

## IDENTITY AND ADOLESCENCE. A PERSPECTIVE ON SCIENTIFIC STUDIES

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**Abstract:** Over time, adolescence has been recognized as a particularly difficult time for this category of population, being full of uncertainties and vulnerable feelings. Identity is often characterized as one's interpersonal characteristics (such as self-definition or personality traits), roles and relationships assumed in different interactions, personal values or moral beliefs. In this research stage, there were introduced original studies identified in international databases, which brought to discussion the two investigated variables: identity and adolescence. The qualitative assessment of scientific articles published in reference journals or presented at international conferences was achieved relying on the PICO process, a technique mainly used in evidence-based practice to answer a research question. Purpose of literature review was to identify scientific studies addressing the role of identity in adolescent formation and development, and also to determine the causal relationships between identity and self-esteem, identity and anxiety, identity and ego development, cultural identity during adolescence. This analyze on scientific studies reveals the depth and complexity of identity processes and areas, and presents views from several different studies and theoretical schools, as well as empirical approaches some studies suggest that girls' self-esteem tend to decrease in adolescence, more recent research does not bring arguments in this respect. The relationships of adolescents with their families are not always comfortable, their rebellions being something common in this period of life.

**Keywords:** *personality, identity, adolescence, self-esteem, cultural identity, moral identity.*

### Introduction

There were differences in social identity between adolescent groups, in that the effects of social identity were relatively strong in early and late adolescents, especially when peer group identity rather than gender identity was evident [1].

Adolescence, defined as the period comprised between puberty and adulthood, has been recognized as a particularly difficult time for this category of population, being full of uncertainties and vulnerable feelings. Teenagers are faced with self-awareness and constantly fight to discover and reinvent themselves in accordance with the social system [2]. From a *psychological* point of view, adolescence is marked by the emergence of identity crises, the expression of alternative behavioral states, exaggerated attention to body perception and fluctuations in self-esteem. During this period, teenagers also express their own gestures, values, aspirations and vocations. An important part of identity is gender identity, because it greatly determines the way in which a person sees himself or herself as both an individual and a social being. From a *social* perspective, the adolescent wants to show independence from parents, the influence of the group of friends occurs, as well as the beginning of a new schooling cycle, all these being premises for identity formation. In a world full of tensions and conflicts, in a world dominated by

rapid and multiple changes (economic, social, political, psychological ones), fostering personal identity becomes absolutely necessary. From a *scientific* point of view, one cannot talk about identity without addressing personality and the factors involved in the psychosocial processes that intervene in structuring personal identity. Given the social nature of man, human personality can be assessed only at a social level and is validated through constant reference to others and reevaluation. Because the social is a mirror reflecting the real image of man, who cannot exist outside of society, but only within and through it, this one can be analyzed only as a social being, whose mental development is always impregnated by his or her relationships with society.

In the light of *psychology*, the term *identity* is correlated with concepts such as self-image, self-esteem and individuality. In cognitive psychology, this term refers to the introspective ability and self-awareness of an individual [3].

From the perspective of *sociology*, the term *identity* is correlated with the concepts of *behavior* and *social role*. Social sciences use it to describe the conception and expression of a person's individuality, also determined by their affiliations to different groups (which involves group identity: cultural, national, social identity etc.) [4]. The negotiation of identity arises from the process of

learning social roles through personal experiences (by interacting with other members of the society, the individual establishes his or her identity status, which is recognized and accepted by others).

Psychologists use the term *identity* to designate the uniqueness of an individual based on each one's idiosyncrasies. Instead, sociologists use the term with the meaning of *social identity*, which involves the group traits that define an individual. However, when analyzing a person's identity, each discipline can use any meaning of the concept, according to their needs [5].

Identity is often characterized as one's interpersonal characteristics (such as self-definition or personality traits), roles and relationships assumed in different interactions, personal values or moral beliefs [6].

Identity also involves a sense of continuity of self-image over time, but this continuity can be disrupted when puberty produces radical changes in someone's physical appearance. Sexual maturation brings changes in the roles that a person is expected to assume in the relationship with opposite-gender partners, this assumption of gender identity being a marker of mature identity [7]. For dominant ethnic groups, 'banality' may itself provide a marker of national identity while paradoxically the proactive display of national identity undermines minority groups claims to national identity [8].

Personal identity is a dynamic construction of the unity of self-awareness through inter-subjective relationships, verbal communications and social experiences. Jenkins [9] asserts that identity refers to the ways in which individuals and collectivities distinguish in their social relationships with other individuals and other collectivities. Consequently, identity is social and involves interaction and comparison. According to the author, identity, whether individual or collective, is always symbolically constructed; it would be enough to mention clothing, accessories, gestures, language and behaviors to show that all these contribute to what an individual is through the associated social meanings.

