An examination of the cross-cultural validity of the Identity Capital Model: American and Japanese students compared

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

A B S T R A C T

The Identity Capital Model proposes that forms of personal agency are associated with identity development as part of the transition to adulthood. This model was examined in two cultural contexts, taking into account age and gender, among college and university students aged 18 to 24 ($N = 995$). Confirmatory Factor Analyses verified cultural, age, and gender invariance of the two key operationalizations of the model. A Structural Equation Model path analysis confirmed that the model applies in both cultures with minor variations—types of personal agency are associated with the formation of adult- and societal-identities as part of the resolution of the identity stage. It was concluded that forms of personal agency providing the most effective ways of dealing with "individualization" (e.g., internal locus of control) are more important in the transition to adulthood among American students, whereas types of personal agency most effective in dealing with "individualistic collectivism" (e.g., ego strength) are more important among Japanese students.

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Introduction

The Identity Capital Model was introduced to the literature two decades ago in this journal (Côté, 1996, 1997). The fundamental assumption of this model is that, especially in late-modern societal contexts, which are characterized by relatively individualized and culturally anomic transitions to adulthood, forms of identity-based agency are useful for young people to employ in gaining access and membership to various groups and social statuses, especially in the education-to-work transition (e.g., Bynner & Parsons, 2002). These forms of agency are also hypothesized to be key components of certain types of psychosocial development associated with the transition to adulthood (Côté, 1996, 2000, 2002). Since its introduction, the Identity Capital Model has been applied empirically to developmental processes (e.g., Côté, 2002, 2006; Côté & Schwartz, 2002; Schwartz, Côté, & Arnett, 2005) and clinical problems (e.g., Jay, 2012) in Western contexts. A task that remains is to assess the Identity Capital Model in other cultural contexts, both in terms of the measures developed to

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operationalize the model and the relationships among the model's key concepts and developmental outcomes (e.g., Sugimura & Mizokami, 2012).

The core operationalizations of the Identity Capital Model are the Multi-Measure Agentic Personality Scale (MAPS) and the Identity Stage Resolution Index (ISRI) (Côté, 1997). The MAPS is a summative measure of several interrelated *agentic traits* that are well researched in the developmental literature, such as self-esteem, purpose in life, internal locus of control, and ego strength. The ISRI was developed based on Erikson's (1968) postulates concerning what is involved in resolving the identity stage as part of the transition to adulthood (developing a sense of feeling like an adult and being recognized as one—adult identity) and integration into an adult community (developing viable and long-term socially validated roles—societal identity). The items in the ISRI were carefully designed to measure forms of identity capital *accumulation* during the transition to adulthood, based on the Eriksonian assumption that completion of this life-cycle transition coincides with the resolution of the identity stage. The ISRI thus emphasizes the *integration* and *continuity* aspects of identity, whereas the MAPS emphasizes the *differentiation* aspects (cf. Côté & Levine, 2016).

Empirical assessments of the ISRI suggest that it has two correlated subscales tapping the interrelated senses of adult identity and societal identity. This research also suggests that, on average, the sense of adult identity gains developmental momentum in the late teens, while the sense of societal identity lags developmentally, at least in the Western samples studied, showing gradual gains with a surge in the late 20s (Côté, 2002). Developmentally, the ISRI has proven to be particularly useful in charting progress in the resolution of the identity stage in terms of entering adulthood and adopting stable social roles (Côté, 2006).

Studies consistently find that the MAPS reliably predicts scores on the ISRI, cross-sectionally (e.g., Schwartz, 2006, 2007), and longitudinally (Côté, 2002, 2006). For example, a ten-year longitudinal study found that the MAPS, as measured in the late teens and net of structural obstacles such as parental income, predicted ISRI scores in respondents' late 20s, along with other indicators of progress in the transition to adulthood and into the labor force. Thus, those with lower levels of agency in their adolescence take longer and have more difficulty in developing forms of adult/societal identity in their early adulthood.

Various developmental advantages of identity-based agency and identity capital accumulation have been corroborated in the literature. Furthermore, several studies have confirmed that both the MAPS and ISRI are positively related to several forms of mental health. For example, Schwartz, Zamboanga, Weisskirch and Rodriguez (2009) found that the MAPS was associated with fewer internalizing tendencies, such as depression and anxiety, as well as fewer externalizing dispositions like impulsivity and tolerance for deviance. The MAPS is also related to broader identity horizons (a willingness to try new educational and occupational options), and lower levels of identity anxiety (a fear of moving out of the comfort zones of childhood and adolescence) (Acumen Research Group, 2008). Similarly, Schwartz et al. (2010) found that the ISRI was associated with better avoidance of health-compromising behaviors, such as drug misuse, risky sexual practices, and driving while intoxicated. And, Luyckx, Schwartz, Goossens, and Pollock (2008) reported that higher ISRI scores were associated with a greater sense of coherence and lower levels of compulsive ruminations.

No gender differences have been reported for the MAPS thus far. The MAPS also appears not to be age-sensitive as a main effect during late adolescence, or responsive to developmental events such as university attendance or intervention efforts (e.g., Côté, 1997, 2002; Ribbe, 2011). It seems that the traits constituting the MAPS develop prior to late adolescence, and remain stable thereafter, although further research is needed to better understand this issue. Furthermore, no significant gender differences have been reported for the ISRI, although Côté (2002) found interaction effects of gender with socio-economic background, with male university students of lower socio-economic status resolving the identity stage more quickly than higher socio-economic status females, as evidenced by higher ISRI scores. Higher socio-economic status male students appear to have the slowest adult-identity development. In contrast to the MAPS, the ISRI is age sensitive, as one would expect of a developmental measure (Côté, 2006).

Cross-cultural issues

Over the past several decades, Western researchers have turned their attention to the cross-cultural validity of their methods and theories, especially in terms of the relevance of individualism versus collectivism (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Takata, 2007). In addition to Canada and the US, the Identity Capital Model has been applied in several cultural contexts, including China (Yuan & Ngai, 2016), Italy (Sica, Aleni Sestito, & Ragozini, 2014), Portugal (Oliveira, Mendonça, Coimbra, & Fontaine, 2014), Taiwan (Chen & Chou, 2014), Turkey (Atak, Kapçi, & Çok, 2013; Morsünbül, 2014), and the UK (Bynner & Parsons, 2002; Schuller, Preston, Hammond, Brassett Grundy, & Bynner, 2004). Our concern in this study was with Japan, where interest in the Identity Capital Model has recently emerged (e.g., Sugimura & Mizokami, 2012).

Research in Japan suggests that in addition to traditional collectivist socialization processes, there may be an emerging form of *individualistic collectivism*, wherein many young people value aspects of both individualism and collectivism (Sugimura & Mizokami, 2012). These young people experiment with and exhibit new forms of individuality within extant collectivist contexts. Sugimura and Mizokami (2012) distinguish these young people from those who base their identity formation on collectivist norms and thus exhibit lower levels of individuality. Those who experiment with individualistic collectivism can experience more conflicts in the interpersonal realm than those who follow traditional collectivistic forms of identity formation. These conflicts can create a more intense identity crisis and accelerate identity formation related to self-reliance, whereas those who follow traditional practices of interpersonal merging have a higher sense of self-acceptance and explore a narrower range of identity options.