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Maneesha Bhatt

PhD Research Scholar,
Department of Human
Development and Family
Studies, College of Community
Science, University of
Agricultural Sciences, Dharwad,
Karnataka, India

Lata Pujar

Professor and Head, Department
of Human Development and
Family Studies, College of
Community Science, University
of Agricultural Sciences,
Dharwad, Karnataka, India

Corresponding Author:

Maneesha Bhatt

PhD Research Scholar,
Department of Human
Development and Family
Studies, College of Community
Science, University of
Agricultural Sciences, Dharwad,
Karnataka, India

Predictors of identity development of pre-university college students: Case summaries

Maneesha Bhatt and Lata Pujar

Abstract

In-depth interviews were performed with 11 Pre-University College Students (Dharwad and Tanakpur PUC students, 16-18 years). Three questions were probed *viz.*, firstly, how do you perceive yourself as an individual? Secondly, how far your identity has played an important role in your life? Thirdly, can you narrate some of the factors (life-events and experiences) which has its influence on your identity? The results of the study highlighted that parental pressure and their lack of support results in low identity development of PUC students. On the other hand, students who got parental support and motivation developed positive identity. Friends also acted as a boon for an individual overall identity development. Overall, it was concluded that identity development during late adolescence consists of integrative issues where parents and friends play a specific and important role.

Keywords: Identity development, parental support, peer support and PUC students

Introduction

Adolescence is a transitional stage of development from childhood to adulthood or a period following the onset of puberty during which a young person develops from a child into an adult. Personal identity formation represents a basic developmental task during adolescence, which serves as a compass to navigate the course of life beyond adolescence (Montgomery and Marcia, 2008) [2]. Identity refers to individuals general sense of themselves and their psychological reality that includes many different beliefs and attitudes about the self (Wigfield and Wagner, 2005) [4].

According to Erikson (1968) [1], a major social task of the adolescents is to search for a unique identity - the ability to answer the question, "Who am I?" Question of "Who am I" becomes increasingly important during adolescence with developmental advancement in their cognitive ability, dramatic physical changes and the impending transition to adulthood. An adolescent must successfully resolve the stage of "identity versus role confusion" by experimenting with different roles, activities, goals, values, and behaviors before moving onto the next stage, the adult stage of "intimacy versus isolation."

Adolescents with a clear sense of self and identity or with synthesized identity tends to be better in identifying their hidden potential and talent as well as in taking their own decisions independently without getting influenced by other people opinion which ultimately helps them to excel in every field such as academics, sports, dance, singing and various other co-curricular activities and accordingly, adolescents give their maximum input in their area of interest without ever getting diverted from their goals. Successful identity development involves the reworking of childhood identifications into a larger and self-determined set of ideals and goals. A firmly established identity provides a sense of uniqueness to an individual. It enables an individual to influence, change or mould, define and create other individual identity. Identity provides a framework for interpreting life events and making life choices. A well-developed identity promotes positive development throughout adolescence and even across a whole life span as well as helps to define and solidify an individual's reputation in the eyes of other members of a social group.

In contrast, adolescents who are unclear about their self or remains in identity confused state are more likely to experience distress, engage in destructive behaviour and also experience difficulties in maintaining healthy relationships with others as well as in defining his or her personal strengths and weaknesses to others (Schwartz, *et al.*, 2011) [3]. Poor identity hampers the ability of adolescents to take correct decision regarding their career and vocational choices which ultimately affects their future career.

Thus, looking into the importance of identity development during adolescence present study

aimed to identify the factors influencing identity development of adolescents by case summary method.

Methodology

Qualitative data was collected by conducting in-depth interviews of six PUC students of Tanakpur and five PUC students of Dharwad after completion of their coaching class. The interviews were conducted in a comfortable place where, the participants could speak up and narrate the issues related to their identity development without any hesitation. General open-ended questions that were asked during interview are as follows:

1. How do you perceive yourself as an individual?
2. How far your identity has played an important role in your life?
3. Can you narrate some of the factors (life-events and experiences) which has its influence on your identity?

