

The existential suspension of the young-adult in times of liquid modernity. A differential analysis of identity uneasiness in precarious times.

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Abstract

The present paper gives a contribution to the Italian psychology literature dealing with identity uneasiness of the young adult, which represents a clinically significant life-span phase especially if considered within the critical working situation that compels them to postpone life-markers which are the first signs of entering adulthood. Those belonging to young adulthood seem uncompleted identities, hanging in between waiting to fulfil one's life projects and the lack of satisfactory responses from modern society.

The present research aims to investigate the relationship between personal and social identity, identifying possible similarities and differences between a group of Italian employed adults and a group of unemployed adults.

A group of 173 Italian young adults, aged between 27 and 34, were recruited to complete an Identifying Information Form constructed ad hoc, the Intolerance of Uncertainty Scale, the Multi-Measure Agnostic Personality Scale, and the Identity Stage Resolution Index. Data showed that unemployed young adults have a lower adult and social identity sense than employed ones, who also present an elevated level of ego-strength. Furthermore, results underline that having a permanent employment, an elevated self-esteem, and good ego-strength, and internal locus of control are predictive of the adult identity among employed subjects. These young people's difficulties to securely enter a profession is a risk factor for establishing a social identity, as well as, for the mental health; they may even impact one's awareness, especially because the principle on which post-modern society is based is the demonstration of the value of one's own resources.

Key words: Identity, Uneasiness, Careers, Precariousness, Agency.

Introduction

The ISTAT surveys in 2016 show that the percentage of Italians, between 25 and 64 years old, with a middle school diploma is growing (66.5%), as well as that of those who obtain an high school diploma (70.5%), although 8.2% of women and 6.3% of men obtained only the primary school certificate.

Data provided by ISTAT on the labor force in Italy, show that in Sicily the level of employment is equal to 42.5% in the range between 15 and 64 years old; moreover, the South of Italy confirms to be the geographical territory with the highest unemployment rate, equal to 19.4%, against 10.6% of Central Italy, and 8.1% of Northern Italy. As regards the age group between 15-24 years, the unemployment rate in Italy is 40.3%, of which 38.8% are males and 42.6% are females.

Data show the need for a deep expansion and diversification of goals and methodologies in the world of education, training and work. The lack of information produces, in fact, the perpetuation of wrong choices, linked to the socio-economic conditions, as well as a reduced participation in training activities,

and, above all, the fragmentation of the professional and personal identity during adolescence and young adulthood.

The need of reflecting on identity uneasiness in post-modern society regarding young adults stems from the daily encounter with psychic and affective difficulties experienced by those subjects who, owing to unemployment and longer schooling, bring their identity needs to a successful end with greater difficulty, remaining in a limbo situation characterised by a dissociation between self-autonomy and social independence, which they still do not have (De Singly, 2001). The term “young-adult” itself represents an ambiguous identity condition: that of an individual suspended between the waiting and the lack of a status, well-defined roles, between a potential evolution towards an ideal adulthood and a stall due to their social shortcomings, whose autobiographical story would then correspond to the metaphor of “uncompleteness” (Bestazza, 2013; Pellerone, et al., 2017a; Pellerone et al., 2017b).

Novelletto (2009), highlights how, over the last few years, inside the clinical setting, more subjects aged between 22 and 38 request treatment because they present an interior maturation crisis which impacts the affective and social fields and show particular symptoms such as anxiety, hypochondria as well psychosomatic and sexual symptoms (Bestazza, 2013). However, according to Galimberti (2007) it would rather be about a historic-cultural uneasiness of the individual more than an existential one, being the expression of an always changing, uncontrollable, liquid, social context (Baumann, 2000; Pellerone et al., 2017c), dominated by the principle of efficiency and of maximum performance, which makes it hard for the individual to satisfy the needs to plan, self-realise and fulfil one's confidence: a “fatherless” cultural context, deprived of a symbolic castration law which rules and establishes the borders of social acting (Recalcati, 2010), which would reduce the individual to a dimension (Marcuse, 1964).

