

Self-Identity and Self-Esteem during Different Stages of Adolescence: The Function of Identity Importance and Identity Firmness*

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Adolescence is often regarded as a transitional stage between childhood and (emerging) adulthood. Adolescence also is viewed as a stage with heightened risks to a healthy development (Adams, Gullotta, & Markstrom-Adams, 1994; Roberts, Lewinsohn, & Seeley, 1996). Erik Erikson (1968) postulated that identity formation is the most important developmental task during adolescence. Researchers also suggested that a more confirmed sense of identity is more likely to lead to positive mental health (Erikson & Erikson, 1950; Marcia, 2002) and optimal psychological functioning (e.g., self-esteem; well-being) (Adler, Lodi-Smith, Philippe, & Houle, 2016; Lillevoll, Kroger, & Martinussen, 2013; Schwartz et al., 2011; Waterman, 1992). Besides, self-esteem is also an important developmental issue in the field of adolescence, reflected to as self-worth or self-image, is the global evaluative dimension of self (Harter, 2006). Researchers have been interested in self-esteem changes during adolescence in the long run (e.g., Harter, 2006; Kling, Hyde, Showers, & Buswell, 1999). For example, researchers generally found that self-esteem often decreases when children make the transition from elementary school to junior high school (Hawkins & Berndt, 1985; Twenge & Campbell, 2001). Robins and his colleagues also indicated that this decrease in self-esteem might take place during life transitions (e.g., from elementary school to junior high school, from junior high school to high school; from high school to college) (Robins, Trzesniewski, Tracy, Gosling, & Potter, 2002). In the past, several studies demonstrated that low self-esteem can influence adolescent mental health and psychopathology (e.g., depression, eating disorders, delinquency...) (Kuhlberg, Peña, & Zayas, 2010; Harter, 1993; Unger, Kipke, Simon, Montgomery, & Johnson, 1997; Usher, Zahn-Waxler, Finch, & Gunlicks, 2000). Numerous studies investigated adolescent self-esteem in various ways (e.g., Baldwin & Hoffman, 2002; Prinstein

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& Dodge, 2010; Roustit, Campoy, Chaix, & Chauvin, 2010), but the role of self-identity in self-esteem changes during adolescence has relatively received little attention. Based on Erikson's belief that a more confirmed sense of identity is more likely to lead to positive psychological adjustment (Erikson & Erikson, 1950) and help individuals ensure the direction, purpose, and meaning of life, this study proposed that all aspects of identity firmness are key predictors to self-esteem at all substages of adolescence. In addition, as different stages highlight different needs for the various aspects of identity, this study hypothesized that, in early and middle adolescence, social and image identity importance would significantly predict self-esteem; while in late adolescence, only personal identity importance would be significantly related to self-esteem. To examine the above hypotheses, four stepwise regression analyses of four serial studies on self-esteem using the aspects of identity importance and firmness as predictors were conducted in three different age levels of adolescents. Study 1 ($N = 1,285$ participants from junior high, high school, college students) generally supported the hypothesis that identity firmness could predict adolescent self-esteem. That is, the results of Study 1 showed that there were different patterns on identity importance in predicting self-esteem among three adolescent stages, but same patterns on identity firmness (i.e., personal identity firmness, social identity firmness) in predicting self-esteem among three adolescent stages. Study 2 ($N = 203$ participants from three different colleges) successfully replicated the findings of Study 1. In Study 3 ($N = 185$ undergraduate students) and Study 4 ($N = 146$ undergraduate students), the measurement of identity importance and identity firmness was revised. Again, the findings were consistent with those of the previous two studies. In sum, this study suggested identity importance and identity firmness are crucial factors contributing to adolescent self-esteem.

Keywords: Adolescence, identity firmness, identity importance, self-esteem.

Introduction

Erik Erikson (1968) postulated that identity formation is the most important developmental task during adolescence. In Erikson's definition, three elements emerge as necessary for a sense of identity. First, individuals must experience inner sameness, or integrity. Second, the sense of inner sameness is continuous over time. Third, identity is experienced within a community of important others (Patterson, Sochting, Marcia, 1992; Schwartz et al., 2011). Other research also suggested that a more confirmed sense of identity is more likely to lead to positive mental health (Erikson & Erikson, 1950; Chen, Lay, & Wu, 2013; Marcia, 2002) and optimal psychological functioning (e.g., self-esteem; well-being) (Adler, Lodi-Smith, Philippe, & Houle, 2016; Lillevoll, Kroger, & Martinussen, 2013; Schwartz et al., 2011; Waterman, 1992).

Self-esteem, which is an important developmentally issue in the field of adolescence, reflected to as self-worth or self-image, is the global evaluative dimension of self (Harter, 2006). Researchers have been interested in self-esteem changes during adolescence in the long run (e.g., Harter, 2006; Kling, Hyde, Showers, & Buswell, 1999). For example, researchers generally found that self-esteem often decreases when children make the transition from elementary school to junior high school (Hawkins & Berndt, 1985; Twenge & Campbell, 2001). Robins and his colleagues also indicated this decrease in self-esteem may take place during the life transition (e.g., from elementary school to junior high school, from junior high school to high school; from high school to college) (Robins, Trzesniewski, Tracy, Gosling, & Potter, 2002). Meanwhile, low self-esteem can develop into other problems (e.g., depression, eating disorders, delinquency...) (Kuhlberg, Peña, & Zayas, 2010; Harter, 1993; Unger, Kipke, Simon, Montgomery, & Johnson, 1997; Usher, Zahn-Waxler, Finch, & Gunlicks, 2000). In the past few decades, numerous studies investigated adolescent self-esteem in various ways (e.g., Baldwin & Hoffman, 2002; Prinstein & Dodge, 2010; Roustit, Campoy, Chaix, & Chauvin, 2010). However, the role of self-identity in self-esteem changes during adolescence has relatively received little attention. Therefore, the goal of the following four studies examined the relations between two measurements of identity features, namely identity importance and identity firmness, and adolescent self-esteem across the substages of adolescence.