The search for identity, defined by Erikson [10] as a coherent concept about self, made up of the goals, values and beliefs to which the person has a firm commitment, comes to the forefront during adolescence. Cognitive development allows teenagers to build a "theory about self". The author thinks that the adolescent's attempt to understand himself or herself is not a kind of anxiety related to maturity, but is part of a healthy, vital process relying on the achievements gained in previous

stages (confidence, autonomy, initiative, diligence) and the required background for coping with the challenges of adulthood.

However, the identity crisis is rarely fully resolved in adolescence; the identity-related problems occur repeatedly throughout the adult lifespan [11].

### **A systematic review of scientific studies**

In this research stage, there were introduced original studies identified in international databases, which brought to discussion the two investigated variables: identity and adolescence. The qualitative assessment of scientific articles published in reference journals or presented at international conferences was achieved relying on the PICO process, a technique mainly used in evidence-based practice to answer a research question [12]. The PICO process is also used to develop search strategies in the literature, whose elements are necessary in an assessment protocol. PICO is an acronym standing for: *P*– patient, problem or population; *I*– intervention; *C*– comparison; *O*–outcome(s) [13].

*The objective of the review:* to identify scientific studies addressing the role of identity in adolescent formation and development, and also to determine the causal relationships between identity and self-esteem, identity and anxiety, identity and ego development, cultural identity during adolescence.

*Participants:* adolescents

*Interventions:* any type of instrument (questionnaire, interview) for assessing the causal relationships between the research variables identified in theoretical articles, empirical studies etc.

*Results:* all results reported by the studies included in this systematic review

*Design of studies included in the analysis:* theoretical studies, case studies, longitudinal studies, cross-sectional studies etc., as related by their authors.

### **Inclusion criteria**

The review of studies aimed to highlight the relationships between the research variables: identity and adolescence. The review included articles published in journals indexed in international databases (Web of Science, SPORT Discus, PubMed, Medline), papers presented at specialized international conferences (for instance, European Child and Adolescent Psychiatry) and books from many specialized fields.

### **Search results**

Identity is one of the most studied constructs in social sciences. However, despite the wealth of findings across many disciplines, identity

researchers remain divided as regards some fundamental questions such as: What exactly is identity?, How do identity processes work ? Do people have one identity or multiple identities ? Is identity oriented individually or collectively ? Is it constructed personally or socially ? Is it stable or constant in its flow? [14].

This comprehensive perspective on scientific studies reveals the depth and complexity of identity processes and areas, and presents views from several different studies and theoretical schools, as well as empirical approaches. Most often, a theory is the starting point. The only question is whether there are or not multiple meanings of the identity status.

**Identity and late adolescence**

Faced with the imminence of adult tasks (for example, getting a job, becoming a citizen, planning marriage), the late adolescent must relinquish the childhood position of being given *to* and prepare to be the giver. The approach involves changing one’s worldview and projecting oneself imaginatively into the future through a possible occupational path. This self-reconstructive process is assumed to strengthen overall ego processes as the individual becomes able to handle a wider range of developmental tasks. Ego strengthening occurs on both an internal level (e.g. delay of impulses) and an external level (e.g. adaptation to societal demands). The psychosocial task of ego identity development is essentially one of integration. Ego identity achievement involves a synthesis of childhood identifications on the individual’s own terms, so that he or she

establishes a mutual relationship with society and maintains a feeling of continuity with himself or herself. It is about a concentrated reformulation of all that the individual is to become [15].

Previous research has shown that late adolescence is associated with developmental changes in identity formation, which leads to individual differences in identity statuses. Special attention was given to the identification and study of the four identity statuses, namely identity diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium and achievement. A combination of emotional attachment to parents and the encouragement of independence by parents is associated with healthy identity development in adolescents [16].

The study of identity, under its different aspects, has revealed a tendency to confuse identity (as a phenomenon and a notion) with self-image or group image. The confusion between these associated (but not identical) notions makes the identity theory of Krappmann [17] to be useful in clarifying the mentioned relationship. The author states that identity represents the performance achieved by an individual for getting involved in joint social actions and also in communication, specifying that identity is something dynamic and should not be confused with the individual’s “rigid” image about self. He proposes an analysis of the relationships between those skills that enable and mediate internalization and characteristics of the social system. The starting premise is that social identity is closely related to social behavior.

Table 1 provides an overview of scientific studies aimed to investigate adolescent identity.

Table 1. An overview of scientific studies on identity development in adolescents [18]

Study	Number of subjects	Age	Study design	Assessment tool	Outcomes
Tanti et al.(2011)	380 adolescents	(12-13 years) (15-16 years) (18-20 years)			The findings showed significant differences in social identity across adolescent groups, in that social identity effects were relatively strong in early- and late-adolescents, particularly when peer group identity rather than gender identity was salient.
Goth et al. (2012)	357 adolescents	Mean age: 15 years		Assessment of Identity Development in Adolescence (AIDA); Junior Temperament and Character Inventory (JTCI)	Dimensionality of JTCI characters. Self-directedness, an indicator of self-related personality functioning, has strong negative correlations with the levels of identity, discontinuity and incoherence measured by AIDA.

