Gender identity and the career decision-making process in matriculants

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Abstract
The purpose of this study was to investigate whether there was a relationship between the gender identity formation and career decision-making process of Grade 12 learners. It was also investigated whether there were any differences between the boys and girls in the study in respect of identity formation and the career decision-making process. Of the 156 learners who participated in the study, 60 were boys and 96 were girls. The Revised Extended Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status and the Study Choice Task Inventory were administered to the learners. The findings revealed a negative correlation between diffusion and foreclosure identity statuses and exploratory behaviour thereby suggesting that identity-diffused and foreclosed adolescents tend to meander and drift aimlessly without actively engaging in career exploration. No gender differences were found in identity formation and the career decision-making process implying that, unlike in the past, the girls considered stereotypical female as well as stereotypical male paths of career development.

INTRODUCTION
The choice of a career is one of the most challenging decisions in a person’s life, and some adolescents may experience difficulties that prevent them from making sound career choices (Gati and Saka 2001; Kinanee 2009). Lacante, Lens, De Metsenaere, Van Esbroek, De Jaeger et al. (2001) confirm that the career decision-making process and deficiencies in the way the study choice is made may increase the risk of dropout. A recent longitudinal survey in institutions of higher learning in South Africa revealed that 45 per cent of the students dropped out, and the reasons given included wrong course choices and inability to cope with the demands of the curriculum (Scott 2008). Given the high failure and dropout rates in South Africa (Woollacott 2003), it was considered necessary to explore the relationship between the career decision-making process and the identity development of high school learners.

Although much has been written about the application of the Study Choice Task Inventory (Gati and Asher 2001; Germeijns and Verschuere 2002; 2005; 2011; Germeijns, Verschuere and Soenens 2006) in career decision making and identity
development, less has been written about its use in career counselling, particularly in (South) Africa. This article reports on the findings of an exploratory study that investigated the relationship between the career decision-making process and the identity development of a group of Grade 12 learners.

Identity has been conceived in various ways in different fields (Cote and Levine 2002), yet most contemporary research on identity in psychology is based on Erikson’s (1963; 1968) work. Identity development is widely considered one of the defining features of adolescence (Hill, Bromell, Tyson and Flint 2007). Adolescence is a period of disorganisation regardless of whether it is navigated fairly smoothly or with difficulty (Yoder 2000). As indicated by Erikson (1968), it is during this period that the formation of a sense of identity becomes the primary task for an individual in the transition to adulthood. Existential questions often arise during this period including, who am I? What is my purpose in life? Where am I going? Adolescence is therefore a challenging time for many adolescents as they attempt to forge an identity. Part of this process is the crisis that adolescents face as they endeavour to balance the desire to try out as many selves as possible and, at the same time, establish an identity. Because of the conflicting and inconsistent results on identity development and gender (McHale, Kim, Whiteman and Crouter 2004; Passmore and French 2001; Waterman 1999), the next section reviews empirical research on gender identity development.

IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT AND GENDER DIFFERENCES

Marcia (1966) expanded on Erikson’s theory by operationalising identity into four statuses, namely achievement, foreclosure, moratorium and diffusion. These statuses are based on the combination of two underlying dimensions of exploration and commitment. Exploration is defined as the adolescent’s gathering of information, active questioning, experimentation, and weighing up of various identity alternatives, beliefs, qualities and roles (Kaplan and Flum 2010), and commitment is defined as the presence of strong convictions and personal investment in different domains or choices (Crocetti, Rubini, Luyckx and Meeus 2008).