Aspects of Identity Importance and Identity Firmness

Prior research on adolescent identity formation included discussions of identity status (Crocetti & Meeus, 2015; Marcia, 1966, 1980; Schwartz et al., 2011), aspect (Cheek, 1989; Galliher, McLean, & Syed, 2017; Syed & McLean, 2015), and process (Berzonsky, 1992, 1994; Berzonsky et al., 2013). Among them, Cheek and his colleagues (Cheek, 1989; Cheek & Briggs, 1982; Hogan & Cheek, 1983) examined the individual differences in the relative importance or value placed on different identity characteristics for self-definition and documented three identity aspects: personal, social, and collective identity. Although Cheek and his colleagues' work has enumerated the aspect-specific content that individuals may feel the need to make sense of who they are, their studies seldom investigate how the identity aspects are related with adolescent adjustment (e.g., self-esteem) (Chen, Lay, Wu, & Yao, 2007).

To preserve Cheek's (1989) aspect-specific approach of identity needs, Chen, Lay and Wu (2005) developed the concept of "identity importance," referring to the extent of personal needs for defining oneself. Based on the empirical findings of factor analysis (Chen et al., 2005), three aspects of identity importance were designated. The aspect of personal identity is rooted in private self-attributes, including personal values, goals, and self-knowledge. The social identity aspect is grounded in elements of the public self, such as reputation, popularity, and impressions managed for others. Finally, the aspect of image identity captures the characteristics of the external-self in the observable and concrete personal attributes and is related to the preoccupation with self-image that prevails during adolescence, such as physical appearance and academic performance (Chen et al. 2005, 2007, 2013; Chen, Lay, Soong, & Wu, 2011). The Questionnaire of Identity Importance (QII) (Chen et al., 2005) was developed to address the extent of adolescent needs in the personal, social, and image aspect in making sense of one's identity. That is, by investigating the extent of personal needs in each aspect of identity for defining oneself, QII tackles the profile of personal desire to fulfill a particular self-configuration.

Cheek's series of studies help establish an empirical perspective for understanding the identity needs. However, the gist of Eriksonian proposition on the significance of the sense of sameness and continuity in identity development is yet to be addressed (Chen et al., 2013). In

other words, Cheek's identity works neglect individual with self-perceived sameness across time and space, otherwise called temporal-spatial continuity. To follow Erikson's (1968) postulation of the critical importance of the sense of sameness and continuity in optimal self-identity, Chen et al. (2005) further posited the construct of "identity firmness." Identity firmness is defined as the degree of certainty regarding personal goals, values, abilities, and beliefs that help the individual experience and expect personal continuity and sameness, regardless of temporal and spatial changes in life. If it is firm and positive enough, this sense of certainty gives the individual direction, purpose, and meaning to life and helps the individual integrate the sense of self (Chen et al., 2005, 2007). Meanwhile, the Questionnaire of Identity Firmness (QIF) was developed to operationalize the sense of certainty regarding sameness and continuity of self-identity (Chen et al., 2005).

Besides, contemporary views of identity development often suggest that identity involves a more gradual and less cataclysmic transition than Erikson's term "crisis" implies (Baumeister, 1991; Schwartz et al., 2011). For examples, Baumeister's statement implies that each developmental phase in adolescence may have its own developmental task as well as societal expectations. Furthermore, James Marcia (1996) also believed that changes in the self during adolescence can best be understood by dividing them into early ("deconstruction"), middle ("reconstruction"), and late ("consolidation") phases. In other words, early adolescents may be challenged by who they are and who they will eventually become, while individuals in middle and late adolescence are more concerned about how to resolve internal contradiction and develop a new and integrated sense of self. By the same token, identity importance and identity firmness may not be static traits but involve a long-term development of differentiation, integration and commitment. By comparing the "identity importance" and "identity firmness" over the aspects of personal, social, and image identity among junior high, high school, and college students, Chen et al. (2005) found differential orientations of identity aspects among adolescents of different ages. Specifically, younger adolescents are more concerned with "social identity" and "image identity" than their older counterparts. Older adolescents are more concerned with "personal identity" than their younger counterparts. Meanwhile, the sense of continuity and sameness of older adolescents is stronger than that of their younger counterparts in all three aspects of identity firmness. These results help to capture the dynamic change of self-identity during different stages of adolescence. In the

same study, Chen et al. (2005) also found that the rating of the sense of "identity firmness" is a measuring dimension independent of the rating of the sense of "identity importance", particularly for older adolescents. That is, with development, adolescents gradually construe a distinctive understanding of their identity importance and identity firmness.