The interviews were conducted in English. Before conducting an interview, each of the participant was briefed about the study and their informed consent was taken before audio taping their interviews. The participants were ensured about the confidentiality that would be maintained regarding their identity and each of them were provided an ID number so, that they could share and narrate all their personal issues without much hesitation. The interview began with the introduction of the participant followed by general open-ended questions related to their identity and later, the interview followed varied directions depending on the narration of the participants. The researcher stayed focused by not interrupting too much in the interview and by being non-judgmental without commenting on any of the issues described by the participants. The interview was audio recorded and the observational notes were taken during the interview, which included all the minute details narrated by the participants. The duration of the interview ranged from half an hour to 1 hour depending on the expressive nature of participants. Thereafter, audio-recorded interviews were transcribed for further analysis and thereafter, case summaries were written. Peer debriefing method was used as a strategy for rigor where, peers of researcher who were also conducting research in other areas constituted Peer Debriefing and Support (PDS) group. Their valuable suggestions were incorporated and feedbacks were taken as and when required. Qualitative data analysis was carried out by transcribing the interviews and thereafter, case summaries were written.

Results and Discussion

The findings of the qualitative study have been presented in the form of case summaries as given below:

C1 (PUC-I student)

He is a 17-year-old science stream PUC-I student from Tanakpur. He is the only son of his family and as such, his parents had lot of expectations from him. With respect to his identity, he stated that:

"I really don't think a lot about who I am, however, it happens sometimes. I think more about how I behave towards others." Further, he narrated:

"I want to be friends with everyone I meet... I don't want to be rude... and if I become rude then, afterwards I often worry that I spoke something bad to the other person, what if we aren't friends anymore..."

Recently he joined a new basketball team in school and he

thinks a lot about this too and narrated about it as given below:

"How well I can perform at practice, what will happen in the next game, whether I will keep my position..."

He had a clear mindset to become a good sportsperson in national or international level ahead in life for which he wanted to join famous well-recognized sports institute in India or abroad after PUC. He was average in studies. He describes himself as a young, energetic, friendly, enthusiastic, active and focused guy. At high school level, he had received various medals in the field of sports at national level. He described his parents as a major role model throughout his life and stated:

"If I hadn't had my parents, I probably would have been a completely different person..."

C2 (PUC-I student)

She is 17-year-old student from PUC-1 who narrated that she had lot of problems and issues with respect to school as she was being bullied by her friends many a times because of her short height. Most of the time she usually thinks about how to cope up in a better way in the classroom situation. Even if things get worst, she remains calm and not talk so much and finds it difficult to tackle with an adverse situation because of the inability to take her own decision and low confidence. She found difficulty in maintaining relationship and getting adjusted with other people and also in taking help from other students of her batch. She was adopted when she was two-year-old and had an adverse childhood experience. She often thinks about living in a different family where, she may be allowed to grow up properly with immense love, care and respect. She had exam phobia too because of which many a times she didn't perform well and got low marks and was too much anxious and depressed regarding her future career. She had difficulty in identifying her hidden potential and as such, she got ditched by the wrong opinion of other people various times and also got diverted from her goals. She narrated one of her Class-Xth incident where, under peer pressure she drinks alcohol excessively and later was being scolded badly by her parents which made her more aggressive towards them. As a result, she did not get much support from family also that developed a feeling of isolation, low self-concept and inferiority complex in her.

C3 (PUC-II student)

She is a 16-year-old PUC-I science stream student from one of the leading schools in Tanakpur. She was less empathetic towards others till the time she did not get any benefit from others. She reported that one should listen to others problem but at the same time, one should be able to stand and speak for their own rights. She considered herself a bit egoistic and reserve type girl and as a result, many a times she remained isolated from her parents and family. She stated that:

"I show less kindness towards others as it makes other people to take full advantage of me and if I fight too much for my own rights then also in the eyes of other people, I would have a negative sort of image." She was totally confused regarding the stream she should prefer after passing PUC and stated:

"My parents wanted me to become an engineer but my interest was more towards biology and as a result, I wanted to join medical line."

This state of confusion where, she was not able to stand up for her own rights regarding her future career to her parents made her little bit in an identity confused state.