Tarrant et al. (2001)	149 adolescents	Mean (14-15 years)			Those participants who demonstrated the most discrimination reported highest levels of ingroup identification. The utility of applying predictions from Social Identity Theory to the study of adolescence is discussed.
Ganiere & Enright (1988)	57 high school adolescents		Tests before and after	Rasmussen Scale of Ego Identity; Self-Identity Social-Similarity Grid	Significant differences in change were demonstrated on the grid between the experimental and control groups.
Meeuset al. (1999)	-	-	Reviews of empirical studies	-	Reviews of empirical studies on identity development support the first assumption of the fundamental developmental hypothesis, but not the second, because of the lack of research.
Kinney (1993)	240 adolescents	-	Qualitative study	Observation; Interview	Adolescents who were unpopular in middle school, but got involved in activities and friendship groups in high school, were able to recover by becoming self-confident and reconstructing themselves.

Based on the psychodynamic and social-cognitive theories, Goth et al. [19] developed 58 items of the self-report questionnaire AIDA (*Assessment of Identity Development in Adolescence*), intended for healthy adolescents, but also for those with mental disorders. The psychometric properties of AIDA questionnaire were examined in a sample made up of 357 adolescents, 305 from two public schools (148 boys and 157 girls aged 12 to 18 years, mean age =15 years, DS = 2.01), and 52 psychiatric patients diagnosed with personality (N = 20) or other mental disorders (N = 32). Scale reliability was assessed by Cronbach's Alpha, content validity was examined by correlating AIDA with JTCI (*Junior Temperament and Character Inventory*), and criterion validity was measured by the differences in identity development between adolescents with personality disorders, other mental disorders or no disorder. Results from AIDA questionnaire have provided a reliable and valid assessment of normal identity development and can be used as an instrument for early detection of personality disorders.

According to Ganiere and Enright [20], identifications from the past, current feedback from social relationships and one's own priorities combine to create the identity of an individual. These insights were incorporated into three distinct

identity development programs that were administered to 57 high school seniors. Tests included the Rasmussen Scale of Ego Identity and a Self-Identity Social-Similarity Grid. Significant differences in change were demonstrated on the grid between the experimental and control groups. That there were no significant changes in Rasmussen scores emphasizes the various attempts to operationalize many aspects of Erikson's theory. Suggestions are made for administering and assessing future identity development programs. A systematic review of scientific articles, achieved by Meeus et al. [21], demonstrates that the theoretical claims of the identity status model have been significantly moderated in the past 30 years. Development does not have an established final target, a fixed achievement, and is not unidirectional, i.e. always proceeding from lower to higher statuses, but a reverse developmental pathway is also possible. Moderation does not mean that a dominant direction in development must be denied, nor does it conflict with the fundamental developmental hypothesis of the identity status model that involves a decrease in diffusion and foreclosure and an increase in achievement during the course of development, but specifies a pattern of identity status transitions underpinning this progressive development.

The same authors analyze the relationship between identity status and psychological well-being in a longitudinal study exploring relational and societal identity, conducted on a sample made up of 1,538 Dutch adolescents. Four new identity statuses are used in this study: diffusion, foreclosing, moratorium, and achieving commitment. Findings support the first assumption of the developmental hypothesis, although not completely; for relational identity, it has been found a decrease in diffusion and an increase in achievement, and for societal identity, a decrease in diffusion and an increase in foreclosure. This means that a direction can be indicated in the development of identity, but also that foreclosure can serve as the end-point of development, especially for societal identity. Generally, the domain of societal identity reveals a less pronounced development than relational identity, and this difference can be interpreted in terms of the distinction between open and closed domains of identity. To test the second assumption of the developmental hypothesis, the identity development patterns were investigated for the first time using log-linear analysis. No indications have been found that identity development occurs faster in a certain period of adolescence than in other periods. However, the stability of relational identity increases mainly in post-adolescence, and a slower development of identity results in a lower level of psychological well-being.

Kinney [22] states that extensive attention has been paid to understanding the nature of adolescent identity, but little consideration has been given to everyday social experiences and processes by which the content of teenagers' self-perceptions are formed and remain stable or change within educational settings. Because studies have focused on members of "popular" groups or "deviant" subcultures, it is important to examine the daily life of adolescents whose schoolmates have labeled them as unpopular "nerds", in order to document how these adolescents manage to overcome the stigma of such labeling. Using intensive interviews and observations, this study delimited the impact of school activities, school social structure and peer culture on the self-perceptions of nerds. Results show that adolescents who were unpopular in middle school, but got involved in activities and friendship groups in high school, were able to recover by becoming self-confident and reconstructing themselves as "normal" within a constantly changing school social system [22].

