

The Developmental Differences of Identity Content and Exploration Among Adolescents of Different Stages

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Erik Erikson postulated that identity formation is the most important developmental task during adolescence. Past research has investigated the variety of identity status, and the different domains of identity content. However, they failed to capture Eriksonian concept of the sameness and continuity in identity achievement, neither did they reflect Erikson's emphasis on role experimentation that is essential for the resolution of identity crisis. Based on Erikson's theory, the aims of the present study are fourfold. The first is to describe the vicissitude of different identity content in the different substages during adolescence. The second is to identify the specific identity contents that serve to be the developmental crises puzzled by adolescents of different stages. The third is to enlarge the conceptualization of identity content proposed by Cheek (1989) in order to reflect Eriksonian thinking about role experimentation. The fourth goal of the present study is to add a new measurement, namely, identity firmness, to reflect Erikson's belief that identity formation reflects one's self-continuity and sameness in his or her value systems and beliefs. A total of 472 junior high school students, 588 high school students, and 225 college students in Taiwan filled up a 5-point-scale questionnaire to rate on their sense of importance, firmness, and experiences of explo-

ration in various aspects related to the issues of self-identity. Results of factor analyses indicated that, in addition to Personal Identity, Social Identity, and Collective Identity proposed by Cheek (1989), one more aspect of identity content, Image Identity, should be included in understanding the development of self-identity. The construct of Image Identity is based on characteristics of private-self. It also reflects Harter's (1990a) postulation of "trait labels." Cross age comparisons measuring sense of importance revealed that junior high and high school students are more concerned about social and image identity, whereas college students are more concerned about personal identity. Meantime, college students' degree of sense of firmness is significantly higher than junior high and high school students' on personal, social and image identity. On the other hand, junior high school students' degree of sense of firmness does not differ from that of high school students in personal and social identity; surprisingly, their average score on image identity is even higher than that of high school students. Results of this study indicate that the rating on firmness is a measuring dimension independent from the rating of importance.

Keywords: *identity importance, identity firmness, personal identity, social identity, image identity*

