

The Development of Self-Identity During Emerging Adulthood and Relevant Factors

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Abstract. This review paper examined the relationship between self-cognition development and related factors during the emerging adulthood phase. Extensive literature, including studies, surveys, and experiments, was analyzed to understand the influence of various factors on self-cognition development. In the research, it was found that self-cognition development has significant connections with daily identity dynamics, family and peer attachment, stress, and psychopathological distress. Two main factors, namely identity confusion and mental health issues, show a positive correlation with the development of self-cognition. As self-identity confusion deepens, individuals may increasingly avoid emotional challenges, potentially increasing the risk of internet addiction and negatively impacting their self-identity development. While emerging adult college students shape their online identities, their choices are not solely influenced by their self-perception but also by their emotional well-being and the social environment in which they exist. Furthermore, unique cultural backgrounds also play a crucial role in the development of self-identity during emerging adulthood. These research findings hold critical implications for the development of adolescent self-cognition and mental health interventions. Future research should delve deeper into the self-cognition development of individuals in emerging adulthood in different regions and the associated factors, as well as the effectiveness of various intervention strategies in diverse contexts.

Keywords: Self-identity, emerging adulthood, adolescence.

1. Introduction

Self-identity refers to an individual's understanding and knowledge of himself or herself, a unique perception constructed on cultural backgrounds, emotions, experiences, and ideas. It includes perceptions of one's own characteristics, interests, values, and roles. Self-identity is a dynamic psychological process that involves thinking about and exploring one's own identity at different stages. Through self-identity, individuals can recognize their place in society, their relationships with others, and their expectations for the future. Individual self-identity is critical to mental health and social interaction. It is a unique cognition constructed based on personal experiences and emotions, which helps individuals find their place in contemporary complex society. At the same time, self-identity fosters self-esteem and self-confidence and helps individuals understand their values and goals. On the contrary, the lack of self-identity can bring confusion as well as a lack of self-confidence. It also affects interpersonal relationships because understanding one's own identity helps to better understand others. A healthy self-identity can help individuals plan for their future, develop self-esteem and self-confidence, and promote personal growth and social interaction.

Emerging adulthood is a transitional stage located between adolescence and adulthood. This stage may occur between the ages of 18 and 25 but is not limited to age. During this time, individuals typically begin to independently face increased responsibilities and decisions, such as career choices, educational paths, relationships, and values. Especially in the 21st century, adolescents are being educated for far longer than ever before. This makes emerging adulthood even more important. It emphasizes individual exploration, self-discovery, and self-growth. It is also a period of developing adaptability and autonomy in preparation for entering formal adulthood. This period allows individuals to experiment with different identities, occupations, relationships, and values in a relatively more relaxed environment. By exploring their interests and abilities, individuals can become more aware of their strengths and passions. This helps to make more informed decisions for future adult life. Emerging adulthood is also an important time to develop resilience, autonomy, and

problem-solving skills. By facing uncertainty and challenges, individuals can develop the ability to cope with stress and adversity, preparing them for the responsibilities and challenges of adulthood.

McLean's article explores Erikson's important work on identity development, focusing on the "Who am I?" This question [1]. Although identity theorists share theoretical similarities, contemporary research has predominantly employed distinct methodologies. While some studies concentrate on identity states, primarily evaluating existing ideas of exploration that could result in future commitments, narrative identity theorists primarily emphasize the reconstruction of past events. Nevertheless, contemporary researchers have not effectively leveraged the advantages of both approaches. This article reviews the research and explores how these approaches can be integrated, making two claims: first, that narrative is a means of conducting identity exploration; and second, that narrative reflects commitment and can facilitate congruence between commitment and behavior. The integration of these approaches allows for a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of identity development. The article points out that Erikson argues that during stages of increased cognitive ability, people develop new perceptions of their environment and relationships, which can lead to shifts in perspectives and beliefs. This shift challenges identity because it means that people's beliefs change and they become completely different people. This shift creates the stage for identity exploration, where people can find their place in society through role experimentation. Erikson argues that this exploration can lead to internal continuity and social coherence, a psychosocial respite [1]. Ultimately, the goal of this stage is identity synthesis, which is the creation of internal coherence through congruence with commitments. However, current research is divided into two main approaches, one focusing on identity states and the other on narratives [1]. Both approaches have their own strengths but also limitations. Integrating these two approaches could lead to a more comprehensive understanding of identity development. An option for integration involves utilizing narratives to scrutinize the progression of exploration and commitment, ultimately contributing to the stabilization and growth of identity states. This integration could remedy the shortcomings of existing approaches to the process of exploration and commitment. In conclusion, an in-depth study of the integration of narrative and state approaches could contribute to a better understanding of identity development.