Erik Erikson built a life cycle theory including eight stages, each one representing a certain period in the human development. The psychologist states

that the development of an individual is based on three processes: the biological process of the hierarchic organization of organ systems constituting a body (*soma*); the psychic process organizing individual experience by ego synthesis (*psyche*); the communal process of the cultural organization of the interdependence of persons (*ethos*). A developing body, a developing mind and a dynamic sociocultural environment are the three primary processes underlying the identity formation and psychosocial development of a person [23].

According to Waterman [24], the identity status paradigm is grounded in Erikson's psychosocial theory; the content domains covered in the Identity Status Interview are areas on which Erikson focused in his writings; identity status theorists and Erikson share a substantial number of theoretical propositions, although notable differences exist as well; while all operational definitions of identity represent only a portion of Erikson's conceptualization of identity, the operational definition of identity in terms of exploration and commitment represents the construct at least as well as other available operational definitions; using generally accepted definitions of construct validity, identity statuses have been largely validated as elements of a broader identity construct. There are presented six propositions within the theory of identity status development and also research studies that support these propositions. The literature is reexamined in order to see to what extent the studies incorporate better design elements for assessing identity status development. Substantial support for developmental hypotheses is provided by the literature as a whole, but especially by those studies containing better design features.

### **Identity and ego development**

Kroger and Marcia [15] state that, in the first studies on the identity status, a "close" primary relationship was established between new identity statuses and the global measure of ego identity, EI-ISB (*Ego Identity Incomplete Sentences Blank*). Although addressing a concurrent form of validity, EI-ISB had not been previously established as a measure of ego identity. The positive relationship found between this measure and identity statuses suggests that these statuses have provided an appropriate representation of Erikson's extended theory. A second measure was authoritarianism, where foreclosure recorded the highest score of all statuses. The fact that persons who followed directions indisputably set for them by important childhood figures would adopt values of "law and

order”, would prefer a strong leader and would be suspicious towards people who are not like them was considered evidence confirming the validity of the term *foreclosure*. If the individual fails to fulfill this task, he or she remains in the stage of non-reconstructed superego formed in childhood, when the internalized paternal figures are fabulous characters in the child’s life. The suggestion arising from the relationship often found between foreclosure and authoritarianism is that people with this identity status remain fixed in the values of childhood, and in their adult life they seek for authoritarian persons who can guide them. Clinically, they would be expected to depend on strict internal (parental) standards that they have never reformulated on their own terms. To avoid guilt and anxiety, it would be important for these individuals to remain in a life situation as closer as possible to that experienced in childhood, because any other context may represent a serious threat for

their rigid structure of values. A third measure involved the participants’ sensitivity to positive or negative feedback from the researcher, who was observing them in the execution of a conceptually difficult task. It has been found that participants in foreclosure and diffusion states changed estimations on their own abilities after receiving external feedback more than after achievements and moratoriums. These results contributed to differentiating between those who had built or were in the process of building identity on their own terms and those who either had adopted assigned identities or did not have firm identities [15]. As regards the basic psychoanalytic theory, it is proposed that the formation of an ideal ego (final development of superego) should occur during adolescence [25]. Table 2 provides an overview of scientific studies addressing identity and ego development in adolescence.

Table 2. An overview of scientific studies on identity and ego development [26]

Study	Number of subjects	Age	Study design	Assessment tool	Outcomes
Marcia (1993)	-	-	-	Theoretical study	Identity can be compared to those mental structures postulated by cognitive developmental theorists.
Kumru & Thompson (2003)	476 adolescents	15-22 years old	-	Extended Version of the Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status; Self-Monitoring Scale	Significant increases in identity achievement and moratorium with age; no gender differences in identity status.
Weinmann & Newcombe (1990)	100 adolescents		Retrospective study	Extended Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status	A significant quadratic trend in identity committed subjects’ ratings of the amount of love they felt for mother across the five age periods; a significant linear trend of increasing love for mother.
LaVoie (1976)	High school students (girls and boys)			Marcia Ego Identity Status Scale; Measures of gender-role identification	The gender differences which emerged were congruent with the identity literature.
Kroger & Haslett (1988)	76 subjects (41 women and 35 men)		Longitudinal study	Marcia Ego Identity Status Scale; Separation	Strong links between attachment style and identity status in 1986, and between identity statuses in 1984 and

				Anxiety Test (SAT)	1986; only an indirect connexion existed between attachment styles in 1984 and 1986, as measured by SAT.
Grotevant & Adams (1984)	3 studies	-	Comparative studies	Extended Version of the Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status	The identity measure was found to have acceptable reliability (both internal consistency and test-retest) and validity.

