Intergenerational associations linking identity styles and processes in adolescents and their parents

Koen Luyckx¹, Seth J. Schwartz², Jessica Rassart¹, and Theo A. Klimstra³

¹School Psychology and Child and Adolescent Development, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, KU Leuven, Leuven, Belgium
² Leonard M. Miller School of Medicine, University of Miami, Miami, FL, USA
³ Social and Behavioral Sciences, Tilburg University, Tilburg, The Netherlands

Identity formation is a lifelong task, yet much research focuses on adolescence and emerging adulthood. Little is known about whether parents’ identities are related to their adolescent children’s identities. The present studies were designed to examine intergenerational associations. Specifically, we focused on identity styles (Study 1 with 191 mother–adolescent and 170 father–adolescent dyads) and exploration and commitment processes (Study 2 with 230 mother–adolescent and 214 father–adolescent dyads). In Study 1, the information-oriented and normative styles, especially among mothers, were positively associated with these same styles among adolescents. Fathers’ use of the normative and diffuse-avoidant style was positively associated with adolescents’ use of these same styles. In Study 2, parental identification with commitment was positively associated with adolescent commitment making and negatively with adolescent ruminative exploration. Maternal exploration in depth was positively associated with adolescent exploration in depth and ruminative exploration. In sum, parents may function as role models for adolescent identity formation, although longitudinal research is needed to support more authoritative claims.

Keywords: Identity; Intergenerational; Identity styles; Commitment; Exploration.

Although adolescence and emerging adulthood constitute key life stages for identity development, identity work and re-evaluations occur into adulthood as
well (Kroger, 2007). Previous research has focused largely on college students, somewhat at the expense of adopting a life-course perspective. Further, although parents influence their offspring’s identity through parenting practices (Beyers & Goossens, 2008), virtually no research has examined how parents’ own identity might serve as a role model for adolescents. In line with the notion of identity agents (Schachter & Ventura, 2008), parents can be viewed as active participants in their children’s identity formation. As adolescents are maturing, parents indeed face many challenges, which may be accompanied by a reappraisal of their own identity commitments enacted earlier in life (Kroger, 2007). The present multi-informant cross-sectional studies examined the degree to which mothers’ and fathers’ identity formation relates to their offspring’s identity formation by drawing on two neo-Eriksonian models. In Study 1, Berzonsky’s (1990) identity style model was used. In Study 2, we drew on a process-oriented model focusing on commitment and exploration processes (Luyckx et al., 2008). Hence, we examined the degree to which adolescents and parents can be viewed as co-participants in the identity process (Schachter & Ventura, 2008).

Identity styles, commitment and exploration

To complement Marcia’s (1980) identity status paradigm, Berzonsky (1990) introduced three socio-cognitive styles to capture individuals’ characteristic ways of addressing identity issues. The information-oriented style is typical of individuals who construct an identity by actively exploring and evaluating personally relevant information. These individuals are open and willing to revise their identity when faced with information that is inconsistent with their sense of self. Second, the normative style is typical of individuals who rely on the expectations of authority figures (such as parents), rather than exploring alternative options. These individuals preserve rigidly organized commitments and are “closed” to information that threatens their beliefs. Finally, the diffuse-avoidant style typifies individuals who avoid dealing with identity issues until situational demands dictate that they do so. These individuals develop their identities haphazardly as a function of social demands and consequences, and do not arrive at self-endorsed commitments or succeed in proactively exploring various options. Although these styles capture how individuals generally approach identity challenges, they do not capture the extent to which individuals are exploring at a certain point in time. Hence, Study 2 focused on the degree to which parents and adolescents engage in different exploration and commitment processes at a given point in time.

We drew on a process-oriented identity model (Luyckx et al., 2008) that extends Marcia (1980) work on identity exploration and commitment. Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens, and Beyers (2006) unpacked commitment and exploration into two processes each. First, the fact that individuals make identity choices does not automatically imply that they feel confident about these choices.
Accordingly, Luyckx et al. distinguished between commitment making and identification with commitment. Identification with commitment emerges when individuals experience their choices as consistent with their core self. Second, whereas Marcia (1980) defined exploration as the degree to which adolescents search for alternatives, identity development also entails an in-depth evaluation of existing commitments. Accordingly, Luyckx et al. distinguished between exploration in breadth and exploration in depth. Whereas exploration in breadth precedes the formation of commitments, exploration in depth occurs after commitments have been enacted.

