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ABSTRACT
                This longitudinal study examined consistency and
change in human personality. Rather than studying the consistency of
individual differences over time, an approach which considers only
the stability of a variable at the group level and ignores
differences in stability at an individual level, this study used a
person-centered approach to study consistency over time of an
individual's personality profile. Subjects were 100 individuals who
participated in an experimental study in 1975, at 1 year of age.
Personality descriptions were obtained at age 7, 10, 12 and 20 years.
Measures included the California Child Q Set (California Q Set for
age 20), the Symptom Checklist, the National Youth Survey, and a peer
acceptance measure using sociometric procedures or a social network
interview (age 20). Findings indicated that consistency of
personality is related to ego resiliency and to supportive
relationships with peers. Resiliency and peer acceptance predicted
later consistency of personality, and personality consistency
predicted later resiliency and perceived peer support. Personality
consistency as perceived by peers predicts later externalizing
problems, especially violent behavior and excessive use of alcohol.
Self-reported personality consistency predicted later internalizing
problems, especially in the areas of sensitivity and distrust in
personal relations and in feelings of hostility towards others. From
a transactional perspective, results suggested that personality
consistency from childhood to young adulthood is accompanied by
social competence and by adequate social relationships. (Contains 19
references.) (KDFB)

THE TEMPORAL CONSISTENCY OF PERSONALITY PROFILES FROM CHILDHOOD THROUGH ADOLESCENCE INTO YOUNG ADULTHOOD[1]

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Abstract

Consistency and change in an individual's personality can be studied in various ways. The most common approach is studying the consistency of individual differences within a sample of individuals over time, typically with a correlation coefficient. This approach, however, refers to the stability of a variable at the group level, and ignores differences in stability at an individual level. A more person-centered approach may study the consistency over time of a personality profile within a person. That way, consistency and change are regarded as attributes of a person, not of a group. One of the methods widely suggested for a person-centered approach to the study of the consistency of personality is using so-called Q-correlations of personality profiles at different time points.

In a longitudinal study with children from age 1 to 20, personality descriptions were gathered at age 7, 10, 12, and 20. Q-correlations were used to indicate the consistency of the personality profile over time. The consistency of personality was found to be related to ego-resiliency and to supportive relationships with peers. Relations were found in both directions, i.e., resiliency and peer acceptance predicting later consistency of personality as well as consistency of personality predicting later resiliency and perceived peer support. In addition, the consistency of personality affects psychological functioning, both in terms of internalising issues. Regarded from a transactional perspective, these results suggest that consistency of personality from childhood through adolescence into young adulthood is accompanied by social competence and by adequate social relationships.

Introduction

Numerous studies have investigated the longitudinal stability of the rank-order of individuals in a particular personality trait (cf. reviews of Conley, 1984, and McCrae & Costa, 1990, for adulthood, and Moss & Susman, 1980, for childhood). Because these studies evaluate the temporal stability of the interindividual differtences in one variable, they have been called "variable-centered approaches to personality" (Block, 1971; Magnusson, 1988).

Another approach to the consistency of personality is to investigate the temporal consistency of the rank order of various traits in terms of their saliency for a particular person (cf. Block, 1971; Ozer & Gjerde, 1989, Asendorpf & van Aken, 1991). This "person-centered approach" evaluates the temporal consistency of intraindividual differences in one person. If we follow Allport's (1937) definition of personality as the "individual organisation of behavior", this type of consistency reflects the consistency of personality more directly than the variable-centered notion of trait stability. Note that in this case personality consistency does not imply personality 'sameness': there is developmental maturation.

One of the methods widely suggested for a person-centered approach to the study of personality is the Q-methodology. Originally described by Stephenson (1953), this methodology has gained attention in personality research through the work of Jack Block, who developed the California Q-set, a Q-sort method of personality description (Block, 1961), and who demonstrated the use of Q-methodology in a longitudinal study (Block, 1971). Recently, the advantages of the use of the Q-sort method in the study of personality have been summarized by Ozer (1994). In a Q-sort method, items have to be sorted into ordered categories, according to a specified criterion, for example how salient an item is for the description of a person. Items have to be sorted in a forced distribution, that is, a specified number of items must be placed in each category. This procedure yields a person-centered personality description, because the rater has to compare one attribute with others within the same individual: a high rating for an attribute indicates that this

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attribute is very salient for a person, compared to other attributes in the set of items.