Relations between Identity Importance/Firmness and Adolescent Mental Adjustment

According to the Eriksonian identity theory, a more confirmed sense of identity is more likely to lead to positive mental health (Erikson & Erikson, 1950) and optimal psychological functioning (e.g., self-esteem) (Schwartz et al., 2011; Waterman, 1992). That is, an individual holding accrued confidence in the inner sameness and continuity would have optimal psychological functioning (e.g., higher self-esteem). The measurement of identity firmness reflects individuals' current feeling of self-continuity and sameness. Plotting the developmental trend of identity firmness and identity importance, several studies have investigated the relations between the identity concepts and adolescent adaption. Chen, Lay and Wu (2003a, 2013) found that college students with higher identity firmness were generally at a lower risk for mental health (e.g., anxiety and depression). Chen, Lay, & Wu (2003b) also indicated that college students with higher scores on identity firmness demonstrated higher "self-esteem," "positive self-efficacy," and "subjective well-being" and lower "negative self-efficacy." In another study, Chen et al. (2007) demonstrated that identity importance is also a correlate of psychological symptoms for adolescents. Specifically, the aspects of identity importance tended to be positively correlated with psychological symptoms in the neurosis group, but negatively correlated with psychological symptoms in the healthy-control group. Chen and Yao (2010) further addressed that the concept of identity firmness could predict adolescent's health-related quality of life (HRQOL) more than the concept of identity importance. Chen et al. (2013) showed that, during early and middle adolescence, identity importance significantly explained the variance of depression above and beyond the effect of identity firmness, which has been consistently revealed in prior studies as a robust predictor for adolescent adjustment. Accordingly, the present study proposed that aspects of identity firmness could predict adolescent self-esteem; in other words, adolescents with higher identity firmness would have higher self-esteem than those with low identity firmness.

In the meantime, since identity importance is defined as an index for one's personal need to define oneself, the present study also proposed that individuals who receive high scores in identity importance would have higher self-esteem than individuals who receive low scores in identity importance. However, the degree of self-esteem might depend on the stages of adolescence because different stages of adolescence highlighted on different identity importance.

The Aim of the Present Study

The goal of the present study would examine the relations between two measurements of identity features, namely identity importance and identity firmness, and adolescent self-esteem across the substages of adolescence.

Hypothesized Developmental Trend of Identity Firmness

Erikson believed that a more confirmed sense of identity is more likely to lead to positive mental health (Erikson & Erikson, 1950). In addition, our series of studies (Chen et al., 2003a, b, 2007, 2011) showed that the score of each of the three aspects of identity firmness in the healthy group was significantly higher than that in the unhealthy group. Chen and Yao (2010) also indicated that all aspects of identity firmness significantly correlated to adolescent's HRQOL. Furthermore, Chen et al. (2013) indicated that all aspects of identity firmness significantly correlated to adolescent's depression. Therefore, this study predicted that a higher degree of identity firmness in each of the three identity aspects would have higher self-esteem across different substages of adolescence.

Hypothesized Developmental Trend of Identity Importance

Drawing on the work of William James, Harter and Whitesell (2001) suggested that adolescent self-esteem is a function of one's performance in a domain as well as the importance that one attaches to that domain. In other words, performing well in domains that are regarded as important is related with higher self-esteem. Based on Erikson's clinical descriptions, the viewpoint of Waterman's optimal psychological functioning, as well as Harter and Whitesell's theoretical derivation, this study hypothesized that identity importance would play a significant predictor of self-esteem. In addition, according to Chen et al. (2005), the degree of importance of each aspect of identity was assigned differentially by adolescents at different substages. The present study thus further hypothesized that each aspect of identity

importance would play a particular role in self-esteem at different substages of adolescent development.

Furthermore, in terms of the aspect of personal identity importance, this study was expected to replicate the healthy-control group in Chen et al. (2007) indicating that higher personal identity importance would protect against maladjustment for college students. In addition, since personal identity importance was evaluated less important for junior- and senior-high-school students (Chen et al., 2005), this study did not expect to demonstrate significant predictability of personal identity importance to younger adolescents' psychological adjustment. Concerning of issues related to image identity importance, Harter (2006) mentioned that younger adolescents more often apply superficial traits (e.g., good looking, good baseball player, high academic achiever, video game lover) to define or label themselves. Some studies showed that these superficial domains (e.g., physical appearance, athletic competence, scholastic competence) were strongly correlated with global self-esteem across different countries (Fox, Page, Armstrong, & Kirby, 1994; Harter, 1999; Maeda, 1997). Similarly, Chen et al. (2005) revealed that issues related with image identity are most important for junior-high-school students followed by senior-high-school students and college students, respectively. Thus, this study hypothesized that higher image identity importance would have higher self-esteem particularly in early and middle adolescence. Finally, in terms of the aspect of social identity importance, such as peer relationship, peer acceptance, friendships, and impression management, are found imperative during early adolescence (George & Hartmann, 1996; Wentzel, Barry, & Caldwell, 2004) and social adjustment (Parker, Low, Walker, & Gamm, 2005; Usher et al., 2000), even contribute to the development of an adolescent's self-esteem (Dusek & McIntyre, 2003; Harter, 2006). Correspondingly, Chen et al. (2005) indicated that younger adolescents in junior and senior high school considered social identity as more important compared to their older counterparts of college students. Hence, this study hypothesized that higher social identity importance would particularly have higher self-esteem in early and middle adolescence.

