3,248) = 4.48$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .01$, while the main effect of gender, Wilks' $\lambda = .99$; $F(4, 1,624) = 0.89$, $p = .47$, $\eta^2 = .00$, and the Style X Gender interaction, Wilks' $\lambda = .99$; $F(8, 3,248) = 0.92$, $p = .50$, $\eta^2 = .00$, were not statistically significant.

Results of follow-up univariate analyses (see Table 2) indicated that the effect of identity styles was significant on engagement in volunteering activities and youth (non-political) organizations, whereas it was not significant on involvement in school self-government activities and youth political organizations. Findings revealed that adolescents with an information-oriented style scored higher than their normative and diffuse-avoidant peers on engagement in volunteer activities. Furthermore, adolescents with an information-oriented style scored higher than normative respondents on involvement in youth (non-political) groups. In this latter case, adolescents with a diffuse-avoidant style did not differ significantly from the other two groups.

Table 2 Mean scores (and SD) of Five Cs of positive youth development and civic engagement in the total sample and in gender and identity style groups

	Total sample	Gender		<i>F</i> (1, 1,632)	η^2	Identity styles			<i>F</i> (2, 1,632)	η^2
		Males	Females			Information-oriented	Normative	Diffuse-avoidant		
Five Cs										
Competence	6.00 (1.24)	5.96 (1.26)	6.04 (1.22)	0.95	.00	6.33 _a (1.26)	6.06 _b (1.16)	5.64 _c (1.18)	45.94***	.05
Confidence	6.48 (1.76)	6.77 (1.67)	6.23 (1.80)	54.66***	.03	6.64 _a (1.79)	6.77 _a (1.69)	6.11 _b (1.73)	29.38***	.04
Character	7.52 (1.54)	7.02 (1.57)	7.95 (1.38)	92.79***	.05	8.21 _a (1.31)	7.51 _b (1.46)	6.88 _c (1.52)	91.50***	.10
Connection	7.80 (1.45)	7.65 (1.49)	7.93 (1.41)	7.17**	.00	8.05 _a (1.48)	8.08 _a (1.35)	7.36 _b (1.40)	40.87***	.05
Caring	8.47 (1.72)	7.84 (1.70)	9.00 (1.56)	142.15***	.08	9.02 _a (1.64)	8.42 _b (1.67)	7.99 _c (1.69)	29.79***	.04
Civic engagement										
School self-government activities	1.50 (1.15)	1.45 (1.07)	1.55 (1.21)	3.07	.00	1.49 _a (1.11)	1.51 _a (1.16)	1.52 _a (1.18)	0.18	.00
Volunteering activities	1.79 (1.35)	1.70 (1.30)	1.87 (1.39)	2.06	.00	1.95 _a (1.48)	1.68 _b (1.23)	1.72 _b (1.30)	5.09**	.01
Youth political organizations	1.35 (0.98)	1.33 (0.95)	1.36 (1.01)	1.01	.00	1.32 _a (0.95)	1.31 _a (0.95)	1.41 _a (1.03)	2.04	.00
Youth (non-political) organizations	1.49 (1.20)	1.44 (1.09)	1.53 (1.28)	0.82	.00	1.59 _a (1.35)	1.35 _b (0.99)	1.50 _{ab} (1.17)	4.59*	.01

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. Different subscripts indicate significant differences between means on the basis of Tukey post hoc tests: for the Five Cs all means with different subscripts were significant at $p < .001$, for the civic engagement variables means with different subscripts were significant at $p < .01$

It is worthwhile noting that overall rates of civic engagement were rather low. A Repeated Measure Analysis of Variance indicated within-subjects differences in the endorsement of these forms of civic engagement, Wilks' $\lambda = .86$; $F(3, 1,630) = 86.49$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .14$. Specifically, participants scored the lowest on participation in youth political groups; they reported intermediate and similar scores on involvement in school self-government activities and in youth (non-political) organizations; and they scored the highest on volunteering activities.

