

# Undergraduate Omani Students' Identity and Perceptions of Parenting Styles

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Received: February 19, 2016

Accepted: March 16, 2016

Online Published: March 25, 2016

doi:10.5539/res.v8n2p114

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/res.v8n2p114>

## Abstract

The current study examined the relationship between university students' academic identity and their perceptions of their parents' parenting styles among a sample of Omani students. Marcia's (1993) academic identity statuses are adapted. These are moratorium, foreclosed, diffuse, and achievement. Parenting styles included authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive. The participants were 192 undergraduate students from Oman. The participants responded to Arabic versions of the Academic Identity Status (Was & Isaacson, 2008) and the Parenting Authority Questionnaire (Buri, 1991). Both questionnaires showed reasonable evidence of validity and reliability. The findings show that parenting styles varied in their relationship with the four statuses of students' academic identity. Using the three parenting styles as predictors in the regression models, the lowest percentage of explained variance among identity dimensions was found for moratorium, while the highest explained variance was found for diffusion. Implications and future research are discussed and presented by the end of the paper.

**Keywords:** academic identity, parenting styles, undergraduate, Oman

## 1. Introduction

Cumulative research shows the important effect of academic identity on students' academic behaviors (e.g., selection of learning strategies) which undoubtedly influence their academic achievement (Was, Al-Harthy, Stack-Oden, & Isaacson, 2009; Berzonsky, 1989; Lange & Byrd, 2002). Consequently, researchers became interested in looking at how students' academic identity develops and what possible factors may influence this development. Among many variables, parenting styles is one factor shaping their children's academic identity. The relationship between identity development and parenting styles has not received enough attention, especially in the Omani context. The current study examines the predictive role of three parenting styles—as conceptualized by Baumrind (1991)—on predicting undergraduate students' academic identity; a concept developed by Marcia (1966, 1980, 1993).

### 1.1 Identity Development and Importance

Erikson (1963, 1968, 1980) proposed a psychosocial theory of development in which adolescence is described as a time of identity crisis. In this theory, crisis is defined as a psychological challenge that presents opportunities for development. Erikson introduced the concept of "identity" in a 1946 study. However, the concept was not completely operationally framed, thereby leading others to further investigate the concept. According to Blasi and Glodis (1995) many of these investigations failed to target the core aspects of the concept of identity. To redress this, their landmark 1995 paper outlined a concept of identity with twelve elements. However, investigating the concept of identity more fully is not within the scope of the current research.

It is important to mention that the decisions students make regarding self-relevant choices, result in commitment to the particular identity they are developing. Over the course of their development, adolescents go through a confusing period of crisis, during which individuals perform intense examinations of values and beliefs in relation to their self-view. After examining these values and beliefs, individuals commit. In other words, they make decisions based on the values and beliefs they have adopted. If for example someone is presented with two opposing options, one being inviting and the other distracting, the inviting option is aligned with the identity

characteristics developed in the individual. Giving students help to navigate through the confusion of self-examination and decision making during the crisis period can lead to individuals being better able to commit to their academic goals.

Expanding on Erikson's work, Marcia (1966, 1980, 1993) named four identity statuses (foreclosure, diffusion, moratorium, and achievement) which an individual may have in the process of identity development. These are based on the presence or absence of active self-exploration and firm identity commitments. The first status, identity foreclosure, refers to adopting the goals, values, and lifestyle that significant others have prescribed. These others are in most cases parents, but can also be teachers, and peers. Someone who is foreclosed shows commitment without doing any internal analysis of values and beliefs, which significant others set for them. The second status, identity diffusion, refers to someone who has not experienced a crisis, nor have they committed to a set of values, goals, or beliefs. An individual who has attained this type of status has made no conclusion about identity and their direction is not clear. The third status, identity moratorium, is defined as the gradual exploration of personal and occupational choices. An individual with this status is in an unstable state regarding values, goals, and beliefs-reflecting on the experience of a crisis, without it resulting in commitment. Lastly, identity achievement is a status which occurs when someone has critically analyzed values in comparison to their self-view, and made choices to pursue certain options. These individuals have experienced both crisis and commitment (Was et al., 2009).