In summary, based on Erikson's belief that a more confirmed sense of identity is more likely to lead to positive psychological adjustment (Erikson & Erikson, 1950) and to help individuals ensure the direction, purpose, and meaning of life, this study proposed that all aspects of identity firmness are key predictors to self-esteem at all substages of adolescence.

In addition, as different stages highlight different needs for the various aspects of identity, this study hypothesized that, in early and middle adolescence, social and image identity importance would significantly predict self-esteem; while in late adolescence, only personal identity importance would be significantly related to self-esteem.

To examine the above hypotheses, four studies would be administered. Study 1 used the three aspects of QII and QIF predict adolescent self-esteem. Study 2 would cross-validate the results of Study 1 using another college sample in exclude possible sampling bias. Study 3 would replicate the results of Study 1 and Study 2 after revising the measures of QII and QII and QIF. Study 4 would cross-validate the results of Study 1, Study 2 and Study 3 after revising the measures of QII and QIF again. In addition, researchers suggested the best analytical strategy in understanding key factors of adolescent mental health was stepwise regression analysis (Field, Diego, & Sanders, 2001; MacPhee & Andrews, 2006). Thus, four stepwise regression analyses on self-esteem using the aspects of identity importance and firmness as predictors were conducted for three different age levels of adolescents in the present study.

Study 1

Study 1 used three samples (i.e., early, middle, late adolescents) to examine our above hypotheses. The use of these three samples is optimal because it represents different developmental stages in adolescence.

Method

Participants

A total of 1285 students from three different adolescent stages in Taiwan participated in Study 1. Among this sample, 472 students (239 male and 233 female; Mean age 13.91) from two junior high schools in Taipei city participated in this study. A sample of 588 high school students (315 male and 273 female; Mean age 16.77) participated in this study from two different schools in Taipei city. The remaining 225 participants (69 male and 156 female,

Mean age = 19.16) were college students from a major Taiwanese university participated in this study to fulfill the course requirement of introductory psychology.

Measures

Questionnaire of Identity Importance, 1st edition (QII-I).

Items of the QII-I were revised and translated into Chinese from Cheek's (1989) "Aspects of Identity Questionnaire" (AIQ), which evaluated subject needs for defining the sense of self, namely, identity importance (Chen et al., 2005). On a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not important for the task of defining and understanding who I am) to 5 (extremely important), participants indicated the extent to which individual items are important in defining their individual identity characteristics. The QII-I consisted of 43 items, including 16 items of personal identity (e.g. "my dreams and imagination"), 12 items of social identity (e.g., "my popularity with other people"), and 15 items of image identity (e.g., "my academic performance"). The mean subscale scores range from 1 to 5. The internal reliability, factorial validity, and construct validity of the QII-I has been documented in Chen et al. (2003a, b, 2005). In the current sample, the Cronbach's α for personal, social and image identity importance was .88, .89, .83 for junior high school students; .84, .90, .86 for high school students; and .86, .88, .88 for college students, respectively.

Questionnaire of Identity Firmness, 1st edition (QIF-I).

The QIF-I developed by Chen et al. (2005) assessed participant sense of identity firmness. Items in QIF-I were either derived from the definition of "identity firmness" or were modified based on items in QII-I. On a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (extremely disagree) to 5 (extremely agree), participants indicated the extent to which each item is appropriate for describing individual identity firmness. The QIF-I contained 23 items, including 11 items of personal identity (e.g., "I am sure of my value system"), eight items of social identity (e.g., "I am sure of the appropriateness of my behaviors"), and five items of image identity (e.g., "I am sure of my academic achievement in the future"). The mean subscale scores ranged from 1 to 5. The internal reliability, factorial validity, and construct validity of the QIF-I has been documented in Chen et al. (2003a, b, 2005). In the current sample, the Cronbach's α for personal, social and image identity firmness were .85, .85, .68 for junior-high-school students; .86, .86, .72 for high-school students; and .89, .89, .74 for

college students, respectively.

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory (RSE).

This measure was used to assess general self-esteem according to 10-item Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory (RSE; Rosenberg, 1965). Participants responded to items on a 5-point scale with the degree to which they agreed with each item. The reliability and validity of this measure have been supported in many research (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991). The internal reliability and construct validity of the RSE - Chinese version has been documented in Robinson, Shaver and Wrightsman (1991) and Wu (2009). In the current sample, the Cronbach's α was .83 for junior-high-school students; .86 for high-school students; and .87 for college students, respectively.

Results

Correlation Analyses

Bivariate correlation coefficients among the QIF-I, QII-I, and the RSE revealed the different correlation pattern among the three samples. In junior-high-school sample, three aspects of identity firmness/identity importance were all associated with self-esteem. In senior-high-school sample, three aspects of identity firmness were all associated with self-esteem, and personal and social identity importance were correlated with self-esteem. In college sample, three aspects of identity firmness were all associated with self-esteem, but only personal identity importance was correlated with self-esteem (see Table 1).

Stepwise Regression Analyses Predicting Self-Esteem

Stepwise regression analyses were conducted with self-esteem as the criterion variable and the aspects of identity importance and identity firmness as the predictor variables for the three samples (see Table 2). In junior-high-school sample, the results of the stepwise selection in the junior-high-school sample revealed that four variables (i.e., personal identity firmness, social identity firmness, personal identity importance, and social identity importance) contributed to the explanation for self-esteem. These variables explained 50 percent of the variance of self-esteem.