Arnett's article explores the concept of emerging adulthood, emphasizing the importance of this life stage in industrialized societies. Although emerging adulthood is interpreted negatively in popular American media, most evidence suggests that this period is positive for most people [2]. Self-esteem grows with age (between the ages of 18-25) and Depressive symptoms decrease during this period. While some emerging adults may feel conflicted about exploring identity and responsibility taking, most will adapt to these developmental challenges. Although some claim that emerging adulthood is harmful to society, it actually provides more time for young people to become educated and trained to prepare for the social and economic challenges ahead [2]. The existence of this new stage is still evolving and will continue to influence people's understanding of the human life cycle.

One aspect of this field that has been overlooked or has not been extensively researched is the connection between self-awareness and emerging adulthood. Current research has focused primarily on their respective impacts on people's lives, rather than the connection between the two areas. In order to fill this gap, this review paper will present research related to the relationship between self-perception and emerging adulthood and discuss them in the article. This review will begin by exploring whether there is a link between the two of them in the existing literature. Then, this paper will propose some possible mechanisms or explanations for the association so as to understand why current research has not yet clearly illustrated the relationship between them and fill the current research gap. By doing so, this review will attempt to provide a clearer picture of the relationship between self-perception and emerging adulthood and provide useful guidance for future research.

2. Identity Development and Psychological Well-Being

2.1. Patterns and Factors Relevant to Identity Development

Adolescence is a pivotal period for identity exploration and formation. Identity construction unfolds in adolescence, driven by a desire for exploration into the unknown and deep introspection of self-awareness. During this period, individuals gradually clarify their areas of interest, leading them to take a suitable decision. Simultaneously, they also cultivate a series of values and beliefs that will guide their decision-making and actions in different environments. To what extent adolescence shapes future behaviors needs some empirical evidence. A study conducted by Becht, Andrik, et al. delved into the connection between daily identity fluctuations in adolescence and the enduring evolution of identity throughout emerging adulthood. The study particularly emphasized the interpersonal and educational aspects. It involved 494 Dutch adolescents and covered the transition from early adolescence to emerging adulthood, employing a measurement burst design with 15 measurement weeks [3]. Throughout these measurement weeks, participants were required to complete daily online questionnaires regarding their interpersonal and educational identities for five consecutive days, from Monday through Friday. This process resulted in a total of 75 daily identity assessments over the initial five years. Additionally, participants were asked to fill out identity questionnaires at four bi-annual intervals during emerging adulthood (from T6 through T9). Any missing data were handled using Full Information Maximum Likelihood (FIML) to ensure the accuracy of the analysis [3].

