

Personal Values as Predictors of Identity Formation among Nigerian University Students

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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/v11-i11/11662> DOI:10.6007/IJARBS/v11-i11/11662

Published Date: 16 November 2021

Abstract

University environments provide atmospheres where young adults can explore Identity alternatives, make Identity commitments, and internalize various values required for adult life before graduation. Previous studies have demonstrated the relationship between values and Identity using Identity process theory. The current study explores this relationship using the Identity status paradigm. Particularly it examines the effects of self-direction, ideal body internalization, and materialistic value orientation on Identity exploration and commitment in a sample of 52 University students. This however is a preliminary exploration of values and identity issues within a broader study. The study utilized a cross-sectional design. Data shows that majority of the participants (84.9%) fall into the low exploration category, while less than half (44.2%) fall into the low commitment category. Also, no differences were found in students identity statuses based on their gender and age groups. Two separate Logistic regression analyses were performed. Result of the commitment model shows that Materialistic value orientation is a significant predictor of low Identity commitment and an increase in Self-direction reduces the probability of low Identity commitment, while the Identity exploration model shows an ascending predicted probability of values and low Identity exploration.

Keywords: Young Adults, Personal Values, Identity Exploration, Identity Commitment, Identity Formation

Introduction

The transition from infancy to adulthood in humans is a long and complicated process. At this stage, emerging adults are at their most vulnerable evolutionary state. They are more prone to Identity crisis because they are usually confused about their role as adults. At this stage, they are also required to separate their identity from their parents and identify themselves within social peer groups (Erikson, 1980). Young adults also begin to establish

basic social and occupational identities, establish healthy relationships, and attain a feeling of love and companionship. It is also during this stage that ideological and occupational commitments are made (Erikson, 1968). According to Marcia (1966), identity formation is established through exploration and commitment processes. Exploration is the examination and consideration of different identity alternatives, while commitment is the choices made in Identity relevant areas. Based on Marcia's operationalization of Erikson's Identity concept, an emerging adult can be categorized into 4 Identity categories depending on the absence or presence of exploration and commitment. These statuses are achievement, foreclosure, moratorium, and diffusion. Achievement individuals have made commitments after exploring Identity alternatives, foreclosure individuals made commitments without explorations, Individuals at the moratorium stage are actively exploring meaningful identity alternatives but have not made commitments, while diffusion individuals are neither actively exploring nor have they made any Identity Commitments (Marcia, 1966).

There is a need for young adults to have some ideological guideline to have a sense of order and meaning to life (Erikson, 1968). According to Kroger (2007), meaningful values can play a significant role in identity formation, particularly among young people. Bardi et al (2012) affirmed that Identity and values are major driving forces in daily human living. Schwartz (1992) conceptualized values as Tran-situational goals that differ in importance and constitute the guiding principles in an individual or a group's life. Values are also seen as a cohesive force within personal Identity' (Hitlin, 2003, p 118). Psychologists tend to use values to understand and explain human behaviors (Schwartz & Butenko, 2014). Having established these facts, it is safe to say that the inculcation of positive values may expedite a cohesive Identity; however, the wrong sets of values may serve as serious barriers to a young adults' identity development.

Self-direction and Identity of Students

The University environment is one of the most suitable to examine the exploration and commitment dimensions of Identity formation. Schools are significant agents of socialization (Anastasiu, 2011). Young people spend a lot of their time in them, and while studying, young adults are exposed to various values that influence their Identity both from teachers and fellow students (See Verhoeven et al., 2019) for review. According to Waterman (1999), before adolescence, it could be said that no individual has either made any Identity commitment or was actively exploring Identity alternatives. Hence dimensions of Identity status (exploration and commitment) are usually evident at late high school years and college or university stages. Another reason why the University environment plays an essential role in Identity formation because most young people are ushered into the labor market after they graduate from universities.