The Q-sort method has been applied very successfully to assess the consistency of personality over time (also refered to as ipsative stability, Caspi & Bem, 1990). To compute the consistency of personality in this approach, Q-correlations between two Q-sort profiles of the same person on different measurement occasions are performed. In a Q-correlation, the set of attributes of a person at time 1 is correlated with the set of attributes of that person at time 2. The higher the correlation, the more the configuration of the attributes has remained stable over time.

Ozer and Gjerde (1989) and Asendorpf and van Aken (1991; van Aken & Asendorpf, in press) examined the consistency of personality between various ages on the basis of Q-sort descriptions on the California Child Q-set, a set of 100 items describing a wide range of social and personality attributes. They found that interindividual variation in the consistency of personality was related to the (social) competence of the subjects. These relations were found both predictive, i.e., competence predicting consistency of personality, as well as retrodictive, i.e., consistency of personality predicting competence.

The first part of these transactional findings (the competence -> consistency effects) can be explained from a traditional socialization perspective. Children and adolescents grow up in a world of continual societal pressure toward a socially desirable personality, with 'competence' as the most characteristic feature of this kind of personality. Through a process of social shaping, competent personality patterns will be stabilised, and incompetent patterns will be under pressure to change. This socialisation perspective, emphasising personality as a result of its environment, predicts that competent personality patterns will be more consistent than incompetent ones. If one has evolved a personality system that is already dynamically and resourcefully adaptive, one is not pushed or pulled towards fundamental personality change.

The other part of these transactional findings (the consistency -> competence effects) can be explained by the fact that consistency of personality as judged by persons in the environment of an adolescent is reflected in a consistent approach from that environment. These consistent approaches over time make it easier to deal with environmental demands, and, thus, promote competence. Similar 'competence-promoting' mechanisms were demonstrated for consistency between personality descriptions given by various others (van Aken & van Lieshout, 1991), and between descriptions provided by others and by adolescents themselves (van Aken, van Lieshout, & Haselager, in press).

Note that this does not mean that personality consistency is a characteristic of the environment: it should be seen as an aspect of personality, but one that is, at least to some extent, caused by environmental reactions.

In the present paper, again we assume transactional relations between competence and the consistency of personality. We will test these relations in an extension of one of the longitudinal data sets from our earlier studies, that now spans a period of age 7 to age 20. We will look at the items in a personality description that either predict or retrodict the consistency of personality over this age span. As a conceptualisation of competence, we will use the construct of 'ego-resiliency'. Ego-resiliency, defined as the "resourceful adaptation to changing circumstances and environmental contingencies, analysis of the 'goodness-of-fit' between situational demands and behavioral possibility, and flexible invocation of the available repertoire of problems-solving strategies" (Block & Block, 1980, p.48), can be regarded as a general disposition, largely similar to the notion of competence (Riksen-Walraven & van Aken, in press; van Aken, 1992).

In addition to this 'personality-based' index of competence, we will also use a more distal measure, namely the quality of relationships with peers. If our ideas are correct that the relation between a person's competence on the one hand and the consistency of his/her personality on the other has to do with the larger domain of the person-environment interaction, than the relations between consistency and competence should also be reflected in relations between consistency and characteristics of the (social) environment. Again, our predictions are that transactional mechanisms will be found, in which the quality of relationships predicts the consistency of personality, and vice versa.

We will also test the generalisation of the consistency -> competence effects into more applied aspects of competence by studying the consequences of consistency of personality from age 12 to age 20 (both in the eyes of the persons themselves as in the eyes of a peer) for internalising and externalising problems in psychological functioning.

Method

Subjects

Subjects were 100 individuals who participated in an experimental study in 1975, at age the age of 1 year old (Riksen-Walraven, 1978). Subjects were seen again with irregular intervals, at age 7 (N=98), at age 10 (N=93), at age 12 (N=89), and at age 20 (N=83). For the present paper, the results from the data collection in infancy will not be used.

Instruments

Personality descriptions

Descriptions of the personality of the subjects were given at ages 7, 10, and 12, with the California Child Q-set (CCQ), a set of 100 items regarding a child's behavior and personality. These 100 items have to be sorted in a forced distribution into nine categories, ranging from most characteristic for the child to least characteristic for the child. CCQ-descriptions were available from teachers (at age 7, 10, and 12), and from peers and the child itself (at age 12).

