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# A comparison of identity and life regard performing arts students with other field's art students

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## ABSTRACT

*The purpose of the present research was to compare identity and life regard in the students of performing arts and students of other fields of art. The method was survey research. The population of the research consisted of all the art students of the University of Tehran's Faculty of Fine Arts and Tehran schools of cinema. The participants were randomly selected from the students of painting, photography, graphics, and sculpting. The instruments of the research were Measure of Ego Identity Status (OMEIS) and Batista's Life Regard Index (LRI). From the 150 questionnaires that were returned, 76 questionnaires were confirmed as valid and the students were divided into two groups of 38 subjects students of performing arts and students of other fields of art. Among the samples, 23.7% had identity foreclosure, 38.2% had identity moratorium, 36.8% had identity diffusion, and 36.8% had identity achievement. The mean scores of the students of performing arts in life regard and the subscales of framework and fulfillment were significantly higher than the students of other fields of art with 99% confidence coefficient. Moreover, the two groups showed no significant relationship in terms of identity formation and its subscales at 95% confidence interval. It is thus necessary and recommended to examine the dimensions of meaning of life as the most important measure of mental health, especially in students. It is imperative for educational officials, experts, and practitioners to pay attention to this issue in planning for promotion of mental health.*

**Keywords:** life regard, meaning of life, identity, identity formation, students.

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## INTRODUCTION

Personal identity is a person's conception of themselves as a persisting entity. This recognition is the most basic, important stage of growth [2]. Toffler (2005) believes that people will have the opportunity to deal with global issues and offer new, innovative solutions when they have already reached an internal solidarity and unity (achieved a persisting identity) [12]. Identity

formation first entails making decisions about some aspects of life such as occupation, love priorities, and religious and political ideologies. Thus, identity formation is an autonomous process and takes place at the person's own discretion for strengthening and integrating a unique set of ideals and goals and for unifying their numerous roles in life [4]. Sneed and White boune (2003) believe that identity guides the individual through life and orients them. Hashemi (2006) also considers identity as a set of personality elements that allow the individual to establish their position with respect to others and the world. The traits and characteristics we attribute to ourselves constitute our identity. Religion, occupation, nationality, education, ethnicity, and other characteristics that matter to the individual and based on which they define themselves are integrated in the process of identity formation. Theorists have distinguished between at least two major types of identity role identity and ego identity. Role identity include our beliefs regarding social constructs (e.g. gender, race, age, and such), group membership (e.g. religion and family), and social roles (e.g. student, teacher, athlete, etc.). Ego identity (related to persisting characteristics) includes our beliefs regarding ourselves with respect to certain personality traits (e.g. optimistic, courageous, weak, antisocial, etc.). We often describe ourselves based on certain information that is a combination of our roles and persistent characteristics [14].

Erikson may be one of the most successful theorists in this context. Erikson (1968) believed that the most important issue that people are dealing with, especially in adolescence, is identity and trying to answer such questions as: Who am I? What state am I in? What am I going to do about my life? How can I be myself? These are usually universal questions and preoccupy people at about high school and university years. The Canadian researcher James Marcia (1980, 1998) expanded Erikson's conception of identity and divided into four states: identity foreclosure, identity moratorium, identity diffusion, and identity achievement [8].

With the help of identity, people come to a definition of their 'self' and if this definition contradicts with their social reality, they will experience states like lack of sophistication, stress, and behavioral problems. In the view of many psychologists, such behaviors in late adolescence and early adulthood indicate the natural attempt of the individual to find a definition for their ego or in other words, to form their identity. What can be gathered from Erikson's theory is that continuity of the identity can be seen throughout the life of the individual. Nonetheless, identity crisis often emerges in the adolescence and early adulthood. Acquiring identity entails the individual's evaluation of their personal abilities and disabilities as well as their upbringing. Any disturbance in the process of identity formation will lead to many consequences including time confusion, extramarital affairs, role confusion, choosing a negative identity, tendency to excel in all the situations, generalized doubt, and uncertainty. The problems on the way of identity formation can lead to aberrant behaviors such as recourse to drugs, abandoning home, and getting involved in illegal or unconventional activities [4, 10, 14]. Moreover, identity is associated with other psychological variables. For instance, in some research the relationship between identity and personality traits has been established and it is also associated with more complex personality characteristics such as self-esteem, locus of control, and higher-level moral reasoning [14]. Marcia (1966) established these four states in his research and they were confirmed in many other studies [4, 7, 8, 10].