Among the values promoted within most University environments is the ability to think and act independently. Although ingrained in human nature, self-direction values require training and nurturing. Self-direction can be conceptualized as 'self-reliance and a proactive approach in the self-management at once chosen endeavor such as developing goals and searching for opportunities while taking responsibility for developing skills and competencies' (Lin, 2015 P.757). Self-directedness value in Schwartz et al (2012) expresses the motivation for independent thoughts and action, freedom, and desire to choose one's own goals and purposes. According to Kroger (2007), an essential identity-defining task of young people is to begin to free themselves from internalized parental standards and dictates from childhood.

Body Ideal Internalization and Identity of Students

Although the university environment helps to facilitate identity formation, it could also present many emerging adults with a crisis regarding their body and identity. During this period, emerging adults are more susceptible to rapid weight gain, eating disorders, and a preoccupation with being overweight (Kamps & Berman, 2011). Research has shown that young people value other people's opinions about their appearance, making them more prone to body preoccupation (Arnett, 2000). In a qualitative study, Kling et al (2018) argued that bodily changes such as weight gain or illness precipitate rapid identity changes. Also, Bucchianeri et al (2013) observed a trend in which diverse youth are increasingly dissatisfied with their bodies as their Body Mass Index (BMI) increases from Adolescence to young adulthood. However, this tends to decrease gradually as a more stable sense of individual identity is formed and identity commitments have been established (Wängqvist & Frisé, 2013). In a study of nursing students in a South-eastern United States University, Kamps & Berman (2011) found that students in the non-committed identity statuses (diffused and moratorium) have a significantly higher weight preoccupation than those in the committed identity statuses (foreclosed and achieved). Furthermore, moratorium status individuals tend to have a considerably higher weight preoccupation than those in the Identity foreclosed class.

Materialistic value Orientation and Identity of students

A sizable body of literature has proved that materialistic values are becoming increasingly prevalent among university students (Ersoy-Quadir, 2012; Kazuzuru, 2020; Likitapiwat et al., 2015). One possible reason for this is that young adults are often the targets of advertisements designed to lure people into buying goods they usually do not need. This age group is particularly more vulnerable to enticing advertisements because they are often identity seekers and constitute the largest consumers of mass media content, which advertisers pick and capitalize on (Rai et al., 2020). This, in essence, leads to compulsive buying and materialism, a problem that as many as half a million people in The United Kingdom, one million Germans, and fifteen million people in the United States of America may be dealing with (Dittmar, 2007). According to Richins (2017), materialism is common among children, and significant factors contributing to the development of a materialistic child are parenting, cultural values, and developmental tasks. Materialists tend to value possession and their acquisition as fundamental to their daily living, necessary to their life satisfaction, and an indicator of success (Richins & Dawson, 1992). Materialistic values are often discouraged among individuals and are the focal point of many research studies because of their unfavorable effects on individuals and societies (Martin et al., 2019). On an individual level, the materialistic value increases debt, reduces savings, and ultimately life satisfaction (Duh, 2015). Furthermore, consistent empirical evidence connects a high level of materialism to dwindling well-being (Carlisle & Hanlon, 2007; Dittmar, 2007; Dittmar & Hurst, 2017; Kasser & Ahuvia, 2002).

The Current study

The purpose of this study is to determine the predictive effect of self-direction, ideal body internalization, and materialistic value orientation on Identity exploration and commitment in a sample of university students in Nigeria. Nigeria, from where the study's sample is obtained, is a society mostly comprised of young individuals. The National Bureau of Statistics (2016) estimated that about 55.8 million of the Nigerian population is between the ages of