At age 20, a description of the personality of the subject was given by the subject itself, and by a friend who accompanied him to the Institute (subjects were asked to bring with them a same-sex friend). Descriptions were given with the California Q-set (CQ), the adult version of the CCQ.

Temporal consistency of personality profiles. For each subject, the Q-sort profiles at different time points were correlated. The resulting Q-correlation-coefficients were used as indices for the temporal consistency of the child's personality. Using the CCQ, indices were thus available for the teacher-profile between age 7 and age 10 and between age 10 and age 12, and between age 7 and 12.

In the CCQ and the CQ, 60 items are overlapping. The profiles (rank orders) on these 60 items at age 12 and at age 20 were correlated. Using this procedure, indices for the consistency of personality were thus available for the self-profile between age 12 and age 20, and for the peer-profile between those ages.

Ego-resiliency scores. Scores for ego-resiliency were computed by correlating the Q-sort descriptions with the Q-sort prototypes for an ego-resilient child (for the CCQ) or adult (for the CQ). The resulting correlation coefficients were used as indices for the ego-resiliency of the child.

Quality of peer relations

Peer acceptance (age 10 and 12). Sociometric procedures were used to measure children's acceptance by their peers at age 10 and 12 (at age 7, no measures for peer acceptance were gathered).. A sociometric interview was conducted in the school classes of the children. All children in a class were asked to nominate the three children that they liked most, and the three children they liked least. In the present paper the number of liked most nominations will be used as an index for the peer acceptance of the child.

Perceived peer support (age 20). A social network interview was conducted at age 20, in which the subject were asked to answer 27 items of a social support questionnaire for all members of their social network. In the present paper, the scores of the 18 items concerning a general support dimension were averaged to get a score on perceived support. Only the perceived support score for friends is used in the present paper (an average of the score for all friends mentioned).

Psychological functioning

Internalizing problems. To measure internalizing psychological functioning, a Dutch version of the Symptom Checklist (SCL, ref.) was used. The SCL is a 90-item self-report scale with subscales for Agoraphobia, Fears, Depression, Somatic complaints, Insufficiency of thoughts, Interpersonal sensitivity, Hostility, Sleeping problems, and a SCL-Total score.

Externalizing problems. To measure externalizing psychological functioning, a questionnaire for criminality was used. This questionnaire is a Dutch version of the National Youth Survey (NYS) a scale used for comparison of various western countries (Junger-Tas, 1994), and contains scales for Small crimes, Vandalism, Theft, Violence, Use of Soft-drugs, Use of Hard-drugs, Use of Alcohol, and Selling drugs.

Results

The temporal consistency of the personality profile over time was computed by pairwise correlating the various Q-sort descriptions. The mean correlations and their ranges

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are presented in Table 1. This table shows substantial positive mean Q-correlations between the Q-sort descriptions over time, indicating fairly high temporal consistency of the personality profile. On the other hand, also a substantial variation in Q-correlations was found, indicating large individual differences in the degree to which the personality profiles remain consistent over time, ranging from no consistency at all (or even a slight negative consistency), to a substantially high consistency. Note that the consistency of personality between age 12 and 20 was lower than between 7, 10, and 12. One of the reasons may be the long time lag between those measurement points, another may be the somewhat lower reliability of the self- and peer-descriptions at age 12. The figures for the consistency of personality between age 12 and 20 might therefore be conservative estimates of the true consistency.

As pointed out before, we expect that the interindividual variation in consistency scores can be regarded as representing meaningful individual differences. To study the correlates of these individual differences in the consistency of personality at various time points, we correlated the indices for consistency with the 100 CCQ- or CQ-items either at the beginning of the time period the consistency score was referring to, or at the end of that time period. Tables 2a to 2f show the highest correlating items either predicting or retrodicting the temporal consistency of personality profile in the eyes of different judges (items are grouped according the results of ad-hoc factor analyses on the correlating items). In these tables, it can be seen that the temporal consistency of personality is related to adequate personal functioning at all ages. In general, the items predicting or retrodicting the consistency of personality refer to a resilient and, particularly, socially competent person, with some age- or rater-specific features (such as the planfulness and creativity in the teacher-rating at age 7 (table 2a), and the emotional stability in the self-rating at age 20 (table 2e)).

