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**DIFFERENTIATION OF IDENTITY FUSION AND
IDENTIFICATION WITH FAMILY, FRIENDS, COUNTRY AND
ORGANIZATION**

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Abstract

According to the body function regulation model approach to identity, we suggest to differentiate at least five different variants of identity formation: emotional commitment, simple identification, concealed identification, identity fusion, cognitive and affective processing. They reflect different forms of subjective control underlying the feelings of belonging or possessing regarding social groups. Our empirical study concentrates on the structural and functional differentiation of two variants – identification and identity fusion regarding four social groups (family, friends, country and organization) in two samples of adults ($N_1=282$ and $N_2=100$). The methods include the Russian versions of the Identity Fusion and Identification Scales, the Utrecht-Management of Identity Commitments Scale, the Subjective Happiness Scale, the Satisfaction with Life Scale, the Positive and Negative Feelings Scale as well as the modification of the “Who am I” method with the quantitative appraisal of valence, salience and the social approval of identifications. According to the results, factor analysis supports the structural differences between identity fusion and identification for all four social objects with almost no gender and age effects. For all four groups, identification and identity fusion are independent predictors of identity commitment and in-depth exploration as well as negative feelings about possible identity change. For the large groups, such as country and organizations, they independently relate to a lower reconsideration of commitment. While for the small groups (like family and friends), the reconsideration is associated with fusion only. The data also suggest that the emotional component of well-being is closer related to identity fusion (happiness, positive, negative emotions).

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Keywords: Identity fusion, identification, the body function regulation model approach to identity, social identity, three-factor dimensional identity model.



1. Introduction

Contemporary identity psychology tends to consider identity formation in terms of a number of different processes and multiple motives underlying these processes (Vignoles et al., 2006). Self-categorization theory suggests processes of self-categorization and self-improvement to be a basis for identification with a group (Turner & Reynolds, 2010, Hogg & Reid, 2006), while self-verification theory (Swann, 1983, Swann et al., 2009) formulates the idea of identity fusion as another variant of identification developing on the basis of self-verification. Comparing with identification, in identity fusion, personal and social identities do not repress each other; moreover, the actualization of one of them leads to the immediate actualization of another one. W. Swann considers identity fusion as an explanation of extreme actions for the group that would be hardly possible, if everybody tries to behave like the group prototype. Empirical studies of identification with the country support structural and partially functional differences (for instance, the different relationship to the readiness for extreme behavior for the group) between identification and identity fusion (Gomez et al., 2011).

Another approach comes from developmental psychology dividing different identity statuses (Marcia, 2002) and later identity processes (Luyckx et al, 2006, Luyckx et al, 2007), characterizing how synthesized or diffused identity is, and what is a person concentrated on the further development of this identity. The three-factor dimensional identity model suggests three processes. Commitment is an indicator of identity, certainty and consolidation. The in-depth exploration reflects the personal activity in thinking and searching for more information on the way to better commitment. Reconsideration of commitment describes the uncertainty in the identity and the process of looking for a better social object for identification.

2. Problem Statement

Different approaches to identity processes make it difficult to compare (both theoretically and empirically) different variants of identification. To our mind, one possible model that could be used as a basis for differentiation of the identity formation processes is the body function regulation model (Tkhostov, 2002). According to this model, as a person localizes the borders of his or her body there where he or she has no control over it, the person perceives a wide range of objects including social groups as “I am this”, if he or she experiences some kind of control. The theory distinguishes three forms of control: manageability (events start and take place according to the will of a person), controllability (the course of events depends on the actions of a person) and predictability (a person can predict further developments). All the forms of control could be more or less realistic or illusory, and based on more or less deep cognitive and affective processes. These differences lead to various forms of identity formation. The review of the relevant literature allows to differentiate at least five those forms: emotional commitment, simple identification, concealed identification, identity fusion and cognitive and affective processing.

Based on the body function regulation model, we expect that there are structural and functional differences in identification and identity fusion that would be similar across different social objects (for small informal and big formal groups).

3. Research Questions

From the theoretical point of view, this study has been devoted to the question whether there are different forms of identity formation that could be distinguished from each other due to different relationships to the group, readiness for some actions and general well-being. Empirically, we have chosen two variants discussed earlier (Swann et al., 2009) – identification and identity fusion – and four different social groups (family and friends as the examples of small groups with informal relationships, and country and organization as the examples of big groups when typically people don't know all the members).

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim was to prove structural and functional differences (different relationships with other identity aspects and well-being) between identity fusion and identification with small informal (family and friends) and large formal social groups (country and organization).

5. Research Methods

Two different samples were used in the study.

5.1. Sample 1

Sample 1 included 282 adults (101 males, 176 females, 5 of them did not indicate their gender) aged 18-75 years old (mean age 26.73 ± 13.14 years old). 98 (34.8%) persons were graduates while the others had professional education or were students. 59 (20.9%) participants were married, and 65 (23.0%) subjects under study reported having children.

