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ABSTRACT

Two models for analyzing thinking about personal identity issues were compared: Marcia's ego identity status system and Kegan's subject-object balances. A total of 61 late adolescent participants (36 women, 25 men) were given Marcia et al.'s (1993) ego identity status interview and Lahey et al.'s (1987) subject-object interview in separate one-hour sessions as part of a larger investigation of identity development during late adolescence. Marcia's ego identity statuses and Kegan's subject object balances were significantly, positively related to one another. There were no gender differences on either measure. Also the use of Kegan's scheme for describing transitions between stages suggests the possibility of different phases in Marcia's moratorium identity status. The finding may hold implications for clinical or counseling interventions. (Author)

The Relationship between Marcia's Ego Identity Statuses and Kegan's Subject-Object
Balances during Late Adolescence

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Abstract

Two models for analyzing thinking about personal identity issues were compared: Marcia's ego identity status system and Kegan's subject-object balances. A total of 61 late adolescent participants (36 women, 25 men) were given Marcia et al.'s (1993) ego identity status interview and Lahey et al.'s (1987) subject-object interview in separate one-hour sessions as part of a larger investigation of identity development during late adolescence. Marcia's ego identity statuses and Kegan's subject object balances were significantly, positively related to one another. There were no gender differences on either measure. Also the use of Kegan's scheme for describing transitions between stages suggests the possibility of different phases in Marcia's moratorium identity status. This finding may hold implications for clinical or counseling interventions

The Relationship between Marcia's Ego Identity Statuses and Kegan's Subject-Object Balances during Late Adolescence

James Marcia (1966; Marcia et al., 1993) and Robert Kegan (1994) have both provided models and means of assessing stability and change in the course of identity or self-development over time. Both theoretical models focus on decision-making processes involving identity issues important to self-definition, and both models define periods of stability and transition in this late adolescent task. It was hypothesized that classifications on Marcia's measure of ego identity status and Kegan's measure of subject-object balance would be positively related. It was furthermore anticipated that Kegan's more refined description and assessment of transition states between stable subject-object balances might provide further insights into the moratorium process described by Marcia.

Marcia (1966; Marcia et al., 1993) has focused on the variables of exploration and commitment to define and empirically validate the presence of four different possible orientations to the resolution of identity issues during late adolescence: identity achievement, moratorium, foreclosure, and diffusion. The identity statuses have been linked with cognitive and moral reasoning (Marcia et al., 1993).

Robert Kegan (1994) has provided a life-span model of self development through a sequence of major "meaning-making" stages. These stages reflect differences in the ways by which individuals come to interpret and make sense of their lives and their life experiences. In addition, Kegan has identified and empirically assessed a sequence of four transition states between major subject-object stages or epistemologies.

The purpose of the present research is to examine any parallel relationship that may exist between Marcia's ego identity statuses and Kegan's subject-object balances during late adolescence.

Method

Subjects

A sample of 61 late adolescent New Zealand university students served as participants in the present investigation. The group ranged in age from 17 to 24 years (M age=19.88, SD =1.53) and was comprised of 36 women (M age = 19.69

years, $SD = 1.56$) and 25 men ($M_{age} = 20.14$, $SD = 1.48$). These participants were drawn from first year education, law, and sociology courses at a New Zealand university. They were a subgroup of a larger sample in the first phase of a larger longitudinal investigation into identity development during late adolescence. Students identified themselves from one of the following ethnic groups: 89% Pakeha (European origin), 7% Maori or Pacific Island, and 4% Asian. The research was presented as a study of values and decision-making. All individuals took part on a voluntary basis and were provided with general feedback in their courses some 4 months later.

Measures

Marcia's Ego Identity Status Interview. Ego identity status was assessed according to Marcia's (1966) ego identity status interview guide, with amendments that appeared in Marcia et al. (1993). The identity domains of occupation, religion, politics, and sex-role values were used to assess overall ego identity status. Participants were classed as identity achieved, moratorium, foreclosure, or diffusion for each interview component, and a single, overall identity status rating was made based on the clinical judgment of the assessor. Identity status interviews have indicated acceptable levels of reliability (generally around .80 for inter-rater agreement, Marcia et al., 1993).