In line with Marcia’s (1980) model, the Luyckx et al. four-dimensional model assumes that exploration is helpful to the person. However, as contemporary societies have become increasingly individualistic and provide less support for young people, individuals may become stuck in their identity quest and experience considerable difficulty enacting commitments (Schwartz, Côté, & Arnett, 2005). Consequently, ruminative exploration was added as a fifth process. Individuals scoring high on ruminative exploration experience difficulty settling on satisfying choices and keep asking themselves the same questions, resulting in feelings of uncertainty and incompetence (Luyckx et al., 2008).

Identity formation through the lifespan

Changes in identity processes have been well documented, especially in adolescence and emerging adulthood. Waterman and Archer (1990) hypothesized that the transition from adolescence to adulthood would be characterized by a progressive strengthening of one’s identity. A recent meta-analysis (Kroger, Martinussen, & Marcia, 2010) indeed indicated that the mean proportion of identity-achieved individuals increased through late adolescence and emerging adulthood. Luyckx, Klimstra, Duriez, Van Petegem, and Beyers (2013) also found that commitment processes increased linearly through the teens and 20s. As adolescents mature, they tend to rely more on the information-oriented identity style (Berzonsky, 2011). Kroger et al. (2010) indicated that the prevalence of the moratorium status increased steadily from mid-adolescence to the late teens but decreased thereafter. Similarly, Luyckx et al. (2013) found that exploration in breadth and in depth increased through the teens and peaked in the early 20s, then decreased again by the late 20s. However, identity formation does not cease by the end of emerging adulthood. About only half of young people are identity achieved by early adulthood, and identity development continues substantially during the adult years (Fadjukoff, Pulkkinen, & Kokko, 2007; Kroger, 2007). The many social role changes experienced throughout adulthood can challenge an individual’s sense of identity and can necessitate renewed exploratory work and/or a revisiting of existing identity commitments. Hence, successive identity decisions regarding various social roles may be inevitable through adulthood (Josselson, 1996; Sneed & Whitbourne, 2003).
Intergenerational linkages in identity

Despite the recent increase in research on identity in adulthood, such research has not focused systematically on identity processes in parents specifically. However, as stated by Schachter and Ventura (2008, p. 450): "[...] parents are active and purposeful co-participants in their children’s identity formation [...], often thoughtfully reassessing and deliberating their own changing parental roles and goals in regards to this process". Studying identity processes in parents and their adolescent children would permit us to examine the extent to which identity processes and styles in adults may relate to processes and styles in adolescents.

Several contextual theories indeed view development as an ongoing process of co-construction involving both active adolescents and their active context (Ford & Lerner, 1992). Waterman and Waterman (1975) examined identity statuses in male college students and their fathers but found no significant associations. Adams (1985, cited in Waterman, 1993) did find an association between female college students’ and their parents’ identity statuses: parents classified into moratorium and achievement were more likely to have daughters classified in these same statuses.

The present studies

In the present studies, we examined intergenerational associations and similarities in identity between parents and their adolescent children. Whereas in Study 1, we focused on identity styles, in Study 2 we examined specific exploration and commitment processes. Two objectives were addressed. Objective 1 was to examine the presence of differences in the use of identity styles or processes between parents and their adolescent children. With respect to commitment variables, in line with developmental theorizing, we expected that parents would score higher than adolescents (Fadjukoff et al., 2005). Conversely, with respect to variables tapping into diffusion and rumination (diffuse-avoidant style in Study 1 and ruminative exploration in Study 2), we expected adolescents to score higher. Finally, for variables assessing proactive exploration, we hypothesized that parents would score higher than adolescents on the information-oriented style (cf. Berzonsky, 2011, regarding greater use of this style with increasing age). For exploration in breadth and in depth, a different pattern was expected. Due to the many developmental changes adolescents are facing, we expected exploration in breadth to be higher in adolescents as compared to adults. With respect to exploration in depth, expectations were less clear, given that adults might also reassess existing commitments, potentially followed by efforts to enact new, more rewarding commitments (Kroger, 2007).

