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PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS, SOCIAL FACTORS, AND IDENTITY STYLES AMONG ADOLESCENTS IN GOLESTAN, IRAN

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By

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PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS, SOCIAL FACTORS, AND IDENTITY STYLES AMONG ADOLESCENTS IN GOLESTAN, IRAN

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September 2013

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The present study aims to identify the identity styles and personality characteristics of adolescents. It also seeks to examine the relationship between personality characteristics, moderating variables, and identity styles in adolescents, to compare the differences between gender and age factors influencing the identity styles, and to determine the moderator effect of moderating variables on the relationship between personality characteristics and the adolescents' identity styles. A quantitative research method was employed. The sample included high school students (n=380) aged 17 and 18. Data were collected through self-administered questionnaires. Descriptive and inferential statistics such as t-test, Pearson correlation and multiple regressions were used. The findings showed there were significant correlations between personality characteristics and identity styles in adolescents. Significant correlations between moderating variables and identity styles in adolescents were also observed. In addition according to the results, a moderate and positive correlation was observed between informational and normative styles, informational style and commitment, normative style and commitment, as well as commitment and neuroticism.

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To examine the moderator effect of moderating variables on relationship between personality characteristics and the adolescents' identity styles five stages were proposed. In the first stage peer group relationship significantly moderates the relationship between neuroticism and normative. In the second stage level of education significantly moderates the relationship between extraversion and normative. Additional results also showed that peer group relationship significantly moderates the relationship between extraversion and diffuse identity style. Third, moderational analyses revealed a significant moderational effect for level of education on the association between openness and informational identity style. Fourth, moderating effects of peer group relationship on the association between conscientiousness and informational was found to be significant. Additionally, results showed moderational analysis revealed that the association between conscientiousness and commitment is significantly moderated by family relationship. The last moderational analysis showed significant moderating effects for family relationship and level of education on the relationship between agreeableness and diffuse. Also, indicated that peer group relationship significantly moderates the relationship between agreeableness and commitment.

Additionaly, the results of the study supported theories like social cognitive theory, General other theory, and triat approach. The results shed new light on the processes involved in the personality characteristics and moderating variables of adolescents' styles of identity exploration.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

CIRI-CIRI PERSONALITI, FAKTOR SOSIAL, DAN IDENTITI GAYA DI KALANGAN REMAJA DI GOLESTAN, IRAN

Oleh

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September 2013

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Kajian ini dijalankan bagi mengenalpasti hubungan antara ciri-ciri personaliti, pembolehubah moderator dan gaya identiti di kalangan remaja dan untuk membandingkan perbezaan antara faktor jantina dan umur dalam mempengaruhi identiti, dan untuk menentukan kesan moderator dari pembolehubah moderator ke atas hubungan antara ciri-ciri personaliti dengan gaya identiti remaja. Kajian ini menggunakan kaedah penyelidikan kuantitatif. Populasi kajian meliputi pelajar sekolah menengah (n=380) berumur di antara 17 hingga 18 tahun. Data kajian dikumpulkan melalui soal selidik yang dihasilkan sendiri. Kaedah huraian dan inferensi statistik seperti t-test, Korelasi Pearson and Regresi Berganda telah digunakan. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa terdapat korelasi yang signifikan antara ciri-ciri personaliti dan gaya identiti di kalangan remaja. Kolerasi yang signifikan antara faktor-faktor sosial dan gaya identiti dalam kalangan remaja juga telah dikenalpasti. Selain itu, keputusan kajian juga menunjukkan bahawa terdapat korelasi sederhana dan positif antara gaya informasional dan normatif, gaya

informasional dan komitmen**,** gaya normatif dan komitmen, dan juga komitmen dan neurotisisme.