As described, we expected that these results could be summarized in the fact that the temporal consistency of personality is related to a child's ego-resiliency, both prospectively and retrospectively. Therefore, we computed the correlations between the indices for the consistency of personality and the ego-resiliency scores. Table 3 presents these correlations. It can be seen that indeed ego-resiliency is always both an antecedent of subsequent consistency of personality as well as a consequence of it, regardless of who is the judge of the consistency of personality. Results with adjacent time points are stronger than with more distant time points.

To further investigate the role of ego-resiliency as antecedent and/or consequence, that is, to investigate the question of the causal relations between personality attributes and consistency of personality, we formulated a path model which contains the relations between ego-resiliency and consistency of personality over the period from age 7 to age 20. The results of the analysis of this model are presented in Figure 1[2]. It can be seen that, with a slight exception (the .15 between ego-resiliency 10 and consistency 10-12), a fully transactional model is supported. At all ages ego-resiliency at time point t has an effect of the consistency of personality between t and $t+1$, and the consistency of personality between t and $t+1$ has an effect on ego-resiliency at $t+1$. The transactional mechanisms become even more clear if we realise that (1) relations continue to come back over time, even after an initial covariation between ego-resiliency and consistency of personality has been corrected for, and (2) the long-term stabilities for ego-resiliency and for consistency of personality are not significant, but the transactional relations are. The latter point means, e.g., that the stability of ego-resiliency from age 12 to age 20 is mediated by the consistency of personality between age 12 and 20, and vice versa.

To test our hypotheses that the consistency of personality is related to the quality of the social relationships of the person, i.c. the relationships with peers, we analyzed the extent to which the consistency of personality during adolescence, between age 7 and 10, 10 and 12, and 12 and 20, was predicted by and predictive of the quality of the adolescents' peer relations at age 12 and 20. Table 4, upper panel, presents the correlations between the consistency of personality on the one hand and peer acceptance at age 12 and perceived

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[2]Note that for this path analysis, the measures are aggregated across judges (so ego-resiliency at age 12 is an aggregate of teacher-, self- and peer-judgment; consistency between 12 and 20 an aggregate of self- and peer-judgment. However, for less aggregated measures the model is basically the same.

peer support at age 20 on the other.

It can be seen that a similar pattern as for ego-resiliency is found. Peer acceptance at age 12 predicts the amount of consistency of personality from age 12 to age 20. Consistency of personality from age 12 to 20, in its turn, predicts the amount of support the subject reports to receive from friends at age 20. Note that these relations concern only the consistency in the eyes of the peers, not in the eyes of the subject itself.

Again, to further investigate the role of peer acceptance and support as antecedent and/or consequence, we formulated a path model which contains the relations between peer acceptance and support on the one hand and the consistency of personality on the other over the period from age 10 to age 20[3]. The results of the analysis of this model are presented in Figure 2. Again, it can be seen that a fully transactional model is supported. At all ages peer relations at time point t have an effect of the consistency of personality between t and $t+1$, and the consistency of personality between t and $t+1$ has an effect on peer relations at $t+1$. Again, the transactional mechanisms become even more clear if we realise that (1) relations continue to come back over time, even after an initial covariation between peer relations and consistency of personality has been corrected for, and (2) the long-term stabilities for peer relations and for consistency of personality are not significant, but the transactional relations are. The stability of peer relations from age 12 to age 20 is mediated by the consistency of personality between age 12 and 20, and vice versa.

To test our assumption that consistency of personality (as 'structure' of personality) and competence (as 'level' of personality) are two separate (although related) aspects of personality, we conducted regression analyses in which the two were treated as independent consequences or antecedents of the quality of peer relations. Figure 3 gives the results of the analyses.

It can be seen that indeed the quality of peer relations predicts both the consistency of personality as well as the level of ego-resiliency. It can also be seen that both the consistency of personality and the level of ego-resiliency have independent contributions to the quality of peer relations.