The participants filled the Russian versions of three identity-related scales for two social groups: family and country.

- *Identification Scale* (Mael & Ashforth, 1992) was based on the social identity theory and included 6 items describing personal relationship to the group, especially, reactions to its possible opportunities and limitations.
- *Identity Fusion Scale* (Gomez et al., 2011) included 7 items describing the feeling of unity and strength due to the group.
- *The Utrecht-Management of Identity Commitments Scale* (U-MICS, Crocetti et al., 2010) included three scales based on three-factor dimensional identity model (Luyckx et al, 2006, Luyckx et al, 2007) suggesting three related processes in the identity formation.

As additional indicators of identification with the family and country, we used the *graphical measure* of identity fusion (Swann et al., 2009). It scored the distance between “Me” and each group as well as two items assessing on the 0-10 Likert scale *personal feelings, if this social object (family or country) would change* (“How severe would it be for you if ... would be changed” and “To what extent would you feel changed, as though there was no real you anymore”).

As described in Table 01, all the measures demonstrated accessible to perfect consistency. For U-MICS, factor analysis supported three-factor structure explaining 69.54% of variance for family and 75.93% of variance for country with factor loadings to “own” factors varying .62-.91.

To appraise general personal relationship to his/her various identification, a *modification of the “Who am I” procedure* (Kuhn, 1960) was employed. The number of answers was diminished to 10, while each identification was then appraised by the 0-10 Likert scale in terms of valence (“To what extent do you like each answer?”), salience (“How often do you think about it?”), psychological centrality (“How important is each answer for you?”) and social approval (“What do you think, to what extent the people, who know you well, would agree to your answer?”). Our earlier study (Tkhostov et al., 2014) demonstrated that people tended to appraise a different identification consistently that allowed to measure general valence, salience, centrality and personal approval of identifications.

Happiness scale (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999) was used as a screening measure of general well-being.

Table 01. Cronbach’s alphas for identity scales and measures for the different social groups: family, country, friends and organization

Scales	Family (N=282)	Country (N=282)	Friends (N=100)	Organization (N=100)
Satisfaction with...	–	–	.88	.86
Feelings about possible change of...	.64	.75	–	–
Identity Fusion	.84	.90	.86	.92
Identification	.79	.84	.81	.87
Identity – Commitment	.95	.94	.93	.92
Identity – In depth exploration	.77	.85	.79	.71
Identity – Reconsideration of commitment	.70	.93	.90	.85

5.2. Sample 2.

Sample 2 included 100 adults (37 males, 60 females, 3 of them did not report gender) aged 20-69 years old (mean age 29.03±10.71 years old). 61 (61.0%) subjects were graduates, while others had professional education or were students.

The participants filled the Russian versions of *Identification Scale*, *Identity Fusion Scale* and *U-MICS* for two social groups: friends and organization where person was working or studying. Additionally, we assessed *satisfaction with friends and organization* by three items each (e.g. “I am satisfied with my work/job”). As in Study 1, there was a good consistency of the scales (see table 01). For U-MICS, factor analysis supported three-factor structure again explaining 72.59% of variance for friends and 70.86% of variance for organization with factor loadings to “own” factors varying .51-.91.

Satisfaction With Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985) was used as a measure of the cognitive dimension of well-being, while *Positive and Negative Feelings Scale* (Diener et al., 2010) was used as a measure of positive and negative emotions (Cronbach’s alpha .81 for positive emotions and .82 for negative emotions).

The data were processed in the SPSS Statistics 22.0.

6. Findings

6.1. The structural differentiation of identification and identity fusion: the results of factor analysis

Exploratory factor analyses (with Varimax rotation) fulfilled separately for each of the four social groups (table 02) support the two-factor structure that in general fits the theoretical model and explains 53.74% of variance for family, 61.19% - for country, 55.65% - for friends and 67.27% - for organization. The only exclusion in the Identity fusion scale refers to the item “I make my friends strong” that seems to be closer to identification but for the friends object only. It might be that this is a result of specificity of identification with friends. For the Identification scale, there are two exclusions: the items “When I talk about my country, I usually say “we” rather than “they”, and “The successes of my country are my successes” seem to reflect both identification and identity fusion (due to high loadings on both factors).

Table 02. Exploratory factor analysis of the items of the Identity Fusion and Identification scales