If it is true that identity development is supported by acknowledging the Other (Oliverio Ferraris, 2002; Pellerone, Tolini, & Polopoli, 2016) and consists in a process taking place inside and through culture, within a framework of continual

individual-environmental transactions (McAdams, Josselson, & Lieblich, 2001; Pellerone, Passanisi, & Bellomo, 2015) and if it is also true that recognition is only allowed if the objectives of belonging apparatuses are fulfilled, then, experiencing an uncertain, economically unpredictable working context like the present one might reduce the possibility to have concrete results and enable society to recognise one's merit, with repercussions on the sense of trust in one's identity as a young-adult able to carry out his/her own life project (Coco et al., 2017; Lancini & Madeddu, 2014; Magnano et al., 2017; Sapienza et al., 2010).

Unemployment and precariousness as a risk factor for psychological health

There is a vast scientific literature dealing with the work-and-mental health relationship. In the past, Seligman (1975) pointed out that a prolonged exposure to external, negative events like unemployment, may interfere with the psychological wellness, namely motivation, self-perception and locus of control, causing a general feeling of apprehended impotence (Santisi et al., 2014).

More recently, it was discovered that the sensation of precariousness is intimately linked with the perception of working insecurity (Kalleberg, 2009): the more uncertain the possibilities to get into a working context or working continuity, the greater the anxiety experienced by the subject.

The perception of work precariousness linked to various types of short-term contracts turned out to be related to a greater probability to develop anxiety and mood disturbances, as well as an increased use of ansiolytic, antidepressive and anti-psychotic drugs (Moscone, Tosetti, & Vittadini, 2016).

Some cross-sectional studies in Italy evidence that short term workers, as well as those looking for their first occupation or, even still, the unemployed, seem to show worse psycho-physical health conditions than long-term workers; namely, they are more vulnerable to cardiovascular diseases and to suicide risks, and this is more probable with male young people living in central-southern Italy (Ledda et al., 2017; Minelli et al., 2014; Ramaci et al., 2017a). Studies on gender differences, however, do not always seem to be in accordance with one another,

although results vary mainly according to geographical variables; from a study carried out in Spain, for instance, it emerged that precariousness significantly correlates with mental uneasiness, mainly in females (Ramaci et al., 2017b; Vives et al., 2013). Studies over the years show how work is important not only for the economic possibilities it offers but for the great symbolic and psychological significance it gives to the individual: quoting Recalcati (2013), work is “the best pulsion sublimation form [...]. Through work the world is given human shape” (p. 53). Jahoda (1997), in this case, worked on a “theory of latent deprivation”, according to which work does not only have a clearly pragmatic function, but also latent functions related to psychological health: time structuring; regular planning of daily tasks; the creation of a widened social network; participation in teamwork; and definition of a social identity. Therefore, living under precarious or unemployment conditions for too long would seem to be an important risk factor for developing mainly depressive, psychosomatic and anxiety mental pathologies (Zhang & Bhavsar, 2013), with related low levels of self esteem and well-being (Paul & Moser, 2009), self or etero direct acting-out risks as well as affective disengagement towards one’s Real Self (Fratini, 2013). Moreover, a recent longitudinal study (Boyce et al., 2015) carried out on a sample of more than 6000 subjects, revealed how unemployment may strongly impact the personality structure of an individual; namely, the authors observed a significant reduction of average scores of conscientiousness, openness and agreeableness proportionally depending on the period of time spent without work. Then, the “being in the world” sense is now assessed in terms of mere economicity, and this means that being unemployed or being precarious has inevitable consequences on the personal identity construction.