Adolescents in the achievement status have made commitments after exploring various alternatives. According to Louw (1991), they have passed through a crisis period and have a relatively strong commitment to a career and a value system. Adolescents in this status in the study were found to score high on personality characteristics such as openness and conscientiousness (Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens, Beyers and Vansteenkiste 2005). Openness refers to the tolerance and exploration of the unfamiliar, and conscientiousness refers to the individual’s degree of organisation, persistence and motivation in goal-oriented behaviour. As individuals advance in their career identity development, they tend to have positive attitudes and openness towards a variety of occupations (Sharf 2006). During the process of career decision making, adolescents in the achievement status are more open and motivated to explore new information about themselves and their environment. This is important as it helps them make informed decisions about the type of career to follow.
Adolescents in the foreclosed status have made an unquestioned and firm commitment to a career typically bowing to the desires of significant others and family traditions without exploring other options. Luyckx et al. (2005) note that individuals in this status score high on conscientiousness but low on openness. This suggests that they are less likely to go through the exploration stage during the career decision-making process. They are more likely to be affected by parental influence and peer pressure in the choice of a career. In addition, they easily conform to social norms and expectations that are in line with stereotypical gender roles.

Unlike individuals in the foreclosure status, those in the moratorium status are still in a crisis period and are actively investigating various alternatives before arriving at firm commitments. These individuals score high on openness suggesting that they are open to new experiences, but they are low on conscientiousness (Luyckx et al. 2005). This implies that they are more likely to go through the various steps of the career decision-making process such as self-exploration and exploration of the environment in order to make an informed decision.

Individuals in the diffusion status are characterised by the absence of both exploration and commitment. For adolescents in this status, there is a lack of genuine concern about identity issues (Holcomb-McCoy 2005). These adolescents are also at risk of accepting and internalising negative and faulty stereotypes and beliefs. This suggests that they are less likely to go through the career decision-making process since they are not concerned about deciding on a career. In addition, they are not motivated to explore knowledge about themselves or the environment in order to search for a career that would be congruent with their personality. They therefore run the risk of entering into careers just for the sake of conformity.

Research has established gender differences in the types of activities adolescents participate in (Eccles, Barber, Stone and Hunt 2003), but does this imply that gender influences adolescents’ identity development? A review of empirical studies conducted on gender differences in identity development reveals an inconsistent picture. While some studies (Branch 2001; Graff 2003; Schwartz and Montgomery 2002) suggest that female identity is more strongly developed, others have found that male identity is more sophisticated (Archer 1985; Mdikana, Seabi, Ntshangase and Sandlana 2008). Yet other studies have found no significant gender differences in identity development (Alessandria and Nelson 2005; Allison and Schultz 2001; Meeus, Ledema, Helsen and Vollenbergh 1999). This inconsistency in research results calls for an in-depth investigation of gender differences in identity development.

Such an investigation is particularly relevant in South Africa after 17 years of democracy during which transformation has been at the forefront in redressing the inequalities of the past and empowering women and members of other designated groups. Unlike in the past, women are encouraged to consider stereotypically female as well as stereotypically male paths of development (Cramer 2000). Linked to identity development is the process of career decision making.

Zunker (1998) notes that careers were largely the domain of men in the past while women were socialised to see their role as homemakers. Emenyonu (1994)
J. Seabi investigated the kinds of careers that females were encouraged to choose in Nigeria and found many restrictions. Scientific, technical and professional occupations were primarily for men – if a woman were to study mechanical engineering, for example, she would be considered out of place. However, according to a recently published report, gender equality and women’s empowerment are crucial to the development of South Africa (Commission for Gender Equality 2010). The country is indeed progressing towards social and labour equality between men and women, but it remains essential to continue to explore from a psychological perspective whether sex differences exist in the career decision-making process and identity development. Given the steps taken to eradicate the inequalities of the past, it has to be considered whether there are still significant differences between male and female identity development and the career decision-making process.

**CAREER DECISION-MAKING PROCESS AND IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT**

According to Miller and Miller (2005), the career decision-making process is a key aspect of career development, and, since choosing a career is central to the identity formation of adolescents, the process of career decision making is crucial in helping adolescents to choose the right career. The career decision-making process refers to the process that people go through when they search for viable career alternatives, compare them and then choose one (Germeijs and Verschueren 2007). The process of career development is vital in development as it has a significant impact on occupational achievement and work satisfaction in adulthood (Hotchkiss and Borow 1996).