Kegan's Subject-Object Interview. Subject-object balance was assessed according to guidelines presented in Lahey, Souvaine, Kegan, Goodman, & Felix (1987). A neo-Piagetian interview and assessment procedure is administered in relation to particular personal dilemmas in order to ascertain a person's level of meaning construction. A sequence of 10 key words is presented individually on cards to each individual: angry, anxious/nervous, success, strong stand/conviction, sad, torn, moved/touched, lost something, change, important to me. The participant notes on each card any recent experiences the word brings to mind and then selects several of these key words to discuss in more detail with the interviewer. The interviewer listens to the experience, then probes through particular key phrases as to how that circumstance was understood and experienced by the participant.

Kegan's scores for meaning-making epistemologies or subject-object balances ranges from concrete and instrumental balances (Stages 1 and 2), to the

interpersonal (Stage 3), to the institutional (Stage 4), to the interindividual balance (Stage 5). Kegan has also identified a sequence of four transition steps between each of these major stages. Thus, each individual receives a score reflecting either a full stage score or a score indicating a position in the transitional process between major stages. Kegan's scheme thus generates a 21 point ordinal scale. Inter-rater reliabilities for this scheme have ranged from .75 to .90 (Lahey et al., 1987).

Procedure

Participants were given Marcia et al.'s (1993) ego identity status interview and Lahey, Souvaine, Kegan, Goodman, & Felix's (1987) subject-object interview in separate one-hour sessions as part of a larger investigation of identity development during late adolescence. Ego identity status interviews were administered by one of four trained interviewers who were graduate students in clinical psychology or educational counseling. All subject-object interviews were conducted by the author, who was trained as an interviewer and had established an acceptable level of scoring reliability with Kegan's Subject-Object Workshop research group. All ego identity status and subject object interviews were tape-recorded for later assessment. Subject-object interview tapes were also transcribed for the assessment process. An additional research assistant collated all data so that interviewers for one set of data remained blind regarding the other data set.

Reliability for assessment of overall ego identity status assessment was 84% agreement between two trained raters over all subjects, while inter-rater reliability of subject-object interview assessments was 85% agreement between two trained raters for a random selection of 20 interviews.

Results

The relationship between ego identity status and subject object balance was analyzed through both parametric and non-parametric methods. While the Kegan subject-object balance measure has clearly demonstrated the hypothesized developmental order of subject-object balances in longitudinal research (Kegan 1994), there has been some recent discussion of the developmental nature of the ego identity statuses (see for example van Hoof, 1999 and Kroger, in press). Longitudinal research on this latter variable has

generally produced movement from less complex and mature (foreclosure and diffusion) to more mature (moratorium and achievement) positions (Kroger, in press). However, a general step-wise progression from diffusion to foreclosure to moratorium to achievement has been less in evidence across longitudinal studies, possibly a result of the relatively long periods of time generally present between data collection points (1-3 years in late adolescence, 4 – 10 years in adulthood). Thus, the identity status data were considered both as ordinal and nominal data for purposes of analysis.

A preliminary analysis of the data revealed no significant gender differences for either ego identity status ratings or subject-object balances. Males and females were thus combined for subsequent parametric analysis. Spearman's rho indicated a significant, positive relationship between Marcia's ego identity statuses and Kegan's subject-object balances (Spearman's $\rho = .67$, $n=61$, $p < 0.01$).

A loglinear analysis was also used to examine the dependency of cell frequencies on gender, identity status, and subject-object balance. The best fitting model required main marginals and only one two-way association to achieve a nonsignificant level of misfit ($p > .51$). The three-way interaction was not significant nor were any of the two-way interactions with gender. There was a significant two-way interaction between ego identity status and subject-object balance ($LR^2 = 46.91$, $p < .001$). More complex forms of meaning construction (Stages 3/4, 4/3, 4(3) and 4) were associated with more mature ego identity statuses (moratorium and achievement), while less complex forms of meaning construction (Stages 2/3, 3/2, 3(2), and 3) were associated with the less mature ego identity statuses (foreclosed and diffuse). The frequency distribution of scores for participants on measures of ego identity status and subject-object balance appears in Table 1.