The study revealed a dual-cycle process model for identity formation and maintenance during adolescence [3]. The daily commitments exerted an influence on the subsequent levels of identity reconsideration, and vice versa, highlighting the presence of an identity formation cycle. An increase in commitment predicted a deeper exploration on the following day, contributing to identity maintenance. Short-term identity processes observed during adolescence were found to be predictive of differences in identity during emerging adulthood. Specifically, adolescents with low daily commitment and high reconsideration tended to retain weak commitments and experience uncertainty during their transition to emerging adulthood [3]. The study effectively demonstrated a continuity in identity development, bridging the gap between short-term daily dynamics in adolescence and long-term development during emerging adulthood. This underscores the significant role played by daily identity dynamics during adolescence in shaping the outcomes of identity during the transition to emerging adulthood. Therefore, a profound understanding of identity exploration during adolescence is needed. This study not only aids in explaining why the daily identity dynamics of adolescence can have lasting impacts on the future, but also offers valuable insights for the fields of education, mental health, and development, enabling better support for the growth and development of young people during this critical period.

On the other hand, the identity development is multidimensional and must take different factors into account [4]. A study proceeded by Grotevant et al. pays specific attention on the domain of adoptive identity. This study focuses on examining the connection between adoptive identity formation during adolescence and adjustment difficulties in emerging adulthood among adopted individuals [4]. Cluster analysis is utilized to distinguish four subgroups within adoptive identity: unexamined, limited, unsettled, and integrated. Youth Self Report (YSR) in adolescence and the Adult Self Report (ASR) in emerging adulthood are used for measuring psychological outcomes. Adopted adolescents classified within the "unsettled identity" category exhibited elevated levels of internalizing issues in comparison to those categorized as having "unexamined" or "limited" identities [4]. This study highlights a significant connection between the development of adoptive identity and challenges in adjustment during emerging adulthood. This connection suggests that the complexities involved in constructing adoptive identity may contribute to psychological adjustment outcomes. Additionally, profiles of adoptive identity characterized by high negative affect appear to be at a heightened risk of experiencing increased internalizing problems. The study also contributes to

understanding the nuances of adoptive identity and its influence on psychological well-being, particularly during the transition to emerging adulthood.

Besides the factor of family, peers also are vital participants in adolescence period. The importance of peers is reflected in the fact that they may be the characters who accompany teenagers the longest during their adolescence. It is reasonable to question that the peer attachment is more obvious than family and parents' engagement. In 2018, a research project was undertaken to explore the correlation between parent and peer attachment and various characteristics associated with emerging adulthood. These characteristics include instability, a sense of being in transition, self-focus, exploration of identity, and the perception of possibilities.

The main finding of this study is that peer attachment was the only statistically significant predictor of emerging adulthood characteristics [5]. This result held true across both genders, although gender-specific differences were identified: peer attachment exhibited stronger correlations with EA for men compared to women [5]. Since the peer attachment uniquely predicted EA characteristics, suggesting a stronger influence than parent, therefore, the study concludes that peers play a significant role in shaping emerging adulthood characteristics such as self-focus, identity exploration, and possibilities. These findings have implications for emerging adult counselors and underscore the importance of peer relationships in this developmental stage.

In order to support and improve the mental health and well-being of young adults, it is necessary to investigate their internal aspects, i.e., their self-consciousness, during their transition to adults. There is a study that aims to investigate the relationships between self-concept, stress, and psychopathological distress in emerging adulthood, while examining the potential mediating role of change in ruminative brooding [6]. This research explores three theoretical models: the Vulnerability Model, the Scarring Model, and the Stress Generation Model. The study followed 170 Israeli freshmen (68% females) with an average age of 23.19 years over a year, conducting assessments at three time points [6].

The study supported the scarring model by revealing that change in ruminative brooding mediated scarring effects for self-criticism, a hated self, and self-concept clarity. The scarring model posits that distress and stress can lead to changes in self-concept and personality, similar to how a wound leaves a physical scar [6]. Therefore, the result of the study shows a relatively high possibility that psychological distress contributes to alterations in self-concept dimensions. This indicates that individuals experiencing distress may develop changes in their self-concept dimensions, particularly through increased ruminative brooding. This study sheds light on the complex interplay between self-concept, stress, and psychopathological distress during emerging adulthood. The result is valuable because it provides actionable insights into the complex dynamics of self-concept, stress, and mental health during the critical phase of emerging adulthood.

