



Which came first, personality traits or identity processes during early and middle adolescence?



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ABSTRACT

No previous studies examined longitudinal associations between personality facets and identity dimensions in early and middle adolescence. To uncover these relationships, we test the direction of effects of domain- and facet-level personality traits with identity dimensions in early and middle adolescence. For this purpose, we used two annual waves of longitudinal data on 1233 Japanese early and middle adolescents. Cross-lagged models provided evidence for bidirectionality between personality and identity in early and middle adolescence. Moreover, our results highlighted that the relationships between the facets-level personality and identity dimensions were more complex than the associations between the domain-level of personality and identity dimensions. Our study facilitates a better understanding of the personality-identity interplay.

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1. Introduction

The self-system is thought to be a complex multi-layered construct (McAdams & Zapata-Gietl, 2015). The first layer consists of dispositional traits that represent core inter-individual differences (i.e., Big Five; McCrae & Costa, 1987). However, individuals are not only affected by these traits but also by motivations to achieve their own life plans, values, and purposes. These motivations and goals are represented in the layer representing the middle level of personality (Cantor, 1990). Identity formation processes are also part of this layer (Klimstra, Luyckx, Goossens, Teppers, & de Fruyt, 2013; Luyckx, Teppers, Klimstra, & Rassart, 2014). The two mentioned layers of the self are mutually related, and they form a key part of the self-system.

Especially, adolescence is a critical period in which several changes occur regarding biological (e.g., body growth), cognitive (e.g., acquisition of formal abstract reasoning), and social (e.g., the restructuring of parent-adolescent relationships) processes (Hill, 1983; Kroger, 2004). These changes have implications for personality changes and identity development (e.g., Klimstra, Hale, Raaijmakers, Branje, & Meeus, 2010; Soto, John, Gosling, & Potter, 2011) and these two concepts are thought to reinforce each other

during adolescence (Erikson, 1968; Roberts & Wood, 2006). Previous studies highlighted the dynamic relationships between personality traits (i.e., Big Five; McCrae & Costa, 1987) and identity processes in adolescence (e.g., Crocetti, Rubini, & Meeus, 2008; Hatano, Sugimura, & Crocetti, 2016; Hill, Allemand, & Burrow, 2010; Hill et al., 2013; Klimstra, Luyckx, Branje et al., 2013; Luyckx, Klimstra, Duriez, Van Petegem, & Beyers, 2014; Luyckx, Soenens, & Goossens, 2006). However, these studies have focused on adolescence as a whole (i.e., from 12 to 18 years old), despite that early and middle adolescence are different periods with respect to the biological, cognitive, and sociological development (e.g., Hill, 1983).

Moreover, personality is hierarchically ordered, and the Big Five only represents broad domains. In the five-factor model, every domain is represented by lower-order facets, which represent specific aspects of the personality trait (e.g., Costa, McCrae, & Dye, 1991; Saucier, 1998). Personality facets have the potential to better highlight the exact dynamics between identity processes and personality traits (Luyckx, Klimstra et al., 2014). However, there is a dearth of research examining the directionality of the relationships between facet-level personality traits and identity processes (Luyckx, Klimstra et al., 2014). In the present study, we longitudinally examine the mutual relationships between personality traits (both domains and facets) and identity processes, dividing adolescents into two age groups (i.e., early and middle adolescence). Thereby, we aim to clarify the developmental

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dynamics of self-formation processes in early and middle adolescence.

1.1. Contemporary identity processes model

A vast majority of studies on identity formation have been guided by Marcia's identity status paradigm. Marcia (1966) focused on two key components of identity formation: exploration and commitment. Exploration refers to the process in which individuals actively search for their own goals, values, and beliefs in life, whereas commitment refers to making a firm choice regarding these goals, values, and beliefs. Marcia's conceptions of exploration and commitment represent exploration in breadth of different alternatives and commitment as actual making of choices, respectively (Luyckx, Soenens et al., 2006). Marcia proposed four identity statuses based upon combinations of these two dimensions: achievement (commitment following exploration), foreclosure (commitment with no exploration), moratorium (ongoing exploration, weak commitment), and diffusion (no commitment and exploration). Adolescents classified in high commitment statuses (i.e., achievement and foreclosure) are typically characterized by high levels of psychological adjustment, whereas adolescents classified in low commitment identity statuses (i.e., moratorium and diffusion) tend to show high levels of psychosocial problems (e.g., anxiety, depression, and delinquent behaviors) (for a review, see Kroger & Marcia, 2011).