Germeijs and Verschueren (2006) identified six career decision-making processes that individuals go through: Orientation to choice, which implies that an individual is aware of the need to make a decision and has the motivation to engage in the career decision-making process; Self-exploration, which implies gathering information about oneself; Broad exploration of the environment, which implies gathering general information about career alternatives; In-depth exploration of the environment, which refers to gathering information about a reduced set of career alternatives; Decisional status, which refers to the progress in choosing a career alternative; and Commitment, which refers to the strength of confidence in and attachment to a particular career alternative. Figure 1 illustrates the career decision-making process. Lock (2005) reports that the process is not an exact linear process because people have their own individual differences and preferences.
Figure 1: Tasks in the career decision-making process

In line with the above figure, Van Esbroeck, Tibos and Zaman (2005) postulated that how one copes with decisional tasks during the career decision-making process has a significant effect on implementing a career decision. It has also been suggested that higher levels of individual (self) and environmental exploration result in a higher degree of congruence between the person and the chosen career, which in turn results in higher levels of satisfaction, adjustment, certainty and identification with the choice (Singh and Greenhaus 2004).

Career decision making has often been contrasted with career indecisiveness (Rassin 2007), which is characterised by decision-making problems such as lack of certainty during the decision-making process and a tendency to delay and avoid decisions. Although the focus of the present study is not on indecisiveness, this construct is crucial as it has been associated with less adaptive characteristics (Ferrari and Dovidio 1997). Nauta (2007) found that indecisive students experience discomfort with their chosen career because they are uncomfortable with a commitment to any choice.

In spite of the attention that the career decision-making process and identity statuses have each received, little research has been done on the relationship between these variables. This study attempted to address this hiatus, and it was therefore hypothesised that non-commitment statuses (diffusion and foreclosed identities) would correlate negatively with career decision-making tasks (Orientation to choice, Self-exploratory behaviour, Broad exploratory behaviour, In-depth exploration of the environment, and Decisional and Commitment scales) while moratorium and achievement statuses would correlate positively with such tasks. In support of this postulation, Waterman (1999) notes that diffusion and foreclosure are the least adaptive statuses while moratorium and achievement are the most adaptive.

**POSTMODERN CAREER COUNSELLING**

Following the criticism levelled against career counselling theory and practice because of their failure to meet the needs of non-white and non-Western populations
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(McMahon and Patton 2002; Savickas 2006), calls were made to transform this field and to make it not only relevant but also responsive to the African context (Maree, Ebersöhn and Biagione-Ceronio 2010). A number of Special Issues have consequently been devoted to the transformation of career counselling in the 21st century. McMahon and Watson (2008) argue that career counselling in the postmodern era more emphasis should be placed on qualitative methods using narrative processes and discursive practices than on the quantitative approach. Indeed, Maree (2010) notes that while career counselling in the past was largely (if not exclusively) based on a quantitative approach with a ‘test-and-tell’ focus, there has been steady shift towards a qualitative approach in more recent times. It is, however, argued in the present study that quantitative approaches should not be completely abandoned, especially because South Africa has only a small number of registered psychologists with only a few of them practising in the area of career counselling. Furthermore, few people from disadvantaged backgrounds can afford such individualised services.

The current study therefore attempted to determine the relevance of the Study Choice Task Inventory (Germeijs and Verschueren 2006) in the career decision-making process and identity development of a sample of Grade 12 learners in Johannesburg.

**AIMS OF THE STUDY**

The general aim of the study was to explore the relationship between gender identity statuses as measured by the Identity Status Interview and the career decision-making process as measured by the Study Choice Task Inventory. Specifically, the aims of the study were threefold: 1) to determine whether a relationship existed between the gender identity statuses and the career decision-making process; 2) to determine whether a significant difference existed between the male and female learners in the study in respect of identity statuses; 3) and to determine whether a significant gender difference existed between the male and female learners in respect of the career decision-making process.