Table 1 Means, standard deviations and simple correlations among the variables in Study 1

Junior High School (N = 764)	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Personal identity importance	3.82	.58							
2. Social identity importance	3.89	.65	.66***						
3. Image identity importance	3.38	.64	.52***	.65***					
4. Personal identity firmness	3.53	.67	.40***	.23**	.24**				
5. Social identity firmness	3.48	.69	.43***	.33***	.23***	.69***			
6. Image identity firmness	3.13	.72	.34***	.23***	.21***	.57***	.47***		
7. Self-esteem	3.52	.69	.42***	.23***	.20***	.66***	.60***	.47***	
Senior High School (N = 805)	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Personal identity importance	3.79	.50							
2. Social identity importance	3.87	.62	.56***						
3. Image identity importance	3.08	.66	.40***	.61***					
4. Personal identity firmness	3.44	.67	.39***	.13**	.10*				
5. Social identity firmness	3.48	.63	.30***	.21***	.17***	.68***			
6. Image identity firmness	3.01	.78	.25***	.13**	.11*	.55***	.53***		
7. Self-esteem	3.53	.73	.21***	.10*	.06	.66***	.61***	.43***	
College (N = 274)	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Personal identity importance	3.93	.45							
2. Social identity importance	3.66	.54	.45***						
3. Image identity importance	2.81	.64	.30***	.57***					
4. Personal identity firmness	3.63	.62	.37***	.05	.01				
5. Social identity firmness	3.68	.56	.33***	.14*	-.02	.67***			
6. Image identity firmness	3.28	.70	.21***	.10	.08	.47***	.48***		
7. Self-esteem	3.75	.63	.27***	.09	-.05	.70***	.60***	.39***	

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed)

For the senior-high-school sample, three variables (i.e., personal identity firmness, social identity firmness, and personal identity importance) were important variables in predicting self-esteem. These variables explained 51 percent of the variance of self-esteem.

For the college sample, personal and social identity firmness entered the regression model. The two variables could explained 49 percent of the variance of self-esteem.

Table 2 Factors identified as predictors of self-esteem by stepwise regression analysis in Study 1

Step	Variable Entered	Model R^2	Adjusted R^2	R^2 Change	Stand. β weights	F Value
Junior High School						
1	Personal identity firmness	.44	.44	.44	.43	319.94***
2	Social identity firmness	.48	.47	.04	.25	31.79***
3	Personal identity Importance	.49	.49	.02	.21	14.67***
4	Social identity Importance	.50	.50	.01	-.10	4.31***
Senior High School						
1	Personal identity firmness	.45	.45	.45	.50	429.17***
2	Social identity firmness	.50	.50	.05	.31	53.97***
3	Personal identity Importance	.51	.51	.01	-.10	8.82**
College						
1	Personal identity firmness	.47	.47	.47	.55	181.91***
2	Social identity firmness	.50	.49	.03	.21	10.23**

Note. ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

In sum, the results of Study 1 found that there were different patterns on identity importance in predicting self-esteem among three adolescent stages, but same patterns on identity firmness (i.e., personal identity firmness, social identity firmness) in predicting self-esteem among three adolescent stages. These results supported our hypotheses that the aspects of identity firmness could predict adolescent self-esteem across three developmental stages. In addition, the aspects of identity importance also could predict adolescent self-esteem; however, the degree of self-esteem might depend on the stages of adolescence.

Study 2

To exclude possible sampling bias of late adolescents in Study 1 (i.e., sampling college students from only one school), our primary goal of Study 2 sampled college students again from three different schools to cross-validate the results of Study 1.

Method

Participants

A total of 203 college students from three different schools in Taiwan participated in Study 2. Among these students, 60 undergraduate students (27 male and 33 female, Mean age = 20.17) from a major university in Taiwan participated in this study to fulfill the course requirement of introductory psychology. Another 97 subjects (29 male and 68 female, Mean age = 20.35) were students of a technology institute. The remaining 46 subjects were all female students (Mean age = 19.16) from a two-year college of nursing and medical care. All three schools were located in the Taipei metropolitan area.

Measures

As in Study 1, the participants were asked to complete a booklet containing the measures of QII-I, QIF-I, and RSE. In QII-I, with the current sample internal reliabilities (coefficient α) were .85 (personal), .88 (social), and .86 (image). In QIF-I, with the present sample internal reliabilities were .90 (personal), .85 (social), and .78 (image). In RSE, with the present sample internal reliabilities were .86.

Results

Correlation Analyses

As in Study 1, bivariate correlation coefficients among the QIF-I, QII-I, and the RSE revealed the same correlation pattern in Study 2. That is, three aspects of identity firmness were all associated with self-esteem, but only personal identity importance was correlated with self-esteem (see Table 3).

Table 3 Means, standard deviations and simple correlations among the variables in Study 2

College (<i>N</i> = 203)	Mean	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Personal identity importance	3.87	.43							
2. Social identity importance	3.91	.49	.53***						
3. Image identity importance	3.25	.62	.35***	.60***					
4. Personal identity firmness	3.27	.66	.31***	.01	.04				
5. Social identity firmness	3.46	.61	.27***	.10	.02	.62***			
6. Image identity firmness	3.01	.77	.19**	.05	.04	.62***	.45***		
7. Self-esteem	3.51	.67	.22**	.01	.07	.66***	.54***	.47***	

Note. ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed)

Stepwise Regression Analyses Predicting Self-Esteem

As in Study 1, the stepwise regression analyses of Study 2 showed that personal and social identity firmness entered the regression model. The two variables could explain 44 percent of the variance of self-esteem (see Table 4).

