



Personality change in adolescence: Results from a Japanese sample



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ABSTRACT

We examined developmental trends in personality traits during adolescence by using data from the secondary school affiliated with the University of Tokyo ($N = 3656$; range 12–18; 1832 female), collected from 1981 to 2010. Hierarchical linear modeling analyses revealed cumulative mean-level changes in personality averaging approximately 1 SD across adolescence. Scales related to Neuroticism showed linear increases, and those related to Extraversion showed distinct developmental patterns: General Activity and Rhythmicity did not change, while Ascendance and Social Extraversion declined. Additionally, we found significant gender and birth cohort effects on personality. Although the intercepts differed according to both factors, the trajectories were different only for the birth cohort. These findings suggest that personality development trajectories differ according to the sociocultural context.

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1. Introduction

Much research about personality change and stability has been conducted over the past twenty years. Researchers have been interested in whether personality can change. Costa and McCrae (1994) suggested that personality traits set like plaster after the age of 30. However, considerable evidence for personality change has been presented (e.g., Bleidorn, 2012; De Fruyt et al., 2006; Josefsson et al., 2013; Klimstra, Bleidorn, Asendorpf, van Aken, & Denissen, 2013; Löckenhoff, Terracciano, Patriciu, Eaton, & Costa, 2009; Möttus, Johnson, & Deary, 2012; Neyer & Lehnart, 2007; Parker, Lüdtke, Trautwein, & Roberts, 2012; Pullmann, Raudsepp, & Allik, 2006; Roberts, Caspi, & Moffitt, 2001; Robins, Fraley, Roberts, & Trzesniewski, 2001; Sneed & Pimontel, 2012; Specht, Egloff, & Schmukle, 2011; Terracciano, McCrae, Brant, & Costa, 2005; Van Aken, Denissen, Branje, Dubas, & Goossens, 2006; Wortman, Lucas, & Donnellan, 2012). Today, personality traits are considered to be changeable and adaptable to new environments, although their method and the extent of change are still being discussed.

1.1. Overview of mean-level change in personality

Many studies have examined mean-level changes in personality and have discussed how much average personality scores change

over time (for meta-analytic reviews, see Roberts, Walton, & Viechtbauer, 2006). Both longitudinal and cross-sectional studies have reported mean-level personality changes in the Big Five, which measures human personality in five domains—Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness to experiences—and is widely used (John, Naumann, & Soto, 2008), across the life span (e.g., Donnellan & Lucas, 2008; Jackson et al., 2009; Lehmann, Denissen, Allemand, & Penke, 2013; Möttus et al., 2012; Soto, John, Gosling, & Potter, 2011; Srivastava, John, Gosling, & Potter, 2003; Terracciano et al., 2005; Wortman et al., 2012). Findings from both of these longitudinal and the cross-sectional studies are largely concordant with a meta-analytic summary of mean-level changes in longitudinal samples (Roberts et al., 2006). Generally, average levels of Agreeableness and Conscientiousness increase across the life span, but Conscientiousness may decline in later life. Neuroticism increases in adolescence and gradually declines, although some studies have failed to support this pattern (e.g., Donnellan & Lucas, 2008). Extraversion and Openness tend to decline across the life span, although Roberts et al. (2006) showed important differences between these two Extraversion facets: the mean levels of social dominance, one of the facets of Extraversion, increased from the college years, while the mean levels of sociability, the other facet of Extraversion, were constant.

1.2. Personality change in adolescence

Mean-level personality changes have been discussed principally in Western countries, and it has been shown that younger people,

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especially adolescents, are relatively prone to experience a large degree of personality change (Roberts & DelVecchio, 2000; Roberts et al., 2006). Therefore, it is better to investigate personality change in adolescence for the purpose of verifying the extent to which personality traits change and the factors related to personality change.

There are several previous studies focusing on personality change in adolescence. Most of them have examined adolescent personality change with a measure of the five major personality domains (Branje, Van Lieshout, & Gerris, 2007; De Fruyt et al., 2006; Klimstra, Hale, Raaijmakers, Branje, & Meeus, 2009; McCrae et al., 2002; Pullmann et al., 2006; Van den Akker, Deković, Asscher, & Prinzie, 2014), and some studies used other personality measures, such as the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (Canals, Vigil-Colet, Chico, & Martí-Henneberg, 2005) or the California Child Q-Set (Lamb, Chuang, Wessels, Broberg, & Hwang, 2002). All of them utilized Western adolescent samples, which is one of the problems with previous research on adolescent personality change. To discover more detailed developmental trajectories of adolescent personality change, we have to obtain additional findings from non-Western countries.