2.2. Identity Confusion and Mental Health Issues

Identity confusion refers to a state of uncertainty and bewilderment individuals experience when grappling with their own sense of self, roles, and purpose in the world. It involves a lack of clarity and coherence in understanding one's own identity, often leading to feelings of disorientation and difficulty in forming a stable and integrated self-concept. As technology continues to reshape people's lives, the prevalence of computers and the internet has drawn college students into spending more time online. This shift has implications for their psychological well-being, particularly during the crucial phase of emerging adulthood where identity development is paramount. However, this phase also exposes them to the risk of internet addiction. It is possible that there is a positive correlation between self-identity confusion and internet addiction. Research underscores this perspective by revealing a direct link between the severity of self-identity confusion and the prevalence of internet addiction [7]. Self-identity confusion signifies uncertainty about one's sense of self, while internet addiction denotes an excessive reliance on online activities [7]. This relationship suggests that heightened self-identity confusion could drive students to seek refuge in the digital realm, consequently raising the risk of internet addiction [7]. Furthermore, this correlation is influenced by

the role of psychological inflexibility and experiential avoidance as mediators. These psychological factors amplify the inclination of students to escape into the virtual world, especially when grappling with self-identity confusion, thereby intensifying the potential for internet addiction. Additionally, the study's findings highlight that the connection between self-identity confusion and internet addiction is also contingent on psychological inflexibility and experiential avoidance [7]. As self-identity confusion deepens, students might increasingly evade emotional challenges, further exacerbating the likelihood of succumbing to internet addiction. Therefore, the positive correlation between self-identity confusion and internet addiction underscores the need to prioritize students' well-being amidst the digital age [7]. Professionals should consider these dynamics while devising strategies that promote both healthy online habits and robust self-identity.

With the widespread integration of computers and the internet in the 21st century, the lives of emerging adult college students have become increasingly intertwined with the online world. This transformation has brought about profound changes in their social interactions, identity development, and psychological well-being. In light of this, it is possible that there is a complex interplay between online self-presentation, identity coherence, identity confusion, and social anxiety during the pivotal period of emerging adulthood. First, a compelling nexus emerges between identity coherence and online self-presentation, as illuminated by research findings. It is evident that emerging adults who possess a stronger sense of identity coherence are more inclined to present authentic and positively grounded portrayals of themselves on digital platforms [8]. This not only accentuates the impact of a clear and unified self-concept on online self-presentation but also underscores the intricate interplay between self-identity and the online persona. Moreover, the correlation between identity confusion and online self-presentation is noteworthy. Research has unveiled that individuals grappling with heightened identity confusion are more prone to projecting idealized and fabricated versions of themselves in online spaces [8]. This finding underscores the way in which an unclear self-concept influences the way individuals construct their online identities, further underscoring the connection between self-identity ambiguity and incongruous digital representation. Furthermore, the role of social anxiety in shaping online self-presentation strategies is salient. The research reveals that individuals burdened by elevated levels of social anxiety tend to present a contrived self in online environments [8]. This type of presentation often involves extensive self-exploration and a desire to meet societal expectations, underscoring the pivotal role that social anxiety plays in molding the tactics employed for online self-presentation. In summation, Michikya's study delves into the intricate tapestry that weaves together online self-presentation, identity coherence, identity confusion, and social anxiety [8]. These revelations emphasize that as emerging adult college students curate their online personas, they are influenced not solely by their sense of identity, but also by their emotional states and the social milieu they navigate. Hence, comprehending the nuances of online self-presentation's impact on psychological and social growth is paramount for fostering the healthy development of individuals during the transformative phase of emerging adulthood.

