

Identity variant classification [*Analysing Identity: Chapter 2* © Peter Weinreich]

The ISA classification of *identity variants* provides a global overview of a person’s macro identity states situated in specified social contexts. It bears some resemblance to Marcia’s *identity status* classification (Marcia, 1980), but differs in respect of ISA’s analytic approach to identification processes in the development and redefinition of identity. Marcia’s approach depends on self-reports of having experienced a crisis of identity or not, and having made a commitment to an occupation and an ideology or not.

The rationale for the identity variant classification arises from consideration of two fundamental global identity processes. The first is self’s process of striving to implement one’s identity aspirations by pursuit of various activities. The consequence of self’s judgement of success or otherwise in pursuing one’s aspirations is one’s greater or less *self-evaluation*. The second is self’s process of attempting to resynthesise one’s identifications with others to date that have resulted in incompatible elemental identifications. The extent of self’s *identity diffusion* marks whether one acknowledges an optimal presence of residually conflicted identifications – *optimal levels*, or defends against them - *low levels*, or exhibits extensive unresolved conflicted identifications - *high levels*.

Accordingly, the Table below presents a usefully analytic classification of *identity variants*, derived from the two parameters: *self-evaluation* and *identity diffusion*. The classification provides an immediately accessible summary of self’s state of identity, whether defensively *foreclosed* or highly conflicted *diffused*, and whether of *high* or *low self-regard*.

Identity variant classification		Identity diffusion		
		Low <i>Foreclosed variants</i>	Moderate	High <i>Diffused variants</i>
Self-evaluation	High	Defensive high self-regard	Confident	Diffuse high self-regard
	Moderate	Defensive	Indeterminate	Diffusion
	Low	Defensive negative	Negative	Crisis

Contrary to general opinion, the nine-fold classification indicates that identity diffusion is not necessarily associated with self-deprecation, as the possibilities of *diffuse, or defensive, high self-regard* show. *Crisis* of identity is an uncomfortable

state of affairs when substantial identity diffusion accompanies low self-evaluation. However, in the ISA classification, the experience or otherwise of *crisis* is not a *defining criterion* of identity states as it is with Marcia's 'identity statuses'.

Standardisation

Although both the *evaluation* and *identity diffusion* parameters are internally standardised for each individual, the identity variant classification depends on judgements of what are low, moderate and high values of these two parameters from a societal or social normative perspective. The identity variant classification therefore depends on societal and cultural contexts, that is, on external *nomothetic* rather than internal *idiographic* standardisation. Such nomothetic standardisation may well vary from culture to culture, such that the relative spheres of 'defensive' and 'diffused' variants may well not coincide across different cultures – some cultures, with differing socialisation procedures, may be normatively more defensive than others.

Nomothetic standardisation proceeds by using a well-balanced generic identity instrument with a representative sample in the order of 500 participants, whereby means and standard deviations for *self-evaluation* and *identity diffusion* may be computed for the sample. One standard deviation from the mean is then used as the criterion for judging whether the individual verges into the regions of high or low for the two parameters, as represented in the identity classification Table above.