Identity formation processes and developmental regulation

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Introduction

• According to Erikson, identity formation requires sorting through a range of choices before making commitments in various life areas

• In order to achieve one's life goals, an individual uses control strategies defined as developmental regulation

• how identity processes i.e. the way young people define life goals, are associated with the strategies they use for their attainment
The dual-cycle model of identity formation

Luyckx et al., 2006, 2008; Zimmermann et al., 2013
Developmental regulation

• **Goal engagement**
  - investing behavior, effort, time, skills and persistence in goal attainment,
  - volitional self-regulation to enhance motivational commitment to a chosen goal,
  - avoidance of distractions,
  - finding out unusual strategies to overcome shortfall of initial resources

• **Goal disengagement**
  - devaluation of goal importance,
  - enhancement value of conflicting goal,
  - protection of motivational resources from negative implications of failure experience.

Heckhausen, Wrosch, Schultz, 2010
Regulation and adaptation

• Both goal engagement and goal disengagement may be adaptive processes considering goal-environment match

• At the same time, research findings point that

• Goal engagement is particularly beneficial in young age

• Goal disengagement is especially adaptive in old age

Haase, Heckhousen, Wrosch, 2013
Developmental regulation and coping strategies

• There is some conceptual overlap between coping strategies and developmental regulation, specifically
  • active coping (emotion-focused, problem-solving) overlap with goal engagement
  • passive coping (devaluation, positive reframing) overlap with goal disengagement

but

• developmental regulation strategies contribute to long-term planning, monitoring and achievement of goals and not specifically to stress management

Heckhausen et al., 2010
Identity processes and coping strategies

• Previous research points that processes of identity formation are associated with both engagement and disengagement coping strategies over time.

• Commitment making and identification with commitment are predicted by engagement coping strategies such as social support seeking and problem solving.

• Exploration processes were intertwined with both engagement and disengagement strategies.

Luyckx, Klimstra, Duriez, Schwartz, Vanhalst, 2012
Hypotheses

• Goal engagement will be positively, whereas goal disengagement negatively associated with commitment-making, identification with commitment, exploration in breadth and exploration in depth.

• Goal disengagement will be positively associated, whereas goal engagement negatively associated with ruminative exploration and reconsideration of commitment.

• Pro-active Identity formation processes will influence goal engagement and disengagement processes; we also expected some, but less pronounced influences from goal engagement and disengagement on identity processes.

• Achievement profile will be the highest on goal engagement followed by foreclosure and searching moratorium, whereas carefree and troubled diffusions will be the lowest.
# Method: participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample 1</th>
<th>Sample 2 (T1, T2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n=320</td>
<td>n=300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mean age = 23.40 (SD=3.12)</td>
<td>mean age = 22. (SD=1.35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41% male</td>
<td>18.7% male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56% student</td>
<td>T1 final year students,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T2 newly graduated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67% working</td>
<td>56% working</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

EARA, 2018, Ghent (Belgium), 12-16 September
Method: measures

Dimensions of Identity Development Scale (DIDS)

- **Commitment making**
  “I know which direction I am going to follow in my life”

- **Exploration in breadth**
  “I think about different things I might do in the future”

- **Identification with commitment**
  “I sense that the direction I want to take in my life will really suit me”

- **Ruminative exploration**
  “I am doubtful about what I really want to achieve in life”

- **Exploration in depth**
  “I think about the future plans I already made”

- **Reconsideration of commitment**
  “I think about whether the aims I already have for life really suit me”
Method: measures

Optimization in Primary and Secondary Control Multi-scale Questionnaire (OPS-Scales)

• **Goal engagement**
  
  “Once I have decided for a goal I do whatever I can to achieve it”
  
  “When I can no longer make progress on something, I look for new ways to reach my goal”

• **Goal disengagement**

  “When I get into a difficult situation, I remind myself that in many ways I am better off than other people”
  
  “When I have not accomplished something important, I console myself by thinking about other areas where I had more success”
### Results: Correlations (sample 1, sample 2)