The narrative coherence, identity, and psychological well-being all play equally important roles in the psychological health of emerging adults. There seems a positive correlation among these three factors. It is worth noting that the study participants come from diverse ethnic backgrounds, and this ethnic diversity may have a significant impact when exploring the relationship between coherence, identity, and psychological well-being. Different cultures, social backgrounds, and values may shape an individual's storytelling style, feelings of identity, and experiences of psychological well-being [9]. The research findings indicate that individuals who self-report higher narrative coherence are often better at weaving their life events into an organic narrative structure, which may enhance their understanding and sense of control over their lives. This internal logic and chronological connection may reflect an individual's cognitive integration and emotional regulation abilities, thus positively correlating with their level of psychological well-being [9]. Additionally, the study suggests that identity recognition may play a key role in this coherence. Identity recognition is the individual's understanding and acceptance of their belonging to a social group in society and is also an important component of constructing an individual's self-concept. Through participants' self-reports, the

research indicates that individuals with a positive sense of identity recognition are more likely to experience higher psychological well-being. The stability and positivity of identity recognition may provide emotional support and a sense of social belonging, thus positively correlating with the level of psychological well-being [9].

3. The Role of Culture in Identity Development

In the process of self-development, culture also plays a crucial role. Take Japan, for example, where students under the cultural backdrop of 21st-century Japan may exhibit better performance in terms of independence and interpersonal relationships compared to students from other cultural backgrounds. In Japan, it is quite common for individuals to enter the workforce directly after graduating from high school. This societal background necessitates many students to commence career planning during their high school years and face the responsibilities of adulthood at an early stage. This early career planning demands a higher level of independence from students. Therefore, based on research findings, it is reasonable to infer that this societal background may encourage students to demonstrate higher levels of independence compared to students from other cultural backgrounds. Another factor influencing students' reconsideration of relationships is the long-standing social relationships within Japanese society. Many Japanese individuals establish solid social circles during their childhood because they may study with the same group of people at the same school for several years, even up to university. This long-term background of interpersonal relationships may lead students to be more cautious when reconsidering their relationship commitments, as they seek to maintain these significant social connections. By gathering self-reported data from participants, the study reveals that students outperformed workers in terms of independence, reevaluating their commitments within relationships, and self-esteem [10]. In contrast, workers exhibited higher scores in the exploration of societal aspects and their commitment within relationships [10]. Nevertheless, it's worth noting that the effect sizes of these differences between the two groups were relatively small, indicating moderate variations. This implies that students within the cultural context of 21st-century Japan indeed excel in independence and reevaluating their relationship commitments, underscoring the substantial impact of culture on the development of self-awareness.

4. Conclusion

To conclude, this paper reviewed the recent research related to identity development during the emerging adulthood. This research investigated different factors that may have impacts on identity by implementing various methodologies to provide empirical evidence. These papers reviewed are mainly about three aspects: patterns and factors relevant to identity development, identity confusion and mental health issues, and the role culture in identity development. Four research papers showed that daily identity dynamics, adoptive identity, peer attachment and psychopathological distress in self-consciousness are related to the development of identity. A positive correlation was found between self-identity confusion and mental health. As self-identity confusion deepens, individuals may increasingly avoid emotional challenges, potentially increasing the risk of internet addiction and negatively impacting their self-identity development. In the third part, this paper further illustrates that cultural backgrounds play a significant role in the development of self-identity during emerging adulthood. These research results have significant implications for the enhancement of adolescent self-awareness and mental health support.

Previous research still has some limitations. Most studies collected and analyzed data through self-reporting, which may result in lower reliability of experimental results compared to other research methods. Additionally, the variables of participants in each study are relatively large, which could potentially affect the experimental outcomes. Furthermore, each study is generally limited to individuals from a specific country or region, which reduces the external validity of the experiments.

In summary, the current limitations include a lack of diversity in experimental methods, a lack of diversity in participants, and data and experiments confined to specific regions. Future research directions should lean towards using experimental methods other than self-reporting, such as observation, to gather data. Additionally, the study subjects can be more diverse, and the scope should be broader, rather than focusing on a specific region or population.

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