Moreover, one of the major problems in the previous studies is that the findings are contradictory and ambiguous. For example, McCrae et al. (2002) analyzed adolescent Big Five personality changes with the Revised NEO Personality Inventory (Costa & McCrae, 1992) and showed that only female adolescents increased in their level of Neuroticism. This interaction effect between age and gender on Neuroticism was observed in other longitudinal (Canals et al., 2005; Van den Akker et al., 2014) and cross-sectional research (Soto et al., 2011). However, some studies have failed to support this gender and age interaction pattern in Neuroticism. Some studies have shown a stable level of Neuroticism in adolescence (Branje et al., 2007; Lamb et al., 2002), and others have indicated a decrease in Neuroticism (De Fruyt et al., 2006; Klimstra et al., 2009; Pullmann et al., 2006). Much the same is true for Extraversion. Van den Akker et al. (2014), for example, investigated mean-level personality development in Flemish children from 6 to 20 years of age with the Hierarchical Personality Inventory for Children (HiPIC; Mervielde & De Fruyt, 1999) and found a decrease in Extraversion, which was supported by other studies (Branje et al., 2007; Lamb et al., 2002; Soto et al., 2011). However, Pullmann et al. (2006) and Canals et al. (2005) conversely found that Extraversion increased and other research has failed to observe a significant change (De Fruyt et al., 2006; Klimstra et al., 2009; McCrae et al., 2002).

As described, the findings of the preceding studies are inconsistent, and they were obtained from only Western samples. Thus, this study focused on a Japanese adolescent sample, which has not been previously examined up, and investigated mean-level personality changes, especially in Neuroticism and Extraversion.

1.3. Yatabe-Guilford Personality Inventory

The sample for this study was given the Yatabe-Guilford Personality Inventory (YGPI; Yatabe, 1975), which was developed in Japan based on three Guilford-Martin inventories (Guilford, 1940; Guilford & Martin, 1943a,b). The YGPI consists of 12 traits: *Depression*, *Cyclic Tendency*, *Inferiority Feelings*, *Nervousness*, *Lack of Objectivity*, *Lack of Cooperativeness*, *Lack of Agreeableness*, *General Activity*, *Rhathymia*, *Thinking Extroversion*, *Ascendance*, and *Social Extroversion*. *Depression* refers to the inclination to become gloomy and pessimistic and to have feelings of guilt. *Cyclic Tendency* describes the tendency to conspicuously change one's mood and to become emotionally unstable. *Inferiority Feelings* denotes a lack of confidence, uncomfortableness, and underestimation of oneself. *Nervousness* represents the tendency to become

surprised, impatient with trivial matters, and restless. *Lack of Objectivity* indicates the inclination to refer everything to oneself, to be sensitive to criticism, and to become easily confused. *Lack of Cooperativeness* describes the inclination to suspect others, to dislike successful people, and to have a belief that people are dishonest. *Lack of Agreeableness* represents the tendency to hate to lose, to be selfish, and to quarrel with others. *General Activity* denotes the tendency to be lively and eager. *Rhathymia* describes the tendency to be easygoing, lighthearted, and happy. *Thinking Extroversion* indicates the tendency to not pay attention to details and to take one's failures quite easily. *Ascendance* refers to social dominance and social leaderships. *Social Extroversion* describes a social vitality and tendency to seek social relationships. Item examples of each YGPI scale are shown in Appendix A.

The 12 YGPI scales cover the Neuroticism and Extraversion domains of the Big Five personality inventory (Shimonaka, 1996; Natsuno, 1998). In this regard, the YGPI is similar to the Guilford-Zimmerman Temperament Survey (GZTS; Guilford, Zimmerman, & Guilford, 1976). Shimonaka (1996) investigated correlations between the YGPI and the Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI-R), and the results are also shown in Appendix A. The NEO-PI-R domains, especially Neuroticism and Extraversion, are correlated with some of the YGPI subscales. Many studies in Japan have used the YGPI and have shown that the YGPI scales are associated with general self-efficacy (Sato, 2009), narcissism (Aizawa, 2002), vividness of mental imagery (Hasegawa, 1990), and parenting attitudes (Kotaka, 1994).

1.4. Cross-sectional and multilevel modeling studies of mean-level personality changes

Cross-sectional studies are an effective method for measuring personality development trajectories. Several studies have taken cross-sectional approaches to investigate lifelong personality development and have shown personality development trajectories at the population level. However, it is substantiated only if a birth cohort effect is eliminated. Compared with the limited approaches, such as cross-sectional studies, longitudinal studies are a more informative and effective approach to understand personality changes or development. When dealing with longitudinal data, multilevel modeling approaches including hierarchical linear modeling (HLM; Bryk & Raudenbush, 1987, 1992), represent one of the most efficacious strategies. Although the number of times of assessment and the ages at which participants were tested are different from person to person, HLM, a very flexible method, can accommodate these differences. For example, Terracciano, McCrae, and Costa (2006) adopted a HLM method for the GZTS data collected between 1958 and 2002 in the Baltimore Longitudinal Study of Aging (BLSA), which varied in retest interval and number of administrations per individual and showed cumulative mean-level changes in some subscales of the GZTS across adulthood. Other research similarly utilized HLM analyses to reveal normative personality developmental curves and individual differences (e.g., Helson, Jones, & Kwan, 2002; Jones, Livson, & Peskin, 2003; Steunenberg, Twisk, Beekman, Deeg, & Kerkhof, 2005; Terracciano et al., 2005).

To maximize the information from the data of this study, we employed both a cross-sectional approach and HLM on Japanese adolescent data to determine normative personality changes. Additionally, this study investigated two variables, gender and the birth cohort, which may moderate normative age changes. Personality changes in adolescence may differ for male and female adolescents. As mentioned above, cross-sectional (Soto et al., 2011) and longitudinal studies (Canals et al., 2005; McCrae et al., 2002; Van den Akker et al., 2014) have indicated different age trajectories among both genders.

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