The young-adult’s identity in the working crisis society

According to the Identity Capital Model (Cotê, 1996), personal identity in post-modern society has become wide and managed, as it appears as an adaptation to the offers available in the environment. It would seem to develop through a

process of discovery others appreciate. The individual is free to choose the most satisfactory identity with no bonds; however, the basis of this choice has a total lack of guarantees or help from the outer reality. Then, the individual can only rely on his/her psychological, cultural and economical resources and invest in them as if they were a capital, in order to gain an identity portfolio in return. Most of this capital would be spent right during the young-adult age, to create both a social identity (the acknowledgement of one's status and the belonging to a social category) and adult identity (the commitment in a role which may be socially useful). Both these identity aspects would seem to be correlated with self-realization conscience and the economic and professional satisfaction levels (Cot , 2002). Furthermore, by a sort of Matthew effect, those subjects, who right from the start work on investing and enriching their portfolio throughout their careers seem to have, in the author's mind, greater ease to identify in clear, social adult roles; instead, those, who during their late adolescence or emerging adulthood do not work on the building of their competence capital, seem to meet more difficulties, once they turn 30, to experience both a social and adult identity (Cot , 2016). If until a few years ago the young-adult age was understood just as a prolonged adolescence phase, before definitely going on to the adult age (Blos, 1954), authors like Guillaumin (2000) began to rethink post-adolescence and interpret it no longer as a dragging of unresolved adolescence phase, nor as a borderline situation, but rather as the outcome of adapting to changed social conditions. This explains why Arnett (2000) preferred inventing the term "emerging adulthood", to give it investigative autonomy and allow himself to study, from another scientific perspective, this life phase ranging from 18 to 25 which the author puts, precisely, between late adolescence and young adulthood. This phase is described as a specific development period during which the individual is engaged in the structuring process of his/her adult identity, going through a identification moratorium (linked to working, affective and social aspects); moreover, post-modernity would seem to have generated this moratorium, which is characterised by a shifting of life-markers which definitely symbolise the entering of adulthood: ending of schooling, entrance into the working world, exit from one's own family nucleus, marriage commitment, and

the creation of one's own family (Arnett, 2000; Iacolino et al., 2016; Magnano, Ramaci, & Platania, 2014; Settersten, Ottusch, & Schneider, 2015). This postponement would seem to be related, on a psychological level, to a loosening of borders between the adolescent and adult Selves (Jeammet, 2000), while on an evolutionary level, it would seem to have given rise to the so-called "retard-syndrome" in adulthood (Livi & Bacci, 2008), typically spread in Italian regions where young adults are those individuals ranging between 25 and 35 who are without a job or any economic support, live with their original family, so a new phenomenon is born called the long family, inside which two adult generations are found living together at the same time. This type of family can risk a generation stall and inhibit subjective resources tending to independence. A recent study (Mortimer et al., 2016), in fact, showed how a son's unemployment condition and the consequent economic support from parents would seem to be associated with low levels of self-efficacy of the son as well as greater difficulties in shifting into adulthood (Pellerone et al., 2017d; Pellerone, Tomasello, & Migliorisi, 2017). The English psychologist Oliver Robinson (2015), in light of post-modern social changes, proposed to revise Erikson's stadial theory, no longer considering the young adult as a subject involved in the psychosocial conflict between intimacy and isolation, but rather as a subject living a double identity crisis between commitment and independence. His studies revealed that subjects between 18 and 25 are experiencing neo-graduate crisis, which is a locked-out crisis, characterised by high levels of anxiety, depression and low levels of agency, as well as a feeling of living in limbo, sense of social exclusion and inability to experience one's own working and economic independence and identify with a stable adult stage; individuals ranging from 25 to 35 called "early adult age", instead live a locked-in crisis, characterised by feeling entrapped inside an adult identity perceived as non authentic and by the need to experience more satisfactory roles. These results, however, have not still been confirmed by cross-cultural studies (Pellerone et al., 2017e). An Italian recent qualitative research (Aleni Sestito, Sica, & Nasti, 2013) dealt more deeply with young adults' identity crisis in correlation with precariousness. The Authors used autobiographical tales of 80 subjects aged between 18 and 32, using as variables