15-29. This current population of emerging adults in Nigeria alone is the total population of South Africa, Australia, and North Korea combined. Among the various challenges emerging adults face in Nigeria are unemployment and underemployment. The youth unemployment and underemployment rate in Nigeria is at an all-time high at 34.9% as of the second quarter of 2020 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020). Unemployment and underemployment have crucial implications for the identity formation of youths. This is because the identity formation process is inherently contingent on combining the individual's interests, talents, and skills with the ones required in the vocational context (Kroger, 2007). Young job seekers who cannot secure employment tend to suffer from a vague sense of purpose and structure, unable to participate in goals and objectives beyond themselves, and consequently, be deprived of recognition for personal achievement and status by their significant others. Also, the fact that they must develop identities within a society beleaguered by unemployment and where material possessions are common goals, and social status is achieved through wealth, and fame is a unique aspect of Nigerian youths' identity development. Therefore, unlike individuals who are equipped with a sense of purpose and are self-directed, the proliferation of materialistic values, the anticipation of possible future unemployment after graduation from university and the increasing consumption of ideal body images on mass media are dreadful conditions that may threaten youths' identity and are worthy of study, particularly in the Nigerian context.

Objectives of the Study

1. To determine the differences in students Identity statuses based on gender and age groups.
2. To determine the predictive effect of self-direction, ideal body internalization, and materialistic value orientation on Identity exploration and commitment.

Theoretical Background

Marcia's (1966) Identity status Paradigm was perhaps the first to Operationalize the Ego Identity and Identity diffusion concepts grounded in Erikson's (1959) 's Psychosocial theory. The identity status paradigm's central idea is that one's sense of Identity is primarily defined by choices and commitments made concerning his/her personal and social characteristics. According to Marcia, Identity development is movement through four statuses. These statuses development essentially refers to the Mechanisms of reacting to the identity issues of late Adolescence. These modes are called 'ego identity statuses,' and an Individuals progress through and outcome of the identity stage can be explained using these four Statuses (Côté & Levine, 1988). Two main elements that are central to Marcia's conception of Identity; are exploration and commitment. Exploration (initially conceptualized as a crisis) is a quest for potential identity alternatives among available elements. At the same time, commitment refers to developing a potentially stable 'Commitment' to some portion of Identity alternatives given consideration (Waterman, 1999). Based on the presence/absence of exploration and commitment in occupation and Ideology, an individual can thereby be categorized into 1 of 4 Identity positions. These are Identity Achievement, Identity foreclosure, Moratorium, and Identity diffusion. Identity achievement refers to (Commitment after exploration), identity foreclosure (Commitment without exploration), moratorium (continuing active exploration without commitment), and identity diffusion (no exploration and no commitment). The Ego Identity status has been extensively studied among University students (see Waterman, 1982) for review. It is the most broadly used as a means through

which Erikson's identity formation concept (1968) is assessed and described (Meeus et al., 2010).

| | |
|--|---|
| Identity Achieved High exploration High commitment | Moratorium High exploration Low commitment |
| Identity Foreclosed Low exploration High commitment | Identity Diffused Low exploration Low commitment |

Figure 1

As a predictor of Identity formation, we use the frequently cited theory of basic human value Schwartz et al., (2012), precisely self-enhancement values of Self direction, power, and security as a background for selecting personal values of self-direction, ideal body internalization, and materialistic value orientation. Based on the Schwartz theory, self-direction expresses the motivation to think and act independently; power expresses the motivation to control people and material resources. The face value expresses the motivation to protect one's public image and prestige against attacks and humiliation. This value subtype expresses an element of both power and security.

Methods

Participants

Fifty-two Philosophy students at a public University in southwestern Nigeria participated in the study. All participants were in their final year. Final year students in philosophy department were particularly selected because often times they are usually more equipped with the ability to critically scrutinize fundamental human beliefs and values and tend to know more about the nature of life. The current study however is a preliminary exploration of values and identity issues within a broader study; Nevertheless the sample size can be considered sufficient to make statistical inferences because the purpose of the analysis is to determine the factors that are highly correlated with an outcome according to (Bujang et al., 2018) also the number of events relative to that of the regression coefficient (EPV) in the study is considerably high which gives room to perform logistics regression analysis according to (Peduzzi et al., 1996). Gender distribution included male (n=27), female (n=25). Twenty-five percent of the participants were less than 20 years old, 73.1% of the respondents were between 21 and 30 years old, while 1.9% of the students were above 30 years old. Regarding marital status, almost all (98.1%) of the participants were single, while 1.9 of the participants are married.