Table 6 presents the correlations between the consistency of personality between age 12 and age 20 and indices of psychological functioning at age 20. As can be seen, consistency as reported by peers predicts later externalizing problems, especially violent behavior and excessive use of alcohol. Consistency of personality as reported by the subject itself, however, predicts later internalizing problems, especially in the realm of sensitivity and distrust in personal relations, and feelings of hostility towards others.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have seen that the transactional mechanisms between children's competence and the temporal consistency of their personality profile, that we found in childhood in our earlier studies (e.g. Asendorpf & van Aken, 1991), were again found between early and late adolescence. We have also seen that these transactional mechanisms are not only confirmed for personality variables, but are also found in the case of social relationships, and that consitency of personality and level of ego-resiliency are independent predictors of the quality of peer relations. In addition, we have seen that the temporal consistency of the personality profile during adolescence affects psychological functioning, both in terms of internalising issues, such as feelings of hostility and distrust, and in terms of externalising issues, such as violent behavior and alcohol use.

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[3]To ensure independence of the measurements, the consistency of personality between age 12 and 20 in this model refers to consistency judged by peers. However, the model with the aggregated variables is basically the same.

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Table 1
Distributions of consistency of personality-scores

Consistency of personality	N	Minimum	Mean	Maximum	S D
Age 7 - 10					
teacher report	90	-.34	.40	.78	.22
Age 10 - 12					
teacher report	80	-.09	.46	.87	.20
Age 7 - 10					
teacher report	79	-.09	.40	.78	.22
Age 12 - 20					
self report	67	-.03	.30	.62	.15
peer report	51	-.10	.28	.60	.16

Table 2a.
Q-sort items (CCQ, teacher-description) at age 7, predicting consistency of personality between age 7 and 12, teacher report. Highest 15 of 38 significant correlations.

Item	Label
04	Gets along well with other children
30	Tends to arouse liking in adults
79 (-)	Is suspicious and distrustful of others
09	Develops genuine and close relationships
78 (-)	Is easily offended
90 (-)	Is stubborn
56 (-)	Is jealous and envious of others
02	Is considerate of other children
43	Can recoup after stressful experiences
64	Is calm and relaxed
76	Can be trusted, is dependable
67	Is planful, thinks ahead
96	Is creative
88	Is self-reliant, confident
12 (-)	Reverts to immature behavior under stress

Table 2b
Q-sort items (CCQ, teacher-description) at age 12, consequence of consistency of personality between 7 and 12, teacher report. Highest 15 of 62 significant correlations

Item	Label
03	Is warm and responsive
06	Is helpful and cooperative
31	Is empathic
09	Develops genuine and close relationships
10 (-)	Has transient relationships
79 (-)	Is suspicous and distrustful of others
29	Is protective of others
04	Gets along well with other children
05	Is admired by other children
100 (-)	Is easily victimized by other children
42	Is an interesting, arresting child
54 (-)	Has rapid shifts in mood
95 (-)	Overreacts to minor frustrations
91 (-)	Has inappropriate emotional reactions
38 (-)	Has unusual thought processes

Table 2c
Q-sort items (CCQ, self-description) at age 12, predicting consistency of personality
between 12 and 20, self-report

Item	Label
76	Is dependable
85 (-)	Is aggressive
80 (-)	Teases other children
69	Is verbally fluent
09	Develops genuine relationships
12 (-)	Reverts to immature behavior under stress
73	Responds to humor
36	Is resourceful in initiating activities
82	Is self-assertive
22 (-)	Manipulates others
57 (-)	Tends to dramatize mishaps
14 (-)	Is eager to please
03	Is warm and responsive

Table 2d
Q-sort items (CCQ, peer-description) at age 12, predicting consistency of personality
between 12 and 20, peer-report

Item	Label
29	Is protective of others
42	Is an interesting and arresting child
31	Recognizes feelings of others
98 (-)	Is shy and reserved
10 (-)	Has transient relationships
77 (-)	Appears to feel unworthy
53 (-)	Tends to be indecisive
88	Is self-reliant
30	Tends to arouse liking in others
94 (-)	Tends to be sulky or whiny
33 (-)	Cries easily
72 (-)	Has a readiness to feel guilty
22 (-)	Manipulates others
79 (-)	Is supicious and distrustful of others
35 (-)	Is inhibited
68	High intellectual capacity
44 (-)	Tends to give in

Table 2e
Q-sort items (CCQ, self-description) at age 20, consequence of consistency of personality
between 12 and 20, self-report