Another often utilized concept by researchers into identity is Berzonsky's (1989, 1992) concept of identity processing styles. These styles refer to differences in how people process self-relevant information to make decisions. These styles are information, normative, and diffuse/avoidant. Berzonsky argues that individuals make decisions according to their identity style. To start with, information oriented individuals seek self-relevant information to make judgments when they encountered tasks. These tasks could be academic or day to day situations. This type of style corresponds to the moratorium or achievement stages in Marcia's framework (explained above). On the other hand, individuals with a foreclosed identity status utilize a normative orientation; conforming to the expectations of significant others (most often, but not always, their parents). The third processing identity style is diffuse/avoidant, where individuals are resistant to information that does not agree with their preset understanding. The individuals with this style procrastinate, and avoid self-relevant decisions.

Because of the importance of students' academic achievement, some aspects of the relationship between identity status and academic achievement have been investigated (Berger, 1998; Berzonsky, 1989; Lange & Byrd, 2002; Was et al., 2009). For example, a study done by Was et al. (2009) investigated the relationship between identity status and academic goal orientation. A sample of 391 undergraduate students completed an academic identity measure developed by Was and Isaacson (2008). A positive relationship was found between foreclosure identity status and performance-approach and performance-avoidant goal orientations. They also found that students who have diffusion status do not set mastery goals for their learning. Matsushima and Ozaki (2015) investigated the relationship between students' psychosocial identity, self-identity, and their academic attitudes. Findings show that students' attitudes toward classes and academic motivation were positively related to both identities. In another study, student's active learning is positively influenced by psychosocial identity and self-identity (Hatano & Harada, 2014). In short, it can be concluded that students' identity has a main role in their learning.

Because of these connections between identity statuses and different aspects of students' academic achievement, there is a growing interest in understanding the factors influencing identity development. One important factor is the children's perceptions of their parents' parenting styles, which is the focus on the current investigation.

### *1.2 Parenting Styles and Identity*

Parenting styles have been found to greatly influence the outcomes of adolescents' overall development outcomes (Aleni & Sica, 2014, Chen, 2015; Driscoll, Russell, & Crockett, 2008; Pope & Ren, 2015; Smits et al., 2008; Yi & Billingham, 2014). The term *parenting style* refers to the manner with which parents choose to interact with their adolescents (Besharat, Azizi, & Poursharifi, 2011). This study examines three different styles, categorized based on the level of demand and responsiveness shown by parents (Baumrind, 1991; Maccoby & Martin, 1983), these styles are: permissive, authoritative, and authoritarian.

The permissive parenting style (generally lenient: responsive and not demanding) has been viewed to lead to many negative outcomes in adolescents (Barry, Dunlap, Lochman, & Wells, 2009; Chan & Chan, 2009; Dwairy, 2004; Gonzalez, Holbein, & Quilter, 2002). On the contrary, the authoritative style (both demanding and responsive) is found to have a positive effect on adolescents' wellbeing and settlement (Besharat et al., 2011; Cheung & McBride-Chang, 2008; Turner, Chadler, & Heffer, 2009; Ratner, 2013; Smits et al., 2008). There

seems to be a lack of agreement upon the effectiveness of the authoritarian parenting style (only demanding). While some researchers view it as a factor leading to negative outcomes in adolescents (Barry et al., 2009; Driscoll et al., 2008), others argue that it has positive impacts in some contexts (e.g., Jaber & Abduraheem, 1993). Some researchers have suggested that the effectiveness of the latter two parenting styles might be influenced by the different cultural contexts around the world (Chao, 1994; Chen & Luster, 2002; Hill, 1995). These variations can also be attributed to the inconsistency in the indicators used to examine each one of the parenting styles. Consequently, Underwood, Beron, Gentsch, Galperin, and Risser (2008) indicated that more specific parenting processes need to be used when examining the effects of parents' behavior on children's outcomes. This is true especially with some existing measures that confound the indicators of authoritarian parenting styles by including corporal punishment, while other studies focus only on the demanding aspects of being authoritarian.

Limited research has examined the connection between parenting styles and children's identity development, mostly done in western literature. For example, Berzonsky (2004) examined the relationship between identity processing styles, parental authority, and commitment. The Identity Style Inventory, and the Parental Authority Questionnaire were administered to 145 late adolescents. Findings show that information identity style is positively correlated with authoritative parental style, whereas normative identity style correlated with authoritarian parental style. In addition, the study demonstrated that commitment to tasks are positively correlated with information and normative identity styles, whereas negatively correlated with diffuse/avoidant styles.

