IDENTITY STYLES IN EMERGING ADULTHOOD: THE ROLE OF PERFECTIONISM AND PERSONAL GROWTH INITIATIVE

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The formation of a stable identity plays an important role throughout life, but it becomes a key developmental task during the period of adolescence and emerging adulthood.

Objective: Examine the role of different dimensions of perfectionism and personal growth initiative in the explanation of identity styles in emerging adulthood.

Method: A total of 228 participants (28 male and 200 female) between the ages of 18 and 28 from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro took part in the research. The data was collected by filling out an online questionnaire that used the Identity Style Inventory, the Positive and Negative Perfectionism Scale and the Personal Growth Initiative Scale.

Results: Young men scored higher on Positive perfectionism and Intentional behavior than young women. A significant positive association of the Diffuse-avoidant identity style with Negative perfectionism was obtained, as well as its negative association with all personal growth initiative components. Informational and Normative style were positively related to both components of perfectionism, with the fact that Informational style was also positively related to all personal growth initiative components. Lower Positive and higher Negative perfectionism proved to be significant predictors of the Diffuse style, while higher Positive and Negative perfectionism predicted Informational and Normative style.

Conclusion: Different components of perfectionism and personal growth initiative significantly contribute to the process of identity formation in emerging adulthood.

Key words: identity styles, perfectionism, personal growth initiative

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INTRODUCTION

The formation of a stable identity plays an important role throughout life, but it becomes a key developmental task during the period of adolescence and emerging adulthood (1). Emerging adulthood is a culturally determined, unique developmental period of extended adolescence that occurs at the age of 18 and extends until the age of 25 or longer, during which there are key developmental tasks that enable an individual to broadly explore possible life paths, participate in self-exploration and identity formation (2 - 6). Berzonsky and Barclay (7) distinguish three process orientations in identity formation: information - oriented, normative - oriented and diffuse - avoidant identity style. These orientations or identity styles refer to relatively stable differences in the way individuals process identity-essential information while participating in or managing to avoid the challenges of constructing, maintaining and / or reconstructing a sense of identity. For example, informational types are inclined to a rational, information-oriented way of thinking and acting when dealing with identity issues, thus engaging in the deliberate search, evaluation and use of identity-important information, and show a willingness to accommodate their own viewpoints in the light of dissonant feedback. In contrast, normative types are prone to an automatic, normative and conforming way of thinking and acting when dealing with identity issues, i.e. automatic internalization and adherence to the goals, expectations and standards of significant others or reference groups, as well as a tendency to defend and maintain existing beliefs and identity structures. Finally, diffuse types are prone to an inconsistent, evasive way of thinking and acting when dealing with identity issues. This means that they avoid and postpone dealing with them as long as possible, with the fact that the way of thinking and acting is not consistent, but is determined by situational requirements and consequences (8).

Emerging adulthood is marked by making important decisions in different life domains. As one of the personality characteristics that strongly influences decision-making is perfectionism (9), it can be assumed that this trait plays an important role in the processes of identity formation, which research has confirmed (10 - 12). Some authors suggest that the cognitive and emotional consequences of perfectionism make perfectionists extremely sensitive to feedback that indicates that their life is not going according to plan (13, 14) and make it difficult for them to create a definitive identity commitment in different domains, which leads to a long - term feeling of insecurity and identity diffusion. However, by reviewing the literature, it is possible to notice inconsistencies in the findings of older and more recent research. The modern understanding of perfectionism considers this construct as a complex phenomenon that can manifest itself in an adaptive, but also in a maladaptive fashion (15 - 18). Researchers who examined perfectionism with multidimensional measures obtained results that imply that its individual aspects are actually important

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indicators of mental health, and that they facilitate optimal identity development (10, 11). At the same time, the high standards, which a person sets for their own performance or behavior, are considered an inseparable aspect of perfectionism, whether adaptive or maladaptive. A key feature of maladaptive perfectionism is attributing self-worth to one's achievements, fear of failure, and worry about potentially disappointing significant others. In contrast, the key feature of adaptive perfectionism is the desire for personal growth and development, which manifests itself in the pursuit of high, but realistic and attainable goals, the achievement of which leads to satisfaction and an increased level of self - esteem. Accordingly, Terry - Short, Owens, Slane and Dewey defined the Positive perfectionism dimension as a tendency towards perfectionistic striving that takes place in the function of positive reinforcement, that is, a person is motivated to achieve a certain goal in order to achieve a desired outcome; while the Negative perfectionism dimension is defined as a tendency towards perfectionistic striving in the function of negative reinforcement, that is, a person is motivated to achieve a certain goal in order to avoid unfavorable outcomes (18).