**METHOD**

**Research design**

A quantitative research approach with correlational and ex post facto designs was adopted. The design was ex post facto because the variables that were measured – gender identity development and the career decision-making process – had already been established in the participants. Furthermore, the author was interested in understanding and explaining the relationship that might exist between the variables, namely identity statuses, the career decision-making process and gender.
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Participants
A purposive sampling method was used to select participants on the basis of gender and grade. As the focus of the study was on the difference between the gender identity development and career decision-making process of the boys and the girls, all Grade 12 learners who volunteered to participate were included. The sample comprised boys and girls from a co-ed former Model C school in an urban settlement in Johannesburg. The school population was made up of 98 per cent African learners and two per cent other nationalities. This sample was chosen because Grade 12 learners were assumed to have gone through most of the career decision-making processes as some had already applied to study at institutions of higher learning. Of the 205 Grade 12 learners, 156 learners (76%) participated in the study. As shown in Table 1, of the 156 participants, 60 learners (38.5%) were boys and 96 learners (61.5%) were girls. The learners’ ages ranged from 17 to 20 years with a mean age of 17.7 years.

Table 1: Background information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Mean age</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>61.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Procedure
Written permission was obtained from the education authorities (the University of the Witwatersrand’s Committee for Research on Human Subjects, the Gauteng Department of Education and the school principal) and from the parents to allow their children to participate in the study. The assurance was given that no participant would be identified and that confidentiality would be maintained. If the learners wished to reject the invitation, they were told that they would not be disadvantaged in any way. Similarly, if the learners chose to participate in the study, they were informed that involvement would not benefit them in any way. The researcher, together with a Master’s student, who was briefed before the actual testing, conducted the assessment in one session. A self-developed demographic questionnaire and two questionnaires, the Extended Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status II (EOM-EIS II) and the Study Choice Task Inventory (SCTI), were group-administered in the classroom in the morning between 09:00 and 10:00. These instruments are discussed below.

Instruments

The Revised Extended Version of the Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status (EOM-EIS II)
The participants’ identity was assessed by using the Revised Extended Version of the Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status (EOM-EIS II) developed by Bennion and
Adams (1986). The EOM-EIS II measures identity formation in two domains, namely the ideological (i.e. occupation, religion and politics) and the interpersonal (i.e. sex roles, friendship and recreation) domains. It comprises 64 items that are divided equally between the ideological and the interpersonal domains with responses on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Because an overall measure of ego identity status was of interest, the ideological and the interpersonal domains were combined for each identity status thus providing four general statuses of ego identity. Reliability estimates have shown the EOM-EIS II to be a fairly consistent measure for participants between the ages of 15 and 30 years (Adams, Bennion and Huh 1989; Allison and Schultz 2001). It has also been shown to have a test-retest reliability of 0.73 to 0.91 (Sandhu and Tung 2006). Evidence of the content and construct validity of the EOM-EIS II was reported by Bennion and Adams (1986) showing relationships between item content and identity formation theory, a factor structure that is consistent with theory. The EOM-EIS II has been found to be applicable across different contexts and countries including South Africa with Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficients ranging from .72 to .95 (Allison and Schultz 2001; Arefi, Ghoreshi and Eiman 2011; Bergh and Erling 2005; Mdikana et al. 2008; Sandhu and Tung 2006; Schwartz and Montgomery 2002).

**Study Choice Task Inventory (SCTI)**

Germeijs and Verschueren (2006) developed the SCTI, which is process oriented and designed to probe the decisional process and not merely the degree of decidedness. The SCTI probes six central career decisional tasks: Orientation to choice, Self-exploratory behaviour, Broad exploratory behaviour, In-depth exploratory behaviour, Decisional status and Commitment. The SCTI uses a separate scale for each of the tasks.

The Orientation to choice scale consists of 12 items, six of which are aimed at assessing learners’ awareness of the need to make a decision. The scale ranges from 1 (not at all applicable) to 9 (entirely applicable) with a reliability coefficient of .86 and construct validity of .90 (Germeijs and Verschueren 2006). In the present study, a Cronbach’s alpha of .70 was found.

The Self-exploratory behaviour scale has 24 items with three response categories, ‘never’, ‘sometimes’ and ‘often’, that are used to indicate the frequency of self-exploratory behaviour during the last and current school year. The 24 items of the Self-exploratory behaviour subscales are based on a combination of the four relevant domains of self-exploration (interests, values, abilities and study strategies) with the six relevant sources of information (self, friends, school counsellors, teachers and others). The scale has a reliability coefficient of .90 (Germeijs and Verschueren 2006), and a Cronbach’s alpha of .83 was found in the present study.