C4 (PUC-I student)

She is a 17-year-old girl from Tanakpur who was studying in PUC I. She gave more importance to attachment and feeling of belongingness with peer groups for an identity development and stated:

“Friends always provide necessary emotional and social support in every ups and downs of life that is essential for one’s identity development. My positive relationship with peer group was positively related to my improved ability to understand and imagine myself better in the future.”

Her participation in various new activities as well as getting acquainted with varied new experiences in peer group such as, dealing with friends of varied types who belonged to different regions or places enabled her to explore and adopt certain values of her friends and rejecting others which they considered as unacceptable as per their point of view. Her social interaction with friends of similar or different values helped her in clarifying her world view and values and it also provided her a supportive social environment where she could freely discuss what she is and who she would like to be in future.

C5 (PUC-I student)

He is a 16-year-old PUC-I boy from one of a famous school in Tanakpur. His attitude towards self-provided a lot of insight regarding his identity. He lacked decision making ability and had inferiority complex which lowered his confidence in expressing his views in front of public. He was a bit shy and fearful and found less freedom in routine activities and also a feeling of insecurity in front of strangers and few friends. He was in a confused state regarding his future career and he simply did not want to follow the crowd without any interest in a particular field. He wanted to make his passion of dancing and singing as his career but his family was against it and wanted him to acquire some professional degree after PUC. He did not have much interest in academics and found it difficult to concentrate on a particular task for a long hour. He was an average student who scored 69 % in Class Xth. At a very early age of 10 years, he lost his father in a road accident which made him stronger and more independent in dealing with everyday life issues.

C6 (PUC-I student)

She is 16-year-old science stream PUC-I student from Tanakpur. She reported that her parents used to behave with her in an unfriendly and humiliating manner at home which had developed a feeling of loneliness and not being understood by others, a low self-concept and self-confidence and also less participation by her in family function and other co-curricular activities in school. She described:

‘I feel that I am subsided and broken when they [my parents] punish me, I get anger when they shout at me. They don’t understand changes; they should know that everything is changing, so we cannot follow them at every step; we cannot do the same things which they did.’

Lack of support shown by her parents made her less-focused and less deterministic towards her career and she started to involve herself more in bad activities like teasing, abusing, making fun of others and sometimes even drinking and smoking with her friends in absence of her parents. She also started hiding so many things with her parents because of their excessive control over her and found it difficult to handle so many obstacles in life independently. She became more aggressive, jealous and less sympathetic towards other

which resulted in only few friends of her.

C7 (PUC I student)

He is a 17-year-old, PUC I student from Tanakpur. He defined his sense of self and identity in contexts of his relationships and interactions with other people and stated. He was more outgoing, who had frank conversation with everyone and also had a huge gang of friends. He stated that: *“I don’t care about what other people speak about me at my back. I keep my opinion and speak my mind more in front of people without any hesitation. But sometimes I don’t get enough support from my friends because of my more outgoing nature that makes them feel jealous of me as it makes me smarter and more intelligent than them.”*

By ignoring such behaviour of his friends he still tries to get along with them and hear about the everyday things they go through such as, if they found difficulty in solving mathematics problem, then he tried to make them understand by helping them out in each and every step of a problem. He stated:

“My interaction with friends makes me feel less lonely and less depressed as well as enables me to remain updated with everything that takes place around.”

He also gave equal importance to his parents for his identity development who always acted as a source of all-time encouragement and motivation for him as and when he felt hopeless and less enthusiastic in carrying out his work.

C8 (PUC I student)

He is a 17-year old, PUC-I student from Dharwad. He described himself as more jolly, friendly and career-oriented boy. He liked to spend more time with his friends as narrated below:

“I like the fact that you get to talk to them and you go through the same things and you’re not alone. I also like the way they make you feel like a person by letting you know your strengths and weaknesses. It helps you to introspect yourself.”

He also stated:

“School trips and academics related discussion with friends help me a lot in solving out my problems and keeping me away from all sort of worries and tension. It gives me an insight on who I really am and who I want to be when I get older, and how I want to live my life after passing out PUC.”