In addition to perfectionism, it can be expected that the tendency to initiate personal development will be of crucial importance for individuals who are establishing their identity, especially at the transition to adulthood (19 - 21). Personal growth initiative (PGI) is a fairly new construct and the assumption of its association with identity formation processes has been relatively neglected

in previous research on identity. PGI implies active and intentional engagement in the process of personal development (22) and is examined through four dimensions. Readiness for change refers to the tendency to evaluate change, while Planfulness represents knowledge about the process of personal development and together these two dimensions make up the cognitive components of personal growth initiative (23). Using resources represents the tendency to use external resources for the purpose of intentionally stimulating the process of personal development, while Intentional behavior examines the tendency to utilize opportunities for personal development and together they form the behavioral components of personal growth initiative (23). By reviewing previous research, it is possible to conclude that the positive association of PGI with desirable traits and life outcomes is common in research that includes this construct (24). Therefore, it is justified to assume that PGI plays a significant role in the optimal identity formation of young individuals. Key features of this search for identity are planning for the future and commitment to specific goals (19, 20), and PGI is believed to influence the setting of clear future-oriented goals and the ways in which individuals strive for and implement them (21). The findings of previous research conducted in this area show that the cognitive and behavioral components of PGI are related to identity styles (25 - 27). In the research conducted by Morsunbul (27), it was shown that active and intentional engagement in personal development facilitates positive identity development, with informational types

intentionally seeking, processing and evaluating identity-relevant information (28, 29), because they are actively interested in their personal development. In contrast, none of the components of PGI were significantly related to the Normative style, except for the Readiness for change component, suggesting that normative types consider change, but that does not seem to translate intobehavior. Furthermore, the findings showed that all components of PGI, except Readiness for change, were negatively related to the Diffuse-avoidant style. This result suggests that diffuse types delay and avoid solving identity problems because they are not interested in their personal development (27).

The aim of this research is to examine the role of certain dimensions of perfectionism and personal growth initiative in the explanation of identity styles in emerging adulthood.

METHOD

Participants and procedure

A total of 228 young individuals between the ages of 18 and 28 (28 male and 200 female with an average age of 23) from Bosnia and Herzegovina (61.8%), Croatia (20.6%), Serbia (14.9%) and Montenegro (2.6%) participated in the research. Students made up 62.7% of the sample, employed individuals 27.6% and unemployed 9.6%. The majority of participants (53.5%) had a university Master's degree, 40.8% a high-school degree and 5.7% a university Bachelor's degree. As for current partner/marital status, 50% of the participants were single, 42.1% in a relationship, 6.1% married and 1.8% divorced. Out of the participants who were students, 13.2% answered that they have retaken a university year, 6.1% that they transferred to another faculty or study course, 1.3% both, and 47.8% none of the above. Participation in the research was voluntary and anonymous, in accordance with the research ethics code. Data were collected by filling out an online questionnaire that was advertised through various social media channels. The questionnaire was constructed for the purposes of validating the Croatian translation of the Identity Style Inventory (ISI-5) (30) and the Personal Growth Initiative Scale (PGIS-2) (30), as well as for the purposes of the current research.

Measuring instruments

The following measuring instruments were applied: a sociodemographic questionnaire constructed for the purposes of this research, the Croatian adaptations of the Identity Style Inventory (8, 30), the Positive and Negative Perfectionism Scale (18, 31) and the Personal Growth Initiative Scale (23, 30). The Identity Style Inventory or ISI-5 consists of 27 items that examine three identity styles (9 items for each subscale): Information oriented, Normative oriented and Diffuse-avoidant. The Positive and Negative Perfectionism Scale or PANPS consists of 40 items that examine Positive and Negative perfectionism (20 items for each subscale). The Personal Growth Initiative Scale or PGIS-2 consists of 16 items that examine Readiness for change (4 items), Planfulness (5 items), Using resources (3 items) and Intentional behavior (4 items). All of the applied questionnaires were of

Likert-type with values ranging from 1 to 5 (1 – completely disagree; 5 – completely agree).