Item	Label
82 (-)	Has fluctuating moods
49 (-)	Is basically distrustful
33	Is calm and relaxed
75	Has a clear-cut and consistent personality
100	Does not vary roles
87 (-)	Interprets simple situations in complicated ways
03	Has a wide range of interests
52	Behaves in an assertive fashion
45 (-)	Is disorganized under stress
26	Is productive, gets things done
99 (-)	Is self-dramatizing
36 (-)	Is subtly negativistic
65 (-)	Pushes and tries to stretch limits
77	Appears straightforward
34 (-)	Is over-reactive to minor frustrations
67 (-)	Is self-indulgent
56	Responds to humor
06	Is fastidious
02	Is dependable and responsible
42 (-)	Is reluctant to commit self

Table 2f
Q-sort items (CCQ, peer-description) at age 20, consequence of consistency of
personality between 12 and 20, peer-report

Item	Label
99 (-)	Is self-dramatizing
23 (-)	Is extrapunitive, tends to transfer blame
34 (-)	Is over-reactive to minor frustrations
95	Tends to proffer advice
37 (-)	Is guileful and deceitful
75	Has a clear-cut, internally consistent personality
26 (-)	Is productive, gets things done
88	Is personally charming

Table 3
Correlations between consistency of personality and ego-resiliency

	Consistency of personality			
	Teacher		Self	Peer
	07-12	10-12	12-20	12-20
Ego-resiliency				
age 07	.30**	.35**	.04	.09
age 10	.49**	.38**	.21	.31*
age 12	.36**	.37**	.29*	.42**
age 20	.08	.03	.38**	.28*

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

Note. Ego-resiliency scores are averaged within time across judges

Table 4
Correlations between consistency of personality and indices of peer relations and
psychological functioning

|	Consistency of personality			
	Teacher		Self	Peer
	07-12	10-12	12-20	12-20
Peer acceptance				
age 10	.29**	.22	.02	.22
age 12	.25*	.31**	.13	.36**
Perceived peer support				
age 20	-.14	-.10	.20	.44**
SCL-90 (age 20)				
Agoraphobia	.21	.17	-.03	.15
Fears	.14	.12	-.10	.08
Depression	.11	.08	-.15	.07
Somatic complaints	-.07	-.02	-.18	-.06
Insufficience	.13	.08	-.21	.00
Interpersonal sensitivity	-.07	-.03	-.42***	-.02
Hostility	-.08	.05	-.34**	-.23
Sleeping problems	.14	.01	.07	.11
SCL-Total score	.07	.07	-.27*	.02
Criminality (age 20)				
Small crimes	-.06	-.02	-.14	-.01
Vandalism	-.06	.03	-.16	-.17
Theft	-.05	-.05	-.13	-.11
Violence	-.02	-.14	.03	-.29*
Soft-drugs	-.15	-.08	-.22	-.05
Hard-drugs	-.20	-.10	-.17	-.19
Alcohol	-.08	-.13	-.19	-.28*
Selling drugs	-.04	-.11	-.07	-.18