the following: employed/non-employed; type of contract; planning; identity and agency. Results underlined that a significant percentage of unemployed and precarious workers have still not managed to reach a stable and definite identity, remaining so in a moratorium phase characterized by high levels of distress (Ramaci, Pellerone, & Iacolino, 2016; Specchiale et al., 2013) and uncertainty to which, according to Bestazza panic, alimentary disturbances, hypochondria sexual disfunctions depression and social exclusion are associated (2013). These studies represent only a starting point to scientific investigation still to be deepened.

Objectives and research hypotheses

The present research aims to to measure the influence of self-esteem and ego-strength on the perception of adult and social identity; investigate the relationship between personal and social identity, identifying possible similarities and differences between a group of Italian employed adults and a group of unemployed adults; and to identify the predictor variables of personal and social identity.

In particular, it is hypothesized that in both groups, subjects with a high level of self-esteem and ego-strength tend to manifest an elevated perception of adult and social identity (Pellerone, Passanisi, & Bellomo, 2015). Besides, on the base of recent literature (Ramaci et al., 2017; Ramaci, et al., 2017a) it is hypothesized that the unemployed young adults have a lower level of adult and social identity sense than employed ones. Finally, it is hypothesized that: having a permanent employment, an elevated self-esteem, and good ego-strength, and internal locus of control are predictive of the adult identity (Minelli et al., 2014; Mortimer et al., 2016).

Materials and methods

The research procedures described in this article were performed in compliance with: the American Psychological Association, the Italian Psychological Association ethical guidelines for research. The Internal Review Board (IRB) of

the Faculty of Human and Social Sciences at the “Kore” University of Enna and the University of Messina approved the present research.

Participants

The present study was conducted on a group of 173 Italian young adults, aged between 27 and 34 ($M=30.03$, $S.D.=2.13$), including 80 men and 93 women.

Within the group of participants, 41% have a permanent contract, 21% have a fixed-term contract, and 38% is unemployed. In reference to the employment status, 43% are employed, 17% are self-employed, 19% are unemployed, 19% are students, 1% are student workers, and 1% are housewives. The group was stratified into:

- a group of 108 employees, aged between 27 and 34 ($M = 30.33$, $SD = 2.07$), of which 54% men and 46% women, with the following educational levels: middle school diploma (2%), high school diploma (42%), bachelor's degree (51%) and master degree (5%);
- a group of 65 unemployed subjects, aged between 27 and 32 ($M = 29.51$; $SD = 2.14$), of which 34% men and 66% women, with the following educational levels: middle school diploma (6%), high school diploma (35%), bachelor's degree (58%).

Regarding civil status, within the group of young adult workers: 30% are single, 32% are married, 6% live together, 32% are engaged; relative to the housing situation, 51% live with their family of origin, 32% with their new family and 13% on their own. Alternatively, within the group of young non-working adults: 29% single, 14% married, 54% engaged and 3% cohabiting; relative to the housing situation, 85% live with the family of origin, 14% with the new family and only 1% alone.

Before administering the questionnaire to the subjects, we informed them that participation was anonymous and voluntary and explained the objective of the

study. The questionnaires were distributed by qualified researchers; convenience sampling was performed owing to accessibility. The average time taken to complete the questionnaire was 40 minutes.

Participants completed all self-report measures consecutively. They also provided information on their age, gender, and ethnicity prior to completing questionnaires.

Researchers collected data during a fellowship research program, conducted between 2015 and 2016.

Instruments

For the measurement of the variables, participants completed the following instruments: the Identifying Information Form constructed ad hoc, the Intolerance of Uncertainty Scale, the Multi-Measure Agnostic Personality Scale, and the Identity Stage Resolution Index.