Statistical analyses

The data collected by this research were analyzed using statistical software SPSS Statistics 25 (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY, USA).

The basic descriptive parameters of the investigated variables were calculated, which confirmed the suitability of the data for conducting parametric statistics. Although the distribution of results on most subscales significantly deviated from normal according to the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, the indices of skewness and kurtosis were in satisfactory ranges, i.e. index of skewness <3 and index of kurtosis<10 (32).

Gender differences in all measured variables were examined using the t-test for independent samples, but only after the equalization of groups was achieved. The method of equivalent pairs (33) was carried out by pairing each male participant with an equivalent female participant who is either identical to him or as similar as possible (in terms of the collected sociodemographic data).In doing so, all characteristics of the participants collected by the sociodemographic data questionnaire were taken into account (listed in the subsection Participants and procedure). This method was applied due to the large difference in the number of female and male participants in the collected sample.

The relationship between all measured variables was examined with the Pearson correlation coefficient, while using the data obtained on the entire sample (N=228). Then, three multiple regression analyses were conducted with identity styles as criterion variables, and with the components of perfectionism and personal growth initiative as predictor variables. In order for the preconditions for performing regression analyses to be met, it is necessary for the variance inflation factor (VIF) to not exceed a value of 10 and for the tolerance to be greater than 0.10, as other values would indicate multicollinearity (34). These prerequisites were met for all regression analyses.

RESULTS

Examination of gender differences in individual identity styles, components of perfectionism and personal growth initiative

Statistically significant gender differences were obtained in Positive perfectionism and the PGI component Intentional behavior (Table 1). Male participants achieved significantly higher results on Positive perfectionism and Intentional behavior than female participants did (for the basic descriptive parameters of the examined variables with regard to gender, see Table 2). No statistically significant gender differences were found in the other examined variables.

Table 1. Examination of the significance of gender differences in individual identity styles, components of perfectionism and personal growth initiative (N=56)

Measuring instruments	Subscales	Leven's test		t-test		
		F	p	T	Df	p
ISI-5	Diffuse	2.823	.099	-.421	54	.675
	Informational	.696	.408	.478	54	.635
	Normative	.007	.935	.835	54	.408
PANPS	Positive perfectionism	.737	.395	2.206	54	.032*
	Negative perfectionism	.211	.648	-.531	54	.597
PGIS-2	Readiness for change	.000	.988	.467	54	.643
	Planfulness	.884	.351	-.115	54	.909
	Using resources	5.360	.024*	1.251	54	.217
	Intentional behavior	.116	.735	2.096	54	.041*

Note: *$p<.05$

Table 2. Basic descriptive parameters of individual identity styles, components of perfectionism and personal growth initiative with regard to gender (N=56)

Measuring instruments	Subscales	Gender	M	SD
ISI-5	Diffuse	Male	20.821	4.603
		Female	21.429	6.076
	Informational	Male	37.464	4.517
		Female	36.857	4.979
	Normative	Male	21.821	5.800
		Female	20.500	6.046
PANPS	Positive perfectionism	Male	80.214	7.795
		Female	75.286	8.890
	Negative perfectionism	Male	56.107	14.753
		Female	58.357	16.870
PGIS-2	Readiness for change	Male	16.286	2.551
		Female	15.964	2.603
	Planfulness	Male	17.821	4.252
		Female	17.964	5.015
	Using resources	Male	10.321	2.178
		Female	9.429	3.084
	Intentional behavior	Male	17.464	2.472
		Female	16.000	2.749

Note: M – mean; SD – standard deviation

Examination of the relationship between identity styles, components of perfectionism and personal growth initiative.

Young individuals with an expressed Diffuse style were significantly inclined to Negative perfectionism and were significantly less inclined to initiate personal development on all PGI

dimensions. Among young individuals with an expressed Informational and Normative identity style, both components of perfectionism are significantly represented, with the fact that among those with a pronounced Informational style, all personal growth initiative components are also significantly represented (Table 3).

