A Longitudinal Study of Identity and Individuation in Emerging Adulthood

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Identity development and individuation are two processes that are considered important developmental challenges for adolescents (Erikson, 1956; Levine, Green, & Millon, 1986). Identity development involves aligning one's capabilities and aspirations with the adult role structure of society, while keeping faith with identity-defining commitments from childhood (Erikson, 1956). Individuation is the process of developing an autonomous self in the midst of forming and maintaining healthy relationships with others. Although both identity and individuation have been linked with adjustment (Block, 1961; Holmbeck & Wandrei, 1993) and parenting (Meeus, Oosterwegel, & Vollebergh, 2002; Aquilino & Supple, 2001), most of the extant research has favored identity with comparatively little attention afforded to individuation. In addition, very little is known about the interplay of identity and individuation, although there are theoretical reasons to suppose that successful identity exploration requires progress in individuation. The purpose of this study is to examine the coevolution of these important developmental constructs using a longitudinal design.

Background Research

Identity Development

Identity statuses. According to Erikson (1956), identity is the psychosocial crisis that confronts adolescents. It requires adolescents to face the question "Who am I?" in a way that forges a unity between one's developmental past and expectations for the future, and which leads to flexible but durable commitments and productive integration into society (Blasi, 1988). Most of the previous research on identity has attempted to identify *statuses* using the two-fold criteria of *exploration* and *commitment.* One is in the "identity achieved" status, for example, when one has actively explored identity options and has made a commitment to

one or more of them. Other statuses include *moratorium* (current exploration, no commitment), *foreclosure* (commitment without exploration) and *diffusion* (no exploration and no commitment).

Dimensions of commitment and exploration. Recently, Luyckx et al. (2008) have claimed that exploration and commitment are multidimensional constructs. For example, they distinguish two kinds of commitment and two kinds of exploration. Exploration-in-breadth refers to the active consideration of identity options prior to commitment, while exploration-in-depth refers to the continued reflection once a commitment is made. In turn, commitment-making refers to choices one has made, while identification with commitments refers to the degree to which one aligns the self with them (and is closer to Erikson's understanding of identity). The authors also identify a third aspect of exploration, called "ruminative exploration", that describes the agonizing deliberations of a young adult "stuck" in his or her identity work.

Previous research on identity development. Current research has explored the relationship of identity development status with multiple other variables (Marcia, 1966; Marcia, 1980; Schmitt-Rodermund & Vondracek, 1999). A study of particular interest to the research proposed in this paper is that of Luyckx, Klimstra, Duriez, Schwartz, and Vanhalst (2012). These researchers found that identity development and coping strategies predict each other reciprocally over time. They also studied the personality traits as a moderator of this relationship, finding that personality traits do not significantly moderate the relationship between identity and coping strategies. This study was the first to examine possible moderators of the four-fold model of identity using a short-term longitudinal design.

Individuation

Much like identity development, individuation is another important developmental task of adolescence (Levine, Green, & Millon, 1986). Individuation and identity are similar but distinct developmental processes. Individuation refers to the differentiation of the ego-in-relationship (Lapsley & Edgerton, 2002), while identity refers to the identification of the ego to a way of being in the world. Both are crucial to successful adaptation and adjustment (Holmbeck & Wandrei, 1993). Furthermore, parenting variables seem to have a similar effect on both individuation and identity development (Aquilino & Supple, 2001; Schmitt-Rodermund & Vondracek, 1999). Although these constructs do seems conceptually related, little is known of the coevolution of identity development and individuation.

The Current Study

The purpose of this study is threefold. First, this study initiates the first longitudinal study that examines individuation over the course of emerging adulthood, and its coevolution with the four-fold model of identity. Second, we examine the influence of perceived parenting on the trajectory of individuation and identity. Third, we will examine whether dysfunctional individuation moderates the relationship between parenting and identity development.

Method

Instruments

This study will include measures of dysfunctional individuation, identity development, parenting style, and college adjustment. The measure of dysfunctional individuation will be a 10-item version of the Dysfunctional Separation-Individuation Scale detailed in Lapsley, Aalsma, and Varshney (2001). This scale itself is a shortened version of a measure of pathology of separation-individuation (PATHSEP), designed by Christenson and Wilson (1985). Identity development will be measured using the Dimensions of Identity Developemnt Scale (DIDS),

developed by Luyckx et al. (2008), which evaluates identity in terms of a four-fold model of identity (commitment-making, identification with commitment, exploration in breadth, exploration in depth). The DIDS also measures ruminative exploration. Three scales developed by Barber, Maughan, and Olsen (2005) will be used to measure parenting variables. The first scale measures parental support, the second measures parental behavioral control, and the third measures parental psychological control. Finally, Anton and Reed's (1991) College Adjustment Scale will be used to measure Family Problems, Interpersonal Problems and Self-Esteem Problems.

Procedure

This study will be a longitudinal study, with data collected in Spring 2013, Fall 2013, and Spring 2014. The instruments will be distributed to a random sample of students from the University of Notre Dame starting in the Spring 2013 semester via a web-based administration.

Schedule

We are currently in the process of receiving IRB approval for this study. Data collection will begin immediately after IRB approval has been granted, sometime around the beginning of April. Data collection will be complete by June 1st. By June 15th the data will be prepped for analysis, and analysis of the data will be completed by July 1st. By July 15th an initial report of the data will be compiled and ready for presentation. This will be the extent of the work done on this study during the summer. Our lab also plans to continue research into the school year with two additional waves of surveys. Overall there will be three sets of data collected to provide the longitudinal data detailed earlier in this paper. Furthermore, I plan to take the honors senior thesis course in the 2013-14 academic year, and to use this data as my senior thesis. I also hope

to present the findings from this study at the Society for Research on Adolescents conference in Spring 2014, which will be held in Austin, Texas.

I plan to meet daily with the Adolescent and Moral Psychology lab director, Dan Lapsley, beginning the last week of May through the first week of August. This time will be used to collect, clean, and analyze the data, as well as to make preparations to implement the next wave of data to be collected at the beginning of the Fall 2013 semester.

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