Journal of Research in Personality 67 (2017) 132–143

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Research in Personality

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jrp

Personality in the age of industry: Structure, heritability, and correlates of personality in middle childhood from the perspective of parents, teachers, and children

D. Angus Clark [a,*], C. Emily Durbin [a], Brian M. Hicks [b], William G. Iacono [c], Matt McGue [c]

[a] Michigan State University, United States
[b] University of Michigan, United States
[c] University of Minnesota, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 18 November 2015
Revised 19 May 2016
Accepted 6 June 2016
Available online 8 June 2016

Keywords:
Personality
Middle childhood
Multiple informants
Personality structure
Personality heritability
Personality outcomes

ABSTRACT

Middle childhood is a crucial juncture in the lifespan where children work toward achieving a sense of competence foundational for future development. However, middle childhood has historically been underrepresented in the personality literature. The current study provides a comprehensive examination of personality in middle childhood using a large (N = 2510), longitudinal sample of 10- to 12-year-old twins. The structure, heritability, and correlates of personality in this period were investigated using personality ratings of parents, teachers, and children. Results showed that personality in middle childhood has a coherent structure, is heritable, and is relevant for developmentally salient outcomes such as externalizing behavior, substance use, and academic engagement. Results emphasize the importance of investigating personality in middle childhood across multiple informants.

© 2016 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

The origins of personality are found in childhood temperament, or, the "individual differences in reactivity and self-regulation" that appear as early as infancy (Rothbart, 2011; Shiner & DeYoung, 2013). Although most research on temperament focuses on infancy through early childhood (3–7 years old), there is also a substantial body of literature on temperament and personality in adolescence (13–17 years old). However, the intervening period of 8–12 years old, sometimes referred to as *middle childhood*, has received considerably less attention. Consequently, much of our understanding of this period is based on the upward or downward extension of findings from early childhood and adolescence, respectively (Teglasi, 1998).

Middle childhood, however, is a distinct and formative period in which critical cognitive, behavioral, and social-emotional changes are taking place that likely influence—and are influenced by—the development of personality. During this stage youngsters face academic and social challenges that are more demanding than those of earlier periods, and for which success is less certain. For example, children are exposed to more explicit and comparative feedback about their performance in intellectual, athletic, and other skill domains (Wigfield, Eccles, Schiefele, Roeser, & Davis-Kean, 2006). They spend less time with their families and more time with peers, which allows for new opportunities and challenges in forging and maintaining friendships, as well as establishing a place in the social hierarchy (Collins, Madsen, & Susman-Stillman, 2002; Kerns, 2008; Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 2006). Mixed-gender play becomes more common (Poulin & Pedersen, 2007; Shrum, Cheek, & Hunter, 1988), parental expectations for independence and responsibility increase (Collins et al., 2002), and children begin to invest in personal goals and life tasks consistent with their own interests and values (Fahey & Shelley, 1981; Harter, 2006; Rochat, 2013).

As a result of these changes, youngsters in middle childhood have more opportunities to discover how their abilities and desires are similar to or different from others', encounter praise or complaints about their behavior, and feel ownership over their accomplishments and failures. As described by Erikson (1980), this period is a decisive one in childhood that sets a course toward industry, competence, and self-confidence or failure, lack of maturation, and inferiority.

In parallel to the greater sophistication of the environments encountered by children during this period, personality in middle childhood is more complex in its manifestation and structure than

* Corresponding author at: Department of Psychology, Michigan State University, Psychology Building, 316 Physics, East Lansing, MI 48824, United States.

E-mail address: clarkd46@msu.edu (D.A. Clark).

http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2016.06.013
0092-6566/© 2016 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

in infancy and early childhood, though it is not yet completely analogous to what is observed in adolescents and adults (Shiner, 2006). Furthermore, consistent with increasing levels of explicit feedback, and greater self-reflection and verbal abilities, most children of this age are able to provide self-reports regarding their own personalities (Shiner & DeYoung, 2013). Therefore, middle childhood represents the point at which we first gain access into how youngsters conceptualize their own personality. At this age, however, children are still not as capable raters as adults (Soto, John, Gosling, & Potter, 2008); consequently, self-reports may still need to be complimented by the ratings of others, specifically, adults with close connections to youngsters who may hold different perspectives on children's dispositional styles than the children themselves. On one hand, individuals such as parents and teachers can only provide an outsider's impression of a child's personality, but on the other, significant adults such as parents and teachers are more experienced, knowledgeable, and capable raters. Given this, gathering and reconciling information from both children and adult informants is important for gaining a more complete understanding of personality within the developmental context of middle childhood.

Our goal was to explore the essential elements of personality in middle childhood so as to provide a detailed picture of the nature of trait dimensions, as well as their origins and influences on other functional domains. We drew upon the reports of youngsters as well as their teachers and parents to take advantage of the unique knowledge and perspectives brought by each of these important individuals, and to explore how varying perspectives provide complementary information for understanding personality during this period.