Beyers and Goossens (2007) used twenty items from the Utrecht-Groningen Identity Development Scale (U-GIDS; Meeus & Dekovic, 1995) to examine the influence of parents on the short-term changes in identity formation of late adolescents. Fathers were found to encourage exploration, and so supportive fathers correlated positively with students' exploration in breadth, but negatively with their ideological and interpersonal commitment making. On the other hand, mothers were found to be more encouraging in terms of children's decision making and resolution taking. Hence, mothers' support associated positively with children's educational and relational identifications with commitments and negatively with children's exploration in breadth. Furthermore, father behavioral control was found to be slightly positively impactful on male's ideological and interpersonal commitment making.

Using Berzonsky's Identity Style Inventory ISI-3, Berzonsky (2008) found that the information-oriented style correlated positively with parents' continuous support. However, contrary to expectations, it associated positively with psychological control as well. Behavioral control was revealed to have an insignificant role in the prediction of the information-oriented identity style (the most apparent style in boys and late adolescents). Normative, the second investigated style, correlated positively to the dimensions of support and maternal behavioral control, but not with psychological control. The diffuse-avoidant identity style correlated negatively with parent support and positively to parent psychological control. Finally, maternal psychological control was found to be more apparent and positively predicted the diffuse-avoidant identity style in both genders. Some of the study findings were contrary to expectations and so the researchers recommend replicating the study with a larger and more heterogeneous sample.

Grundman (n.d.) examined the connection between parenting styles and undergraduate student identity. The researcher explored two parenting styles, with a focus on autonomy support and conditional regard. Regarding students' identity development, the variables of exploration and commitment were investigated. Eighty students, of which 64 are females, from psychology courses in a small private college took part in this study. The Ego Identity Process Questionnaire (EIPQ) was adopted to measure the levels of commitment and exploration in the identity development of the students. Moreover, two versions of the Perception of Parents Scale were used to cover the variables of mother and father autonomy support separately. Also, to assess the extent to which the participants' parents used positive and negative conditional regard, two subscales of the Parent Conditional Regard Scale were used. The results showed that autonomy support from parents resulted in positive identity development. More specifically, father autonomy support correlated significantly and positively with exploration, and so did mother autonomy support, but to a slightly lesser extent. On the other hand, the conditional regard approach in parents was found to have a negative association with healthy identity development. Negative conditional regard in Mothers was associated positively with commitment in identity formation. However, fathers in the study were found to have a stronger effect on their child's identity. Grundman (n.d.) suggested that future research in this area could cover the identity developmental outline to check when it is most and least influenced by parents' parenting style.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Sample

The sample consisted of 192 undergraduate students at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) in the Sultanate of Oman. Female students represented 84% of the participating students. The participants come from different scientific and humanistic colleges at SQU (almost equal number of students from each type). In addition, participating students come from different academic years of college; however, the highest portion of them were in their third year.

### 2.2 Measures

The participants responded to two questionnaires—the Academic Identity Measure (AIM; Was & Isaacson, 2008), and the Parenting Authority Questionnaire (PAQ, Buri, 1991). The measures were administered in Arabic.

*Academic Identity Status:* The current study adapted the academic identity measure (AIM; Was & Isaacson, 2008). A 5-point Likert scale of 1 (not at all like me) to 5 (very much like me) was used. The AIM contained four subscales. Each subscale contained 10-items that measure the four academic identity statuses: moratorium, foreclosed, diffuse, and achievement. The AIM was adapted using a translation and back-translation procedure to ensure the measurement equivalence of the Arabic and English versions. One item from each subscale was deleted because of low item-total correlation (less than 0.10). The internal reliability (coefficient alpha,  $N = 192$ ) of the four subscales was as follows: Moratorium = 0.75, Foreclosure = 0.60, Diffusion = 0.57, and Achievement = 0.64. High scores in each one of the found identity subscales represent high levels in that subscale.

