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## Identity, prosocial behavior, and generative concern in German and Cameroonian Nso adolescents

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Little is known about whether ego identity statuses have the same developmental concomitants in different cultural contexts. Thus, 159 German and 158 Cameroonian Nso adolescents aged 15–18 were recruited to test if associations between identity and generativity (i.e. the desire to create a positive legacy) and prosocial behavior (i.e. helpful and supportive behavior), respectively, are comparable. In both cultural samples, only identity achievement was positively linked with generative concern and prosocial tendencies. Integrating these and previous findings on the association between prosocial behavior and generativity, a partial mediation of the relation between identity achievement and generative concern through prosocial tendencies was hypothesized and confirmed for both cultural groups. Thus, there is an equivalent association between identity achievement, prosocial behavior, and generative concern in adolescents with widely different cultural background.

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Erikson's theory of psychosocial development (Erikson, 1959) is one of the best-established developmental theories. Particularly, the chief developmental task it postulates for adolescence has been the focus of much research since Marcia (1966) elaborated his status approach to identity. Unfortunately, there is little empirical knowledge about whether the developmental processes and behavioral correlates of identity that have been identified in Western cultural contexts are the same in non-Western cultural contexts. Thus, the present study adds to the literature on identity by expanding findings on the relationship between identity statuses, prosocial behavior, and generative concern in samples of adolescents from Germany and the Cameroonian Nso.

### Cross-cultural rationale

To test universality or culture-specificity of relationships among psychological constructs, it is essential to select cultural groups which differ in relevant background characteristics (Van de Vijver & Leung, 1997). Thus, German and Cameroonian Nso adolescents were chosen because apart from differences in socioeconomic conditions such as life expectancy (United Nations Development Programme, 2003), there is ample evidence for differences between German and Cameroonian Nso samples concerning culturally relevant characteristics.

Historically, Cameroonian ethnicities have already had a long tradition when they came into first contact with Europeans when in the 15th century Portuguese sailors explored some areas of what today constitutes Cameroon. A German protectorate from 1884 to 1914, Cameroon subsequently was under French and British protectorate until the French territory gained

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independence in 1960 and the British territory in 1961, then forming a joint state. Cameroon is a multi-ethnic country. The Nso live in the highland grass-fields of the North-Western province. They are predominantly of Christian faith but also adhere to indigenous religious beliefs. Honoring ancestors and elders is an important value and there are local traditional rulers (Fon) who inherit their title (Mbaku, 2005).

According to the importance of honor for ancestors and elders, Cameroonian Nso parents more strongly emphasize obedience to parents and elders than German parents (Keller, 2007). In consequence, for adolescents in Cameroon, a higher amount of time is spent on household chores, farm work, or other forms of helping (foster) parents. Generally, fertility rate in Cameroon is higher than in Germany and children in Cameroon are taught from very early on to take care of and responsibility for their younger siblings (Keller, 2007).

Also, Cameroonian society is much more hierarchically organized than German society: age and traditional titles play an important role in social stratification (Mbaku, 2005; Nsamenang, 1992). In line with this, Cameroonian Nso adults assign more importance to conservation values (e.g., tradition) and less importance to openness to change values (e.g., self-direction) than German adults (Hofer, Chasiotis, Friedlmeier, Busch, & Campos, 2005).

Education is very highly valued in Cameroon which has a school attendance rate above the African average (Mbaku, 2005). Schooling is less taken for granted in Cameroon than in Germany, partly due to school fees which some parents cannot afford and wide distances to schools. Consequently, a higher proportion of children does not live with their parents but with other relatives in towns where schools are located (cf. Lloyd & Blanc, 1996). In the Anglophone part of Cameroon, the educational system is based on the British model with primary school starting at the age of six and lasting for seven years followed by secondary school (two cycles of five and two years, respectively). After their final examinations, students leaving secondary school have completed their General Certificate of Education.

In sum, adolescence in Germany and the Cameroonian Nso differs in some respects. In both cultural groups, however, adolescence is a transitional phase leading to full adult responsibilities in work and family life.

To achieve further certainty that adolescents from the two groups represent diverging cultural backgrounds, it was decided to test whether they show differences in the cultural marker of self-construal. Markus and Kitayama (1991; Singelis, 1994) have argued that members of different cultures define themselves to varying degree on the dimensions of being a unique personality separate from others (i.e., independent self-construal) and of being connected to others in social relationships (i.e., interdependent self-construal). Generally, samples from non-Western cultural contexts report stronger interdependent and weaker independent self-construal than participants from Western cultures (e.g., Singelis, Bond, Sharkey, & Lai, 1999).

Given that self-construal is meaningfully related not only to collectivism/individualism (Singelis et al., 1999) but also to cultural norms and values (Markus & Kitayama, 1994) and in light of differences in value orientations between Cameroonian Nso and German samples (Hofer et al., 2005), it is expected that self-construal shows comparable cultural differences. More precisely, our first hypothesis predicts that Cameroonian Nso adolescents show weaker independent and stronger interdependent self-construal than German adolescents.

## Identity and generativity

The theory of psychosocial development postulates eight main developmental tasks across the life-span (Erikson, 1950). Positive outcomes of a given developmental task are proposed to facilitate the successful solution of successive developmental crises. Longitudinal studies have corroborated this postulate (e.g., Whitbourne, Zuschlag, Elliot, & Waterman, 1992).

The chief developmental task in adolescence is the formation of an identity which provides a sense of sameness and continuity in one's life (Erikson, 1959). Marcia (1966) has introduced the status approach to studying identity (for an overview see, e.g., Berzonsky & Adams, 1999). This paradigm differentiates between four identity statuses on the basis of the dimensions of exploration and commitment (e.g., Marcia, 1980). Exploration refers to the active testing of alternative identity elements and commitment covers whether a firm decision has been made regarding the extent to which a given identity element is affirmed or rejected.

Identity achievement denotes that the individual has explored identity elements and has come to a firm commitment. Identity foreclosure describes a state when an individual has made a commitment without previously testing identity elements (adopting them from parents or peers instead). When neither exploration nor commitment is present, there is identity diffusion. The state of exploring without having committed yet is called moratorium. These statuses can be defined for the domains of ideological (occupation, politics, religion, lifestyle) and interpersonal (friendship, sex roles, dating, recreational activities) identity. However, a general identity status comprises both domains.

In Western contexts, identity achievement is considered the healthiest ego identity status and is associated with the most positive outcomes (Berzonsky & Adams, 1999; Marcia, 1980). Thus, identity achievement ought to predict a successful resolution of subsequent developmental tasks such as intimacy (i.e., engaging in mature relationships) and generativity (i.e., promoting younger generations and broader societal concern including care for humans, institutions, and nature) (cf. Whitbourne et al., 1992). Despite this sequential formulation, all developmental tasks are present to some extent and in some form at every point in life but vary widely in importance (Erikson, 1959). Thus, although generativity is not the most pressing psychosocial issue in adolescence, it can nevertheless be meaningfully studied at this age to further our knowledge on how the successful resolution of this important developmental task is fostered at an earlier age (Lawford, Pratt, Hunsberger, & Pancer, 2005).

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