



## Perceived parenting dimensions and identity styles: Exploring the socialization of adolescents' processing of identity-relevant information

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### Abstract

This study examined the relationships between crucial dimensions of perceived parenting (support, behavioral control, and psychological control) and the three identity styles defined by Berzonsky [Berzonsky, M. D. (1990). Self-construction over the life span: A process perspective on identity formation. *Advances in Personal Construct Psychology*, 1, 155–186.]. Each identity style was hypothesized to relate to a specific pattern of perceived parenting dimensions. Hypotheses were examined in a sample of middle and late adolescents ( $n = 674$ ). An information-oriented style was positively predicted by parental support. Contrary to expectations, however, an information-oriented style was also positively predicted by psychological control. A normative identity style was positively predicted by support and behavioral control. In line with expectations, a diffuse-avoidant identity style was positively predicted by psychological control and negatively by maternal (but not paternal) behavioral control. Findings are discussed in

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light of the literature on the socialization of identity formation and directions for future research are outlined.

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*Keywords:* Identity styles; Parenting; Identity; Adolescence

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## Q1 Introduction

The development of a stable and coherent identity is considered a central developmental task during adolescence (Erikson, 1968). It was already acknowledged by Erikson, though, that not all adolescents are equally successful in negotiating this task. Whereas some adolescents arrive at a clear and integrated identity, others end up in a state of identity confusion. To account for such differences, several frameworks identified important individual differences in adolescents' approach to identity formation in general (e.g., Marcia, 1980) and in their style of identity exploration in particular (e.g., Berzonsky, 1990). The model of Berzonsky (1990), which distinguishes three styles of exploring and processing identity-relevant information, takes a central position in current identity formation research. Although research documented the validity of a distinction between Berzonsky's identity styles, the contextual origins of these styles received little attention. The present study addresses the possible role of socialization in the identity exploration process by examining associations between three core parenting style dimensions and Berzonsky's identity styles.

### *The identity style model*

Marcia's (1966) identity status paradigm has long been the prevailing model in identity research. Marcia defined individual differences in identity formation along the dimensions of exploration and commitment. Exploration refers to the questioning and weighing of various alternatives or possible selves. Commitment pertains to decision making in identity-relevant domains. Within the identity status paradigm, self-reported commitment and exploration are used to define four identity statuses: achievement (high commitment/high exploration), moratorium (low commitment/high exploration), foreclosure (high commitment/low exploration) and diffusion (low commitment/low exploration).

Although most researchers considered identity statuses as personality outcomes, they can also be conceptualized in terms of a process model. The four outcomes classified by Marcia may represent or at least be associated with different styles of decision making and problem solving (Berzonsky, 1990). Elaborating on this, Berzonsky (1990) developed a process-oriented and dynamic model of identity formation. Specifically, Berzonsky (1990) focuses on the exploration process and identifies differences in how individuals seek, process, and use identity-relevant information. The model distinguishes three styles of exploration that are thought to represent the socio-cognitive underpinnings of Marcia's (1966) model: The information-oriented, the normative, and the diffuse-avoidant style.

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