Bagi mengkaji kesan pembolehubah moderator ke atas hubungan diantara perwatakan personaliti dan gaya identiti remaja melalui lima (5) model yang dianjurkan dlm kajian ini. Di dalam model yang pertama (1), kumpulan rakan sebaya didapati menjadi moderator yang sangat signifikan diantara neurotisism dan normatif. Di dalam model yang kedua (2) didapati bahawa pendidikan menjadi moderator yang signifikan diantara hubungan extraversi dan normatif. Tambahan dapatan juga menunjukkan bahawa kumpulan rakan sebaya menjadi moderator yang signifikan diantara hubungan extaversi dan gaya identiti yang tidak tetap. Di dalam model yang ketiga (3) analisis moderator menunjukkan kesan moderator yang signifikan diatas hubungan keterbukaan dan gaya identiti berinformasi disebabkan oleh pendidikan. Bagi model yang keempat (4), kesan moderator oleh kumpulan rakan sebaya diatas hubungan diantara kehematan dan informasi didapati signifikan. Dapatan juga menunjukkan analisis moderator menunjukkan hubungan diantara kehematan dan komitmen adalah dipengaruhi oleh keluarga. Analisis moderator yang terakhir menunjukkan kesan moderator yang signifikan bagi keluarga dan pendidikan didalam hubungan diantara penerimaan kesetujuan dan komitmen.

Dapatan daripada kajian menyokong teori seperti teori kognitif sosial, general other theory and pendekatan tret. Dapatan memberikan pandangan yang baru ke atas proses-proses yang terlibat didalam perwatakan personality dan faktor-faktor sosial didalam pencarian gaya identiti remaja.

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I certify that an Examination Committee has met on 6 September 2013 to conduct the final examination of Alireza Ghorbani on his thesis entitled "Personality Characteristics, Social Factors, and Identity Styles among Adolescents in Golestan, Iran" in accordance with the Universities and University College Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A)106] 15 March 1988. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Doctor of Philosophy.

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DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis is based on my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously, and is not concurrently, submitted for any other degree at Universiti Putra Malaysia or at any other institutions.
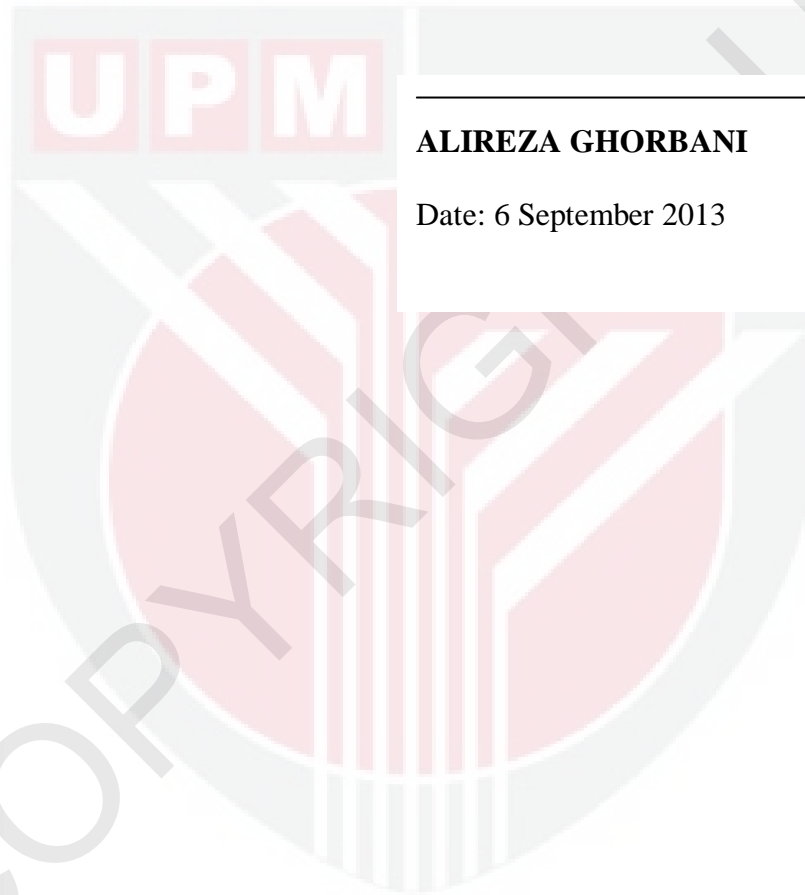
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The issue of identity has been discussed in various sub-fields of psychology, such as social, developmental, pathological and personality. This fact indicates the relevance of identity to various fields of study while also demonstrating the vastness of the topic. Identity is an organized sense of self-recognition that includes the values, beliefs and goals to which individuals are committed (Berzonsky, 1998a). Identity helps people to define themselves. A person whose self-definition contradicts with his/ her social reality will exhibit lack of experience, stress and behavioral problems. Many psychologists believe that adolescents' typical behaviors are their natural attempt to define themselves and explore their identity (Lotfabadi, 2007).