*The Parenting Authority Questionnaire.* The PAQ is a 30-item 5-point Likert scale that was constructed first in English (Buri, 1991), and adapted into Arabic for school and university students (Aldhafri et al., 2011). The PAQ consists of three subscales (authoritative, authoritarian, & permissive). Each one of the scales has 10 items. High scores indicate high levels of the corresponding parenting style. A short version of the 30-item scale was developed (Alkharusi et al., 2011) and the new version included 20 items (7 items authoritative, 7 items authoritarian, & 6 items for the permissive scale). Reliability coefficients reported for the three subscales in the short version were similar to what was reported for the original long version. Factorial analyses using CFA supported a three-factor structure. The data from the current sample showed reliability coefficients of 0.80, 0.71, and 0.50 for the three styles respectively.

### 2.3 Procedures

Students were approached to answer the measures during their class sessions. Random classrooms were visited, and after obtaining permission from the class instructor, the measures were administered to students by the end of the class. The visits were conducted during a full week throughout the academic semester of spring 2015. The participants were assured of complete confidentiality regarding their information and no identification numbers were requested. Participation was voluntary, and most students had no problem dedicating 10-15 minutes to respond to the questionnaires. Data were entered into SPSS later for analysis and a regression model was applied to count for the predictive relationship between parenting styles and identity formation.

## 3. Results

Prior to the actual data analyses to answer the study questions, the data were first examined for any outliers, and none was identified. Descriptive findings of the main variable are presented in Table 1. As can be seen from the one-sample t-test, the Omani students reported high levels of authoritative and authoritarian parenting styles and low levels of permissive parenting styles. High levels were also found in three of the four dimensions of academic identity (foreclosure, moratorium, & achievement). The current sample seems to exhibit low levels of diffusion.

Table 1. One-sample t-test results for parenting styles and identity dimensions (3.00)

Variables	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>α</i>
Authoritative	190	3.80	0.59	0.000
Authoritarian	190	3.25	0.61	0.000
Permissive	190	2.63	0.52	0.000
Foreclosed	192	3.39	0.50	0.000
Moratorium	192	3.31	0.58	0.000
Diffuse	192	2.45	0.52	0.000
Achievement	192	3.95	0.46	0.000

To examine the role of the three parenting styles in predicting each of the academic identity statuses, four standard regression models were used; each model treated one of the four identity dimensions as a dependent variable. Because there were no gender differences found across the study variables (except for diffusion,  $t = 3.00$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), gender was not examined in the regression models. Prior to running the regression analyses, Pearson correlations of the study variables were examined. The findings (as displayed in Table 2) showed that only authoritarian parenting style correlated positively and significantly with foreclosure. While none of the parenting styles correlated significantly with moratorium levels, three of the styles correlated positively with diffusion, with the exception being authoritative style, which correlated negatively. When examined in relation to achievement, authoritative style correlated positively while permissive style correlated negatively. Authoritarian parenting style correlation with achievement was not significant.

Table 2. Correlation coefficients of parenting styles and identity dimensions

Study variables	Authoritative	Authoritarian	Permissive	Foreclosed	Moratorium	Diffuse	Achievement
Authoritative	1	-0.22**	-0.24-**	0.11	-0.01-	-0.16-*	0.29**
Authoritarian		1	0.19**	0.30**	0.11	0.34**	-0.05-
Permissive			1	-0.13-	0.10	0.39**	-0.18-**
Foreclosed				1	0.13	0.13	0.20**
Moratorium					1	0.47**	-0.32-**
Diffuse						1	-0.45-**
Achievement							1

To examine the effects of the three parenting styles on each of the academic identity statuses, four standard multiple regressions were performed. In the first analysis, students' foreclosure was regressed on the three parenting styles. All three styles were found to predict foreclosure (authoritative,  $\beta = 0.16$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , authoritarian,  $\beta = 0.37$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , and permissive,  $\beta = -0.17$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The model explained 14.2% of the variance for foreclosure. The regression model to predict moratorium was not significant for any of the three predicting parenting styles. When regressing diffusion on the parenting styles, authoritarian ( $\beta = 0.27$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and permissive ( $\beta = 0.33$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) parenting styles seem to be important. The model explained 22% of the variance in students' diffusion level. The last regression model included the three parenting styles to predict the achievement status of the student's academic identity. Only authoritative parenting style ( $\beta = 0.26$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) seems to be a significant predictor of students' achievement identity status. The model explained 8.6% of the variance for the achievement identity dimension. Table 3 shows the four regression models.