The Identifying Information Form is used to measure the following anamnestic data: age, gender, educational level, socio-economic level and employed status, the civil status, the number of children, and parents' educational level.

Intolerance of Uncertainty Scale (IUS), is a tool which includes a total of 27 evaluable items on a five-point Likert scale (1 = not at all agree, 5 = completely agree) and is based on a four-factor structure for four basic beliefs: 1) Uncertainty is stressful and upsetting; 2) Uncertainty leads to inability to act; 3) Unforeseen events are negative and should be avoided; 4) Uncertainty over the future is unfair. Examples of items are: "It is unfair to have no guarantees in life" and "I can not stand to be undecided on my future." IUS was first developed in France (Freeston, et al., 1994) and later translated into English (Buhr & Dugas, 2002) and Chinese (Yang, 2013). All of these versions demonstrated excellent internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.91$), good test-retest reliability over a five-week period ($r = 0.78$) and a convergent and divergent validity when evaluated with symptomatic measures of concern, depression and anxiety.

Multi-Measure Agnostic Personality Scale (MAPS-20), developed by Cot   (1997) to measure the agency's sense through 20 items subdivided into 4 subscales (Self-esteem, Purpose in Life, Locus of Internal Control, and Force of I), each consisting of 5 items. The Cronbach alpha values are between .58 and .86.

Identity Stage Resolution Index (ISRI) aims to evaluate the sense of adult and social identity through 6 simple items measured with a 5-point Likert scale (0 = none true, 4 = completely true). It has a bipartisan structure that consists of two subscales: Resolution Scale (AIRS), which investigates the sense of adult identity, and the Societal Identity Resolution Scale (SIRS), which instead investigates the sense of social integration. The first 3 items that make up the AIRS subscale evaluate to what extent the subject 1) perceives himself as an adult, 2) feels he is fully matured, 3) feels he is considered adult from the others; the remaining 3 items of the SIRS evaluate how much the subject 4) feels that he has found his place in life, 5) feels he has found a lifestyle that satisfies him for the rest of his life, 6) feels he has found a community in which to spend the rest of his life (Cot  , 1997).

Data analyses

Concerning preliminary analyzes, descriptive analyses were used to investigate mean scores, standard deviation and frequencies.

In order to verify the first hypothesis, Multivariate Variance Analysis (Manova) was conducted to investigate how dependent variables could be influenced by the following independent variables, respectively: a) gender, age, and level of education; b) civil status, housing status and composition of the family; c) worker status versus non-worker, type of contract and type of profession.

In order to verify the second hypothesis, T-Test for independent groups was conducted in order to compare the scores obtained with the administration of the instruments to employed and unemployed subjects.

Four multiple linear regression analyzes were conducted to investigate the variables predicting the perception of adult and social identity in the group of workers and non-workers, by inserting into the model the following predictors: socio-anagraphic variables, tolerance to uncertainty, self-esteem, purpose of life, internal locus of control and ego-strength.

The data analysis was conducted using the SPSS-23 statistical analysis package.

Preliminary analyses

The first Multivariate Variance Analysis (Manova) shows the absence of gender and age influence on the perception of uncertainty ($p > .05$).

The same analysis shows the influence of gender on the purpose of life ($F = 4.53$, $SD = .05$); in particular the average score analysis shows that women manifest a higher scores ($M = 4.53$) than men ($M = 4.32$).

In reference to the identity dimension, Manova shows the influence of gender on adult ($F = 5.08$, $p < .01$) and social identity ($F = 4.27$, $p < .01$); the average score analysis shows that men seem to show a higher scores of women both in the adult identity (Males: $M = 2.87$; Females: $M = 2.78$) and the social identity (Males: $M = 2.56$; Females: $M = 2.40$). Similarly, education level appears to influence adult ($F = 5.72$, $p < .01$) and social identity ($F = 45.05$, $p < .01$); the average score analysis shows that subjects with an elevated educational level seem to have a higher level of adult and social identity (Table 1).