Identity has various synonyms (e.g., subjective me, objective me, we, self, self-perception, self-imagination, self-awareness, self-image, self-identity, ego, superego and personality). This variety could be due to its multiple meanings (Doran & Mohseni, 2003). Psychologists believe that identity is a necessary and essential aspect of all humans, in all cultures, from birth to death (Zaki, 2003). The peak of identity exploration is during adolescence, and identity achievement typically occurs during the third decade of one's life (Lotfabadi, 2007).

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Identity has been defined as the image that a person creates of him/herself, which may be similar to or different from the image that others have of him/her (Shafeabadi & Naseri, 2004). Berzonsky (1998a) defines identity as an organized sense of self that includes the values, beliefs and goals to which an individual is committed. People differ in their use of social-cognitive processes to solve private issues, make decisions and form their identity, and they apply these processes in different ways (Berzonsky, 1998b). One of these ways is through the diffuse-avoidant identity style. People exhibiting this style avoid confronting personal issues and decisions. If they delay confronting these issues for a sufficiently long time, they will exhibit behavioral reactions and will be controlled by situational demands and motives (Berzonsky & Kuk, 2005). Another identity style that is called informational style entails a willingness to investigate multiple solutions to a given problem and to explore several options before committing to anyone. The normative style represents growth by conforming to social and familial expectations and a high degree of commitment to authority and to the exercise of judgment (Berzonsky, 1993). These individual differences in approaching important life decisions are referred to as identity styles (Smits, 2009).

It is important to distinguish identity styles from other relatively stable individual differences such as personality characteristics, values and attitudes. Personal characteristics describe what people are like, while values and attitudes describe what people consider as important, and identity styles describe how people make identity-relevant decisions. In this respect, Berzonsky (1990) points out that identity styles should be considered as developmental outcomes. According to him, adolescents interact within environmental contexts; they develop a preference for a particular

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identity style. This preference may be further reinforced by the life events and social relationships that are elicited by this identity style. As adolescents enter adulthood, their identity style is thought to become relatively stable although stressful life events or therapeutic interventions may still affect their identity styles.

During adolescence, parents, companions, educational, religious, political and legal systems play essential roles in forming one's cultural pattern (Korger, 1996). Family, school, society and peer group have huge effects on youth identity styles (Neliahmmadabadi, 2003). Interaction and relation structure between family and education is important to adolescents' and youths identity styles (Hajikhayat, 2003). Our environment, family, school, society, surrounding issues and all the things we encountered have roles in forming our identity styles (Doran, 2003).

Among all moderating variables, parents and family have the most crucial effect on individual identity and how it forms. In addition, school, political system and socioeconomic status of the society have a great role in identity formation (Aghamohammdian & Shekhrohani, 2003). Identity formation in adolescents is affected by four factors: cognitive development, adolescent-parent relationship, outside experiences and broader cultural encounters (Sigelman, 1999). Among aforementioned factors, the role of family in identity style is stressed in many studies (Campbell, Adams, & Dobson, 1984; Kamptner, 1988; Kerpelman, Pittman, & Lamke, 1997; Markstrom-Adams, 1992; Matos, Barbosa, Almedia, & Costa, 1999; Schultheiss & Blustein, 1994; Sigelman, 1999; Waterman, 1992). Some researchers have shown Iranian adolescents' identity styles were at risk Jomenia (2009) and Jabbari and Ghorbani (2007) showed that

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most people were experiencing diffuse identity style. Ghorbani (2005) showed that people mostly belong to diffuse style.