Within time Correlations among Identity Dimensions and Goal Engagement and Goal Disengagement, Sample 1, Sample 2 – Time 1 and Time 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Goal Engagement sample1/sample 2-T1-T2</th>
<th>Goal Disengagement sample1/sample 2-T1-T2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commitment making</td>
<td>.43***/.49***/.57***</td>
<td>-.15**/-15**/.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification with commitment</td>
<td>.57***/.67***/.65***</td>
<td>.05/-15**/.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploration in breadth</td>
<td>.25**/15**/.14**</td>
<td>.11*/12*/.23***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploration in depth</td>
<td>.28***/.43***/.38***</td>
<td>.07/.04/.13**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconsideration of commitment</td>
<td>.02/.04/.005</td>
<td>.23***/.38***/.44***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruminative exploration</td>
<td>-.02/-22***/-.17**</td>
<td>.27***/.34***/.32***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.
Results: Identity profiles and developmental regulation (sample 1)
### Results: Cross-lagged analysis (sample 2)

Standardized cross-lagged path coefficients linking identity and goal engagement/disengagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Goal Engagement</th>
<th>Goal Disengagement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>identity &gt; engagement</td>
<td>identity &gt; disengagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>engagement &gt; identity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment making</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.16*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.16**</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification with commitment</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.28***</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploration in breadth</td>
<td>.08*</td>
<td>.005</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.14**</td>
<td>.09*</td>
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<td>.08</td>
<td>.04</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.10</td>
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<td>Ruminative exploration</td>
<td>.03</td>
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Model fit Indices: $\chi^2(32) = 81.42$; CFI = .96; RMSEA = .07

EARA, 2018, Ghent (Belgium), 12-16 September
Discussion

• The correlations among identity processes and goal engagement and disengagement were mostly in line with our hypotheses across two samples.

• Commitment making, identification with commitment, exploration in breadth were positively associated with goal engagement.

• Ruminative exploration and reconsideration of commitment were positively associated with goal disengagement.
Discussion

- Achieved and foreclosed young adults are most persistent on following their aims and least inclined to abandon them.

- Searching moratorium young adults experiencing intense identity formation phase at present (high commitment as well as reconsideration and exploration processes), also show signs of instability in developmental regulation.

- Carefree diffusion young adults are the least involved in identity work and also least persistent in goal realization.
Discussion

• Analysis of cross-lagged associations, in contrast to the initial hypothesis, point that developmental regulation strategies predict identity processes more than identity processes predict developmental regulation

• Possibly our time distance between data collection points was too short and identity > regulation prediction will be more pronounced later

• Identity work is possibly very intense at this stage and will stabilize later
Discussion

- According to the findings, the more young people put effort and time in pursuing their goals, and are ready to overcome difficulties to achieve, the more they are certain and confident in them.

- On the other hand, opposite association with disengagement is not so clear.

- According to the theory, disengagement from some goals, especially in case when they are not reality relevant is an adaptive process.

- In conditions of restricted opportunities disengagement from some goals might preserve energy for following other more reality concordant ones.
Discussion

• Exploration of different goal alternatives appeared to be positively predicted by both goal engagement and goal disengagement.

• This might point to dual nature of exploration in breadth process (especially in Georgian context, where it is positively correlated with ruminative exploration).

• Exploration in breadth may be a pro-active approach to possible goal alternatives, at the same time in some cases lack of opportunities will restrict this process and disengagement will be a new start for the next goal engagement.
Discussion

• but goal disengagement strategy is not always adaptive for identity work

• based on the findings it predicts more indecisiveness and worry about future life goals

• reconsideration of commitment is also positively predicted by goal disengagement which is quite expected considering that reconsideration as well as goal disengagement is about giving up one’s prior commitment
Discussion

• Quite unexpectedly, commitment making at first time point positively predicted goal disengagement at second time point.

• As our sample 2 was composed from final year bachelor students, it is possible that involvement in final exams and purpose of graduation were the primary commitments for some of them which was achieved by second time data collection and new goals were not formed yet.
Future directions

• The present research created initial knowledge about how identity processes and profiles are associated with developmental regulation

• Further analysis of T3 data will shed light on the further development of identity processes and developmental regulation

• Qualitative data collected from the longitudinal study participants will create insights about content of identity and regulation processes
Thank You!
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