Table 3. Results of the multiple regression models to predict identity dimensions using parenting styles

Model	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>sig</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>
Foreclosed						
Authoritative	0.13	0.06	0.16	2.27	0.024	
Authoritarian	0.30	0.05	0.37	5.33	0.00	
Permissive	-0.16-	0.06	-0.17-	-2.44-	0.015	0.156
Moratorium						
Authoritative	0.02	0.07	0.02	0.37	0.712	
Authoritarian	0.09	0.07	0.10	1.35	0.178	
Permissive	0.10	0.08	0.09	1.21	0.227	0.021
Diffuse						
Authoritative	-0.02-	0.06	-0.02-	-0.35-	0.727	
Authoritarian	0.23	0.05	0.27	4.17	0.000	
Permissive	0.33	0.06	0.33	4.96	0.000	0.232
Achievement						
Authoritative	0.20	0.05	0.26	3.67	0.000	
Authoritarian	0.02	0.05	0.03	0.41	0.679	
Permissive	-0.11-	0.06	-0.12-	-1.78-	0.077	0.101

#### 4. Discussion

The current study aimed to examine Omani students' academic identity statuses and their relationship with parenting styles. The findings show that these Omani students have mostly adopted foreclosure, moratorium, and achievement identity statuses. This finding could be explained by examining the characteristics of the students at Sultan Qaboos University. Only students with very good high-school grades have been accepted. These students are considered the top high-school achievers in the country. It can therefore be assumed that these students are not at the identity diffusion stage, and that their desired academic path should be clear and in progress. However, the findings from the current study suggest that it would be useful for future research to examine academic identity statuses in other institutions. Before looking to future research, the question of why many Sultan Qaboos University students have the moratorium identity status must be asked. This could be due to the transitional stages that students proceed through. Moratorium students are in gradual exploration of the environment surrounding them. They experience instability and are in the process of adopting beliefs, goals, and values. They do not commit to any, but rather they continue exploring the environment till certain academic identity statuses are developed. This leads to another suggestion for future research, which is to examine the transition stages that students transfer through, and the type of academic identity corresponding to each stage. Sultan Qaboos University students are expected to have the status of identity foreclosure. They demonstrate a high commitment to goals; some of which are set by significant others. On the other hand, the achievement academic identity status is also adopted by Sultan Qaboos University students. Students with this status are capable of analyzing academic tasks and have gone through varied academic experiences. These experiences assisted these students to self-view their tasks.

The current study showed that these Omani students perceived their parents as more authoritative and authoritarian and less permissive; this low level of permissiveness indicates that for the average Omani family, parents tend to give regulations and instructions for their children and not to lose control over their daily lives events as they grow up. This style of parenting should result in positive outcomes, as research has emphasized the importance of having high levels of authoritative style, and low levels of permissive style (Maddahi, Javidi, Samadzahed, & Amini, 2012). The effects of an authoritarian style varied across cultures and contexts (Dehyadegary, Yaacob, Juhari, & Abu, 2012) and thus the preferred level of practicing an authoritarian style might not be clear. This is true especially in the context of comparing collectivistic and individualistic cultures (Hung, 2007; Kokkinos & Hatzinikolaou, 2011) where parenting styles may have different patterns of relationships with children's outcomes.

Different relationships were found between students' perceptions of parenting styles and academic identity statuses. Interestingly, as shown in the results, the authoritarian and permissive parenting styles positively correlated with diffusion. In other words, students with highly demanding parents or highly responsive parents are not able to develop a clear direction for their academic career. These students are perhaps not able to self-view their academic tasks since they are raised receiving either orders, or conversely, high levels of responsiveness to their requests, with no balance between the two styles.

The relationship between the three parenting styles and foreclosure changed when these three styles were examined together in one model to predict students' level of foreclosure. This indicates that these three parenting styles may have influences on foreclosure levels, but only when their effects are considered together. This model explained 14.2% of the variance in students' foreclosure. These results demonstrate that students who receive demands from significant others (authoritarian) develop foreclosure academic identities. These students show commitment to academic tasks with no internal analysis or self-view, depending largely on significant others' demands. This finding is in line with the earlier discussion of foreclosure (as an academic identity dimension), in which it was argued that authoritarian style parenting, where parents control everything in their children's lives, provides no space to discuss or negotiate regulations. Such a parenting style does not support positive identity development unless children start to overcome this parenting control and enter into authoritative relationships with parents.