Table 1

Influence of the educational level on Identity: Average Score Analysis

Measures		<i>M</i>	<i>S.D</i>	Inferior limit	Superior limit
Adult Identity	Middle school	4.00	.54	2.93	5.07
	High school	2.99	.11	2.77	3.21
	Bachelor's degree	2.89	.10	2.69	3.09

	Master's degree	1.83	.28	1.28	2.38
Social Identity	Middle school	4.00	.76	2.50	5.50
	High school	2.74	.15	2.44	3.05
	Bachelor's degree	2.54	.14	2.26	2.82
	Master's degree	1.11	.39	.34	1.88

Note: N=173 Italian young adults, aged between 27 and 34 (M=30.03, S.D.=2.13).

Abbreviation: SE= Standard Error

In relation to the Global measure of identity-based agency, a subsequent Manova shows the influence of the civil status on the internal locus of control ($F = 3.28$, $p < .05$); the family composition on the level of self-esteem ($F = 3.31$, $p < .05$) and on the internal locus of control ($F = 5.99$, $p < .01$); the number of children on the internal locus of control ($F = 7.09$, $p < .01$). In particular, Tukey's post hoc shows how people who live in the house with friends and / or work colleagues manifest a higher level of self-esteem; subjects who live alone have an elevated negative perception of their future life; subjects who have formed a new family, and who have a fewer children present a higher level of internal locus of control.

Regarding the measurement of the Identity Stage Resolution Index, a Multivariate Variance Analysis shows: the influence of the family nucleus on social identity, the number of children on social and adult identity, interaction between the family nucleus and the number of children on social identity (Table 2).

Table 2

Influence of Family Dimensions on Identity: Multivariate Analysis of Variance

Measures	Dependent variables	<i>F</i>	<i>P-value</i>
Marital status	Adult Identity	1.58	.20
	Social Identity	1.98	.12
Family nucleous	Adult Identity	2.19	.09
	Social Identity	2.98	.03
Children	Adult Identity	4.31	.039
	Social Identity	5.70	.018
Marital status * Family nucleous	Adult Identity	.39	.68
	Social Identity	.67	.56
Marital status * Children	Adult Identity	.15	.70
	Social Identity	.22	.64
Family nucleous * Children	Adult Identity	2.95	.09
	Social Identity	5.79	.02

Note: N=173 Italian young adults, aged between 27 and 34 (M=30.03, S.D.=2.13).

In particular, the analysis of the average score shows how: the subjects who have formed a new family nucleus tend to manifest an elevated level of social identity; subjects with one child tend to show a greater adult (M = 3.51) and social identity (M = 3.46) than subjects with two children, who exhibit a lower level of adult (M = 2.51) and social identity (M = 1.99).

Results

With regards to the employed group, the table 3 underlines the following positive correlations: intolerance of uncertainty with purpose of life; self-esteem with adult and social identity; locus of control with adult and social identity; ego-strength with adult and social identity.

Table 3

Correlation Matrix for Self-Report Measures in the Employee Group

Measures	IUS A	IUS B	Self esteem	Purpose life	Locus of control	Ego strength	Adult identity
IUS A	-						
IUS B	.69**	-					
Self esteem	-.04	-.02	-				
Purpose life	.15	.23*	.02	-			
Locus of control	-.09	-.05	.24*	.07	-		
Ego-strenght	-.03	.06	.33**	.07	.45**	-	
Adult identity	-.11	.08	.46**	.16	.52**	.53**	-
Social identity	-.04	.06	.38**	.17	.50**	.42**	.93**

Note: ** $p < 0.01$, two-tailed; * $p < 0.05$ two-tailed. $N = 108$

Among the unemployed group, the table 4 shows that: intolerance of uncertainty positively correlates with purpose of life and negatively with adult identity; and ego-strength positively correlates with adult and social identity.