The Broad exploratory behaviour of the environment scale contains five items with three response categories, ‘never’, ‘sometimes’ and ‘often’. To probe In-depth exploratory behaviour, the participants are asked to give the names of the careers they have collected information on. Afterwards, the 13 items of the In-depth
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exploratory behaviour scale are completed with regard to these careers on a three-point scale, ‘never’, ‘sometimes’ and ‘often’. Germeijs and Verschueren (2006) report reliability coefficients of .81 and .74 for the Broad exploratory behaviour and In-depth exploratory behaviour scales respectively. In the current study, Cronbach’s alphas of .76 (Broad exploratory behaviour) and .72 (In-depth exploratory behaviour) were found.

The Decisional status scale has two items, (a) ‘list all studies you are considering now’ and (b) ‘which study is your first choice?’ (if undecided, write undecided). Numerical values are given to four possibilities: 1 (no first choice and no alternatives are listed), 2 (alternatives are listed without a first choice), 3 (a first choice is listed with alternatives), and 4 (a first choice is listed with no alternatives). The Commitment scale comprises 8 items given on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from ‘yes’, ‘very’ to ‘not at all’. Participants who indicate having a first choice on the Decisional status scale are asked to rate the degree of commitment to their choice using the Commitment scale. The reliability coefficient for this scale is .74 and the construct validity.83 (Germeijs and Verschueren 2002; 2006). In the present study, the Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was .70.

Although the SCTI has not been applied in South Africa, its reliability and construct validity are satisfactory (Germeijs and Verschueren 2002; 2007; 2011; Germeijs, Verschueren and Soenens 2006).

Data analysis
In order to determine whether there was a relationship between the identity statuses and the career decision-making process of the participants, a Spearman’s Ranks correlation coefficient was used for the boys and girls groups. Secondly, two sample independent T-tests were conducted to compare the identity statuses of the boys and the girls. These tests were also conducted to compare the career decision-making process of the boys and the girls.

RESULTS

Correlation between gender identity statuses and the career decision-making process
As already mentioned, the primary aim of this study was to explore the relationship between gender identity statuses and the career decision-making process. The relationship between female identity statuses and the career decision-making process is shown in Table 2.

Table 2 indicates that Self-exploratory behaviour correlated significantly only with Diffusion ($r = -0.289, p<0.01$) and Foreclosure ($r = -0.257, p<0.05$). Broad exploratory behaviour also correlated significantly only with Diffusion ($r = -0.219, p<0.05$) and Foreclosure ($r = -0.244, p<0.05$). Although significant findings were established with these variables (Self-exploratory behaviour, Broad exploratory
behaviour, Diffusion and Foreclosure), they all yielded negative correlations. However, Commitment correlated positively with Moratorium ($r = 0.234, p < 0.05$). No significant correlation was evident between career decision-making process and Achievement. There was also no statistically significant correlation between Orientation to choice and In-depth exploratory behaviour with the identity statuses.

Table 2: Relationship between identity statuses and the career decision-making subscales in the girls

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Diffusion</th>
<th>Foreclosure</th>
<th>Moratorium</th>
<th>Achievement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ORT</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>-0.150</td>
<td>0.106</td>
<td>-0.028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEB</td>
<td>-0.289*</td>
<td>-0.257*</td>
<td>-0.163</td>
<td>-0.077</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEB</td>
<td>-0.219*</td>
<td>-0.245*</td>
<td>-0.072</td>
<td>0.109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDE</td>
<td>-0.173</td>
<td>-0.043</td>
<td>-0.106</td>
<td>0.051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COM</td>
<td>0.080</td>
<td>0.055</td>
<td>0.234*</td>
<td>-0.005</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < 0.05

KEY
ORT: Orientation to choice    IDE: In-depth exploratory behaviour
SEB: Self-exploratory behaviour COM: Commitment
BEB: Broad exploratory behaviour