*$p<.05$; **$p<.01$; ***$p<.001$

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Figure 1. Path model for the longitudinal relations between ego-resiliency and personality consistency from age 7 to age 20 (dashed lines are not significant)
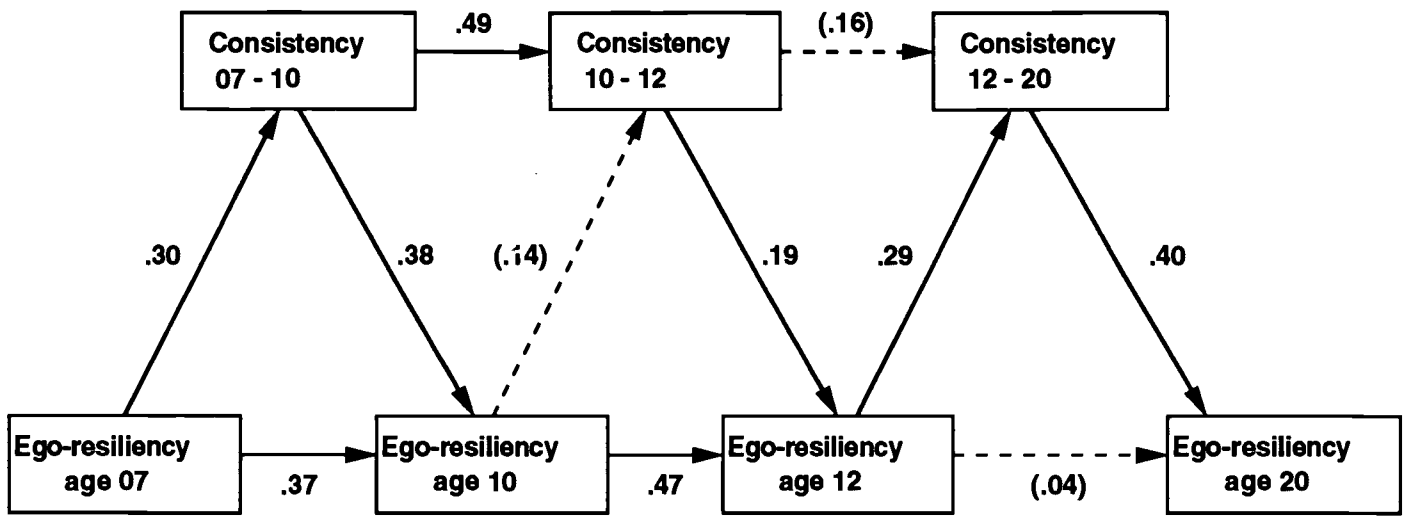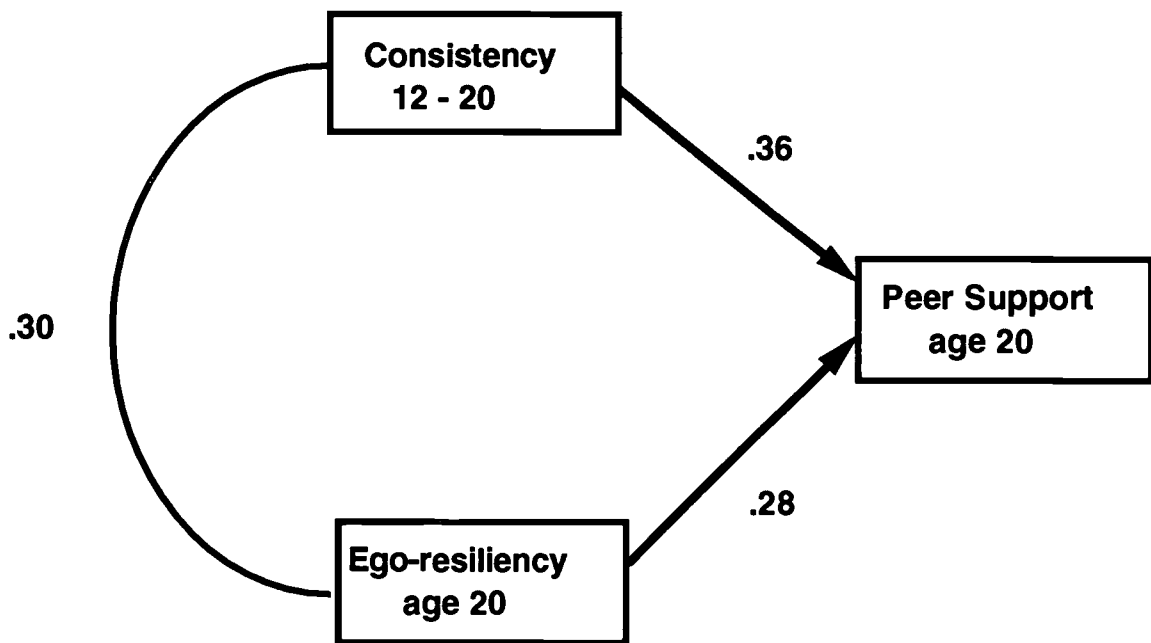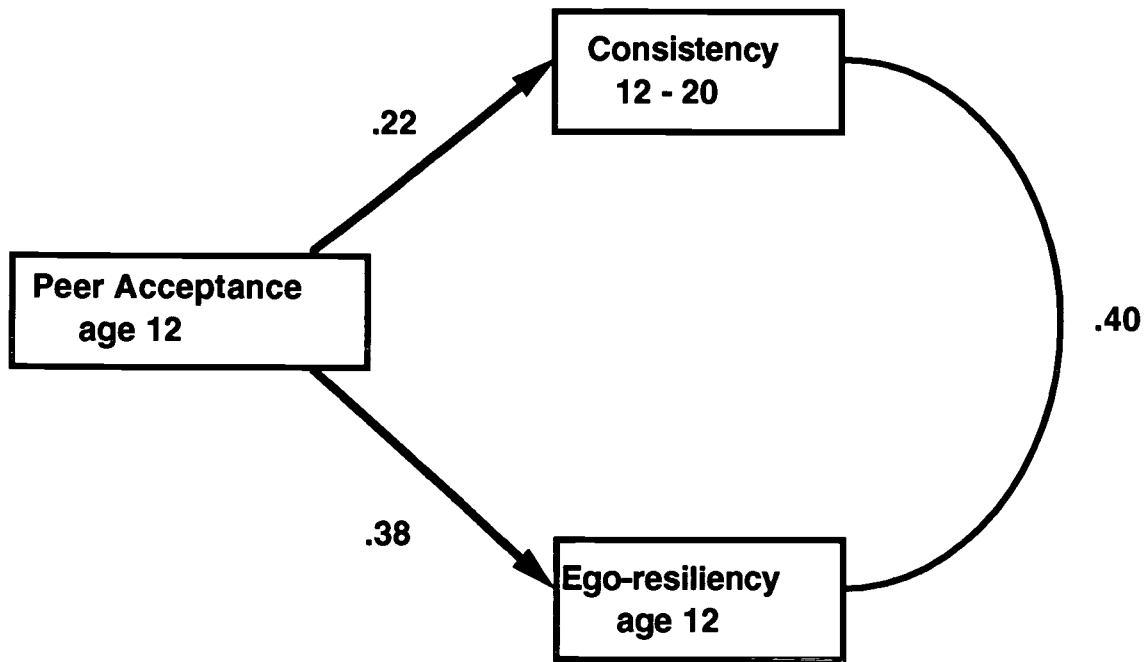