Table 4

Correlation Matrix for Self-Report Measures in the Unemployed Group

Measures	IUS A	IUS B	Self Esteem	Purpos e Life	Locus of control	Ego Streng ht	Adult identit y
IUS A	-						
IUS B	.60**	-					
Self esteem	.01	.16	-				
Purpose of life	.12	.27*	.06	-			
Locus of control	-.11	.04	.09	.16	-		
Ego-strength	-.10	.11	.19	-.01	.33**	-	
Adult identity	-.25*	-.21	.14	-.19	.09	.29**	-
Social identity	-.19	-.15	.10	-.09	.09	.25**	.92**

Note: ** $p < 0.01$, two-tailed; * $p < 0.05$ two-tailed

In reference to the intolerance of uncertainty, global measure of identity-based agency, and development identity, T-Test showed that there were significant differences (Table 5): in particular employed subjects appear to manifest a higher mean scores of ego-strength, adult and social identity than unemployed ones.

Table 5

T Test for independent group in reference to Self-Report Measures (employed versus unemployed)

Measures	Employed	Unemployed	Levene's Test		Student's Test		
	<i>M ± SD</i>	<i>M ± SD</i>	F	P-value	<i>t</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>P-value</i>
IUS A	2.10± .66	2.20 ± .63	.27	.61	-1.03	171	.30
IUS B	2.76 ± .73	2.85 ± .67	.44	.51	-.82	171	.41
Self esteem	1.80 ± .25	1.79 ± .22	.04	.85	.41	171	.69
Purpose of life	4.43 ± .55	4.47 ± .57	.04	.85	-.46	171	.65
Locus of control	4.36 ± .86	4.24 ± .80	1.66	.20	.91	171	.36
Ego-strength	4.52 ± .87	4.23 ± .81	2.37	.13	2.19	171	.03
Adult identity	2.99 ± .77	2.51 ± .79	.01	.91	3.96	171	<.001
Social identity	2.73 ± 1.06	2.09 ± 1.08	.02	.90	3.76	171	<.001

Four multiple linear regression analyzes were conducted in order to investigate predictive variables to the perception of adult and social identity in employed and unemployed groups.

Regarding the employees, the first regression analysis shows that among predictive variables of adult identity there are the following dimensions: the type of work, the idea that uncertainty is unjust and dangerous, self-esteem, internal

locus of internal and ego-strength (Table 6), explaining 59.3% of the total variance.

Table 6

Multiple Regression: Predictive Variables to Adult Identity in the Employed Subjects

Measures	R ²	Adjusted R ²	No adjusted <i>B</i>	SE	<i>B</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>P</i> -value
Age	.59	.53	.01	.03	.03	.49	.63
Sex			-.02	.12	-.02	-.21	.84
Country			.21	.11	.15	1.86	.07
Educational level			-.11	.10	-.09	-1.04	.30
Marital status			-.00	.03	-.01	-.14	.89
Profession			.11	.06	.14	1.82	.07
Family nucleous			.14	.08	.13	1.87	.06
Children			-.14	.16	-.06	-.85	.40
Type of job			-.28	.13	-.17	-2.22	.03
IUS A			-.22	.11	-.19	-1.97	.05
IUS B			.21	.10	.20	2.05	.04
Self esteem			.81	.23	.27	3.50	.00
Purpose of life			.13	.10	.10	1.31	.19
Locus of control			.24	.07	.27	3.45	<.001
Ego-strength			.23	.07	.26	3.36	<.001

Note: ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$. $N=108$

Abbreviations: SE= Standard Error; β =beta standardized coefficients

The second regression analysis shows that, in the employed group, predictive variables of social identity are: the type of work ($\beta = -0.26$, $p < 0.01$), the level of self-esteem ($\beta = 0.19$, $p < 0.05$) and the internal locus of internal ($\beta = 0.30$, $p < 0.01$), explaining 50.3% of the total variance.