Not only was the correlation between female identity statuses and the career decision-making process explored but also that between male identity statuses and the career decision-making process. As shown in Table 3, Orientation to choice correlated significantly with Foreclosure ($r = 0.295, p < 0.05$), Moratorium ($r = 0.481, p < 0.01$) and Achievement ($r = -0.347, p < 0.01$). In addition, Broad exploratory behaviour correlated significantly with Diffusion ($r = -0.269, p < 0.05$) and Foreclosure ($r = -0.290, p < 0.05$), and Commitment correlated significantly with Moratorium ($r = -0.312, p < 0.05$). It is important to note that Orientation to choice yielded positive correlations with the two identity statuses, Foreclosure and Moratorium, while it yielded a negative correlation with the Achievement identity status. Commitment to choice, however, yielded a negative correlation with the Moratorium identity status.

No significant relationship was evident between Self-exploratory behaviour and the identity statuses and the career decision-making process. There was also no statistically significant relationship between In-depth exploratory behaviour and the identity statuses and the career decision-making process in the boys.
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Table 3: Relationship between identity statuses and the career decision-making subscales in the boys

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Diffusion</th>
<th>Foreclosure</th>
<th>Moratorium</th>
<th>Achievement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ORT</td>
<td>0.245</td>
<td>-0.2968</td>
<td>0.481**</td>
<td>-0.347**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEB</td>
<td>-0.194</td>
<td>-0.129</td>
<td>-0.098</td>
<td>0.095</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEB</td>
<td>-0.269</td>
<td>-0.291*</td>
<td>-0.095</td>
<td>0.171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDE</td>
<td>-0.040</td>
<td>-0.031</td>
<td>-0.008</td>
<td>0.198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COM</td>
<td>0.239</td>
<td>0.079</td>
<td>0.313*</td>
<td>0.116</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < 0.05 **p < 0.01

Gender differences in the formation of identity

The second aim of the study was to determine whether there was a significant difference between the means of the boys and the girls in respect of identity statuses. Several t-tests were also conducted to determine if there were significant differences in the four identity statuses – Diffusion, Foreclosure, Moratorium and Achievement – between the boys and the girls. As shown in Table 4, the results indicated no statistically significant difference between the boys and the girls in respect of Diffusion \( t(154)= -0.12, p>.05 \), Moratorium \( t(154)= 0.36, p>.05 \), Foreclosure \( t(154)= 1.67, p>.05 \) and Achievement \( t(154)= 0.35, p>.05 \). Although no significant difference was indicated between the boys and the girls in respect of any of the identity statuses, the tendency of the boys to be more foreclosed than their female counterparts was noteworthy.

Table 4: Mean scores on identity statuses and t-test results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Boys (n=60)</th>
<th>Girls (n=96)</th>
<th>t.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diffusion</td>
<td>49.1</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>49.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreclosure</td>
<td>42.3</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>38.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moratorium</td>
<td>56.1</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>55.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement</td>
<td>69.3</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>68.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gender differences on career decision-making subscales

The third aim of the study was to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference between the boys and the girls in respect of the career decision-making scales. As can be seen in Table 5, of the five scales (Orientation, Self-exploratory behaviour, Broad exploratory behaviour, In-depth exploratory behaviour and Commitment), only the Self-exploratory behaviour scale yielded a significant difference \( t(154)= -2.96, p<0.05 \) between the gender groups in favour of the girls.
Table 5: Comparison of the male and female scores on the career decision-making process scales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender scale</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Boys</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>5.18</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>-0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Girls</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>5.21</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Boys</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-exploratory behaviour</td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Girls</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-exploratory behaviour</td>
<td>2.17</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>-2.96*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Boys</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broad exploratory behaviour</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Girls</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broad exploratory behaviour</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Boys</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-depth exploratory behaviour</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>-1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Girls</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-depth exploratory behaviour</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Boys</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Girls</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**DISCUSSION**

Relationship between gender identity statuses and the career decision-making process

As indicated earlier, the primary aim of the study was to determine whether there was a relationship between gender identity statuses and the career decision-making process. The study attempted also to determine whether there were gender differences between the boys and the girls in respect of identity statuses. Gender differences were also investigated in respect of the career decision-making process.