Measures

The questionnaire included measures of Identity formation, self-direction, ideal body internalization, and materialistic value orientation.

Ego Identity formation

The Ego Identity process questionnaire (EIPQ) by Balistreri et al. (1995) is a 32 item scale that accesses the dimensions of exploration and commitment of young people in eight domains: occupations, religion, values, politics, family, friendship, sex roles, and dating. The ego-identity process questionnaire contains 20 positively worded questions and 12 Negatively worded questions. The median score of 66.5 for exploration and 62 for commitment was used

to permit a comparison to measure the identity status of each respondent based on the recommendation of (Balistreri et al., 1995). Respondents' scores above the median of both dimensions were classified as Achieved, while respondents below both dimensions will be classified as Diffused. Respondents who score above median on exploration but low on commitment are classified as Moratoriums. Those who score above median on commitment but low on exploration were classified as Foreclosed. The EIPQ is measured on a 6-point scale, with six being Strongly agreed and one Strongly disagreeing. Alpha coefficient of 0.79 was reported for commitment items while those for exploration items was 0.834.

Personal Values

The self-direction subscale of the portrait value questionnaire Schwartz et al. (2012) was used to measure self-direction. The self-direction thoughts and action in this study reported internal consistency of .91. The self-direction thoughts and actions were combined to make up a 6-item questionnaire in the current study. Items were measured on a 6-point Likert-type scale. Body ideal internalization in this study was measured using the eight items on the Internalization subscale of the Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire (SATAQ) (Heinberg et al., 1995) measured on a 7 point scale. In this study, the internalization subscale of the SATAQ reported internal consistency of .79. Lastly, The Material value scale by (Richins 2004) was used to measure materialistic value orientation in this study. Internal consistency of .85 was reported for the Material value scale in this study.

Procedure

An online questionnaire was administered to the participant who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study after the class representative proposed to all students through a class group chat. The questionnaire contained measures of the variables used in the study alongside demographic measures of age, gender, and marital status. All students in the class agreed to participate in the survey with the exemption of 2 unreachable students. Participants then received a mobile top-up of ₦100 as an incentive after completing the online questionnaire.

Findings and Discussions

Descriptive and Preliminary Analysis

Results indicates that a more significant proportion (51.9%) of the participants are male as they amount to 27 out of 52 students while female students consisted of 25 (48.1%). Participants in the age group 21 to 30 years old are higher in number (73.1), followed by participants in the age group below 20 years old (25%). Only one (1.9%) participant falls within the above 30 years old age group. Almost all the participants (98.1%) are single, except one student that falls in the married category.

Results from table 1 reveal the classification of participants within the four Identity categories. The table shows that most of the participants (44.2%) fall within the diffused category, followed by 30.8% foreclosed, 15.4% moratorium, and 9.6% achieved.

Table 1

Identity Status classification of students

| Statues Classification | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Achieved | 5 | 9.6 |
| Foreclosed | 16 | 30.8 |
| Moratorium | 8 | 15.4 |
| Diffused | 23 | 44.2 |

Table 2 presents the results of a chi-square analysis, which revealed no significant differences in the Identity classification of participants based on gender and age groups. Hence we conclude that male and female students do not differ in Identity status based on gender. Similarly, we conclude that the Identity status of students is the same in all age groups under consideration in the study.