In reference to the unemployed subjects, the regression analysis shows that among predictive variables of adult identity there are the following dimensions: a reduced number of children ($\beta = -0.55$, $p < 0.01$) and an elevated level of ego-strength ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.05$), explaining 46.1% of the total variance.

Similarly, the reduced number of children seems to be the only predictor of social identity in a group of unemployed subjects ($\beta = -0.56$, $p < 0.01$), explaining 38.2% of the total variance.

Discussion

The young adult passes through a life-cycle stage which is placed in an intermediate status between emerging-adulthood and adulthood (Arnett, 2000). This phase would have met post-modern society with a series of changes related to the development tasks which would be faced in order to facilitate the transition to maturity. In this perspective, the psychosocial conflict, because of transition between emerging-adulthood and adulthood, would move to a new dialectical plan, which is identity commitment and identity independence (Robinson, 2015). Therefore, young adults are mostly in a situation of existential suspensions, characterized by a double crunch: the expectation of a stable social role and the absence of an adult identity aimed to self-design (Bestazza, 2013), with negative consequences on the level of psycho-physical well-being.

Considering the crucial importance of professional careers in the process of defining social identity (Cot , 2002; Jahoda, 1997) and the resulting risk of psychopathological development in the absence of employment or job stability (Moscone, Tosetti, & Vittadini, 2015), the present research aimed to evaluate the differences in the perception of adult and social identity among employed and unemployed young adults. With regards to the employed group, the present research shows that subjects with a high level of self-esteem, ego-strength and internal locus of control seem to have an elevated perception of adult and social identity. Similarly, in the unemployed group, subjects with a good level of ego-strength manifest an elevated perception of adult and social identity, although subjects with an elevated intolerance of uncertainty seem to manifest a reduced level of adult identity. Furthermore, the results show that unemployed young adults seem to have a lower adult and social identity sense than employed ones, who also present an elevated level of ego-strength. It is interesting to note that having a permanent employment, an elevated self-esteem, good ego-strength, and internal locus of control are predictive of the adult identity among employed subjects; similarly, the presence of a permanent employment, a high level of self-esteem and internal locus of control seem to be predictors of the social identity, in the same group. So, subjects with internal locus of control believe that satisfaction and defeat depend on their capabilities or defects compared to those who have an external locus of control that will tend to cope with negative events less actively. Result confirms that in our society, the self-image is deeply rooted in the professional role; in fact, people with a high level of the identity development are more able to face the difficulties that may arise in their life and work environment. Moreover, it seems interesting that having a reduced number of children and elevated level of ego-strength are the only predictive variables to adult identity among unemployed subjects; while, having fewer children can be considered the only predictor of social identity in the same group. These results confirm the Identity Capital Model (Cot , 1996; 2016) according to which the individuals must “invest their capital” of resources in their company, in order to develop their own personal identity, and to obtain an increase of their resources and personal identity.

Identity, therefore, is a process that the individual constantly trades with the belonging society.

Conclusion

In this perspective, job employment may prove to be a mediator in the process of identity development because, through it, the subject acquires not only a social identity (since it gives a status and marks the recognition of the individual by the community), but also an adult identity (since work engages the subject in a socially generative role). For this reason, it may be thought that young adults who have no access to the labour market have greater difficulty in structuring a solid sense of adult and social identity than peer workers. Based on the results described herein, it is appropriate to emphasise the limits of this work, namely: the absence of a sampling method, which prevents the presence of a representative sample, the generalisation of the results, and the external validity. In addition, the absence of a longitudinal-type study design, which is more suitable for research involving young adults and their identity development (Pellerone, Passanisi, & Bellomo, 2015; Pellerone, Tolini, & Polopoli, 2016). Looking forward to further progress, we hope that the postmodern clinic will be aware of the specificity and difficulty of evolution of young adults, so that the postmodern clinic can respond in a timely manner to their need to be recognised by the “other” for their authenticity.

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