1.1. Informants of personality

A critical issue in the study of personality is how to most accurately and thoroughly assess individual differences in personality. Self-report is the most frequently used approach for measuring adult personality, but is generally inappropriate for younger children given their cognitive limitations (Shiner & DeYoung, 2013). Personality in childhood is thus most commonly assessed via informant-report (Gartstein, Bridgett, & Low, 2012; Goldsmith & Gagne, 2012), which draws upon the knowledge and experience of those presumed to be 'expert' observers of child characteristics. Parents—the most common informant—spend and have spent considerable time with their children, and observe their behavior across a wide variety of situations (Rothbart & Goldsmith, 1985). Teachers are less commonly employed as informants than parents, but have extensive experience interacting with many different children, resulting in better norms for rating individual differences in personality (Teglasi, 1998). Also, teachers have unique access to contexts that are strong elicitors of individual differences in various personality traits (e.g., highly structured classroom activities, performance evaluations, peer interaction).

The developmental achievements of middle childhood suggest that compared to younger children, those in this age range may be more able to serve as reliable reporters of their own personality. By middle childhood children think more in trait terms (Alvarez, Ruble, & Bolger, 2001), and have developed other linguistic and meta-cognitive abilities that support the ability to provide self-reports (Shiner & DeYoung, 2013; Soto et al., 2008). Children are knowledgeable of their behavior across all situations, and are privy to a private inner world that may be obscure to parents and teachers. Indeed, one advantage of self-reports is they provide better information on "internalized" traits (e.g., neuroticism) not easily observed by others (Funder, 1995).

Despite widespread use and utility, informant and self-report approaches have faced criticism (Gartstein et al., 2012). One reason is that agreement across informants tends to be modest (Achenbach, McConaughy, & Howell, 1987; Laidra, Allik, Harro, Merenakk, & Harro, 2006; Verhulst & Akkerhuis, 1989; Worobey, 1987). Disagreement can arise because each informant is subject to different influences (De Los Reyes & Kazdin, 2005). For example, mood and anxiety symptoms in parents are associated with over-reporting maladaptive behavior in children (Durbin & Wilson, 2012; Fergusson, Lynskey, & Horwood, 1993; Muller, Achtergarde, & Furniss, 2011). Furthermore, teachers sometimes exhibit a generalized evaluative rating style for children who have more behavioral problems (i.e., a "negative halo effect"; Abikoff, Courtney, Pelham, & Koplewicz, 1993; Stevens, Quittner, & Abikoff, 1998). Self-reports of children on the other hand show more acquiescence bias than adults, and are less reliable (Soto et al., 2008).

Although rater disagreement has spurred several methodological critiques, it may not be completely disadvantageous. Disagreement can be informative in that it provides an opportunity to learn about the ways in which different informants conceptualize a child's personality. For instance, in their relationships with children, parents and teachers differ in their goals, means of interaction, and degree of intimacy. Thus, the behaviors they are likely to observe and the situations in which they are elicited are different. Therefore, examining the reports of multiple informants provides a more complete representation of personality in middle childhood than would be obtained from any single informant.

1.2. Personality structure

Understanding personality in middle childhood requires that many key issues be considered that have historically been integral for understanding personality in other developmental periods. One of the most basic and important of these issues concerns the structure of individual differences. That is, how is personality typically organized and manifested; how many trait dimensions are needed to provide an adequate summary of the myriad individual differences that are demonstrated in middle childhood? There are several competing theories regarding the structure of temperament in earlier childhood (Goldsmith et al., 1987; Mervielde & De Pauw, 2012). Despite ostensible differences, however, there is considerable overlap across conceptualizations, and structural examinations often reveal that three major factors provide a useful framework to organize the narrower temperamental differences that are investigated (Mervielde & De Pauw, 2012; Rothbart, Ahadi, Hershey, & Fisher, 2001; Shiner, 2006). One of the most prominent models of child temperament is Rothbart's psychobiological model, which posits 3 major factors: Surgency, Negative Affectivity, and Effortful Control (Rothbart, 2011). The first two dimensions capture individual differences in affective experience (positive and negative, respectively), and Effortful Control captures individual differences in self-regulatory ability.

There has been similar debate and semi-consensus in the adult literature. Three and 5 factor models have generally received the most support and attention (Clark & Watson, 2008; Saucier & Simonds, 2006). The Big 3 model includes the theoretically independent traits of Positive Emotionality, Negative Emotionality, and Constraint (Clark & Watson, 2008). Roughly analogous to the temperament traits described above, these dimensions capture individual differences in sociability and positive affect, aggression and distress, and self-control and traditionalism (Clark & Watson, 2008). The Big 5 model includes the traits of Extraversion, Neuroticism, Conscientiousness, Agreeableness, and Openness (Saucier & Simonds, 2006). The first three traits are similar to the Big 3, and the last two capture individual differences in trust and selflessness, and intellect and aesthetics (Saucier & Simonds, 2006). Importantly, although the Big 3 and 5 appear to be competing paradigms, this is not necessarily the case, as the Big 5 factors are largely

Download English Version:

https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5046212

Download Persian Version:

https://daneshyari.com/article/5046212

Daneshyari.com