It was expected that Diffusion would correlate negatively with Orientation to choice, Self-exploratory behaviour, Broad exploratory behaviour, In-depth exploratory behaviour, Commitment and Decisional task. This was because individuals in the Diffusion identity status generally appear to have no direction and are not interested in finding personally expressive adult roles and values (Kroger 2000). The current study revealed a significant negative correlation between the Diffusion identity status and Self-exploratory behaviour and Broad exploratory behaviour in the female participants while a significant negative correlation between Diffusion and Broad exploratory behaviour was found for the male participants. Although these findings did not yield significant negative correlations with all the...
career decision-making scales as was postulated, they were consistent with the view that identity-diffused adolescents meander and drift aimlessly more than they actively engage in exploration (Bergh and Erling 2005). Such adolescents often display an unwillingness to deal directly with problems and identity issues (Nurmi, Berzonsky, Tammi and Kinney 1997).

It was also found that Foreclosure correlated negatively with Self-exploratory behaviour and Broad exploratory behaviour in the female participants while Broad exploratory behaviour correlated negatively with the male Foreclosure identity status. These results suggest that the participants in the Foreclosure identity status did not gather general information about career alternatives to help them make a sound career choice. Given their lack of exploration, they were more likely to commit to a career that was not suitable for them, which could possibly be attributed to conformity, peer pressure or societal expectations (Chae 2002; Louw 1991). Since similar results were found in the male and female gender groups, it can be postulated that identity development rather than gender plays a crucial role.

The results of the present study revealed a positive correlation between the Moratorium identity status and Commitment in the female participants while positive and negative correlations were found respectively between Moratorium and Orientation to choice and Commitment in the male participants. It was expected that Moratorium would correlate positively with all the career decision-making processes (Orientation to choice, Self-exploratory behaviour, Broad exploratory behaviour and In-depth exploratory behaviour) except Commitment in both gender groups. This was because individuals in the Moratorium identity status are generally still actively investigating various alternatives before arriving at a firm commitment. It seems that since the learners in the study were in Grade 12, they had already made provisional decisions in terms of careers to pursue.

No significant correlation was found between the Achievement identity status and all the variables of the career decision-making process in the female participants while Orientation to choice correlated negatively with the male Achievement identity status. These findings are inconsistent with the literature, which shows a significant correlation between the Achievement identity status and Broad exploratory behaviour and Commitment (Crocetti et al. 2008). The results in this study are unusual as adolescents in the Achievement identity status are often motivated to achieve goals, are open to explore and seek new information about themselves and the environment, and persist in the task of career decision making until they have explored all the relevant information. These findings therefore warrant further investigation.

**Comparison of the boys and the girls in respect of identity status**

The second aim of the research was to determine whether there was a significant difference between the boys and the girls in the formation of an identity. The results of the present study indicated no statistically significant difference between the boys and the girls in respect of any of the identity statuses. These findings corroborate previous studies (Alessandria and Nelson 2005), which found no significant
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differences between the gender groups in the development of an identity among American learners. Similar results were found in identity development in other countries as well (Allison and Schultz 2001; Meeus et al. 1999). It therefore seems that the identity development of adolescents is independent of gender. These findings are encouraging as they suggest that South African society is transforming and moving away from stereotypically gendered identity roles.

Comparison between the boys and the girls in respect of the career decision-making process

The findings from the present study revealed no significant difference between the boys and the girls in respect of the process of career decision making. This suggests that gender has no impact on the process that boys and girls go through when they choose a career. This could be seen as flowing from the global transformation in women’s rights and affirmative action in South Africa, especially in the workforce where men and women can compete for and occupy the same jobs. Cramer (2000) notes that, unlike in the past, women are actively encouraged to consider stereotypically female as well as stereotypically male paths of career development.