ChiSq(10) = 24.78, p=.006
GFI = .92

Figure 2. Path model for the longitudinal relations between peer acceptance and support and personality consistency from age 10 to age 20 (dashed lines are not significant)
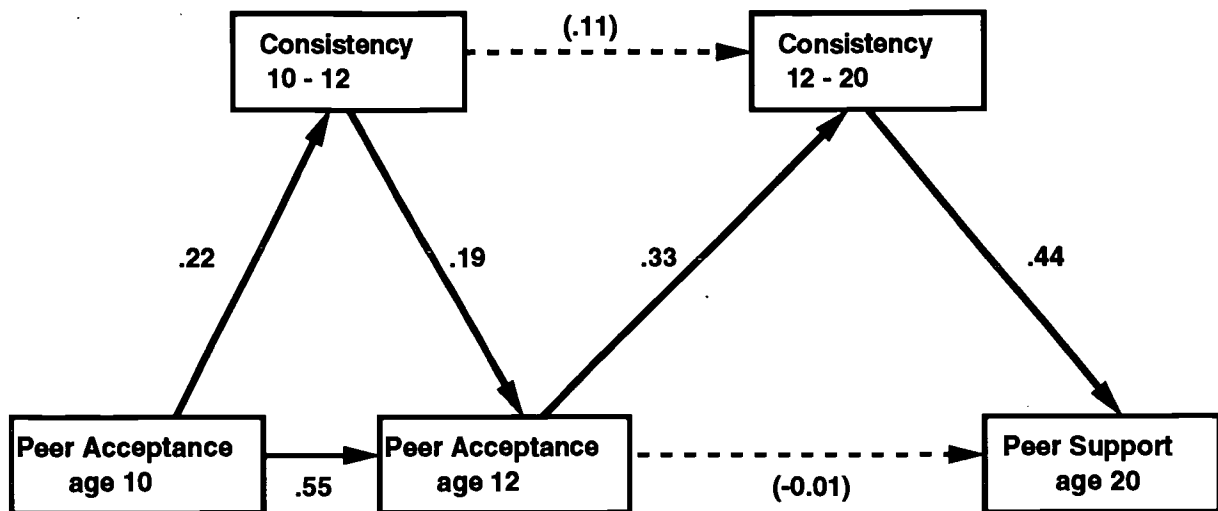
ChiSq(3) = 4.41, n.s.
GFI = .98

Figure 3. Indepent relations between consistency (=structure) and ego-resiliency (=level) and the quality of peer relations.

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