Table 3. Examination of the significance of the relationship between all measured variables (N=228)

Subscales	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.
1. Diffuse	1	-.043	.261**	-.041	.451**	-.269**	-.306**	-.140*	-.262**
2. Informational		1	-.057	.358**	.214**	.244**	.153*	.220**	.251**
3. Normative			1	.336**	.249**	-.090	-.089	-.010	-.043
4. Positive perfectionism				1	.276**	.167*	.141*	.098	.196**
5. Negative perfectionism					1	-.171**	-.291**	-.124	-.144*
6. Readiness for change						1	.748**	.468**	.660**
7. Planfulness							1	.455**	.625**
8. Using resources								1	.488**
9. Intentional behavior									1

Note: *p<.05; **p<.01

Examination of the relative contributions of individual components of perfectionism and personal growth initiative in the explanation of different identity styles.

All conducted regression models of predictors of individual dimensions of perfectionism and personal growth initiative for different identity styles proved to be statistically significant (Table 4). The examined predictors together explain 26.7% of the variance of the results on the Diffuse-avoidant, 21.3% on the Informational and 15.4% on the Normative identity style.

Table 4. Examination of the predictive value of different dimensions of perfectionism and personal growth initiative as determinants of different identity styles (N=228)

Diffuse-avoidant identity style						
Measuring instruments	Predictors	R	R^2	β	F	p
		.517	.267		13.411	.000**
PANPS	Positive perfectionism			-.127		.043*
	Negative perfectionism			.448		.000**
	Readiness for change			-.083		.378
PGIS-2	Planfulness			-.046		.622
	Using resources			.042		.543
	Intentional behavior			-.110		.184
Information oriented identity style						
Measuring instruments	Predictors	R	R^2	β	F	p
		.461	.213		9.950	.000**
PANPS	Positive perfectionism			.259		.000**
	Negative perfectionism			.180		.007**
	Readiness for change			.157		.110
PGIS-2	Planfulness			-.071		.466
	Using resources			.124		.079
	Intentional behavior			.106		.217
Normative oriented identity style						
Measuring instruments	Predictors	R	R^2	β	F	p
		.393	.154		6.718	.000**
PANPS	Positive perfectionism			.319		.000**
	Negative perfectionism			.140		.042*
	Readiness for change			-.116		.255
PGIS-2	Planfulness			-.014		.892
	Using resources			.049		.502
	Intentional behavior			-.025		.778

Note: R –multiple correlation coefficient; R^2–multiple determination coefficient; β - beta coefficients of the listed predictors; F – value on the F distribution; *p<.05; **p<.01

The Positive and Negative perfectionism dimensions proved to be significant predictors for all three identity styles. Lower Positive perfectionism and higher Negative perfectionism significantly predict higher scores on the Diffuse-avoidant identity style. In contrast, higher scores on Positive and Negative perfectionism significantly predicted higher scores on the Information oriented and Normative oriented identity style. Personal growth initiative components did not prove to be significant predictors in the explanation of individual identity styles.

DISCUSSION

The obtained results partially confirm the findings and theoretical assumptions of previous research (10, 11, 26, 27), although some unexpected results were also obtained. When it comes to gender differences in the examined variables (Table 1), the results show that male and female individuals are equally inclined to use all three identity processing orientations. However, male participants achieved significantly higher results on Positive perfectionism and Intentional behavior compared to female participants. The explanation can be found in the socialization patterns according to which men are often raised in such a way that they are expected to demonstrate activity, confidence, dominance, easiness in making decisions, persistence and independence, while women are expected to be dedicated to children, passive, sensitive, warm in relation to others, caring and tender (35, 36). Throughout history, men have been noted as the initiators of activities in most life domains, which was extremely important for increasing the probability of reproduction and survival of the species (37). With this in mind, it is not surprising that the young men in this research achieve higher scores on Intentional behavior and Positive perfectionism, most likely because the aforementioned dominant characteristics enable them to strive towards achieving goals, i.e. positive feelings they get from achievements and reaching their own high standards.