One of the most important findings of the current study was the positive relationship between an authoritative parenting style and achievement academic identity. In fact, this parenting style was found to be the only predictor of achievement academic identity. Children of parents who balance their demands and responsiveness positively develop achievement identity. They self-view their goals and are able to analyze academic situations. The moderate demands placed on them by parents may also help them explore different means to meet the demands. In authoritative families, students are able to develop positive attitudes toward learning due to less pressure from parents, which might lead to develop achievement identity. Future research might investigate students' academic attitudes, students' practices (e.g., learning styles), and academic identities.

Moratorium status seems to have a different structure of relationship with parenting styles. The results showed that none of the parenting styles correlated significantly or predicted students' moratorium levels. In this stage of identity development, individuals experience crisis without reaching commitment and continue to debate values, goals, and beliefs. This vague status might not be directly related to parenting styles as they were conceptualized and measured in the current paper. Other parenting styles might be better predictors of moratorium especially overprotection and instability, and discrimination among children. Future research may examine this possibility by adapting other measures of parenting styles.

In contrast to moratorium, the diffusion dimension of academic identity was influenced positively by both authoritarian and permissive parenting styles. Authoritative effects on diffusion, however, were not significant. This pattern of connection is aligned with the parenting literature that has emphasized the negative effects of both authoritarian and permissive parenting styles on children's outcomes (Barry et al., 2009; Chen, 2015; Driscoll et al., 2008; Gonzalez et al., 2002; Pope & Ren, 2015). Children who live with high control or high responsiveness are less likely to be able to make identity decisions, nor take steps in directing their values and goals as a result of the absence of parenting dialogue and positive communication in the two parenting styles.

The last examined model showed positive effects for only the authoritative parenting style on predicting achievement identity status. The other two parenting styles did not seem to have significant effects on achievement status. This finding is consistent with research on the authoritative parenting style that show it to be a strong predictor of positive children's outcomes across different cultures. Previous research shows that positive parenting styles (e.g., authoritative) are connected to a range of positive children's outcomes that include violence reduction (Spano, Rivera, & Bolland, 2011), psychological adjustment (Klein & Pierce, 2009), sibling relationship quality (Yu & Gamble, 2008), high school achievement (Assadi et al., 2007; Besharat, Azizi, & Poursharifi, 2011), social competence (Driscoll et al., 2008), and mastery goal orientation (Cheung & McBride-Chang, 2008; Gonzalez, Holbein, & Quilter, 2002). The connection between authoritative style and achievement identity status in the current study shows the connection between two optimal aspects in the identity development and the parenting styles.

## 5. Conclusion

To conclude, it is clear that each of the parenting styles has a unique connection with each of the academic identity dimensions. Among the four identity dimensions, students' diffusion levels appeared to be the most influenced by parenting styles because it got the highest percentage of explained variance (22%) across the four

regression models.

More research is needed in this area. While the current study did not differentiate between parental and maternal parenting styles, many studies have emphasized the importance of examining each parent's styles separately to capture their independent effects on children's outcomes (Aldhafri, 2011; Aldhafri, 2014; Chao, 1994; Meunier et al., 2011). This research shows that maternal styles might be effective in promoting specific children's outcomes within specific life conditions, while paternal styles might not have the same degree of influence or the same pattern of connections. In addition, other possible variables may contribute to the development of students' academic identity. These variables include, but are not limited to; students' academic self-efficacy; self-regulated learning; academic adaptation skills; emotional intelligence; teaching styles (Alrajhi & Aldhafri, 2015); teacher-student relationships (Aldhafri & Alhadabi, 2015); parents' school involvement; and moral and religious development, and parental identity (Fadjukoff, Pulkkinen, Lyyra, & Kokko, 2016). Expanding the sample to have an equal number of male and female participants may provide a better picture whether or not the connection between parenting styles and identity dimensions vary based on gender.

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