Items of the Identity Fusion Scale and Identification Scale (item formulations are given for country)	Family		Country		Friends		Organization	
	Identity fusion	Identification	Identity fusion	Identification	Identification	Identity fusion	Identity fusion	Identification
I am one with my country	.88	.10	.80	.26	.07	.87	.64	.46
I feel immersed in my country	.41	.11	.75	.07	.14	.83	.73	.36
I have a deep emotional bond with my country	.88	.03	.75	.39	.15	.86	.81	.33
My country is me	.86	.13	.81	.27	.35	.76	.82	.31
I'll do for my country more than anyone of the other group members would do	.27	.29	.70	.19	.47	.31	.85	.10
I am strong because of my country	.80	.16	.77	.30	.50	.57	.63	.42
I make my country strong	.53	.28	.67	.07	.67	.32	.82	.13
When someone criticizes my country, it feels like a personal insult	.45	.61	.47	.70	.64	.31	.36	.76
I am very interested in what citizens of others countries think about my country	-.07	.67	-.03	.77	.50	.03	.18	.70
When I talk about my country, I usually say “we” rather than “they.”	.59	.46	.45	.59	.66	.22	.69	.40
Successes of my country are my successes	.59	.51	.60	.47	.80	.18	.63	.50
When someone praises my country, it feels like a personal compliment	.35	.74	.38	.70	.83	.02	.41	.72
If a story in the media criticized my country, I would feel embarrassed	.05	.68	.13	.70	.50	.10	.13	.85

The only gender difference for identification with family and country indicates that the females are more ready to change the country in comparison with the males ($t=-2.10$, $df=275$, $p<.05$, Cohen's $d=.26$). Identity fusion regarding to friends is higher in the males ($t=-2.02$, $df=95$, $p<.05$, Cohen's $d=.47$), while the readiness to change friends was higher in the females ($t=2.26$, $df=95$, $p<.05$, Cohen's $d=.43$).

The younger adults more often reconsider their country ($r=-.30, p<.01$), try to know more about friends ($r=-.21, p<.05$) and are less frequently fused with the country ($r=-.24, p<.01$) and friends ($r=-.32, p<.01$) in comparison with the older adults.

Taken together with the good consistency of the scales, these results support the hypothesis that there are two different dimensions of identification: one that is better described as fusion, and another one that is closer to classical identification. However, obviously high correlation between identification and fusion (in our data $r=.59$ for family, $r=.67$ for country, $r=.58$ for friends, $r=.75$ for organization) does not allow to fix any functional differences between identification and fusion. To decrease this problem, the analyses below are performed using factor scores of identification and identity fusion instead of item sums or means.

6.2. Functional differentiation of identification and identity fusion: relationships with other measures of identification and general well-being

The functional independence of identification and identity fusion is supported by correlational analyses: for all the four social groups, identity fusion and identification are independent predictors of commitment, in-depth exploration related to these groups as well as negative feelings about possibility to change the group for another one (tables 03, 04). However, only identity fusion seems to predict a lower reconsideration of commitment, a lower subjective distance of the group to Self and a better satisfaction with the group. The only exclusion is identification and satisfaction with organization where identification is also a significant negative predictor of reconsideration. The subjective happiness, emotions and general valence of identifications seem to be related to identity fusion rather than to identification while psychological centrality could be (at least, for country) related to both identification and fusion.

Table 03. The relationships of identification and fusion with the other identity measures and general well-being: correlation analysis in Sample 1

Scales	Identity fusion - Family	Identification - Family	Identity fusion - Country	Identification - Country
Identity Commitment	.76**	.25**	.68**	.33**
In-depth Exploration	.38**	.42**	.33**	.46**
Reconsideration Of Commitment	-.43**	.04	-.47**	-.19**
Negative feelings about possible change of identification	.24**	.22**	.31**	.15*
Graphical measure of identity fusion (distance)	-.25**	-.01	-.23**	-.13*
Happiness scale	.23**	.04	.18**	.06
Mean valence of identifications ("Who am I?")	.23**	.12	.23**	.07
Mean psychological centrality of identifications ("Who am I?")	.17**	.10	.17**	.20**

* - $p<.05$, ** - $p<.01$.

Table 04. The relationships of identification and fusion with the other identity measures and general well-being: correlation analysis in Sample 2

Scales	Identityfusion - Friends	Identification - Friends	Identity fusion - Organization	Identification - Organization
Identity Commitment	.49**	.45**	.39**	.48**
In-depth Exploration	.35**	.29**	.50**	.37**
Reconsideration Of Commitment	-.36**	-.10	-.31**	-.38**
Satisfaction with Friends / Organization	.49**	.01	.34**	.27**
Satisfaction With Life	.20	.10	.04	-.11
Positive Emotions	.37**	.01	.16	-.19
Negative Emotions	-.13	.09	-.25*	.10

* - p<.05, ** - p<.01.

7. Conclusion

Factor analyses support the structural differences between identity fusion and identification; moreover, these differences are demonstrated on two samples using four social objects (Henson, 2006). Age and gender are not predictive of identity fusion and identification across the group: we have found only the weak effect of age for country fusion and medium effect of gender for fusion with friends.

As a further support for functional independence of identification and identity fusion, they are independent predictors of identity commitment and in-depth exploration as well as negative feelings about a possible identity change. For large groups, such as country and organizations, they are independently related to lower reconsideration of commitment, while for small groups, (like family and friends) reconsideration is associated with fusion only. The data also suggest that the emotional component of well-being is closer related to identity fusion (happiness and positive and negative emotions), while satisfaction with the group correlates with both fusion and identification.

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