Objective 2 was to assess to what extent parental identity processes were associated with adolescent identity processes. For the commitment variables, we expected that parental identification with commitment, in particular, would be...
related to adolescent identity commitment processes. When parents feel certain and self-confident about their choices and display such identity certainty in daily life and interactions, such a process might lead adolescents to form self-endorsed commitments themselves (and probably more so than when parents do not feel certain of their commitments). With respect to style and process indicators of exploration, we expected that adolescent children would be likely to utilize similar identity styles as their parents (Waterman & Waterman, 1975). We expected the intergenerational associations for specific exploration processes to be somewhat smaller than those associations observed for the identity styles (which may be more trait-like; Berzonsky, 2011). Nonetheless, parents engaging in proactive exploration of different alternatives could function as role models for adolescents. Finally, partially based on previous research demonstrating the intergenerational similarity of variables such as self-criticism (Ahmad & Soenens, 2010), identity rumination in parents might lead adolescents to increasingly question and ruminate about their own life options.

STUDY 1

In Study 1, we examined intergenerational similarities in Berzonsky’s (1990, 2011) identity styles. We hypothesized that (a) parents would score higher on the information-oriented style and lower on the diffuse-avoidant style as compared to adolescents, and (b) adolescents would rely on the same identity style as displayed by their parents, at least to some extent.

Method

Participants. The sample consisted of 236 high school students (49% boys) from Flanders, Belgium. Mean age was 16.39 years (SD = 1.04; range 14–19). The majority (73%) of participants came from intact families, whereas the remainder had divorced parents or one deceased parent. Of all parents, 191 mothers and 170 fathers returned completed questionnaires. Mean age for mothers was 43.86 (SD = 3.85; range 35–54) and 46.30 (SD = 4.67; range 37–70) for fathers. A total of 37.8% of fathers and 50.6% of mothers had at least a college or university degree. Adolescents who had no participating mother or father were not included in the analyses for the parent for which data were not available. For maternal data, excluded adolescents were more likely to be male (χ²(1) = 5.06, p < 0.05) and older (F(1, 234) = 10.09, p < 0.01, η² = 0.04). For paternal data, excluded adolescents were older (F(1, 234) = 13.73, p < 0.001, η² = 0.05). No differences on the identity variables emerged between included and excluded students based on either maternal or paternal data. In Studies 1–2, adolescents and parents consented to participate after being informed about the study. A unique code was used to match adolescent and parent questionnaires.
Measure

Identity styles. We used the Identity Style Inventory—Version 4 (ISI-4; Smits et al., 2009). Sample items are “When facing a life decision, I take into account different points of view before making a choice” (information-oriented; 7 items), “I think it is better to adopt a firm set of beliefs than to be open-minded” (normative; 8 items) and “I’m not sure where I’m heading in my life; I guess things will work themselves out” (diffuse-avoidant; 9 items). Participants responded to each item using a five-point scale from 1 (not at all like me) to 5 (very much like me). Cronbach’s alphas ranged between 0.69 and 0.78 for adolescents, 0.73 and 0.84 for fathers, and 0.78 and 0.84 for mothers.1

Results

Preliminary analyses. Multivariate analyses of variance were conducted to examine whether adolescent and parent scores differed based on adolescent gender or family structure (dummy coded: 0 = parents married and/or living together; 1 = parents divorced or one parent deceased). No significant gender or family structure differences were obtained for adolescent- (gender: $F(3, 232) = 0.87, p = 0.46$; family structure: $F(3, 229) = 0.39, p = 0.76$), mother- (gender: $F(3, 185) = 1.59, p = 0.19$; family structure: $F(3, 182) = 0.52, p = 0.67$) or father-reported variables (gender: $F(3, 166) = 2.28, p = 0.08$; family structure: $F(3, 164) = 0.19, p = 0.90$). Further, adolescent age was negatively related to adolescent normative style ($r = -0.15, p < 0.05$) and paternal age was positively related to paternal normative style ($r = 0.25, p < 0.001$).

Intergenerational mean-level comparisons and associations. As displayed in Table 1, paired samples t-tests were used given the dyadic nature of the data. Mothers and fathers scored higher on the information-oriented and lower on the diffuse-avoidant style, as compared to their adolescent children.