Discussion

Identity formation is the core developmental task for adolescents (Erikson 1968). However, not all adolescents face this task in the same way (Berzonsky 1989). While adolescents with an information-oriented style are active in seeking and evaluating self-relevant information, adolescents with a normative style tend to automatically adopt prescriptions and values from significant others, and those with a diffuse-avoidant style postpone managing the

identity formation task for as long as possible (Berzonsky 2011). This study adds to the literature by demonstrating that adolescents with different identity styles report strong differences in positive youth development and in civic engagement.

Gender and Identity Styles

We found in a large sample of high school students that the distribution of adolescents across the three style groups was strongly affected by gender. In fact, the majority of females (46.5 %) preferred the information-oriented style, while the majority of males (46.3 %) the diffuse-avoidant one. These gender patterns are consistent with the literature (e.g., Klimstra et al. 2010) that shows that, when gender differences in identity emerge, they occur in adolescence more than in emerging adulthood. For instance, in Bosch and Card's (2012) meta-analysis, gender differences in the information-oriented style were found only in high school samples but not in college samples. Females' earlier physical (girls reach puberty 1–2 years earlier than boys; Beunen et al. 2000) and cognitive maturation (in early

adolescence, girls tend to be up to a full year ahead of boys in several aspects of brain development; Giedd et al. 1999) may explain these gender differences. While gender affected the distribution of participants across the three style groups, it did not moderate the profile of each identity style group in terms of positive youth development and civic engagement. Thus, the pattern of differences that the three style groups reported on the Five Cs and on forms of civic involvement was consistent across gender groups.

Identity Styles and Positive Youth Development

This study adds to the increasing literature on the positive correlates of identity styles (Seaton and Beaumont 2008) by demonstrating that identity styles are meaningfully related to the Five Cs (competence, confidence, character, connection, and caring) aspects of positive youth development (Bowers et al. 2010; Lerner et al. 2005). In line with our hypotheses, these findings clearly indicated that adolescents with an information-oriented style were characterized by the most positive profile with high scores on all the Five Cs. As expected, adolescents with a normative style reported high levels of confidence and connection (similar to those of their peers with an information-oriented style), while they displayed intermediate scores on competence, character, and caring. Finally, adolescents with a diffuse-avoidant style scored the lowest on each of the Five Cs.

Thus, the present study provides findings that further uncover the profile of adolescents with different identity styles. In particular, prior studies pointed out that adolescents with an information-oriented style are characterized by agency, openness to experience, need for cognition, effortful and vigilant decisional strategies (see Berzonsky 2011 for a review). Our findings further add to this picture, by showing that these adolescents are also more likely to report high levels of positive youth development.

Identity Styles and Civic Engagement

We further demonstrated that the styles adolescents prefer to use when dealing with the identity formation task are related to their rates of civic engagement. First, concerning participation in various forms of civic engagement, in line with the pattern emerged in various national contexts (e.g., Cicognani et al. 2008; Esser and de Vreese 2007; Jahromi et al. 2012), rates of involvement in political groups were extremely low, whereas adolescents' endorsement of volunteer activity was higher. These findings suggest, similarly to what is documented in the United States and in other Western countries, that adolescents are characterized by political disengagement and apathy (e.g., Andolina et al. 2002) but higher willingness to volunteering (e.g., Walker 2000).

In addition, identity styles explained differences in involvement in volunteer activities and in youth (non-political) organization, but not in self-governing school activities and in youth political groups. This latter result, consistent with the literature showing that identity statuses are related to volunteerism but not to political engagement (e.g., Crocetti et al. 2012), might suggest that youth disaffection from politics is so endemic that even adolescents with higher ability of moral reasoning (like those who have achieved a mature identity) do not consider the political arena as a context in which they can express their prosocial orientations. Hence, future studies are urgently needed to identify which factors might re-connect young people with politics.