Table 4 Factors identified as predictors of self-esteem by stepwise regression analysis in Study 2

Step	Variable Entered	Model R^2	Adjusted R^2	R^2 Change	Stand. β weights	F Value
College Sample						
1	Personal identity firmness	.42	.42	.42	.53	133.75***
2	Social identity firmness	.44	.44	.02	.19	7.26**

Note. ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

In sum, the results of Study 2 consistently found personal identity firmness and social identity firmness could predict self-esteem in late adolescent sample as Study 1. In other words, the results of Study 2 successfully replicated the results of Study 1 in late adolescent sample.

Study 3

Our primary goal in Study 3 was to cross-validate the results of Study 1 and Study 2 after revising the measures of self-identity. Since the items of QII-I and QIF-I administered in Study 1 and Study 2 did not have one-to-one item correspondence between the two scales, these items were modified to balance the total item numbers in both scales as well as to achieve one-to-one item correspondence between the two scales. For example, the statement "My future direction is important for defining and understanding who I am" in QII-II corresponds with the item "I am sure my future direction" in QIF-II. In addition, the total number of items in QIF-I (23 items) is considerably less than those in QII-I (43 items), Study 3 reconstructed the QII-I and the QIF-I into the QII-II and the QIF-II.

Method

Participants

A total of 185 undergraduate students (88 male and 97 female, Mean age = 20.39) from a major university in Taiwan participated in this study to fulfill course requirements for introductory psychology courses.

Measures

Questionnaire of Identity Importance, 2nd edition (QII-II) and Questionnaire of Identity Firmness, 2nd edition (QIF-II).

Study 3 reconstructed the QII-I and the QIF-I. The resulting scale of QII-II and QIF-II both comprised 11 items for personal identity, 10 items for social identity, and 10 items for image identity subscale. Both QII-II and QIF-II were assessed using five-point Likert scales. The internal reliability and construct validity of the QII-II and QIF-II has been documented in Chen et al. (2007). In the current sample, the Cronbach's α for personal, social and image identity importance were .83, .86, .85, while those for personal, social and image identity firmness were .88, .82, .78, respectively.

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory (RSE).

As Study 1 and Study 2, the RSE was measured as an indicator of mental health in Study 3. In RSE, with the present sample internal reliabilities were .89.

Results

Correlation Analyses

As in Study 1 and Study 2, bivariate correlation coefficients among the QIF-II, QII-II, and the RSE revealed the same correlation pattern in Study 3. The results showed that three aspects of identity firmness were all associated with self-esteem, but only personal identity importance was correlated with self-esteem (see Table 5).

Table 5 Means, standard deviations and simple correlations among the variables in Study 3

College (<i>N</i> = 185)	Mean	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Personal identity importance	4.09	.47							
2. Social identity importance	3.74	.58	.35***						
3. Image identity importance	2.68	.70	.07	.57***					
4. Personal identity firmness	3.40	.67	.37***	.13	.05				
5. Social identity firmness	3.52	.55	.36***	.20**	.07	.72***			
6. Image identity firmness	3.59	.58	.29***	.12	.00	.62***	.54***		
7. Self-esteem	3.68	.67	.24***	.08	.03	.65***	.55***	.35***	

Note. ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed)

Stepwise Regression Analyses Predicting Self-Esteem

As in Study 1 and Study 2, the stepwise regression analyses of Study 3 showed that personal and social identity firmness entered the regression model. The two variables could explain 43 percent of the variance of self-esteem (see Table 6).

Table 6 Factors identified as predictors of self-esteem by stepwise regression analysis in Study 3

Step	Variable Entered	Model R^2	Adjusted R^2	R^2 Change	Stand. β weights	F Value
College Sample						
1	Personal identity firmness	.42	.42	.42	.52	129.61***
2	Social identity firmness	.43	.43	.01	.17	4.39*

Note. * $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$

In sum, the results of Study 3 consistently found personal identity firmness and social identity firmness could predict self-esteem in late adolescent sample as Study 1 and Study 2. In other words, the results of Study 3 successfully replicated the results of Study 1 and Study 2 again in late adolescent sample.

Study 4

Our primary goal in Study 4 was to cross-validate the results of Study 1, Study 2, and Study 3 after revising the measures of self-identity. Since the items of QIF-I and QIF-II administered in Study 1, Study 2, and Study 3 only measuring positive valence of identity firmness (e.g., I am sure my future direction) which could not catch the idea of Erikson's negative identity (Erikson, 1968; Frager & Fadiman, 1984), and this measuring approach also violated the guidelines for writing multiple-choice items (i.e., double stems in one question). Thus, Study 4 reconstructed the QII-II and the QIF-II into the QII-III and the QIF-III. After revision, the resulting scale of QII-III and QIF-III both comprised 10 items for personal identity, 10 items for social identity, and 10 items for image identity subscale.

Method

Participants

A total of 146 undergraduate students (71 male and 75 female, Mean age = 20.23) from a major university in Taiwan participated in this study to fulfill course requirements for introductory psychology courses.