Therefore, it seems to be important to examine the condition of identity in the youth, especially university students, since according to research, students with identity confusion are more likely to have difficulties in adapting to a university environment [3]. Meanwhile, one of the issues that seem to play a role in identity formation and mental health of people is life regard. Positive life regard or searching for meaning in life is so important as a tendency and effort to

create or fulfill one's conception of the meaning, importance, and goal in life that its disturbance brings about psychological disorders. In the view of Frankl (1965), people are motivated by will to find the meaning of life as an intrinsic urge and their motivation and tendency to search for meaning becomes more in reaction to disturbing events in life [6]. Nowadays, art is one of the most serious and essential aspects of human life, penetrating in the lives of almost everybody. These days, art is in the hands of learned, conscious intellectuals [4]. Some research studies have reported differences in personality characteristics of artists from other people [4]. Further, research has shown that art students have specific psychological characteristics that distinguish them from others. The results of Gwinner (2009) also suggested a relationship between the mental health of artists and identity problems [5]. Little research has studied the condition of identity and life regard in art students and apparently students of performing arts are somehow different from the students of other fields of art. Given the above theoretical background, the purpose of the present research is to compare the condition of identity and life regard in students of performing arts and students of other fields of art and this research is expected to provide useful information for policy-makers, experts, and associated officials.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study is a survey research which is the most widely used method in quantitative research. The population consists of all the art students of the University of Tehran's Faculty of Fine Arts and art Tehran schools of cinema. Students of arts were randomly selected from the students of painting, photography, graphics, and sculpting. The instruments of the research were Measure of Ego Identity Status (OMEIS) and Batista's Life Regard Index (LRI). From the 150 questionnaires that were returned, 76 questionnaires were confirmed as valid and the students were divided in two groups of 38 students of performing arts and students of other fields of art.

### *Measure of Ego Identity Status (OMEIS)*

This questionnaire consists of 64 items and has 4 subscales. The subscales are: (1) identity foreclosure, (2) identity moratorium, (3) identity diffusion, and (4) identity achievement. Each subscale involves 16 questions and the scoring is based on Likert scale. The validity of the questionnaire was confirmed in a study on Persian students by Rahiminejad and Ahmadi (cited in [5]). Using Cronbach's alpha, its reliability was estimated as 0.60, 0.73, 0.63, and 0.59 respectively for each of the states and 0.60, 0.81, 0.65, and 0.68 at the interpersonal level. Omidian and Shekarkan also reported the reliability coefficient of these states to be 0.75, 0.69, 0.73, and 0.68. Adams et al. (1984) reported the convergent validity of this questionnaire between 0.32 and 0.92 and its divergent validity between 0.27 and 0.79 (cited in [6]). For calculating the reliability of the questionnaire, a sample of 40 art students voluntarily participated in the test. Cronbach's alpha ranged from 66% to 84% and the results are presented in table 1.

**Table 1. Range of Cronbach's alpha**

Subscales	Interpersonal Relationships	Ideological	General
Identity Achievement	0.69	0.64	0.75
Identity Moratorium	0.61	0.63	0.66
Identity Foreclosure	0.79	0.72	0.84
Identity Diffusion	0.67-0.57	0.68	

