Contributing while gaining skills: The interplay of voluntary work with personality and competence development in emerging adults

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Introduction

- Late adolescence and early adulthood are the periods of life when much of the work of identity formation takes place.
- The “identity crisis” of this life time period is characterized by the challenge to develop a sense of identity in the wider context of society (Erikson, 1968).
- Only recently, personality and identity research focus on the role of contextual factors and social involvement for identity formation and self-growth.
- For instance, prior research points to the benefits of social engagement (Lawford & Ramey, 2015) and religious involvement (Hardy et al., 2011) for healthy identity development.
- But it has not yet been examined whether and how volunteering work and contextualized mentoring lead to both personal self-growth and improved social competence.
- However, to understand the interplay of volunteering work as societal context on the one hand and personality development of emerging adults on the other hand may open new promising alleys for both sides.
- Therefore, the purposes of this longitudinal studies are:
  - to investigate whether volunteering work and contextualized mentoring promote personality development and social competence
  - to explore whether the concern for one’s environment and for future generations, i.e., generativity, changes throughout one year of volunteering and whether this relates to personal spirituality as well as to implicit and explicit motives

Materials and methods

Participants:
- 14 emerging adults (9 female, mean age 23.46 years, SD = 2.20)
- All involved in volunteering work since M = 7.9 years, SD = 3.88
- For one year, they engage in freely chosen volunteer projects and receive thereby mentoring by experienced YMCA employers.

Measures:
We measure personality and competence development at the beginning (August 2015) and at the end of the year of mentored volunteering (April 2016).

- Measures for personality development:
  - Washington Sentence Completions Test to assess ego development
  - Five self-defining memories to assess explicit and implicit motives
  - Questionnaire to assess self-efficacy

- Measures for competence development:
  - Loyola Generativity Scale
  - Questionnaire to assess social competence

- Control variables:
  - DISG to assess personality
  - Centrality of Religiosity Scale to assess personal spirituality measured once
  - Questionnaire to assess the perceived quality of mentoring measured twice

Results of preliminary analyses

- These correlations point to possible contributions of volunteering work to personal development such as self-efficacy as well as to competence development such as social responsibility and leadership ability.
- Yet, since these preliminary results are only correlational, no conclusions about causality can be drawn.
- The planned second measurement time will allow the investigation of possible longitudinal effects and their causal direction.

References