Measures

Questionnaire of Identity Importance, 3rd edition (QII-III) and Questionnaire of Identity Firmness, 3rd edition (QIF-III). Study 4 reconstructed the QII-II and the QIF-II. The contents of items in QIF-III were designed to reach one-to-one correspondence to those in QII-III. QII-III were assessed using five-point Likert scales. QIF-III mean subscale scores ranged from -4 to 4 by multiplying the valance from the like/unlike choice with four-point rating (Chen et al., 2013). The internal reliability and construct validity of the QII-III and QIF-III has been documented in Chen et al. (2013). In the current sample, the Cronbach's α for personal, social and image identity importance were .87, .87, .80, while those for personal, social and image identity firmness were .85, .91, .71, respectively.

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory (RSE). As Study 1, Study 2 and Study3, the RSE was measured as an indicator of mental health in Study 4. In RSE, with the present sample internal reliabilities were .89.

Results

Correlation Analyses

As in Study 1, Study 2 and Study3, bivariate correlation coefficients among the QIF-II, QII-II, and the RSE revealed almost the same correlation pattern in Study 4. The results showed that three aspects of identity firmness were all associated with self-esteem, but only personal identity importance was correlated with self-esteem (see Table 7).

Table 7 Means, standard deviations and simple correlations among the variables in Study 3

College (N = 146)	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Personal identity importance	3.91	.58							
2. Social identity importance	3.95	.53	.28**						
3. Image identity importance	2.95	.58	.10	.39***					
4. Personal identity firmness	1.44	1.26	.30***	-.13	-.00				
5. Social identity firmness	1.85	1.09	.19*	.09	-.01	.59***			
6. Image identity firmness	1.06	1.17	.26**	.01	.09	.53***	.62***		
7. Self-esteem	3.71	.68	.30***	-.09	-.03	.69***	.60***	.53***	

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed)

Stepwise Regression Analyses Predicting Self-Esteem

As in Study 1, Study 2 and Study 3, the stepwise regression analyses of Study 4 showed that personal and social identity firmness entered the regression model. The two variables could explain 53 percent of the variance of self-esteem (see Table 8).

In sum, the results of Study 4 consistently found personal identity firmness and social identity firmness could predict self-esteem in late adolescent sample as Study 1, Study 2 and Study 3. In other words, the results of Study 4 fully replicated the results of Study 1, Study 2 and Study 3 in late adolescent sample.

Table 8 Factors identified as predictors of self-esteem by stepwise regression analysis in Study 4

Step	Variable Entered	Model R^2	Adjusted R^2	R^2 Change	Stand. β weights	F Value
College Sample						
1	Personal identity firmness	.49	.49	.49	.54	133.80***
2	Social identity firmness	.54	.54	.05	.28	81.09*

Note. * $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$

General Discussion

The goal of the present study was to examine the relation between two identity features (identity firmness, identity importance) and adolescent self-esteem. The results revealed that individuals with high identity firmness would have higher self-esteem than those with low identity firmness. In the meantime, the relation between identity importance and degree of self-esteem depended on the stages of adolescence.

The Function of Aspects of Identity Importance on Adolescent Self-Esteem

The measurement of identity importance reflects personal needs for defining oneself. That is, identity importance is regarded as the desire to fulfill the ideal self. Prior research indicated that the ideal self would lead individuals toward personal growth and positive development (Rogers, 1951; Erikson, 1968). Taylor and Brown (1988) also stated that positive illusions involve a general tendency to perceive the self more favorably overall than most others are perceived, and positive illusions could also predict mental health (e.g., self-esteem) (Compton, 1992; Taylor, Kemeny, Reed, Bower, & Gruenewald, 2000). The present study proposed that one's sense of identity importance might also be regarded as a kind of ideal self or positive illusions, and it might enhance adolescent self-esteem. Chen et al. (2005) found differential orientations of identity aspects among adolescents of different ages. Specifically, younger adolescents (i.e., junior high and high school students) are more concerned with "image identity" and/or "social identity" than their older counterparts. In contrast, late adolescents are more concerned about "personal identity importance" than early and middle adolescents. Thus, the present study proposed that the degree of self-esteem might depend on the stages of adolescence because different stages of adolescence highlighted on different identity importance. The results in general confirmed our hypothesis. For example, Study 1 found that all three aspects of identity importance were significantly related to self-esteem in early adolescence. In middle adolescence, personal and social identity importance were significantly related to self-esteem. However, only personal identity importance was significantly related to self-esteem in late adolescence. These findings may imply that there is a dynamic change in identity importance, in turn, influences adolescent self-esteem.

In term of early adolescents, although the attributes of image identity appear to be very superficial or concrete, these attributes perhaps could reflect the psychological needs of younger adolescents at that time (Harter, 2006). On the basis of these superficial/concrete attributes, adolescent will gradually change their characteristics of self-description from external/superficial attributes to internal/abstract attributes (Harter, 1990, 1999). In the developmental process, early adolescents with high image identity importance may instigate their internal developing motivation even actual action to fulfill their visible needs of self-definition (e.g., academic performance). Therefore, early adolescents possessing high image identity importance may be beneficial for their self-esteem.

For early and middle adolescents, how they are seen by peers is often the most important aspect of their lives (Thorne & Michaelieu, 1996; Santor, Messervey, & Kusumakar, 2000). Under such circumstances, their thoughts or emotions are easily possessed by needs in the aspect of social identity (e.g., being peer accepted, being liked). A possible explanation for social identity importance facilitating self-esteem from social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, Turner, 1987) that individuals maybe more concerned with social identity importance, and they are more likely to win friendship as well as maintain their self-esteem.

