Abstract

Identity is an essential part of psycho-social functioning. Most identity theories are based on Erikson's work (Erikson, 1968). Erikson claimed that the development and consolidation of identity is the main developmental task during adolescence and the formation of a healthy and developed identity through the process of investigation and commitment is essential for one's mental health (French, Seidman, Allen & Aber, 2006).

There are several approaches towards the understanding of personal identity; among them are Marcia's identity status approach (Marcia, 1966), Tzuriel's approach of identity components (Tzuriel, 1990) and the narrative approach (McLean & Thorne, 2003). In the present study Tzuriel's identity components approach was used. This approach is based on Erikson's theory and Marcia's identity status approach. Tzuriel conceptualized identity as consisting of components, each of which is a continuum, as well as a gestalt like global construct (Gabriel-Frid & Taichman, 2008). Tzuriel's approach specifies seven components of personal identity: feeling of commitment and purpose, feeling of solidarity and continuity, social recognition, feeling of significance, physical identity, naturalness and truthfulness, and perception of self-control (Tzuriel, 1990).

At the same time, a different line of literature developed on cultural identity. Cultural identity is a special kind of social identity. Social identity is defined as a sense of belonging to certain social groups, along with the values and feelings that accompany this belonging (Schwartz, Montgomery & Briones, 2006). Cultural identity represents the perception and self-definition of an individual regarding his\her membership in any

cultural group (Tartakovsky, 2009). The literature refers to different aspects of cultural identity, including cultural behavior (use of language, social ties cultural customs), values (set of beliefs tied to a certain group) and identification (attachment to cultural groups and feelings towards them) (Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga & Szapocznik, 2010).

Much research on cultural identity is based on Berry's work (Berry, 1997). Berry proposed a bi-dimensional model that acknowledges that the main aspects of acculturation, preserving the original culture and adaptation to the new culture, are conceptually different and independent of each other. Berry referred to four types of cultural identity: integrated identity, separated identity, assimilated identity and marginalized identity (Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind & Vedder, 2001). Research based on Berry's work focused mainly on cultural behavior. Schwartz, Unger, et al. (2010) suggest examining cultural identification as well, for better understanding of cultural identity.

Personal and cultural identities were studied separately until now (Schwartz, Zamboanga, Weisskirch & Wang, 2010). Integrative study of the relation between them is important because personal and cultural identities are related to important health outcomes, such as behavioral problems, substance use and risky sexual behavior. Integrative adoption of practices from both cultures and more developed personal identity are connected to less destructive behaviors (Schwartz, Zamboanga & Weisskirch, 2008). Additionally, Tartakovsky (2009) points out that studying the identity of young immigrants is of special interest – these young people are dealing with the simultaneous creation of cultural identity together with personal identity, and therefore

the simultaneous study of their identities allows testing the mutual relationships between these identities.

Schwartz, Zamboanga, Weisskirch & Wang (2010) suggest that in a multi-cultural society, cultural identification (with one or more cultures) can contribute to personal identity consolidation during adolescence and young adulthood. Empirical work to test this hypothesis connecting cultural identity to personal identity is important and should be tested in different immigrant groups in different countries, in order to establish a comprehensive theory on the subject (Schwartz et al., 2008).

In addition, there is a theoretical and empirical relation between cultural identity and social support (Haslam, Jetten, Postmes & Haslam, 2009), and a theoretical relation between social support and personal identity (Schwartz, Montgomery & Briones, 2006). Social support is provided and received in higher probability by those who perceive themselves as sharing a particular cultural identity (Haslam et al., 2009), while lack of social support may hinder the development of personal identity. Both formal and informal social institutions provide the most social support to individuals holding on to widely accepted cultural values (Schwartz et al., 2006). As a result, lack of support from social institutions can make the construction of personal identity much harder for individuals whose cultural identity is not that of the majority culture.

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between cultural identity and personal identity among immigrants from Russia to Israel, and to test whether social support mediates the connection between cultural identity and personal identity.

One hundred and seven young immigrants aged 18-30 from Russia to Israel participated in this study. The participants filled out questionnaires in Russian that

assessed cultural identity and identification, personal identity, social support and demographic information.

A relationship between cultural identity and personal identity was found – the personal identity of participants with integrative or separated cultural identity was more developed than of participants with assimilated or marginalized cultural identity, in accordance with the hypothesis. Additionally, Israeli identification and Russian identification contributed significantly to the explanation of variance of personal identity. The stronger the Israeli and Russian identities of the participant were, the more developed was the respondent's personal identity. Finally, the proposed model according to which social support mediates the relationship between cultural identity and personal identity was not supported. Nevertheless, another mediation model emerged from the results, in which cultural identity mediates the relationship between social support and personal identity.

The meaning of the results is discussed – the relationship between cultural identity and personal identity stresses the importance of preserving the original cultural identity and raises the Importance of an integrative absorption policy. Differences between results pertaining to cultural identity versus results pertaining to cultural identification (for example, cultural behavior is related to self-control, while cultural identification is related to social recognition), support the need to empirically test all three cultural identity components (behavior, identification and values) separately in future research. In addition, an alternative mediation model is proposed and discussed in light of existing research and future research directions. Finally, the applied meanings of the results concerning age at the time of immigration is discussed, as well as the

significance of interventions aimed at helping those who immigrated as children to develop an accomplished cultural and personal identity.