The literature clearly shows the two most significant factors such as: personality characteristics and family relationship, level of education and peer group relationship affecting identity formation among adolescents (Bartle-Haring, 1997; Campbell et al., 1984; Grotevant & Cooper, 1985; Kamptner, 1988; Kerpelman et al., 1997; Kerpelman, 1988; Markstrom-Adams, 1992; Matos et al., 1999; Schultheiss & Blustein, 1994; Sigelman, 1999; Waterman, 1992).

Therefore this study aims to identify personality characteristics, moderating variables and identity styles, to examine the relationship between personality characteristics, moderating variables, and identity styles, to compare the differences between gender and age factors influencing identity styles and the end to examine the moderator effect of moderating variables on relationship between personality characteristics and the adolescents' identity styles in Golestan, Iran.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Psychologists believe that identity is a basic and necessary part of people's lives in all cultures, present from the moment of birth until death (Zaki, 2003). One of the major problems that adolescents face is their identity formation. Adolescents try to relate scattered elements of their character, re-experience previous conflicts, engage with their parents on this way, constantly experience different roles as well as various behaviors

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and finally put them aside and attempt to re-experience everything on their own (Atkinson, Atkinson, & Hilgard, 1979). Although there may be differences in the efficiency with which they are accessed and utilized, research has indicated that by age 18 most late adolescents are capable of utilizing all three types of social-cognitive strategies that underpin the identity styles (Berzonsky, 1990; Berzonsky & Ferrari, 1996; Berzonsky & Kuk, 2005).

As for the demographic variable of gender, Shokrayi (2001) showed that there is no significant difference between the different identity situations among boy and girl students. In terms of socio-economic variable, (Daneshvar, 1996) reported that the lower the economic class of the family, the more likely it is for the adolescents to face identity crisis; also, the older the adolescents are, the stronger the identity crisis in them will be. Previous related research conducted in Golestan, Iran, showed that one third of the participations can be categorized in diffuse identity style (Ghorbani, 2005; Jabbari & Ghorbani, 2007; Jomenia 2009). Research on school students has shown that the higher their age, the higher the percentage of students with successful identity status, which also leads to a decrease in the percentage of students with, confused identity status (Ghazanfari, 2003). A review of the related literature in this area clearly shows personality characteristics significantly contribute to identity formation among adolescents (Bartle-Haring, 1997; Campbell et al., 1984; Grotevant & Cooper, 1985; Kamptner, 1988; Kerpelman et al., 1997; Kerpelman, 1988; Markstrom- Adams, 1992; Matos et al., 1999; Schultheiss & Blustein, 1994; Sigelman, 1999; Waterman, 1992).

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As mentioned, review of related knowledge shows that personality characteristics substantially influence identity styles. It is, therefore, imperative to find psychosocial factors that may moderate the association between personality characteristics and identity styles. Since, during one's adolescence, parents, companions, as well as educational, religious, political and legal systems play essential roles in forming one's cultural pattern (Korger, 1996) and have huge effects on youth identity formation (Neli-e-Ahmmadabadi, 2003), the current study aims to examine whether the family relationship, level of education, and peer group relationship moderate the impact of personality characteristics on the identity styles among adolescents in Golestan, Iran.

Based on the problem stated above, the following research questions were posed:

1. What are the demographic characteristics of the adolescents in Golestan Province?
2. What are the identity styles of these adolescents?
3. What are the personality characteristics of these adolescents?
4. Is there a difference in the identity styles of adolescent's girls and boys?
5. Is there a difference in the identity styles of the male and female adolescents and their age?
6. Is there a relationship between personality characteristics and identity styles?
7. Is there a relationship between family relationship, level of education and peer group relationship and identity styles?
8. Do family relationship, level of education and peer group relationship moderate the relationship between personality characteristics and identity styles?