Ego identity formation is a major event in personality development. Identity consolidation, which occurs in late adolescence, marks the end of childhood and the beginning of adulthood. Identity formation involves a synthesis of skills, beliefs and childhood identifications in a more or less coherent but unique whole, which gives the young adult both a sense of continuity with the past and a direction for the future. In terms of internal organization, identity can be compared with those mental structures postulated by cognitive developmental theorists, particularly Piaget. However, identity differs from Piaget’s structures by the fact that it is both content- and process-based. While Piaget’s structures are primarily experience-based operating procedures, identity includes both procedure styles and content elements. Shortly, identity as a structure refers to how experience is treated and what experiences are considered important [27].

Kumru and Thompson [28] conducted a research to analyze the association between identity status and self-monitoring behavior (including age and gender differences), on a sample of 476 adolescents (aged 15 to 22 years) from Turkey – a non-Western society characterized by traditional and modernist cultural elements. Identity was assessed using the Extended Version of the Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status, and self-monitoring was measured by the Self-Monitoring Scale. Identity and self-monitoring were significantly associated, for ideological identity, with adolescents having the lowest identity achievement and the highest diffusion in self-monitoring. The authors reported that there were no associations for interpersonal or general identity status. Consistent with other research conducted in North America, this study also revealed significant increases in identity achievement and moratorium with age, and no gender differences in identity status. Males obtained significantly higher scores than women for self-monitoring, with no age differences. These findings are discussed in relation to cultural

influences on identity formation in adolescents from Turkey.

Weinmann and Newcombe [29] analyzed the connection between identity status in late adolescents and their memories of the relationships with parents. The study included 100 male and female adolescents who completed two questionnaires: the former assessed the retrospective perceptions of subjects’ affective relationships with parents across five age periods: from 1 to 5 years, 5 to 10 years, 10 to 15 years, 15 to 20 years, and the present; the latter, the Extended Version of the Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status, assessed the subjects’ current identity status. Analysis revealed a significant quadratic trend in identity committed subjects’ ratings of the amount of love they felt for mother across the five age periods and also a significant linear trend of increasing love for mother. In contrast, uncommitted subjects showed significant linear trends of decreasing love both for and from their mothers. The research results are interpreted as evidence of the importance of solving the identity issues to the establishment of feelings of intimacy between late adolescents and their parents.

The ego determinants were investigated by LaVoie [30] in a study conducted on high school students (males and females). Subjects were administered the Marcia Ego Identity Status Scale and measures of gender-role identification, personality development, psychological functioning, self-concept and parental socialization practices. Data analysis has shown that adolescents with high-identity levels have more positive scores for gender-role identification, personality development, psychological adjustment and self-concept than adolescents with low-identity levels. The identified gender differences were congruent with the identity literature. Generally, the study data supported Erikson’s theory of ego identity development.

Interested in clarifying the connection between the structure of intra-psychic relationship and ego identity status in late adolescence, Kroger and

Haslett [31] conducted a longitudinal study on 76 subjects (41 women and 35 men). The study purpose was to examine the possible predictive relationship between initial attachment style and later identity status. The research subjects were administered, in 1984, the Marcia Ego Identity Status Scale and Hamburg Separation Anxiety Test (SAT), and after 2 years, in 1986, they were assessed again. Log-linear models indicated strong links between attachment style and identity status in 1986, and between identity statuses in 1984 and 1986; only an indirect connexion existed between attachment styles in 1984 and 1986, as measured by SAT. According to the study results, when there were known the identity statuses of 1984 and 1986, it was possible to predict the attachment style of 1986, without knowing the attachment style of 1984; but only the attachment style of 1984 could not predict exactly the later identity status. Jespersen et al. [32] performed a meta-analysis of the relationship between identity status and ego

development level. A total of 12 out of 14 studies contained sufficient data to be included in the two analyses. The results from 8 studies indicated a poor to moderate relationship between identity achievement and post-conformist levels of ego development (probability rate = 2.15). However, no relationship was found between foreclosure and the conformist levels of ego development. Moreover, the results from 6 studies showed a moderate correlation ( $r = 0.35$ ) between continuous measures of identity status and ego development. Although some relationships emerged between identity achievement and post-conformist levels of ego development, and also between continuous measures of identity status and ego development, these ones were not as strong as expected.

**Identity and self-esteem**

Several studies on identity in relation with self-esteem have been achieved in recent decades, some of them being presented in table 3.