### *Life Regard Index*

This index was developed by Battista and Almond (1973) based on the concept of positive life regard. They designed this test to evaluate the level of meaningfulness in life. This test has two scales: (1) *Framework Scale*, individuals have a framework from which they can see their life

within some perspective or context and have derived a set of life-goals, purpose in life, or life view from these, and (2) *Fulfillment Scale*, meaning that they see themselves as having fulfilled or as being in the process of fulfilling their framework or life goals. Each of these scales has 14 items, half phrased positively and half negatively. The total score of the positive items in both scales gives the total score of life regard. Battista and Almond (1973) reported a test-retest reliability of 0.94. Test-retest reliabilities of this index were reported by Debats et al. (1993) as  $r = 0.80$  for the entire index,  $r = 0.73$  for the framework scale, and  $r = 0.79$  for the fulfillment scale. Zika and Chamberlain (1992) also reported the Cronbach's alpha to be 0.84 for the framework scale and 0.87 for the fulfillment scale, suggesting the high internal consistency of this test. For testing the validity of the index, 5 expert professors were asked to discuss their views regarding the index. The reliability coefficient of this test, when administered in a sample of 30 students, was 0.802, 0.733, and 0.745 respectively for the framework subscale, fulfillment subscale, and the entire index. In the next stage, when this index was administered in a sample of 40 students, the Cronbach's alpha was obtained as 0.816, 0.742, and 0.767 respectively for the framework subscale, fulfillment subscale, and the entire index. Data were analyzed in SPSS 18. Descriptive statistics, t-test, and one-way analysis of variance were applied for data analysis.

## RESULTS

In the present research 38 students of performing arts and 38 students of other fields of art were studied. Of the students of performing arts, 21 students (55.3%) were between 17 and 25 years old, 16 students (42.1%) between 26 and 33, and 1 student (2.6%) between 34 and 42 years old. Of the students in other fields of art, 5 students (13.2%) were between 17 and 25 years old, 18 students (47.4%) between 26 and 33, 11 students (28.9%) between 34 and 42, and 4 students (10.5%) between 43 and 51 years old. Of all the students of performing arts, 11 students were female (28.9%) and 27 were male (71.1%). Further, 20 of the students of other fields of art were female (52.6%) and 18 were male (47.4%). The two groups were similar in terms of gender ( $p < 0.061$ ). The results of the research showed that 23.7% of the samples had identity foreclosure, 38.2% had identity moratorium, 36.8% had identity diffusion, and 36.8% had identity achievement.

**Table 2. Mean score on Life Regard Index**

Dimension	Mean	SD	Range
Framework	18.13	2.78	9
Fulfillment	17.36	2.9	12
Life Regard	35.49	5.3	21

**Table 3. Comparing the mean score of the students of performing arts and students of other fields of art in Life Regard Index and its subscales**

	Field of Study				Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	
	Performing Arts		Other Fields of Art		t	Sig
Framework Scale	19.21	1.818	17.05	3.162	3.647	$p \leq 0.001$
Fulfillment Scale	18.53	2.023	16.18	3.287	3.741	$p \leq 0.001$
Life Regard	37.74	3.326	33.24	5.957	4.066	$p \leq 0.001$

As it can be seen from the data in table 2, the mean score of the samples in Life Regard Index was 35.49 with a standard deviation of 5.3 and a range of 21. The mean score of the samples in the framework subscale, which implies whether an individual has the necessary framework for developing life goals, was 18.13 with a standard deviation of 2.78 and a range of 9. Further, the mean score of the samples in the fulfillment scale, which indicates the extent to which these goals are fulfilled, was 17.36 with a standard deviation of 2.9 and a range of 12.

As it can be seen in table 3, the mean score of the students of performing arts in *liferegard*, *framework*, and *fulfillment* was significantly higher than that of the students of other fields of art.

**Table 4. Comparing the mean score of the students of performing arts and students of other fields of art in OMEIS and its subscales**