Furthermore, adolescents in the three developmental stages concerned about personal identity importance all the time. The results constantly implied that adolescents with high personal identity importance may help them establish self-esteem throughout the whole period of adolescence. A possible reason is that, in the process of identity formation, individuals devote themselves to pursuing their personal values and fulfilling their personal goals and dreams. Under the circumstances, they may easily have proactive coping or positive illusion. Consequently, this future minded may help them having possession of higher self-esteem.

The Function of Aspects of Identity Firmness on Adolescent Self-Esteem

The present study also examined the relation between identity firmness and adolescent self-esteem. The analytical results of four studies in this article consistently revealed that all three aspects of identity firmness were significantly related to self-esteem in every stage of adolescence. More specifically, personal and social identity firmness stably influenced adolescent self-esteem across three developmental stages. These findings imply that the role

of identity firmness might play a stable and protective factor on adolescent self-esteem. According to the Eriksonian identity theory, a more confirmed sense of identity is more likely to lead to positive mental health (Erikson & Erikson, 1950; Jahoda, 1958) and optimal psychological functioning (Adler et al., 2016; Lillevoll et al., 2013; Schwartz et al., 2011; Waterman, 1992). This study suggested that adolescents who have higher level of aspects of identity firmness scored higher on self-esteem. This finding also corresponds with Campbell (1990) that self-clarity and certainty is related to self-esteem, which has been indicated an important correlate with mental health in many other studies (Harter & Marold, 1992). Thus, it is worthy of designing some clinical or educational programs to facilitate adolescent identity firmness for healthy development.

In sum, the present article suggested that both identity importance and identity firmness are important factors for adolescent self-esteem. Specifically, the construct of identity firmness played a stable and crucial role predicting adolescent self-esteem. In addition, Chen et al. (2005) pointed out that late adolescents had higher scores in all three aspects of identity firmness, that is, older adolescents' sense of continuity and sameness are stronger than their younger counterparts in all three aspects of identity firmness. Marcia (1980) considered that identity achievements, for the most part, are seen as strong, self-directed, and high adaptive. Both converged into the same idea that individuals with a more confirmed sense of identity is more likely to lead to positive mental health (Erikson & Erikson, 1950; Jahoda, 1958) and optimal psychological functioning (Waterman, 1992). As previously mentioned, Marcia (1996) addressed that changes in the self in adolescence can be understood by dividing them into deconstruction, reconstruction, and consolidation phases. For this, it raises an interesting research issue to explore the relation among the concepts of self-development phase, identity achievement, and identity firmness. For example, a late adolescent might either achieve the consolidation phase, or lie in identity achievement status, or possess high identity firmness, or both of any two, or all. It is possible that different combinations of these three concepts might represent different quality of mental health. To fulfill this inquiry, future studies may allow us to further clarify the relationships and/or mechanisms of these concepts in influencing adolescent positive development.

Limitation of the Present Study

There were two major limitations in the present study. First, adolescent samples of the present study only located in the metropolitan Taipei area. It would have some limitations of external validity to generalize our findings to other situations and to other people. In the future, it is better to cross-validate the results of the present study using other samples out of the metropolitan Taipei area. Second, the present study adopting four studies to examine how the aspects of identity importance and identity firmness predict self-esteem across the substages of adolescence. Although four studies showed consistent findings in relations between self-identity and self-esteem, especially in late adolescent sample, only Study 1 included early, middle, and late adolescent samples in the present study. Thus, the different age levels of adolescents should be included to examine the relations between two new measurements of identity features (i.e., QII-III, QIF-III) and adolescent self-esteem across the substages of adolescence in the future study.

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青少年自我認同與自尊： 認同重要性與認同確定性之功能

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Erik Erikson (1968) 認為自我認同為青少年最重要的發展任務。過去研究亦指出個體若越能有自我認同感，則會擁有正向的心理健康，及最適的心理功能表現（例如：自尊、幸福感）。此外，自尊亦為青少年重要的發展議題之一，它反映著個體自我價值、自我形象及對自己整體的評價。過去諸多研究顯示，青少年的自尊問題會影響青少年的心理健康或心理病理（例如：憂鬱、行為偏差）。雖過去探討青少年自尊有諸多取向，但鮮少從自我認同來探討青少年的自尊。基於Erikson自我認同感之觀點，本研究認為青少年認同確定性越高，其自尊亦會越高。此外，由於不同青少年時期，其內在需求有所不同，因此本研究假設早、中期之青少年，其社會及形象認同重要性能預測其自尊，而晚期青少年則個人認同重要性能預測其自尊。本系列研究以逐步回歸分析探討不同階段青少年，其認同確定性及認同重要性是否能預測其自尊。研究一（共計1,285名國中、高中、大學樣本）支持研究假設，亦即認同確定性可預測青少年自尊，而認同重要性則隨不同的發展階段，對自尊有不同的預測效果。研究二（共計203名三所大學生樣本）成功複製研究一之結果。研究三（185名大學生樣本）及研究四（146名大學生樣本）更新認同確定性、認同重要性測量工具，得到與研究一、研究二相同的相同結果。總結，本研究建議認同確定性及認同重要性皆為青少年自尊重要的預測因子。

關鍵詞：自尊、青少年、認同重要性、認同確定性。

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