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1.3 Significance of the Study

According to Zaki (2003) individuals' time-place container, as well as space and social position make up their identity. According to Hosseini et al. (2010) identity style has been one of the basic discussions in social and personality psychology during the past decades. The present research is important for several reasons. Firstly, because of the young age of the population of Iran, it is important to gain a better understanding of the adolescents, to know how to treat them and to predict their characteristics depending on the type of general identity. In this regard, the self-identity and the relevant variables should be carefully studied. A better understanding of the identity-relevant characteristics and their flexibility, depending on the types of identity, will pave the way for a proper future planning for these youths.

Secondly, a lack of research on the subject of personality characteristics, moderating variables and identity styles among adolescents in Golestan Province justifies the present study which fills up the existing research vacuum. In addition, by improving the level of awareness of the cultural officials of the Province about adolescents' identity and personality status in their individual and belief relations, this research can make the cultural authorities more successful in their future planning because without such awareness the plans will most probably be ineffective.

Third, development of identity is a life-long process which includes exploration and commitment or consolidation. Although this has its roots in childhood, it becomes more and more important in adolescence because in this age, physical, cognitive, and social

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changes take place. Especially during the late adolescent years, the individual tries to explore at least the society to find out the possibilities for a sense of identity (Erikson, 1968; quotes Grotevant, 1997).

Fourth, identity development during adolescence is important because it serves as a foundation for adult psychosocial development and interpersonal relationships, and because difficulties in identity development have been considered to be the result of problematic behavior (Grotevant, 1997). According to Berzonsky (2003), the identity style is important to observe commitment. Because it tells about personality's responsibility, constancy of its decisions, optimism, increased self-esteem, sense of duty, personal adaptability. Adolescence is the most critical stage for individuals' constructiveness and personality integration. Adolescents need to be recognized as unique human beings in the social system. They need to obtain identity reaction until they reach perceptions that are different from others'. Today's adolescents will build up the future society. Formation of a successful and positive identity will bring them personality integration and help them follow a right track in their lives.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

This section discusses the objectives of the present study, including main and specific objectives.

1.4.1   Main objective

The study aims to identify personality characteristics, moderating variables and identity styles among adolescents.

1.4.2   Specific objectives

The study was proposed in order to meet the following objectives:

1. To describe demographic background of the adolescents in Golestan

2. To describe the identity styles of the adolescents in Golestan

3. To describe the personality characteristics of the adolescents in Golestan

4. To compare the differences between the gender factors that influence the adolescents' identity styles

5. To compare the differences between the age factors that influence the adolescents' identity styles

6. To examine the relationship between the personality characteristics and the identity styles of the adolescents

7. To examine the relationship between the family relationship, level of education, peer group relationship and the identity styles of the adolescents

8. To examine moderating effects of family relationship, level of education and peer group relationship on the association between personality characteristics and identity styles

1.5   Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were postulated based on the aforementioned objectives:

H_1: There is difference between girl and boy adolescents' identity styles.

H_2: There is difference between the age of the adolescents and their identity styles.

H3: There is significant relationship between the adolescents' personality characteristics and their identity styles.

H_4: There is significant relationship between family relationship, level of education, peer group relationship and the adolescents' identity styles.

H_5: Family relationship, level of education and peer group relationship significantly moderate the association between personality characteristics and identity styles.

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1.6 Conceptual Framework

Based on theories, the conceptual framework of the study was designed. According to this framework, the study has independent variable, namely, personality characteristics and family relationship, level of education and peer group relationship as moderator; while its dependent variable is the identity styles. Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework of this study:

Moderating variables

Family Relationship
Level of Education
Peer Group Relationship

Personality Characteristics

Neuroticism
Agreeableness
Openness to experience
Extraversion
Conscientiousness

Identity Styles

Informational
Normative
Diffuse/ Avoidant
Commitment

Demographic Characteristics

Gender
Age
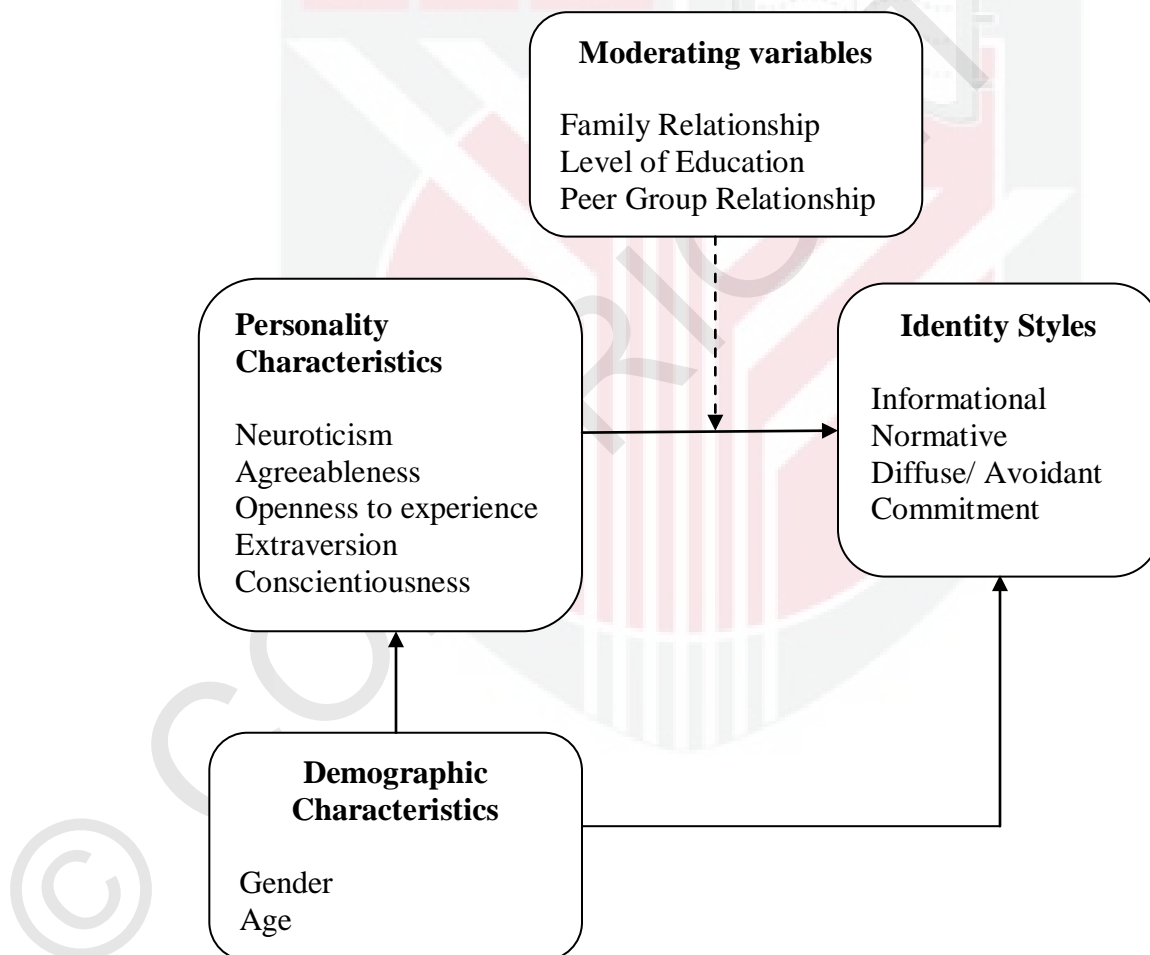
Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

1.7   Definition of Key Terms

In this research, the Berzonsky's (1990) identity styles questionnaire and Zaki's (2003) moderating variables as well as Costa and McCrae's (1992) personality Five-Factor Model questionnaire were applied to collect the primary data. The conceptual and operational definitions of the variables under study are as follows:

1.7.1   Identity style

People are different in terms of the social cognitive processes used for solving personality problems, decisions making, identity formation, and application of different methods to work these problems out (Berzonsky, 2011). The three types of identity styles are identified that are presented in this section.

Informational style, this type of identity style encourages the individual to be in search of information about them and to refer to this information later to make judgments. Therefore, people who follow this style look for information about them, and then evaluate that information and use it (Berzonsky, 2011).

Normative style people, who follow this style, reply their identity questions and deal with decision making situations by following the words and expectations of outstanding people (Berzonsky, 2011).