Table 3. An overview of scientific studies on the relationship between identity and self-esteem

Study	Number of subjects	Age	Study design	Assessment tool	Outcomes
Patton, Bartrum, & Creed (2004)	467 high school students	14-18 years old	Comparative study	Social-Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT); Cognitive-Motivational-Relational Theory (CMR)	Self-esteem predicted career expectations, which then directly influenced career planning and exploration by bypassing career goals.
Young & Bagley(1982)	-	-	Theoretical study	-	Adequate self-esteem is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition of adequate identity.
Bayardet et al. (2014)	Cohort	15, 16 and 18 years old	Longitudinal study	Swiss Survey of Children and Youth (COCON)	Evidence suggests that women’s self-development is more affected by the educational level compared to men’s.
Lo Cascio et al. (2013)	350 adolescents	13-16 years old		Self-report measures on indecisiveness, quality of family	Students’ indecisiveness is predicted by family communication

				communication, trait anxiety and self-esteem	mediated by anxiety and self-esteem.
Brown & Lohr (1987)	221 students and 106 adolescents	7th-12th graders and outsiders adolescents	Comparative study	-	Outsiders' self-esteem differed in both the accuracy of their reflected appraisals and the salience they attached to crowd affiliation.
Usmiani & Daniluk (1997)	82 mothers and their pubertal daughters, and 31 mothers and their prepubertal daughters	-	Comparative study	The relationship between self-esteem and gender-role identity, and the criterion measure of body image	Results indicate a complex relationship between age, physical maturation and mother/daughter dynamics in contributing to the development of a positive body image for adolescent girls during puberty.
Cooper (1984)	22 adolescent school refusers and 45 adolescent disruptive truants	-	Comparative study	-	Self-perceptions are closely related to the objective assessments of school refusers and truants, as reported in the literature.

Patton et. all [33] conducted a study on a group of Australian high school students (N = 467), who were administered a scale measuring optimism, self-esteem, carrier expectations, carrier goals, carrier planning and carrier exploration. The study tested a carrier meditational model based on the Social-Cognitive Carrier Theory (SCCT) and Cognitive-Motivational-Relational Theory (CMR). The researchers hypothesized that, in the case of a stable person, the inputs of optimism and self-esteem would predict carrier planning and carrier exploration through the variables of carrier expectations and carrier goals differentially for young males and females. The study results highlighted that, for males, optimism and self-esteem influenced carrier expectations, sequentially predicting carrier goals, carrier planning and carrier exploration. For females, a different pathway was identified, with optimism directly influencing carrier goals, which

subsequently predicted carrier planning and carrier exploration.

Young and Bagley [34] presented some of the most important theories on how children could acquire a sense of their identity, as individuals having attributes and qualities of different kinds. The authors tried to correlate the ideas of self-esteem, self-concept and identity, and concluded that self-esteem should be subsumed under and incorporated within the notion of *global self-concept*, which is equivalent to Erikson's idea of identity. Adequate self-esteem is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition of adequate identity. What is important is the way in which global identity integrates past and present experiences, particularly in adolescence, so that the individual potential can be maximized. Obviously, social structure is an important enhancer of identity [34]. We consider it appropriate to bring to discussion the opinion of Bayard et al. [35], who emphasize that adolescents' self-esteem is an important

indicator of their successful development and their well-being. The authors investigated the impact of educational pathways on the development of self-esteem in girls and boys from Switzerland, starting with middle adolescence until late adolescence. They state that cooling-out processes after educational failure, which lead to a decrease in self-esteem, are more frequent among women than men and can be attributed to particular institutional characteristics of the stratified educational system in Switzerland and gender differences in the salience of social comparisons. In this cohort survey of children and youth, the first three research stages (2006-2009) were conducted when the respondents were 15, 16 and 18 years old. Self-esteem development was examined by using latent growth-curve models, and analyses showed an increase in self-esteem at both the mean and intra-individual levels, for all adolescents. However, the impact of educational success or failure in the years following the transition to post-compulsory education differs by gender. Evidence suggests that women's self-esteem development is more affected by educational achievement than men's. The study conducted by Lo Cascio et al. [36] on a total of 350 students aged 13 to 16 years explored the unique and common contributions of anxiety, self-esteem and family communication on indecisiveness among adolescents. The participating subjects completed self-report measures on indecisiveness, quality of family communication, trait anxiety and self-esteem. The study findings show that adolescents' indecisiveness is predicted by family communication mediated by anxiety and self-esteem. These results have particular implications for practice, because they highlight the importance of anxiety and self-esteem. According to the authors, the counselors could also focus on enhancing relationship-building skills by introducing the adolescents' career formation as an adolescent-parent joint project. Brown and Lohr [37] examined the self-esteem of 221 students in grades 7-12 associated by peers with one of the five major school crowds and 106 adolescents relatively unknown by classmates and not associated with any school crowd. Among crowd members, self-esteem was directly related to the position of one's crowd in the peer-group status hierarchy (based on peer-rated and self-perceived crowd affiliation). Outsiders' self-esteem differed in both the accuracy of their reflected appraisals and the salience they attached to crowd affiliation. Crowd members, as a whole, exhibited higher self-esteem than outsiders, as a whole. However,

differences were mediated by crowd status, salience of crowd affiliation and the accuracy of reflected appraisals.