Table 2

Cross-tabulation of students Identity statuses with background variables

| Demographic Variables | Achieved | Foreclosed | Moratorium | Diffused | X ² | P |
|-----------------------|----------|------------|------------|----------|----------------|------|
| Gender | | | | | | |
| Male | 3 | 9 | 1 | 14 | | |
| Female | 2 | 7 | 0 | 16 | .680 | .457 |
| Age | | | | | | |
| Below 20 Yrs. Old | 0 | 3 | 1 | 9 | | |
| 21-30 Yrs. Old | 5 | 12 | 0 | 21 | | |
| Above 30 Yrs. Old | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | .271 | .111 |

Determination of factors that predicts Identity exploration and Commitment of Students

Two separate Enter Binary logistic regression analysis was performed to determine the predictive effect of self-direction, ideal body internalization and materialistic value orientation on Identity exploration and Identity commitment. Regression results for Identity exploration indicated that the overall model is not fit for all predictors (self-direction, ideal body internalization, materialistic value orientation). Although according to Hosmer and Lemeshow test $\chi^2(3, N=52) = 9.55, P > 0.05$, the model can still be considered fit. Going by Pallant 2011, a model is regarded as an excellent fit to the data if the Hosmer-Lemeshow test value is greater than .05. Having established the partial fitness of the model, it is essential to indicate that the model was able to distinguish between participants with low exploration and high exploration by correctly classifying 88.5% of the cases. Also, the model as a whole explained between 13% (Cox and Snell R square) and 25.5% (Nagelkerke R squared) of the variance in the Low exploration category. According to table 4, although none of the predictors (self-direction, ideal body internalization, materialistic value orientation) was a statistically significant predictor of Low identity exploration, the model shows an ascending predicted probability of low Identity exploration, i.e., for every additional unit increase in self-direction, ideal body internalization and materialistic value Orientation the odds of falling into the low exploration category increases by 52%, 3.7%, and 7.3% respectively.

Table 3

Logistic regression model result for Personal values and Low exploration

| Independent Variables | B | S. E | Wald | Sig | EXP (B) | 95% C.I for EXP (B) | |
|---------------------------------|------|------|-------|------|---------|---------------------|-------|
| | | | | | | Lower | Upper |
| Self-Direction | .420 | .354 | 1.403 | .236 | 1.521 | .760 | 3.046 |
| Body ideal Internalization | .037 | .050 | .531 | .466 | 1.037 | .940 | 1.144 |
| Materialistic Value Orientation | .071 | .062 | 1.320 | .251 | 1.073 | .951 | 1.211 |

Table 5 below presents the logistic regression model of Self-direction, Body ideal internalization, materialistic value orientation, and identity commitment. The regression model contained three predictors (A1=Self-Direction, ideal body internalization, materialistic value orientation). The full model comprising all the predictors was statistically significant, $\chi^2(3, N=52) = 8.9, p < 0.05$. Likewise, the Hosmer and Lemeshow test $\chi^2(3, N = 52) = 10.2, p > .05$ supported the model fit. This implies that the model was able to distinguish between participants with high Commitment and low Commitment. The model explained 1.5% (Cox and Snell R Square) and 2.1% (Nagelkerke R squared) of the variance in the commitment category and correctly classified 67.3% of cases. For self-direction, a negative regression coefficient of $-.121$ indicates that with an increasing score in self-direction, there is a decreasing likelihood that participants will fall into the low commitment category. Self-direction is not a statistically significant predictor of low Identity commitment. While there is a slightly positive relationship between body ideal internalization and Identity commitment, Body ideal internalization is not a statistically significant predictor of low Identity commitment $p > .05$. Table 5 indicates that for every additional unit increase in materialistic value orientation, the likelihood of participants being classified in the low Identity commitment category increases by 10.3%, and materialistic value orientation is a statistically significant predictor of low Identity commitments as the significant value (0.02) is less than .05. Hence participants who hold higher materialistic values are more likely to fall within the low Identity commitment category.

