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# Personality dynamics in adolescence

If this special issue would have appeared about ten years earlier, many psychologists would have read its title as a *contradictio in terminis*. Personality traits were supposed to be stable dispositions, with changes mainly reflecting measurement error. Individual differences in such traits were thought to be set in stone, at least after age 30 (e.g., Costa & McCrae, 1994). Well, no more! Two influential meta-analyses shook up the field of personality psychology, by showing that traits should only be regarded *relatively* stable, but by no means *perfectly* stable, entities that can change in all phases of the lifespan (Roberts & DelVecchio, 2000; Roberts, Walton, & Viechtbauer, 2006). Adolescence is among the phases in the lifespan in which the most substantial changes in personality take place. As a result, research on adolescent personality change has been on the rise in the last decade (Klimstra, 2013). Developmental trajectories of key personality traits, such as temperamental traits and the well-known Big Five traits (Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness), and individual differences in changes herein are extensively being examined. Perhaps even more importantly, researchers studying adolescent personality development increasingly often follow in the footsteps left by the pioneers of the study on (childhood) antecedents of Big Five traits (e.g., Kohnstamm, Mervielde, Besevegis, & Halverson, 1995). That is, antecedents, correlates, and effects of such changes in personality traits on key constructs of adolescent research (e.g., psychopathology symptoms, identity formation processes) are increasingly often being studied.

It is not just that views regarding the stability of personality have changed; the concept of personality is also broadening. Of key interest are still so-called core traits, such as the aforementioned Big Five, but there is also a growing interest in pathological traits, such as psychopathy. The increased interest in such traits is partly due the fact that there has been growing empirical evidence that there is no qualitative breach between healthy and pathological personality, as suggested in traditional categorical approaches. Although this is not a new trend in psychological research, what is new is that dimensional approaches now slowly seem to capture the attention of clinicians. As a result, the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5; American Psychiatric Association, 2013) now includes a dimensional model for the diagnosis of personality disorders in Section III for constructs in need of further study. Therefore, it is likely that dimensional approaches will be incorporated in future editions of the DSM.

Thus, dimensional approaches are still gaining ground. Such dimensional views stress that healthy individuals also possess pathological personality traits; they merely exhibit lower levels on such traits (e.g., Widiger & Costa, 2012). For instance, it is now thought that we are all more or less psychopathic, it is just that some of us are (a great lot) worse than others in this respect. The increasing awareness of dimensional views of the linkages between healthy and pathological personality has led to a rapidly increasing number of studies examining individual differences in pathological personality traits (e.g., psychopathy) in the general population. This trend is nicely reflected in the current special issue, as four papers focus, at least partly, on pathological personality traits.

In the first of these papers, Castellani and colleagues examined how Big Five traits predicted depressive problems and antisocial personality problems, and what the role of hostile interactions with the mother was in this respect. They found both direct effects of the Big Five and some indirect effects via hostile interactions with the mother, underscoring that personality traits may affect adolescent adjustment through their effect on the mother–child relationship. Second, Tackett and colleagues examined how externalizing symptoms were associated with personality pathology symptoms in a sample drawn from the general population. Their results suggest that externalizing symptoms seem to lay on the same continuum as specific aspects of personality pathology. From a developmental perspective, it was particularly interesting that linkages between personality pathology and externalizing behavior were age-specific, with stronger associations between externalizing behavior and personality pathology at ages at which specific externalizing behaviors were more prevalent. The third study in this special issue that examined the pathological side of personality was conducted by Suter and colleagues. They examined mental models regarding aggression and transgression and their associations with psychopathic traits in incarcerated youth and a community sample of adolescents. Implicit attitudes of incarcerated youth were no different from those displayed by community adolescents. Suter and colleagues also obtained a particularly thought-provoking finding, suggesting that implicit measures of aggression and transgression were negatively associated with psychopathic traits, whereas explicit measures

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were positively associated with these traits. Fourth, Salihovic and colleagues examined whether two theoretically proposed subgroups of psychopathic adolescents could be distinguished in an adolescent community sample. They found evidence for these hypothesized subgroups, by distinguishing between a highly anxious and a low-anxious subgroup of adolescent psychopaths. These subgroups exhibited different levels of aggression and ADHD-symptoms.