He described his friends as an emotional support provider in various sorrows and joys of his life who did not allow him to face any adverse situation lonely. He had good academic records too and secured 85 % in High school. His aim was to serve the nation by becoming a doctor in future. He stated that:

“One should possess a clear sense of self regarding their capabilities and hidden talents so that, one can excel ahead in their life without getting into a stage of confusion as well as one should also have a role model to whom one can admire in excelling in their life like I considered Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam as my role model and like him I also want to be hard-working, dedicated and focused towards my goals without getting diverted.”

C9 (PUC I student)

He is a 17 years old PUC-I science stream boy from Dharwad. He defined himself as a young, deterministic, inquisitive free-budding soul who wanted to do something different to create his own unique identity. He thinks outside the box and finds various alternatives for solving a particular problem. He was

unafraid and didn't think too much about what other people think or say nor he got swayed by the opinions of other people. He often reads same books again and again and considered book as his best friend that helped him to enhance his knowledge and skills and also enabled him to create a best version of himself. He stated:

"I talk more and I think about books more. Like I talk more in classes because I can talk."

He was also a good debater who had participated in many debate competitions which were organized at the national and school level and received many awards for the same. He tried to grab every opportunity that came on his way and dealt with everyday life issues in a more planned way without getting nervous. He perceived every situation in a different way unlike others. He had a strong faith on "Work is worship" and thus, he worked day and night to achieve his goals.

C10 (PUC I student)

She is a 16-year-old, PUC-I science stream student from Dharwad. She defined her uniqueness as follows:

"I am really motivated, confident and dedicated to what I want to do...I love to write, sing and act... So, in a high school, I didn't look at myself as everyone else. I try to be different. I never want to be a product of my own environment."

Her parents acted as a great role model in shaping her identity particularly her mother who was graduate and teacher by profession. She stated that her mother provided her a vision of hope in her odd times as stated:

"When I was in class-Vth, I suffered from typhoid during my final exams and as a result, I could not focus properly on my studies and got very less marks in all subjects." At that time, her mother only motivated her through her inspirational words:

"In life, one undergoes lot of ups and downs so, getting less marks in exams because of typhoid is such a small issue which should not be taken as a big burden. Your health is more important than your marks."

She had more close bonding with her mother than father as most of the time, her father tended to be busy in work. Despite of this, she could talk a lot regarding her future with her father too. She was a multitalented student who participated in many other co-curricular activities like singing, dancing, drama etc beside academics. Her friends always liked to be around her and appreciate her all-time dedication towards her work. She always likes to help others in all possible manner she could without showing any ego. She wanted to become doctor in future for which she wanted to join medical coaching after PUC. Her optimistic nature towards everything enabled her to excel in every field.

C 11 (PUC-I student)

She is a 17 years old PUC-I science stream student from Dharwad. She reported, when she was in class 10th, she lacked guidance regarding selection of her stream of subject in PUC-I. Though, her interest was more towards history but she opted for science stream by simply following her other friends and also under parental pressure. She took PCB as a major subject in PUC-I and as a result, later she was facing difficulty in developing interest in all those subjects and was unable to give her best in those subjects. She had a shy and reserve nature and as such, she did not share much of her problems and opinions with other friends and family members. Most of the time, she felt isolated, less motivated,

less enthusiastic and less participative in various activities. She found difficulty in expressing herself in front of public because of too much inferiority complex. She also had trust issues and as such, she always used to have negative opinions about others by simply thinking that everyone speaks about her at her back. But slowly she is trying to overcome this problem by getting along with few of her close friends. At every situation, she considered her parents as a real backbone for providing all time support even at her worst. She emphasized that one should be able to take their own decision independently without getting influenced by other people opinion in order to have one's own unique identity and clear self-concept.

Conclusion

Parental pressure and their lack of support resulted in confused identity status of PUC students which developed a feeling of isolation, low self-concept and inferiority complex in them. They engaged themselves more in bad activities. On the other hand, students who got parental support and motivation developed positive identity. Friends also provided necessary emotional and social support in every ups and downs of life that acted as a boon for an individual identity development.

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