Path models were estimated for mothers and fathers separately to preserve at least a 5:1 ratio between number of estimated parameters and sample size (Kline, 2006). Following the empirical approach to model building (Kline, 2006), all associations among adolescent identity variables and among parental identity variables (see Table 2) were estimated. Further, all paths linking parental identity variables to adolescent identity variables were estimated. Based on the preliminary analyses, adolescent age was controlled for by allowing age to predict all of the adolescent-reported variables. In addition, in the father model,

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1Using confirmatory factor analyses to test for measurement invariance in Studies 1-2, preliminary evidence was obtained for configural, metric, and partial scalar invariance for adolescents-mothers and adolescents-fathers, both in Study 1 for identity styles and in Study 2 for identity processes. Detailed results can be obtained from the first author.
paternal age was controlled for by allowing paternal age to predict all of the father-reported variables. We controlled only for these associations with the control variables as including all path coefficients linking the control variables to the identity variables resulted in suboptimal fit (due to the fact that many non-significant path coefficients were included). Standard-fit indices were used to assess model fit (Kline, 2006). The chi-square index should be as small as possible; RMSEA should be $< 0.06$; and CFI should be $> 0.95$.

Both the adolescent–mother $(\chi^2(3) = 4.03, \ p = 0.26; \ \text{RMSEA} = 0.043; \ \text{CFI} = 0.986)$ and adolescent–father models $(\chi^2(7) = 8.99, \ p = 0.25; \ \text{RMSEA} = 0.041; \ \text{CFI} = 0.968)$ fit the data adequately. Figure 1 displays all (marginally) significant paths. Maternal use of the information-oriented and normative styles was significantly and positively associated with adolescent use of these respective styles. Paternal use of the normative and diffuse-avoidant style was marginally significantly and positively associated with adolescent use of these

### TABLE 1
Paired-samples $t$-tests for mean differences on identity styles in Study 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Adolescents M (SD)</th>
<th>Parents M (SD)</th>
<th>95% CI of difference</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>Cohen’s d</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mothers</td>
<td>Fathers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information-oriented A</td>
<td>3.95 (0.47)</td>
<td>4.25 (0.51)</td>
<td>(–0.39 to –0.21)</td>
<td>–6.83***</td>
<td>–0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normative</td>
<td>2.76 (0.48)</td>
<td>2.72 (0.61)</td>
<td>(–0.06 to 0.13)</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diffuse-avoidant</td>
<td>2.66 (0.62)</td>
<td>2.17 (0.63)</td>
<td>(0.37 to 0.61)</td>
<td>8.23***</td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information-oriented P</td>
<td>3.93 (0.44)</td>
<td>4.12 (0.52)</td>
<td>(–0.28 to –0.08)</td>
<td>–3.58***</td>
<td>–0.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normative</td>
<td>2.75 (0.47)</td>
<td>2.75 (0.54)</td>
<td>(–0.10 to 0.10)</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diffuse-avoidant</td>
<td>2.68 (0.62)</td>
<td>2.23 (0.60)</td>
<td>(0.38 to 0.57)</td>
<td>7.30***</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: CI = Confidence interval; $M =$ mean; $SD =$ standard deviation. All variables have a possible range of 1–5.

$***p < 0.001$.

### TABLE 2
Correlations among adolescent and parental identity styles in Study 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Information-oriented A</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>–0.31***</td>
<td>0.20**</td>
<td>–0.01</td>
<td>–0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Normative A</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.36***</td>
<td>–0.12</td>
<td>0.24***</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Diffuse-avoidant A</td>
<td>–0.28***</td>
<td>0.35***</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>–0.09</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.16*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Information-oriented P</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>–0.09</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>–0.19**</td>
<td>–0.38***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Normative P</td>
<td>–0.03</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>–0.02</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.54***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Diffuse-avoidant P</td>
<td>–0.06</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>–0.27***</td>
<td>0.38***</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Coefficients for mothers ($N = 189$) are displayed above the diagonal; coefficients for fathers ($N = 170$) are displayed below the diagonal. A = adolescent; P = parent.

