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ABSTRACT

Identity formation from a relational viewpoint is a process of internalizing the expectations, needs, and opinions of significant others while recognizing and expressing one's own needs and interests. To achieve this, adolescents must resolve disagreement between their own and others' points of view through mutual regulation between self and others. This study examined mechanisms of transition between levels of relatedness in identity formation, focusing on transition to Levels 5 and 6 in which adolescents are actively engaged in balancing one's own and others' points of view. Participants in this qualitative study were 31 Japanese female university students ages 20 and 21 years. The Ego Identity Interview was administered three times during the junior and senior years at various points during the job seeking process. The interview covered occupations, friendships, dating, and sex roles. Interview transcripts were examined within two frameworks of the development in representation of relationships and the structural transition in identity formation. Findings indicated that disagreements between one's own and others' points of view at Level 5 were marked by recognizing discrepancies between an adolescent's existing representation of relationships and a new one. This new representation was mainly provoked by a significant other's act. Negative emotional states played an important role in constructing a new representation. Once the discrepancy between the representations was recognized, the discrepancy reduction process began. Coordinating the two representations was achieved intrapsychically rather than through verbal negotiation. Findings indicated that transition in levels of relatedness was promoted by interaction between the adolescent and others and the adolescent's individual effort with specific mechanisms influenced by the sociocultural context. (KB)

TRANSITION IN THE LEVELS OF RELATEDNESS IN IDENTITY EXPLORATION

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INTRODUCTION

- Identity researchers are beginning to recognize that identity formation occurs not only by separation from others but also in relational contexts.
- From a relational viewpoint, identity formation can be described as the process of internalizing expectations, needs, and opinions of significant others, while recognizing and expressing one's own needs and interests. To accomplish it, adolescents must resolve disagreement between their own and others' points of view through mutual regulation between self and others.
- Based on this notion, Sugimura (2001) formulated six levels of relatedness in identity exploration (Table 1). These levels are ordered according to the sophistication of social cognitive development.
- Although one of the important questions on identity formation is mechanisms of the transition in identity formation process (Kroger, 1993), little attempt is made to explore them.
- This study aims to explore mechanisms of transition in the levels of relatedness in identity exploration by using qualitative analysis. We focus on the transitions to Levels 5 and 6 in which adolescents are actively engaged in balancing between one's own and others' points of view.

METHOD

- The participants were 31 Japanese female university students at age 20 to 21 years.
- The expanded Ego Identity Interview (Grotevant & Cooper, 1981), which includes questions about relationships, was administered to participants three times.
 - Time 1: the first semester as juniors (before job seeking)
 - Time 2: the first semester as seniors (in job seeking)
 - Time 3: the latter semester as seniors (after job seeking)
- The interview covered four domains of occupation, friendships, dating, and sex roles.
- Each interview was coded as one of the six levels of relatedness for each domain by two raters (reliability $M=78.3\%$).
- The interview transcripts of ten participants, who achieved Levels 5 and 6 from Time

1 to 2 or Time 2 to 3 in at least one of the four domains, were selected.

- These transcripts were examined within two frameworks of the development in representation of relationships (Marcia, 1999; Mascolo & Fischer, 1999) and the structural transition in identity formation process (Kroger, 1993).

RESULTS

Recognizing discrepancy

- Disagreements between one's own and others' points of view at Level 5 were marked by recognizing discrepancy between an adolescent's existing representation of relationships and a new one.
- This new representation was mainly **provoked by a significant other's act**, which was incompatible with the adolescent's own needs and interests (8 of 10 participants).

When it comes to having a close friend, especially when that friend is very close, . . . I tend to have a feeling that I should point out to her what her weaknesses are . . . even though I know I might hurt her feelings. . . . But, [when I pointed out to a certain close friend what her weaknesses were,] my friend cried . . . She said [to me,] "None would speak in such a way to a close friend." Then, it means, [I found] her view of friendship and mine were completely different. (#30, Time 3, Friendships)

I thought I was stable [after having developed a mature character], but I'm being tossed every which way by him. (#8, Time 1, Dating)

- **Negative emotional states**, such as repulsive and anger, played an important role in constructing a new representation (5 of 10 participants).