To analyze the relationship between the predictive variables of self-esteem and gender-role identity, as well as the criterion measure of body image, Usmiani and Daniluk [38] examined 82 mothers and their pubertal daughters and 31 mothers and their prepubertal daughters. Regression analysis indicated that higher self-esteem was significantly related to positive body image scores for pubertal girls and both groups of mothers, but not for the prepubertal participants. The role of gender identity in contributing to body image was more complex, greater femininity being correlated with more positive body image for the prepubertal girls and the mothers of pubertal girls, and greater masculinity being correlated with more positive body image scores for the pubertal girls in the study. Mothers' body image scores were positively correlated with their daughters' body image scores for the mother/pubertal daughter pairs, but not for the mother/prepubertal daughter pairs in the study. Results indicate a complex relationship between age, physical maturation and mother/daughter dynamics in contributing to the development of a positive body image for adolescent girls during puberty.

The study conducted by Cooper [39] describes and compares self-identity dimensions of 22 adolescent school refusers and 45 adolescent disruptive truants. The author has found that self-perceptions are closely related to objective evaluations of school refusers and truants reported in the literature. What is important is the way in which these absentees perceive parents and teachers, and more importantly, how they feel these individuals relate to others. Such perceptions may influence any successful management of school absenteeism.

### **Identity and anxiety**

The meta-analysis performed by Lillevoll, Kroger and Martinussen [40] aimed to examine the relationship between identity status and anxiety. The research included 565 empirical identity status studies conducted between 1966 and 2005, of which 27 addressed the relationship between identity status and general anxiety; only 12 of these 27 investigations (N = 1,124 participants, mainly university students) provided data that could be examined through techniques of meta-analysis. The authors also determined the effect size differences in anxiety scores for each pair of identity statuses, by gender. Results showed that anxiety scores for identity statuses were in the generally

predicted directions, although some gender differences occurred.

From the same perspective, after reviewing descriptive epidemiological studies, Hankin and Abramson [41] have stated that the female preponderance in depression begins to emerge around the age of 13. The authors propose a cognitive vulnerability-transactional stress model of depression to explain the gender difference in the onset of depression. The causal chain postulates that negative events contribute to initial elevations of general negative affect. Generic cognitive vulnerability factors subsequently moderate the probability that the initial negative affect will progress to full depression. Increases in depression can lead transaction ally to more self-generated negative life events, and thus the causal chain begins again. Evidence proves preliminary support for the model, as an explanation for the gender difference in depression during adolescence.

### **Cultural identity in adolescents**

Cultural identity refers to the sense of belonging to a group or culture. The process also involves knowing and accepting traditions, heritage, language, religion, aesthetics, patterns of thought and social structures of a culture. People internalize the beliefs, values, social norms and practices of a particular culture, identifying with it. Culture becomes thus a part of the self-concept [42].

Other researchers state that cultural identity refers to the content of values as guiding principles, the significant symbols and the lifestyles that individuals share with others, although not necessarily within recognizable groups [43].

Thomas [44] analyzed the relationship between dance and cultural identity among adolescent girls to create a performance piece centered on the question: *What does it mean to be a girl in the twenty-first century?* The three reasons for using dance in this project were: (a) to facilitate understanding of one's identity through movement as narrative; (b) to collect and analyze qualitative data through movement; (c) to disseminate the project findings in an informative and easily accessed performance format. The method used to collect and analyze data was Community-based-participatory-research (CBPR). The results echoed the tenets of third-wave feminism, demonstrating an era of "girl power", choice and gender equality. Although the method is not without flows and limitations, CBPR facilitates the use of research as a method for improving community structures, by employing community members as active participants who are involved in most research processes.

Guided by a risk and resilience framework, the study of Umaña-Taylor and Updegraff [45] used cross-sectional data to examine the degree to which self-esteem, ethnic identity and cultural orientations of Latino adolescents (N = 274; mean age = 16.3; 47.1% women) mediated and moderated the relationship between perceived discrimination and depressive symptoms. Using a multiple-group comparative approach, analyses indicated that higher levels of ethnic identity exploration and resolution significantly predicted higher levels of self-esteem for both boys and girls. Moreover, self-esteem partially mediated the relationship between perceived discrimination and depressive symptoms in adolescents. Additional analyses revealed that boys' cultural orientations moderated the relationship between perceived discrimination and both self-esteem and depressive symptoms. Overall, findings indicated that various aspects of the self (self-esteem, ethnic identity, cultural orientations) can reduce the risks associated with discrimination.

### **Moral identity**

According to Frankfurt [46, 47], a person (but not a wanton) possesses the self-reflexive ability in order to examine his or her desires and form judgments on them. A person cares about the desirability of his or her desires ("second-order desires") and wants to act in accordance with them ("second-order volitions").

Similarly, Taylor [48] argues that a person is the one who engages in strong evaluation, making thus careful ethical discriminations about what is better and worse, higher and lower, worthy and unworthy; and these discriminations are made against a "horizon of significance", which frames and constitutes our self-understanding. From this perspective, our identity is defined by reference to things that have significance for us. Furthermore, it is a basic human aspiration to be connected to something of crucial importance, to something considered good, worthy and of fundamental value; and this orientation to the good "is essential to being a functional moral agent" [48].