Besides the study of pathological traits, there is also a movement towards the inclusion of a greater number of other constructs under the broader personality construct. Specifically, contemporary models of personality no longer focus exclusively on broad characteristics such as the Big Five. Asendorpf and van Aken (2003), for example, distinguish core characteristics from surface characteristics in their model. A similar distinction is made in another model, with core characteristics being referred to as basic tendencies and surface characteristic referred to as characteristic adaptations (McCrae & Costa, 1999). Surface characteristics, or characteristic adaptations, include affective evaluations of one's life in general (e.g., self-esteem, life satisfaction) or of specific aspects of life (e.g., perceived peer-acceptance). Several of these surface characteristics have always been of great interest to researchers studying adolescent development, but can now be considered parts of one's broader personality. An example of a construct which is now considered a surface characteristic of personality is adolescent loneliness. From a developmental perspective, it is important to note that core characteristics are thought to be less malleable by environment factors and hence more stable across time than surface characteristics are. Furthermore, there is the interesting idea that surface characteristics can become more stable after a certain age, and move on to become core characteristics.

In the current special issue, Teppers and colleagues explicitly referred to this core and surface distinction. They examined longitudinal associations of the surface traits of peer- and parent-related loneliness with motives for Facebook use. Using Facebook for making new friends predicted decreases in peer-related loneliness, whereas using it for compensating for one's lacking social skills predicted increases in loneliness. Luengo Kanacri and colleagues examined associations of core traits (i.e., the Big Five) with longitudinal trajectories of prosocial behavior. They showed that core traits may be relatively stable dispositions, but are still malleable. Specifically, developmental trajectories of prosocial behavior differentially predicted changes in the Big Five traits Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness.

Core versus surface trait models already contain some developmental premises, but the three-layered model of personality proposed by McAdams (McAdams & Olsen, 2010) has an even more explicit developmental focus. In brief, this model proposes that an individual's behavior is predominantly guided by core traits (i.e., the basic layer of personality) in infancy and early childhood. In late childhood, behavior is thought to also become affected by a second layer constituted by goals and motives. From late adolescence onwards a third layer containing a narrative identity (i.e., individual's autobiographical accounts of what makes them the person they currently are) is thought to emerge and affect behavior. All three layers are thought to mutually affect one another. Thus, highly agreeable individuals could, for example, develop a stronger orientation towards interpersonal goals (e.g., trying to establish new friendships) when compared to less extraverted individuals, but being more oriented towards establishing friendships may also enlarge initial differences in extraversion. Overall, the model is particularly interesting for developmental psychologists, as it provides clear theoretical ideas on *what* should change regarding one's personality. In addition, the model can give rise to a great deal of new research on *how* personality changes and particularly on how the different hypothesized layers of personality affect one another.

Although not explicitly framed in terms of the three-layered model (McAdams & Olson, 2010), the study of Zupančič and colleagues in this special issue could be perceived as an example of how the core layer of personality, constituted by Big Five traits, may affect the layer of personality containing one's identity. That is, they examined how the individuation process, which is crucial in establishing an identity, is associated with Big Five traits. They showed that all Big Five traits were to some extent associated with individuation processes, but that all these traits played a somewhat different role. Reese and colleagues explicitly embraced the three-layered model of personality by studying Big Five traits, narrative identity, and the associations between these two layers of personality as a function of age and cultural group. Some of their key findings suggest that narrative identity and Big Five traits are more strongly associated with one another in older adolescents than in younger adolescents, and that there is more age-related change in narrative identity than in Big Five personality traits through adolescence.

One more important trend in research on personality development concerns the focus on changes in personality around major life transitions. This is likely due to the emphasis that has been placed on the importance of transitions in one of the key theoretical principles regarding personality change: The Social Investment Principle (Lodi-Smith & Roberts, 2007). According to this principle, the increases in Agreeableness and Conscientiousness, and decreases in Neuroticism that are typically found in late adolescence and young adulthood, are likely due to individuals taking up roles of adult social life (e.g., a first job, having children, taking up serious romantic relationships).

In the current special issue, there are three studies that deal with the role of personality around transitions. Baay and colleagues study the role of Big Five personality traits in the transition from school to work, and examine the possible role of social capital (i.e., resources acquired through social relationships) herein. They show that Big Five traits and social capital act mostly independently in predicting job-search outcomes (e.g., employment status, number of job offers). That is, there was little evidence for effects of Big Five traits being moderated or mediated by effects of social capital, or effects of social capital being moderated or mediated by effects of Big Five traits. Yu and colleagues examined whether previous romantic relationship experiences affected how young adults perceived the quality of their current romantic relationship, and whether these effects were moderated by personality types (i.e., profiles based on the Big Five traits). They showed that in general, relationship history had no significant effect on current perceived relationship quality. However, for undercontrollers (i.e., individuals especially characterized by relatively low levels of Agreeableness and Conscientiousness) relationship history did

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