[So far, my family has had] no fights at all at home. But, for the first time, I think, [I recognized] it became obvious that my father[']s views about sex roles] were "wrong." . . . Maybe I was confused then. (#29, Time 2, Sex roles)

When I wondered what the reasons [for me] were to become a civil servant, I thought

I merely accepted my parent remarks at their face value, “Wouldn’t it be great to be a civil servant?” . . . That caused me to have an emotional backlash against their thinking. Whenever my mother said to me, “Go for the civil service exam!” I sometimes rebelled and said, “[You are not concerned about me, but,] you just want me to become a civil servant.” (#10, Time 2, Occupation)

Coordinating two representations

- Once the discrepancy between the representations was recognized, the process aimed at reducing the discrepancy began for several adolescents (5 of 10 participants). The mutual regulation between self and others at Level 6 could be viewed as coordinating act of two representations.
- To reduce the discrepancy, it was assumed that adolescents negotiate with significant others, such as discussing and bickering with them. However, the regulation was mostly achieved in the nonverbal way in which they **synthesized both representations intrapsychically rather than they negotiated with others** (4 of 5 participants).

[For this woman, her big brother, who has been her significant other, holds traditional views about sex roles, while she holds progressive views.]

Suppose if I were to become a teacher – something I have dreamed of for many years – I wonder if somebody I would like to marry were to be similar to my brother . . . I wonder if I were to have to make a choice, which I would choose [either marriage or occupation]. (#28, Time 2, Sex roles)

[She never talks with her brother about this issue.]

I tried to solve the problem [of different views, through talking things over with him], and I tried to bring solutions, but was rejected [by him] whenever I tried. (#8, Time 3, Dating)

[Later, she broke up with him, and since then, she has been asking herself about this issue.]

- “**Bridging others**” (Kroger, 1993), who supported them to deal with and connect the two conflicting representations, played an important role in the coordinating process (1 of 5 participants).

For me, [I vacillated between wondering whether] happiness would be to follow the person whom I were to marry, or to pursue a carrier. . . . When I heard what an aunt . . . [and] a more-experienced friend had to say [about this issue] . . . I thought, “A woman also has such a way to live.” (#28, Time 2, Sex roles)

CONCLUSIONS

- The results indicate that the transition in the levels of relatedness in identity exploration is promoted by the **interaction between adolescents and others** and the **individual effort within the adolescent**.
- In the interaction, others’ acts play an important role to proceed the transition, i.e., provoking the discrepancy between an adolescent’s existing representation and a new one, playing a partner in mutual regulation to reduce the discrepancy, and bridging the two conflicting representations.
- However, not only the interaction but also an adolescent’s effort is crucial to the transition. The results regarding feeling negative emotion and coordinating two representations intrapsychically can be viewed as an adolescent’s agentic act of interpreting and making meanings about the events in the interaction.
- Mechanisms of transition in the levels of relatedness might be influenced by **sociocultural contexts**. In Japanese culture, avoiding negotiation with others is the typical style of relationships. Thus, the result that the regulation was mostly in a nonverbal way might reflect such characteristic of relatedness in Japanese cultural contexts.

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Table 1 Proposed levels of relatedness in identity exploration

Level 1 This level refers to a decision-making process about important life choices without relatedness. Individuals cannot recognize their own and others' points of view.

Level 2 This level refers to a decision-making process with little relatedness. Individuals recognize vaguely their own and others' points of view.

Level 3 This level refers to a decision-making process with relatedness, in which individuals decide their important life choices by the influence of others. They copy others' points of view.

Level 4 This level refers to a decision-making process with relatedness, in which individuals can recognize both their own and others' points of view.

Level 5 This level refers to a decision-making process with relatedness, in which individuals experience disagreements between their own and others' points of view.

Level 6 This level refers to a decision-making process with relatedness, in which individuals resolve disagreements through mutual regulation between self and others.



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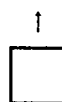
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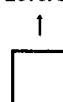
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