The results of correlation analyses show that young individuals with a pronounced Diffuse-avoidant identity style are significantly prone to negative perfectionistic aspirations, and that they are significantly less prone to initiate personal development on all dimensions, which is consistent with other research (11, 27). Namely, Negative perfectionism of the PANPS scale (18) is defined as the motivation to achieve goals in order to avoid undesirable outcomes. Consequently, individuals with high Negative perfectionism are not intrinsically motivated and experience fewer positive emotions even after achieving goals. Instead, their actions are aimed at avoiding punishment, that is, negative emotions associated with failure, disappointing significant others, and other undesirable life outcomes. At the same time, their actions are postponed as long as possible, until the threat in the form of punishment appears, which is also an important feature of the Diffuse-avoidant identity style (38, 39). In addition, the negative association of this style with all PGI components suggests that diffuse types are not interested in their personal development, which is one of the reasons for their avoidance and postponement of identity-related questions and issues (27). The Informational style was significantly positively related to both perfectionism components and to all PGI components. As established in previous research (10, 11, 25 - 27), positive perfectionistic aspirations and initiating personal development facilitate adaptive self-exploration and identity commitment, which is simultaneously a part of the informational orientation. Therefore, it is not surprising that informational types have a strong motivation for personal development and are

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intrinsically motivated to achieve desirable outcomes from which they derive positive feelings, which is the basis of Positive perfectionism. However, a positive association of this style with Negative perfectionism was also obtained, which was not expected. This result implies that the active resolution of identity problems, which is characteristic of the Informational style, is at least partially conditioned by the fear of failure or undesirable life outcomes. Namely, it is clear that facing important identity-relevant questions and reconsidering them is not always a pleasant process, especially if it takes place in the function of avoiding undesirable outcomes, which is not rare. The obtained results suggest that informational types still decide to deal with unpleasant emotions and solve identity problems in order to avoid life outcomes that are considered undesirable, which is why Negative perfectionism becomes apparent in informational types. The Normative identity style was positively related to both components of perfectionism as well. According to Berzonsky et al. (8), conscientiousness and self-control, as well as a high level of commitment and a sense of purpose, all of which are also characteristics of the informational orientation, characterize people with a normative orientation. Thus, these two styles achieve important points of agreement, including similar tendencies in terms of perfectionistic aspirations, as shown by the obtained results. Furthermore, the Normative style was not related to personal growth initiative on any component. In other words, in the sample

of normative types there are individuals who are inclined as well as those who are not inclined to initiate personal development. This suggests that initiating personal development is not out of the question for normative individuals, but is not a characteristic of this identity style either. Additionally, the results of some previous research (30, 40) indicate that the Normative style may be underpinned by similar deficits in the processing of identity-important information as the Diffuse style. Thus, it seems that the Normative style embraces some characteristics of the Informational, as well as the Diffuse-avoidant style, but is still distinct enough in order to form a separate category among the identity styles.

The results of the regression analyses show that both components of perfectionism significantly predict the results on all three identity styles. At the same time, lower scores on Positive perfectionism predict a more pronounced Diffuse-avoidant style. In contrast, higher scores on Negative perfectionism predict higher scores on the Diffuse-avoidant style, which is consistent with the findings and theoretical assumptions of previous research (10, 11). The obtained findings can be explained in that young individuals who do not have sufficient motivation to achieve desirable outcomes (low Positive perfectionism), and whose action is mainly driven by the avoidance of unfavorable outcomes (high Negative perfectionism), are subject to a sense of insecurity and identity diffusion. Namely, individuals who are not motivated by positive, but exclusively by negative reinforcement (removal of an unpleasant stimulus such as punishment,

failure, disappointment, financial consequences, etc.), are usually encouraged to act and deal with identity issues by urgent situational demands, which represent a greater threat (38, 39). As potential reasons for this, one should consider a lack of self-confidence regarding the achievement of desirable life outcomes, due to which there is a lack of motivation for the same, or that the person does not value achievement, or does not have their own definition of desirable outcomes and therefore does not know which areas to focus on. Future research should focus on identifying these reasons and counseling and/or psychotherapeutic work that would help young individuals in developing skills for dealing with life challenges and identity issues. In contrast, higher scores on Positive and Negative perfectionism significantly predicted higher scores on the Informational and Normative identity style. The significant predictive value of Negative perfectionism for these identity styles was not expected, while the predictive value of Positive perfectionism is in line with other research (10, 11). It seems that the existence of a strong commitment to identity, which is characteristic of informational as well as normative types (28, 39), carries accompanying advantages and disadvantages. Along with strong commitments and goals, there is often a strong motivation for achievement but also a certain and inevitable fear of failure, which is probably the reason why these characteristics predict both, the Informational and the Normative identity style. However, when one considers that Negative perfectionism positively predicted the Diffuse-avoidant style as well, it seems that a certain