*$p < 0.05; **p < 0.01. ***p < 0.001.$
respective styles. Multigroup analyses were conducted to explore whether path coefficients from parental to adolescent identity style were moderated by adolescent gender. For both mother and father models, a constrained model (with all path coefficients set equal across adolescent gender) was compared with an unconstrained model (with all path coefficients allowed to vary across gender). Invariance tests indicated no moderating effects of adolescent gender for either mother ($\Delta \chi^2(9) = 8.02, p = 0.53$) or father ($\Delta \chi^2(9) = 2.16, p = 0.99$).

**STUDY 2**

Whereas Study 1 used a more generic approach to identity exploration by focusing on the socio-cognitive styles on which individuals commonly rely when exploring identity issues (Berzonsky, 2011), Study 2 focused on the specific exploration processes (both proactive and ruminative) at work in the identity domain of future plans and lifestyles (Luyckx et al., 2008). Further, Study 2 followed recent calls for differentiating among different components of commitment (Luyckx et al., 2008) and assessed both commitment making and identification with commitment. We expected parents to score higher on the commitment processes and lower on exploration in breadth and ruminative exploration as compared to adolescents. Further, we expected small to moderate intergenerational associations for exploration and commitment processes (with the strongest associations expected for identification with commitment).

**Method**

*Participants.* The sample consisted of 409 high school students (50% boys). Mean age was 16.29 years (SD = 1.04; range 14–19). The majority (77%) were from intact families, whereas the remainder had divorced parents or one deceased parent.
parent. Of all parents invited, 230 mothers and 214 fathers returned completed questionnaires. Mean age for mothers was 45.53 (SD = 3.86; range 36–59) and 48.12 (SD = 5.03; range 32–73) for fathers. A total of 46.1% of fathers and 57.6% of mothers had at least a college or university degree. Adolescents who had no participating mother or father were again not included in the analyses. For maternal data, excluded adolescents were more likely to be male ($\chi^2(1) = 23.29$, $p < 0.001$) and older ($F(1, 400) = 18.38$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.04$). For paternal data, excluded adolescents were more likely to be male ($\chi^2(1) = 20.05$, $p < 0.001$), older ($F(1, 400) = 19.90$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.05$), and scored higher on commitment making ($F(1, 400) = 5.56$, $p < 0.05$, $\eta^2 = 0.01$) and identification with commitment ($F(1, 400) = 4.32$, $p < 0.05$, $\eta^2 = 0.01$). The latter two effect sizes were small.

**Measure**

*Identity processes.* Adolescents, fathers and mothers completed the Dimensions of Identity Development Scale (DIDS; Luyckx et al., 2008). The five identity processes were each measured using five items on a five-point scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Sample items include “I have decided on the direction I want to follow in my life” (commitment making), “I sense that the direction I want to take in my life will really suit me” (identification with commitment), “I regularly think over a number of different plans for the future” (exploration in breadth), “I regularly talk with other people about the plans for the future I have made for myself” (exploration in depth) and “It is hard for me to stop thinking about the direction I want to follow in my life” (ruminative exploration). Cronbach’s alphas ranged between .79 and .91 for adolescents, .82 and .94 for fathers, and .83 and .93 for mothers.

**Results**

*Preliminary analyses.* No significant adolescent–gender differences were obtained for mother- ($F(5, 211) = 0.89$, $p = 0.49$) or father-reported variables ($F(5, 199) = 0.69$, $p = 0.63$), whereas a significant multivariate effect of gender was obtained for adolescent reports ($F(5, 398) = 2.26$, $p < 0.05$, $\eta^2 = 0.03$). Girls ($M = 2.90$, SD = 0.93) scored higher on ruminative exploration than boys ($M = 2.71$, SD = 0.90). Next, for adolescent reports ($F(5, 399) = 4.99$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.06$) (but not for mother, $F(5, 205) = 1.83$, $p = 0.11$, and father reports, $F(5, 200) = 0.13$, $p = 0.99$), significant differences emerged across family structure. Adolescents from intact families scored lower on commitment making ($M = 3.26$, SD = 0.89 vs. $M = 3.69$, SD = 0.90, respectively) and exploration in breadth ($M = 3.44$, SD = 0.78 vs. $M = 3.63$, SD = 0.84, respectively) as compared to other family structures. Further, adolescent age was positively related to adolescent commitment making.
Identification with commitment ($r = 0.22$), exploration in breadth ($r = 0.22$) and exploration in depth ($r = 0.28$). Maternal age was positively related to maternal identification with commitment ($r = 0.14$) (all $p < 0.01$).