Table 1

Logistic regression model result for Personal values and Low Commitment

| Independent Variables | B | S. E | Wald | Sig | EXP (B) | 95% C.I for EXP (B) | |
|---------------------------------|-------|------|-------|------|---------|---------------------|-------|
| | | | | | | Lower | Upper |
| Self-Direction | -.121 | .072 | 2.843 | .092 | .886 | .770 | 1.020 |
| Body ideal internalization | .001 | .035 | .000 | .985 | 1.001 | .934 | 1.072 |
| Materialistic Value Orientation | .098 | .042 | 5.430 | .020 | 1.103 | 1.016 | 1.198 |

Conclusion and Recommendations*Conclusions*

The study highlighted the concept of Identity exploration and Identity commitment alongside the values that influences them. According to the study's findings, most participants (84.9%) fall into the low exploration category, while less than half (44.2%) of the participants fall into the low commitment category. This implies that Nigerian students are quick to make identity commitments without necessarily exploring suitable Identity alternatives. This confirms the findings of (Verhoeven et al., 2019) that schools and educators are not often acquainted with the techniques of influencing the Identity developments of students. The study did not find any significant difference in the Identity status of participants based on their gender and age group. Suggesting that the level of students' examination and consideration of different identity alternatives is the same across gender and age groups. It also suggests that young adults begin to internalize the roles they have to play in society once they determine their gender identity, either as a man or as a woman. The data also depicted that Materialistic value orientation is the only value that significantly predicts Low Identity commitment of students. This implies that the higher the level of materialistic value acquired by university students, the lesser their chances of making Identity commitment. As expected, Self-direction values had a negative association with low Identity commitment and a positive association with Low Identity exploration. Hence, the more self-directed students are in their thoughts and actions, the more they tend to quickly make identity commitments and the less they tend time they spend exploring in identity alternatives. This is consistent with the findings of (Kasser & Ryan, 1996) that self-directed values is coherent with self-actualization and growth tendencies and furnishes the individual satisfaction of his/her latent psychological needs. All things being equal, other values were observed to play minimal roles in Low Identity exploration and commitment. However, there is sufficient evidence suggesting that the likelihood of not making Identity exploration and commitment increases as young adults' body ideal internalization increases. In other words, young adults' likelihood of not making Identity exploration and commitment increases with increasing body ideal internalization 'the degree to which an individual mentally buys into society norms of size and appearance, to the point of changing one's behavior in an attempt to resemble these standards. These results confirms findings of (Nelson et al., 2018) that the body and its dynamics play a significant role in emerging adults perception of themselves; and that the preoccupation with romantic and sexual relationships characteristics of this period is likely to result into deeper identity exploration as they prepare for intimacy in adult life (Wängqvist & Frisé, 2013).

Recommendations

The findings of this study have implications for young adults and parents alike. Parents should ensure that they create a climate where more positive values like self-direction is promoted in the family and the ability to critically examine their choices. Also, parents should ensure that young adults at a early stage are equipped skills and crafts that will assist them in contributing to the wellbeing of their society on a mass scale rather than the motivation to consume material good from it. Parents also need to ensure that young adults are secure enough in their bodies and encourage good eating habits and exercises among their children at an early stage. We recommend that there is need for Nigerian universities to organize more learning experiences that are explorative to assist in their Identity development during their course of study. Doing so, students can acquire values that can help students discern

what is worth struggling for in life outside the realm of material possessions and consumption and values that are beneficial for the psychological and vocational wellbeing of students. This study only examined a small aspect of basic human values among Nigerian University students. Hence this study is limited in some areas. One of the limitations of this research is its inability to generalize its conclusions due to its limited sample frame. Also, the investigation is limited to undergraduates' students only. This was done to capture the specific age range most appropriate for the study.

Further investigations should be conducted to incorporate the views of graduate students for a more generalizable result. Further studies should also be extended to other higher educational institutions, e.g., private universities and colleges of education in different geographical zones in Nigeria, to get better generalizable. Furthermore, further researchers may also consider gender differences in self-direction, ideal body internalization, and materialistic value orientation. It would be interesting to consider using qualitative methods to explore more in-depth information on the constructs in the study.

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