Confusion/avoidant style people who follow this style avoid facing problems and make personal decisions. These people refuse to make personal decisions and face their problems for a long time and can be controlled by environmental motivators and demands (Berzonsky & Kuk, 2000; Berzonsky, 2011).

Commitment involves following a particular group of goals, values and beliefs whether self-products or presented by others (Berzonsky, 2011; Schwartz, Mullis, Waterman, & Dunham, 2000).

1.7.2   Operational definition of identity style

In this study, identity style is measured by administering a forty-item questionnaire called Identity Style Inventory, 6th version (ISI6).

1.8   Moderating Variables

In the current study, moderating variables are including family relationship, level of education, and peer group relationship. According to Zaki (2003), family relationship refers to the level of respect, understand, support, and love that a person receives from his or her family members. In defining the level of education, the focus is on the type of relationship between a student and his or her teacher in an academic place regarding to the amount of respect, trust, academic assistance, and kindliness that the student perceives from his or her teacher. Moreover, it refers to behavior patterns of the teacher in supporting the student to achieve the academic succeed. Likewise, peer group

relationship is a concept that sought to understand how adolescences develop their relationships with peers in the society significantly through receiving trust, kindliness, respect, and positive views in the peer groups (Zaki, 2003).

1.8.1 Operational definition of moderating variables

In this study, moderating variables are measured by a thirty-item questionnaire. In the analysis, sociologists regard factors such as family relationship, level of education, peer group relationship (Zaki, 2003).

1.9 Personality

Personality characteristics include the five main factors discussed below. Neuroticism covers rumination and feeling ashamed, anxious, depressed, helpless and worthless. Extraversion means enjoying people's company and being optimistic, gay, energetic and active. Openness to experience involves being intrigued and thrilled by art, poetry, nature, foreign food, theories and abstract ideas. Conscientiousness can be defined as being reliable, productive, systematic, structured and perfectionist. Finally, agreeableness includes being polite, cooperative, empathic, tender and caring (Costa & McCrae, 1978, 1992).

1.9.1 Operational definition of personality

In this study, personality characteristics are measured by administering a sixty-item questionnaire called Five-Factor Model of Personality (NEO-FFI).

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1.10 Scope and Limitations of the Study

The objective of the study was to identify the most important sociability factors affecting adolescents' identity style in Golestan province. One of the problems that the researcher faced was the great distance between the towns and villages selected for this study. This made the data collection a lengthy procedure. Additionally, at times some of the school principals did not cooperate with the researcher which urged him to return to the same school for several times to collect the incomplete questionnaires. Even in some cases, the researcher was compelled to replace some of the respondents.

In this study, adolescents were selected as the samples because an individual's personality is formed in this period of life. High school graduates and pre-university students in Golestan Province were selected since the researcher had easier access to them and would find it more manageable and cost-effective to conduct the research and collect the data using these students. Cluster sampling method was employed to select the sample randomly. This would enable the researcher to collect data from a representative group of the target sample from as many socio-economic levels of the target population as possible.

1.11 Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. The first chapter is a general introduction to other chapters and includes the background of the study, statement of the problem, research questions, objectives, hypotheses, significance of the study, operational and

conceptual definitions as well as the conceptual framework. The second chapter is a literature review that is divided into two parts. The first part is related to theoretical framework, while the second part considers previous literature related to youth identity. The third chapter concerns research methodology. It discusses the research design, sampling, instrumentation and measurement. The fourth chapter reports the results and discusses the key findings of the study. Finally, in chapter five a summary of the key findings, conclusions, implications and recommendation for future research are presented.

1.12 Chapter Summary

This chapter began with an introduction which provided an account of the relationship between factors influencing identity style. The phenomenon of identity was discussed. The dilemma of adolescents' identity formation was discussed as a significant problem in the related fields. The purpose of the current research is to gain a better understanding of the relationship between the effective factors and identity styles in adolescents. The conceptual framework proposed in this chapter was developed based on theoretically derived development of identity styles in adolescents. Finally, the research questions related to various hypotheses were stated. The next chapter reviews the related literature.

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