**Intergenerational mean-level comparisons and associations.** As displayed in Table 3, mothers and fathers scored higher on commitment processes, and especially (as based on Cohen’s $d$) lower on ruminative exploration, as compared to adolescents. Further, mothers scored somewhat lower on exploration in breadth compared to adolescents.

Path models were again estimated for mothers and fathers separately, and all associations among adolescent identity variables and among parental identity variables (displayed in Table 4) were estimated. Further, all paths linking parental identity variables to adolescent identity variables were estimated. Adolescent gender, age and family structure were controlled by allowing paths to all adolescent-reported variables in both the mother and father models. In addition, in the mother model, we controlled for maternal age.

Both the mother ($\chi^2(26) = 41.02, p < 0.05; \text{RMSEA} = 0.054; \text{CFI} = 0.968$) and father ($\chi^2(18) = 9.29, p = 0.95; \text{RMSEA} = 0.000; \text{CFI} = 1.000$) models fit the data well. Figure 2 displays all (marginally) significant paths in either model. In both models, parental identification with commitment positively predicted adolescent commitment making and negatively predicted adolescent ruminative exploration. In the mother model, maternal exploration in depth positively

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Adolescents M (SD)</th>
<th>Parents M (SD)</th>
<th>95% CI of difference</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>Cohen’s d</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commitment making</td>
<td>3.30 (0.92)</td>
<td>3.81 (0.81)</td>
<td>(–0.68 to –0.35)</td>
<td>–6.17***</td>
<td>–0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification with commitment</td>
<td>3.25 (0.83)</td>
<td>3.59 (0.81)</td>
<td>(–0.48 to –0.19)</td>
<td>–4.51***</td>
<td>–0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploration in breadth</td>
<td>3.54 (0.79)</td>
<td>3.39 (0.87)</td>
<td>(0.01 to 0.30)</td>
<td>2.11*</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploration in depth</td>
<td>3.10 (0.84)</td>
<td>2.98 (0.86)</td>
<td>(–0.02 to 0.27)</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruminative exploration</td>
<td>2.89 (0.92)</td>
<td>2.12 (1.01)</td>
<td>(0.61 to 0.95)</td>
<td>9.14***</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment making</td>
<td>3.27 (0.93)</td>
<td>3.83 (0.87)</td>
<td>(–0.74 to –0.39)</td>
<td>–6.38***</td>
<td>–0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification with commitment</td>
<td>3.24 (0.83)</td>
<td>3.61 (0.80)</td>
<td>(–0.53 to –0.23)</td>
<td>–4.92***</td>
<td>–0.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploration in breadth</td>
<td>3.50 (0.78)</td>
<td>3.44 (0.85)</td>
<td>(–0.09 to 0.21)</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploration in depth</td>
<td>3.09 (0.86)</td>
<td>2.97 (0.84)</td>
<td>(–0.03 to 0.28)</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruminative exploration</td>
<td>2.86 (0.87)</td>
<td>2.10 (0.87)</td>
<td>(0.60 to 0.91)</td>
<td>9.44***</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: CI = confidence interval; $M =$ mean; SD = standard deviation. All variables have a possible range of 1–5.

* $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.001$. 