Interestingly, findings indicated that adolescents with an information-oriented style reported levels of involvement in volunteerism higher than those of both their peers with a normative or a diffuse-avoidant style. Thus, adolescents with an information-oriented style apply their capacity of perspective taking and emphatic concern (Smits et al. 2011; Soenens et al. 2005) in concrete activities in favor of other people who might be in need. On the contrary, both adolescents with a normative style and those with a diffuse-avoidant style appear more self-focused and less prone to endorse active behaviors in favor of other people (Smits et al. 2011).

Practical Implications

Overall, this study has relevant practical implications. The findings underscore that identity interventions focused on improving adolescents' capacity of actively and critically evaluating self-relevant information might lead to positive effects for both the individual and his/her community (Schwartz and Pantin 2006). In fact, interventions that successfully promote transitions from a prevalent reliance on the normative or the diffuse-avoidant style to a dominant reliance on the information-oriented style could result in a gain for the positive youth development of the individual and also for his/her active role in community services. Future intervention studies are needed to further confirm this hypothesis.

Strengths and Limitations of this Study and Suggestions for Future Research

This study should be considered both in light of its strengths and shortcomings that might suggest future lines of research. A first strength of this study was the novel focus on differences reported by adolescents with different identity styles on positive youth development and civic engagement. However, a primary limitation concerns the cross-sectional design, which does not allow investigations

of causality or directionality. Longitudinal studies are needed to shed light on the interplay of identity styles, positive youth development, and civic engagement. Based on the identity literature (Berzonsky 2011), we hypothesized that identity styles can explain differences in the Five Cs and in civic engagement, but it could also be the other way around. For instance, in this study, we found that adolescents with an information-oriented style reported higher rates of volunteer activities. It could also be that doing volunteer activities create a context of opportunities and experiences that foster positive youth development and trigger identity development toward greater identity maturity (e.g., Hardy et al. 2010; Larson 2000; Youniss and Levine 2009). Thus, future research should consider the possible reciprocal relationships between the constructs investigated in this study.

A second strength of this study is the sample composition. In fact, a main limitation of the overall identity style literature is the overreliance on college female student samples, mainly psychology freshman undergraduates. In this study, we examined associations between identity styles, positive youth development, and civic engagement in a large, gender-balanced, and economically heterogeneous sample of Lithuanian adolescents attending high school. Future studies could test if the set of findings yielded in the current study are further replicated in diverse adolescent samples including for instance adolescents who belong to minority groups (Schwartz 2005).

Conclusion

This study highlighted that the styles that adolescents prefer to use for dealing with identity issues affect their positive youth development and also their effective participation in the civic community, in terms of involvement in volunteer activities and in youth (non-political) organizations. The information-oriented style was characterized by the most positive profile, with beneficial effects not only for the individual but also for the community. Differently from the information-oriented style, the diffuse-avoidant style reported the worst profile, resulting as detrimental for both the individual and the community. Finally, the normative style exhibited a more differentiated profile, with generally beneficial effects for the adolescent but not for his/her community. Thus, adolescents relying on different identity styles report meaningful differences in positive youth development and in their rates of civic engagement.

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Author contributions E.C. conceived of the current study, performed the statistical analyses, and wrote the manuscript; R.E. participated in the data preparation and in the drafting of the article; R.Z. is the principal investigator of the POSIDEV project from which data for the current study were drawn and she participated in the interpretation of the results. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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- Elisabetta Crocetti** is a researcher at the Research Centre on Adolescent Development, Utrecht University, The Netherlands. She received her doctorate in Educational Sciences from the University of Macerata, Italy. Her major research interests include identity formation in adolescence and emerging adulthood.
- Rasa Erentaitė** is a lecturer and junior researcher at the Institute of Psychology, Mykolas Romeris University, Lithuania, where she received her doctorate in Social Sciences (Psychology). She is interested in identity and its links to other aspects of psychological functioning in adolescence.
- Rita Žukauskienė** is a professor at the Institute of Psychology, Mykolas Romeris University, Lithuania. She received her doctorate in Social sciences (Psychology) from the Vilnius Pedagogical University, Lithuania. Her major research interests include positive youth development in adolescence and emerging adulthood.