Although these identity statuses are useful to diagnose the outcomes of identity formation among adolescents, they are less useful for understanding the process of identity development (Bosma & Kunnen, 2001; Grotevant, 1987). Therefore, new identity models have been proposed (e.g., Bosma, 1985; Crocetti et al., 2008; Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens, & Beyers, 2006; Meeus, 1996). Among the most prominent of these models is the five-dimensional model by Luyckx, Goossens et al. (2006) and Luyckx et al. (2008). They distinguished three exploration dimensions and two commitment dimensions. Commitment dimensions consist of commitment making and identification with commitment. Exploration dimensions consist of exploration in breadth, exploration in depth, and ruminative exploration. Exploration in breadth and exploration in depth are the same as the ones proposed by Marcia (1966) and Meeus (1996), respectively. Additionally, some individuals may not struggle with moving toward a decision on their life choices and continue to worry about these choices. Luyckx et al. (2008) described this maladaptive process as ruminative exploration. Ruminative exploration could occur at any stage in the process of identity development. Four of these five identity dimensions are accompanied with higher levels of positive adaptation and well-being, but ruminative exploration is associated with maladaptive psychological functioning (Luyckx, Schwartz, Goossens, Beyers, & Missotten, 2011).

1.2. The relationships between personality traits and identity processes

Although identity processes are critical aspects of personality, they are not at the core of personality (McAdams & Zapata-Gietl, 2015). The core of personality is typically captured with Big Five personality trait domains (McCrae & Costa, 1987). These personality trait domains are neuroticism (the tendency to be vulnerable to anxiety and depression), extroversion (the tendency to be assertive, active, and sociable), openness (curiosity and interest in the unknown), agreeableness (the tendency to engage in prosocial behavior), and conscientiousness (planfulness and achievement-orientation). Each trait domain is represented by more specific facets. Frequently used personality measures, such as the 240-item NEO-PI-3 captures six facets for each trait domain, amounting to a total number of 30 facets (McCrae, Costa, & Martin, 2005).

In adolescence, the identity processes develop through the interaction with the core layer (i.e., both domain and facet levels of personality traits). Previous studies focused on the association between domain level of personality traits and identity processes (e.g., Crocetti et al., 2008; Hatano et al., 2016; Hill et al., 2010, 2013; Luyckx, Soenens, et al., 2006). However, to more precisely gain insight into how individuals differ from one another during adolescence, we need to focus on the interaction between facet level of personality traits and identity processes (Klimstra, Luyckx, Branje et al., 2013; Luyckx, Klimstra et al., 2014). It has been argued that personality facets underlying the same trait could tap different aspects of personality and develop in different ways (e.g., Jackson et al., 2009). Furthermore, personality facets are more specific and closely linked to observable behaviors (e.g., Klimstra, Luyckx, Branje et al., 2013).

Recent advancement of Big Five theory provides a useful framework to explain the mechanisms of the transformation of identity in relation to personality traits (DeYoung, 2015). In this model, neuroticism, agreeableness, and conscientiousness are grouped together in a higher-order stability factor (DeYoung, Peterson, & Higgins, 2002). This factor is related to the need to keep the stability of ongoing goal-directed functioning (DeYoung, 2015). On the other hand, extroversion and openness are grouped together in a higher-order plasticity factor (DeYoung et al., 2002), which reflects the need to engage the exploratory activity that integrates the unknown information with existing knowledge (DeYoung, 2015). Based on this model, neuroticism, agreeableness, and conscientiousness would be expected to be associated with firm choices about life goals, values, and beliefs (i.e., commitment dimensions), while extroversion and openness would be associated with the active search for personal goals, values, and beliefs (i.e., exploration dimensions). However, it is possible that the associations between personality traits and identity dimensions would be more complex as we focus on the lower levels in the hierarchy of personality traits. In fact, findings from the study examining the dynamic associations between personality traits (domain and facet levels) and identity dimensions (Klimstra, Luyckx, Branje et al., 2013) indicated that, at the domain level, neuroticism and conscientiousness were related to commitment dimensions as well as exploration dimensions; extroversion and openness were positively associated with exploration dimensions, and extroversion was also positively related to identification with commitment. At the facet level, these associations were found to be even more complex. Distinct facets of neuroticism were differentially related to identity dimensions; that is, internalizing tendencies (e.g., depression and anxiety) were related to identification with commitment, exploration in depth, and ruminative exploration, whereas externalizing tendencies (e.g., angry hostility and impulsiveness) were not so. As for the extroversion facets, positive feelings (i.e., warmth and positive emotions) and assertiveness rather than gregariousness and excitement seeking were associated with the identification with commitment, proactive exploration dimensions (i.e., exploration in breadth and in depth), and ruminative exploration. In openness facets, curiosity-related tendencies (e.g., aesthetic, intellect, actions, and ideas) rather than fantasy and feelings were associated with proactive exploration dimensions. In agreeableness facets, altruism and tender-mindedness were positively related to proactive exploration dimensions, whereas compliance and modesty were positively associated with ruminative exploration. Finally, conscientiousness facets were positively related to commitment and proactive exploration dimensions, and two facets (i.e., competence and achievement striving) were negatively related to ruminative exploration.

In summary, personality traits are clearly associated with identity dimensions. Moreover, these results suggest that focusing on facet level personality traits allows us to discover the dynamic

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