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TABLE 4
Correlations among adolescent and parental identity processes in Study 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Commitment making A</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.72***</td>
<td>0.39***</td>
<td>0.48***</td>
<td>−0.41***</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Identification commitment A</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.72***</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.50***</td>
<td>0.59***</td>
<td>−0.39***</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Exploration in breadth A</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.39***</td>
<td>0.46***</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.62***</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>−0.01</td>
<td>0.17*</td>
<td>0.17*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Exploration in depth A</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.49***</td>
<td>0.58***</td>
<td>0.64***</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>−0.05</td>
<td>−0.04</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.17*</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Ruminative exploration A</td>
<td></td>
<td>−0.37***</td>
<td>−0.37***</td>
<td>0.14*</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td></td>
<td>−0.13*</td>
<td>−0.16*</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Commitment making P</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>−0.10</td>
<td>−0.02</td>
<td>−0.17*</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.68***</td>
<td>0.26***</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Identification commitment P</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>−0.02</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>−0.25***</td>
<td>0.67***</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.16*</td>
<td>0.22***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Exploration in breadth P</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.14*</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.14*</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>−0.11</td>
<td>0.29***</td>
<td>0.43***</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.53***</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Exploration in depth P</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.14*</td>
<td>−0.07</td>
<td>0.26***</td>
<td>0.43***</td>
<td>0.52***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Ruminative exploration P</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>−0.03</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.07</td>
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<td>−0.51***</td>
<td>−0.40***</td>
<td>0.13</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Coefficients for mothers (N = 211) are displayed above the diagonal; coefficients for fathers (N = 202) are displayed below the diagonal. A = adolescent; P = parent.
*p < 0.05. ***p < 0.001.
predicted adolescent exploration in depth and ruminative exploration. In the father model, paternal commitment making negatively predicted, and paternal exploration in breadth positively predicted, adolescent exploration in breadth. Multigroup analyses by adolescent gender again indicated no significant differences between the unconstrained and the constrained models for mothers ($\Delta \chi^2(25) = 21.19, p = 0.68$) or fathers ($\Delta \chi^2(25) = 25.45, p = 0.44$).

**GENERAL DISCUSSION**

Meaningful differences in the use of identity styles or processes were obtained between parents and their adolescent children. Further, parental identity styles and processes were related to adolescent identity styles and processes, with differential intergenerational associations obtained depending on whether identity styles or processes were studied. Given the cross-sectional designs
used, we were not able to discern whether parents actually influenced their adolescent children’s identity processes, or whether bidirectional mechanisms may have emerged. For instance, parents questioning their own commitments may not only influence how adolescents address identity issues; adolescents struggling with identity issues may prompt parents to question their own commitments as well. Hence, parents are viewed as active, reflective and influential co-participants in their adolescent’s identity quest (Schachter & Ventura, 2008).

Intergenerational mean-level comparisons

Parents scored higher on commitment processes than adolescents. Although no strong developmental conclusions can be drawn based on the current cross-sectional studies, the commonly reported principle of identity maturation through adolescence and emerging adulthood seemingly may extend into adulthood (Cramer, 2004). Adults not only seemed to have stronger commitments as compared to their adolescent children, but they also identified themselves more strongly with these choices. Conversely, adolescents scored higher on the diffuse-avoidant style and ruminative exploration, possibly as an indication of adolescence as a time when identity work begins (Erikson, 1968). The higher scores on the diffuse-avoidant style also indicated that adolescents, as compared to their parents, relied more on a procrastinating or avoidant approach towards identity issues.

With respect to indices of proactive exploration, parents scored higher on the information-oriented style, whereas no consistent differences in exploration in breadth and in depth emerged between parents and adolescents. Hence, although adults seem to have stronger identity commitments and worry less about identity issues than adolescents do, adults seem just as open to identity issues as adolescents. Consistent with this interpretation, parents did not score higher on the normative identity style as compared to adolescents. As such, although adolescence has been traditionally proposed as the age of exploration (Erikson, 1968), adults remain open for identity issues as well. Our results support a framing of identity as a lifelong task (Sneed, Whitbourne, Schwartz, & Huang, 2012).

Intergenerational associations

With respect to identity styles in Study 1, when parents utilize a certain identity style, adolescents tend to utilize this same style to some extent. Further, these associations were found to apply somewhat more consistently to mother–adolescent than to father–adolescent dyads. These associations were not moderated by adolescent gender (as was also the case for identity processes in Study 2). In other words, mothers’ and fathers’ use of identity styles was related to the use of these same identity styles for both boys and girls. Hence, following
Schachter and Ventura (2008), parents can be seen as identity agents—“partners-in-identity-formation”—for developing adolescents. Indeed, through their own identity work, parents may represent a resource for adolescent identity work.