Practical implications of the results

The present study attempted to determine the relationship between two theoretical positions, that of identity formation and the career development process of which the career decision-making process is an integral part. The study also attempted to determine the relevance of the Study Task Choice Inventory in the South African context. Although minimal correlations between career decision-making processes and identity statuses were found in the study, a few crucial implications are noted. It is suggested that counsellors working with clients in career counselling settings together with educators who teach career guidance (Life Orientation) could play a key role in identifying learners whose identity development is inadequately developed (diffused and foreclosed) and thereby provide them with career intervention. This would help them not to commit prematurely to inappropriate career paths but rather to make informed career choices. Furthermore, those in the Moratorium identity status could benefit from such intervention in terms of exploration of whom they are and what career options may be more suitable for them.

Of equal importance is the issue of gender and its relationship to the career decision-making process. Varied and contradicting results have emerged on the possible influence of gender on the this process where some research findings, as discussed earlier, have suggested that gender does influence the career decision-making process of adolescents. However, the present study found no relationship between gender identity and this process. These findings are pertinent especially in South Africa where transformation is taking place in the socio-political, cultural and economic arenas all of which seem to impact on the formation of identity and therefore the career choices of young South Africans. Gender does not appear to play a critical role in the choice of a career.
Finally, this research also attempted to determine the relevance of the Study Choice Task Inventory in the South African context – counsellors may find it useful in conjunction with other existing measures such as the Self-Directed Search and the Career Decision Scale, which remain influential in South Africa. These instruments could be used concurrently with the EOM-EIS, and a combination of such instruments could be useful in identifying learners who are career indecisive. This could lead to a better understanding of how different learners engage in the identity formation process and the difficulties they encounter in establishing an identity.

Limitations of the study
The limitations of the study provide avenues for future research. A more balanced sample in terms of gender would enable a systematic investigation of gender differences in the career decision-making process and identity development. Since the sample was not diverse – it represented only the African learners from one public school – the findings should be interpreted with caution. It would have been more beneficial had the study been conducted longitudinally thus allowing the collection of data on the learners from Grade 10 to Grade 12 to determine whether there were developmental shifts in their career decision-making processes and identity formations.

Suggestions for future research
A follow-up longitudinal study should be conducted as identity development and career decision making are developmental processes that take place over a period of time. In South Africa, learners are expected to choose learning areas that they will carry through to Grade 12, and their choice of a career by the end of Grade 12 is significantly impacted by the choice of these learning areas in Grade 9. The career exploration of South African learners should therefore begin towards the end of Grade 9. It would be of great benefit to follow the progress of these learners over a longer period during high school as this would provide additional information about their career decision-making process. Such research would also provide crucial information on the possible relationship between identity development and this process as high school adolescents are also engaged in forging an identity.

For a more comprehensive understanding of an individual’s career development results for the SCTI should be brought together with the results from other instruments such as the Self-Directed Search (SDS), which focuses on career decisions and developmental task mastery in general. The SDS has remained influential in career practice and research in South Africa over many years.

Lastly, because of the limited research on gender identity development in South Africa, further research on this subject is needed. Such research would help determine whether a relationship exists between the gender identity development and career decision-making process of high school learners. The research would also shed more light on whether gender differences play a role in the formation of an identity. With the rapid social and cultural transformation that is taking place in South Africa, and
with the move towards equal opportunities in the workplace for men and women, the study would be relevant as it would look at how these changes impact on the identity development and career decision-making process of South African adolescents.

**CONCLUSION**

The study examined the relationship between the gender identity development and career decision-making process of high school learners in South Africa. The research also looked at gender differences in respect of the career decision-making process and identity development of the learners. The results suggested that learners in the Diffusion identity status do not explore career choices and do not make any commitments to a career. The findings also suggested that adolescents in the Foreclosure identity status do not gather general information about career alternatives to help them make an informed career choice. Therefore students found to be identity diffused and foreclosed should be exposed to career counselling intervention so that they do not register for courses they may end up cancelling due to lack of interest, fit or ability. No gender differences were found in the formation of an identity and in the career decision-making process, which suggests that gender does not play a crucial role in the choice of a career.

**REFERENCES**