While several early studies and theoretical articles have emphasized the role of moral reasoning, criticism has suggested that it failed to function properly as a predictor of moral motivation, and more recent morality models have shown that identity is the source of moral motivation. Empirical studies have indicated that moral identity develops through moral action, while theoretical studies have highlighted that moral identity develops through the concepts of *moral knowledge, moral reasoning and moral*

*functioning*. When morality is an important factor for the individual, it intensifies the responsibility to constantly live a moral life.

In this regard, Hardy and Carlo [49] raise critical questions for future research, such as: *What is the causal nature of relations between moral identity and moral behavior? What mechanisms link moral identity to moral action? What factors might mediate or moderate links between moral identity and moral action? How does moral identity develop? What factors influence moral identity development?* The authors believe that more attention should be paid to the operationalization and measurement of moral identity, that more methodological diversity and sophistication, and also more applied research, are needed in the studies on moral identity.

### **Discussions and conclusions**

Adolescence is a social construct. In preindustrial societies, such a concept did not exist, children being considered adults with the onset of physical maturation and the beginning of apprenticeship to learn a trade. Only in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, adolescence was defined, in the Western world, as a distinct stage of life. Adolescence provides growth opportunities in terms of physical size, but also relating to cognitive and social skills, autonomy, self-esteem and intimacy [11].

It has been noted that young people who have support from parents and school tend to have a positive development. In highly modern societies, the transition from childhood to adulthood is not marked by a singular event, but by a longer period called “transition adolescence”, which involves physical, cognitive, emotional and social changes that take several forms in the current different types of social, economic and cultural contexts [50]. The reduced social experience of adolescents may lead to identifications with inappropriate models (whether it is about traits or the models are adopted globally and uncritically, with all their qualities and defects), the creation of inaccessible ideals (beyond the real possibilities of the adolescent) or even the identification with false ideals (full of non-values or qualities inappropriate to social requirements) [51].

A permanent concern during adolescence is the search for identity, which has occupational, sexual and axiological components. As regards the idea that boys and girls follow different pathways in identity formation, researchers have diverse opinions.

Identity is an essential part of human experience, which marks a milestone in adolescent development [6]. In previous studies, identity had

been addressed with a view to the relations in the inner world (such as personality and self-definition) and outer world (such as joint social actions). The Internet has created a new context to explore identity, virtual world providing a space for exploring a complex set of relationships, which is flexible and potentially anonymous. The language used on the Internet represents a new kind of discourse that creates opportunities for creativity and innovation, and thus the communities of users can express their identity [52].

Although some studies suggest that girls' self-esteem tend to decrease in adolescence, more recent research does not bring arguments in this respect. Previous research has proven that late adolescence is associated with developmental changes in identity formation, which leads to individual differences in identity statuses. Special attention was given to the identification and study of the four identity statuses, namely identity diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium and achievement.

Ego identity formation is a major event in personality development. Identity consolidation, which occurs in late adolescence, marks the end of childhood and the beginning of adulthood. Identity formation involves a synthesis of skills, beliefs and childhood identifications in a more or less coherent but unique whole, which gives the young adult both a sense of continuity with the past and a direction for the future. Closely related to the concept of identity, the concept of ego appears in numerous works, being sometimes replaced with that of identity. However, the concept of identity is much closer to that of self-image. Designed or not as a structure of knowledge, the ego has always been regarded as something mysterious, unusual, as an entity that dominates the individual's mental life and is exclusively responsible for his or her behavior [53].

In search of identity, of their place in the world and the group of belonging, the adolescent completes a life stage strongly imbued emotionally and intellectually. Adolescence is a period intensely lived, being a continuous search for one's own self across social egos. The relationships of adolescents with their families are not always comfortable, their rebellions being something common in this period of life. According to studies, adolescents spend more time with peers, but their relationships with parents continue to be influential. The conflict with parents tends to be stronger in early adolescence. The effects of family structure and parents' occupational status on adolescent development may depend on factors such as

economic resources, quality of home environment and the attention paid by parents to child monitoring outside the home.

As to the conception of each society about ethnic and cultural identity, personal identity results from the individual's own experience concretized in the feeling of existence and self-recognition by relating to others. Personal identity is a dynamic construction of the unity of self-awareness through inter-subjective relationships, verbal communications and social experiences. According to Jenkins [9], identity refers to the ways in which individuals and collectivities distinguish in their social relationships with other individuals and other collectivities. Therefore, identity is social and involves interaction and comparison. Identity is always symbolically constructed; it would be enough to mention clothing, accessories, gestures, language and behaviors to show that all these contribute to what an individual is through the associated social meanings.

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