	Field of Study				Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	
	Performing Art		Other Fields of Art		t	Sig
<b>Identity Foreclosure – Ideological</b>	20.66	7.276	21.18	10.048	-0.262	0.794
<b>Identity Foreclosure – Interpersonal</b>	20.76	6.672	23.16	10.752	-1.167	0.247
<b>Identity Foreclosure – Total</b>	41.42	13.266	44.34	20.373	-0.741	0.461
<b>Identity Moratorium – Ideological</b>	29.32	6.650	30.55	5.510	-0.883	0.380
<b>Identity Moratorium – Interpersonal</b>	29	5.918	31.68	6.711	-1.849	0.068
<b>Identity Moratorium – Total</b>	58.32	10.254	62.24	11.523	-1.567	0.121
<b>Identity Diffusion – Ideological</b>	23.11	6.632	25.76	9.128	-1.452	0.151
<b>Identity Diffusion – Interpersonal</b>	24.18	5.407	24.71	8.040	-0.335	0.739
<b>Identity Diffusion – Total</b>	47.29	10.353	50.47	16.380	-1.013	0.314
<b>Identity Achievement – Ideological</b>	35.95	5.301	34.84	5.602	0.883	0.380
<b>Identity Achievement – Interpersonal</b>	25.05	5.613	35.61	6.288	-0.404	0.687
<b>Identity Achievement – Total</b>	71	9.954	70.45	10.104	0.240	0.811

However, no significant difference was observed between the two groups in scores of OMEIS and its subscale ( $p \leq 0.005$ ) (table 4).

Since the two groups were not similar in terms of age ( $p \leq 0.001$ ), one-way analysis of variance was applied to examine life regard and its subscales and because the subjects in the age groups 34-42 and 43-51 were very few, these two groups were combined.

**Table 5. Mean score on Life Regard Index by age**

	17-25		26-33		≥34		ANOVA	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	F	Sig
<b>Framework Scale</b>	18.46	2.672	17.88	3.013	18.13	2.553	0.313	0.732
<b>Fulfillment Scale</b>	17.46	2.996	17.59	3.096	16.69	2.651	0.524	0.594
<b>Life Regard</b>	35.92	5.388	35.47	5.647	34.81	4.593	0.213	0.809

The results of the research showed that there is no significant difference between different age groups in the mean score in Life Regard Index and its subscales ( $p \leq 0.005$ ), implying that the age of people is not associated with their life regard (table 5).

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In the present research 38 students of performing arts and 38 students of other fields of art were studied. No significant difference was observed between the two groups in terms of identity formation and its subscales. A review of the literature revealed that no research has been carried out that studies identity formation in art students and they were mainly carried out on different types of identity and among the students of technical and vocational education and humanities [6]. Moreover, the results of the research revealed that the mean score of the students of performing arts in Life Regard Index and its subscales (framework and fulfillment) was significantly higher than the students of other fields of art. Although no research has been carried out in this regard, previous research had shown that the personality characteristics of artists are different from non-artists [3] and that the personality characteristics of different artists differ [1]. The findings of the present research also suggested a difference between the students of performing arts and students of other fields of art in life regard.



The results of Debats (1996) showed that higher level of meaningfulness in life and positive life regard is a predictor of lower levels of psychological disorders and a high level of elation and self-esteem and concluded that there is a significant relationship between meaningfulness in life and mental health [15]. Those with more meaningful lives and positive life regard are more emotionally stable [13], and demonstrate less neuroticism, anxiety, and depression than those with less meaningful lives [15]. Individuals with meaningful lives have goals that transcend themselves, are more creative, and spend less time in solitary activities, and demonstrate more resistance to problems [15]. Harlow, Newcomb, and Bentler (1986) found that meaning in life served as a mediator between depression and self-derogation and drug use for women and suicidal ideation for men [15]. Therefore, it appears that the students of performing arts prefer to be more active in groups than students of other fields of art, and consequently performing arts has such a nature. Perhaps that is because actors play a role on the spot and according to Ryan [5], present-centered awareness creates a new, non-judgmental attitude and broadens the extent of choices and decisions of the individual, and research also indicates that attention and mindfulness are directly associated with positive self regard. However, some research suggest that attention and mindfulness are accompanied by greater life satisfaction [5]. Considering the importance of examining the psychological health of the society in the attempt to promote it, it is recommended to study the concepts of meaningfulness in life and life regard as the paramount measures of society's psychological health [8] and such studies must be carried out on young people with different occupational and educational tendencies. Moreover, more research on this issue with interventional methods are also recommended.

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