amount of fear of failure and avoidance of unfavorable outcomes are inevitable human characteristics that act as a driving force regardless of identity style. However, it should be pointed out that the Positive and Negative perfectionism of the PANPS scale are defined exclusively in terms of its motivational components. Thus, this instrument is potentially not a comprehensive measure of perfectionism. It is certain that milder deviations from the results of previous research are the result of the application of different measures of perfectionism.

An unexpected result in this research is that the PGI components did not prove to be significant predictors of any identity style, which contradicts the theoretical assumptions and findings of other research (25 - 27). Namely, although the calculated VIF values suggested the appropriateness of conducting regression analyses, it should be noted that the correlations among the PGI components are very high (see Table 3). High correlation between predictors, i.e. multicollinearity, is a problem because it reduces the statistical power and increases the type 2 error, by which significant results remain hidden (41). According to Tomic and Macuka (30), the psychometric validation of the Croatian translation of the PGIS-2 and ISI-5 questionnaires resulted only with marginally acceptable indices of model fit with the obtained data and the need to verify their characteristics on larger samples was emphasized. Therefore, it should be taken into account that the lack of predictive value of the PGIS-2 subscales for identity styles in the

current research could also be a reflection of the measuring instruments' shortcomings and does not reflect the real predictive value of these variables in the population. The obtained results of this research should be taken with caution and checked in future research on larger samples of young individuals.

CONCLUSION

On a sample of emerging adults, different components of perfectionism and personal growth initiative together significantly explain 26.7% of the variance of the results on the Diffuse - avoidant, 21.3% on the Informational and 15.4% on the Normative identity style. Thus, these variables significantly contribute to identity formation processes in emerging adulthood.

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STILOVI IDENTITETA U PREDODRASLOSTI: ULOGA PERFEKCIONIZMA I INICIRANJA OSOBNOG RAZVOJA

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SAŽETAK

Uvod: Formiranje stabilnog identiteta igra važnu ulogu tijekom cijelog života, no postaje ključni razvojni zadatak tijekom razdoblja adolescencije i predodraslosti.

Cilj istraživanja: Ispitati ulogu nekih dimenzija perfekcionizma i iniciranja osobnog razvoja u objašnjenju stilova identiteta u predodrasloj dobi.

Metoda: U istraživanju je sudjelovalo ukupno 228 sudionika (28 mladića i 200 djevojaka) u dobi od 18 do 28 godina sa područja BiH, Hrvatske, Srbije i Crne Gore. Podaci su prikupljeni ispunjavanjem online upitnika kojim su primijenjeni Inventar stilova identiteta, Skala pozitivnog i negativnog perfekcionizma i Skala iniciranja osobnog razvoja.

Rezultati: Mladići su postizali više rezultate na Pozitivnom perfekcionizmu i Namjernom ponašanju u odnosu na djevojke. Utvrđena je značajna pozitivna povezanost Difuzno izbjegavajućeg stila identiteta sa Negativnim perfekcionizmom, te negativna povezanost istog sa svim komponentama iniciranja osobnog razvoja. Informacijski i Normativni stil bili su pozitivno povezani s obje komponente perfekcionizma, s time da je Informacijski stil bio pozitivno povezan i sa svim komponentama iniciranja osobnog razvoja.Značajnim prediktorima Difuznog stila pokazali su se niži Pozitivni i viši Negativni perfekcionizam, dok su viši Pozitivni i Negativni perfekcionizam predviđali Informacijski i Normativni stil.

Zaključak: Različite komponente perfekcionizma i iniciranja osobnog razvoja bitno doprinose procesima formiranja identiteta u predodrasloj dobi.

Ključne riječi: stilovi identiteta, perfekcionizam, iniciranje osobnog razvoja

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