Discussion and Conclusions

This study was undertaken to examine the possible parallel relationship between two developmental schemes of identity (Marcia, 1967) and meaning construction (Kegan, 1994). As anticipated, there was a significant, positive relationship between these two developmental schemes. Both schemes appear to assess cognitive complexity about reasoning regarding identity or other

personal dilemmas. Both systems focus on the structure of reasoning and are based on the developmental constructs of differentiation and integration. Hence, the strong relationship between the two systems is not surprising.

Consistent with previous research, no gender differences appeared for either the identity status or meaning-making measure and gender did not contribute to model fit when data were treated as categorical. In a previous major review of identity status researches between 1966 and 1995, Kroger (1997) found no significant gender differences in overall identity status assessments, nor in the individual identity domains. While less research has been undertaken with Kegan's scheme, virtually none of the work reviewed by Kegan (1994) or publications appearing outside this review have found gender differences in subject-object balances (e.g. Pratt, Diessner, Hunsberger, Pancer, & Savoy).

Kegan's scheme, which enables one to examine any transitional process in meaning-making systems, suggests the possibility of a series of subphases in the construction of meaning through Marcia's moratorium identity status. Those moratorium individuals, searching for personally meaningful identity-defining values and commitments, appear to undergo a series of different meaning-making positions as they relinquish an identity based on identifications and move to a more differentiated, self-defined, identity achieved status.

Furthermore, subphases within the moratorium process may hold implications for clinical or counseling interventions. There may be forms of intervention specific to a particular phase of the moratorium process that may best facilitate the change process. For example, those just entering a moratorium position in identity terms who are constructing meaning in Kegan's 3(4) phase of meaning-making (in which some self-determined decisions are made on behalf of another's wishes) might be best assisted by therapeutic intervention introducing contradictions to stimulate more self-determined choices, while those moratoriums fully demonstrating Kegan's fourth epistemologies (e.g. 4/3 , 4(3) positions) might best be met by therapeutic efforts to honor and support more self-determined forms of meaning construction.

The present investigation was not longitudinal in nature. Future research into the relationships between structural models of identity and meaning

construction might well engage in longitudinal research, with data collection points over intervals of months rather than years, in order to trace the slow evolutionary courses of these two variables. Only through such painstaking research approaches will we be able to refine our understandings of the course of identity development and meaning-construction over time.

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Table 1

Kegan's Subject-Object Balances by Marcia's Ego Identity Statuses

| <u>Kegan's Subject- Object Balance</u> | <u>Marcia's Identity Statuses</u> | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------|--------------------|-------|-------------------|-------|-----------------|-------|--------------|-------|
| | <u>Diffusion</u> | | <u>Foreclosure</u> | | <u>Moratorium</u> | | <u>Achieved</u> | | <u>Total</u> | |
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| 2/3 | 2 | 66.7 | 1 | 5.6 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 3 | 4.9 |
| 3/2 | 0 | 0.0 | 2 | 11.1 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 2 | 3.3 |
| 3(2) | 0 | 0.0 | 5 | 28.7 | 1 | 3.7 | 1 | 7.7 | 7 | 11.5 |
| 3 | 1 | 33.3 | 4 | 22.2 | 4 | 14.8 | 0 | 0.0 | 9 | 14.8 |
| 3(4) | 0 | 0.0 | 3 | 16.7 | 3 | 11.1 | 0 | 0.0 | 6 | 9.8 |
| 3/4 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 7 | 25.9 | 1 | 7.7 | 8 | 13.1 |
| 4/3 | 0 | 0.0 | 2 | 11.1 | 8 | 29.6 | 3 | 23.1 | 13 | 21.3 |
| 4(3) | 0 | 0.0 | 1 | 5.6 | 4 | 14.8 | 4 | 30.8 | 9 | 14.8 |
| 4 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 4 | 30.8 | 4 | 6.5 |
| Total | 3 | 100.0 | 18 | 100.0 | 27 | 100.0 | 13 | 100.0 | 61 | 100.0 |

LR² = 46.91, p < 0.001



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