With respect to identity processes in Study 2, again in line with the notion of parents as co-participants in adolescent identity formation, parental identification with commitment (especially among fathers) was positively related to adolescent commitment making and negatively to ruminative exploration. Possibly, observing one’s parents feeling secure and confident about their commitments can prompt adolescents to settle on satisfying identity choices and to refrain from worry and rumination. In addition, paternal commitment making was negatively related to, and paternal exploration in breadth was positively related to, adolescent exploration in breadth. Possibly, the absence of strong commitments and the presence of a broad exploratory search in fathers, but not in mothers, may encourage adolescents to explore themselves. As suggested previously (Beyers & Goossens, 2008; Verschueren & Marcoen, 1999), mothers and fathers may influence different aspects of their children’s development. Fathers are hypothesized to function as “foreign ministers” by providing opportunities for exploring the outer social world (Finley & Schwartz, 2006). Our finding that paternal, but not maternal, identity processes were related to adolescent exploration in breadth can be interpreted as in line with this hypothesis. Relatedly, mothers are hypothesized to function as “ministers of the interior”, encouraging an orientation towards making and consolidating commitments. We indeed found that maternal (but not paternal) exploration in depth was related to this same identity process in adolescents. When mothers turn inwards and evaluate their identity choices, their adolescent children tend to do the same to some extent. However, exploration in depth by mothers might possibly take on a ruminative character as some mothers reconsider and discard their current commitments, potentially due to the many, often conflicting social roles (e.g., wife, worker, mother and caretaker) they have to deal with on a daily basis (Denmark & Paludi, 1993). This pattern might explain why ruminative exploration in mothers was positively related to this same process in adolescents. When adolescents witness their mothers revisiting and eventually discarding their commitments, adolescents might start worrying where their own lives are heading.

The intergenerational associations obtained were rather small. First, although behavioural-genetic research has demonstrated that personality traits show a modest degree of heritability, findings are less clear with respect to identity (Larsen & Buss, 2010). These findings are in line with theories suggesting traits as core personality features that are more heavily influenced by genetics, in contrast to more malleable characteristics such as identity (McAdams & Olson, 2010). Second, peer, as well as parental, identity processes can serve as role models for adolescents (Akers, Jones, & Coyl, 1998). The few studies that have examined these associations have found peer relationships to be more strongly
related to identity than parent–adolescent relationships (Meeus, Iedema, Maassen, & Engels, 2002). Identity development requires adolescents to shape their lives in a way that fits their own goals and values. Relationships that rely on adolescents’ autonomy, such as peer relationships, may therefore have a greater impact than relationships with parents. Hence, future research should focus on these more horizontal relationships as well.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Despite its strengths (the use of two independent samples, three informants and two identity models), the present research is characterized by some limitations. First, both studies were cross-sectional. Longitudinal studies are needed to support more definitive claims with respect to directionality of effects. The associations obtained could be reciprocal. For instance, if parents perceive their children as investing time and energy in identity issues and increasingly explore or worry about different alternatives, this might prompt parents to reconsider their current commitments as well. Such future longitudinal research should take socioeconomic status of the participants into account as the intergenerational associations linking identity styles and processes in adolescents and their parents might be qualified by socioeconomic status.

Second, our findings should be interpreted in light of the specific identity domains assessed. Whereas the Study 1 questionnaire focuses on more general identity-related tendencies, in Study 2 we focused on future plans and lifestyles. Hence, future research needs to examine intergenerational mechanisms in other domains such as religion, politics and career. Fadjukoff et al. (2005) found identity progression through adulthood in most domains but, within the domains of politics and religion, a considerable proportion of adults continued to be identity diffused. Hence, future research should investigate the implications of such domain-specific parental identity diffusion for adolescents’ identity formation.

Third, although some intergenerational similarities and associations were found, the present studies do not shed light on the intervening mechanisms that might explain how parental identity processes relate to adolescent identity processes. A key candidate might be parenting strategies. Soenens, Duriez, Vansteenkiste, and Goossens (2007) demonstrated that perspective taking was transmitted from mothers to adolescents through the use of supportive parenting. Mothers’ generic empathic capabilities translate into an open and responsive parenting style. Similarly, it could be argued that, if parents display an open and information-oriented style, such a style would translate into supportive parenting that has been shown to relate to adaptive identity processes in adolescents.

Despite these limitations, the present findings extend previous research on the importance of family processes on identity formation. Whereas previous research has focused mainly on parenting processes, the present studies suggest that, in
line with the notion of identity agents (Schachter & Ventura, 2008), parental identity processes may co-develop with adolescent identity processes.

REFERENCES


