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A Cross-National Study of Identity Status in Dutch and Italian Adolescents

Status Distributions and Correlates

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Abstract. The purpose of this study was to examine differences in identity formation between large community samples of Italian ($N = 1,975$) and Dutch ($N = 1,521$) adolescents. Findings indicated that the distribution across five previously extracted identity statuses (i.e., achievement, early closure, moratorium, searching moratorium, and diffusion) differed strongly across nationality, with Italian participants more represented in the moratorium statuses, and with Dutch adolescents more likely to be in the early closure and diffusion statuses. Furthermore, the profile of the searching moratorium status, in terms of personality characteristics, internalizing symptoms, and parent-adolescent relationships, was found to be more adaptive in the Italian context. These findings are discussed in light of social, economic, and cultural differences between Italy and the Netherlands.

Keywords: adolescents, identity statuses, moratorium, searching moratorium, cross-national comparisons, Italy, The Netherlands

According to Erikson's (1950) developmental theory, identity formation is the primary psychosocial task of adolescence. Marcia (1966) operationalized Erikson's theory by extracting the assumedly independent dimensions of *exploration* (evaluating a broad array of goals, values, and beliefs), and *commitment* (adopting one or more of the available options). Marcia crossed high versus low levels of exploration and commitment to derive four identity statuses: *achievement* (stable commitments enacted following a period of active exploration); *foreclosure* (strong commitments enacted without much exploration of other possible alternatives); *moratorium* (exploration of different possibilities, but without having made commitments); and *diffusion* (no systematic exploration and a lack of firm commitments).

The identity status model has inspired a large amount of research focused on psychosocial and personality profiles across the four identity statuses (see Alsaker & Kroger, 2006, for a review). Nevertheless, over the past 20 years, the model has also received its share of criticism (e.g., Blasi & Glodis, 1995; Côté & Levine, 1988; Schwartz, 2001; van Hoof, 1999). A primary criticism of Marcia's paradigm has focused on its emphasis on the statuses as outcomes of identity development, and on its lack of attention to the processes through which identity is developed and modified

over time (Bosma, 1985). This critique has been particularly constructive, given that it has prompted increased attention to the social-cognitive strategies that underlie the identity statuses (Berzonsky & Adams, 1999) and to differentiating subtypes of commitment and exploration (Luyckx et al., 2008; Meeus, 1996) – which can provide further insights into the ways identity is developed and maintained.

Extending Marcia's Identity Status Model

Within this renewed line of research focused on identity processes, Crocetti, Rubini, and Meeus (2008), advancing previous work by Meeus (1996; Meeus, Iedema, Helsen, & Vollebergh, 1999; Meeus, Iedema, & Maassen, 2002), developed a three-process identity model. This model includes commitment, in-depth exploration, and reconsideration of commitment as pivotal processes to capture the dynamic by which identity is continuously developed and revised. *Commitment* refers to firm choices that adolescents have enacted, and to the self-confidence they derive from these choices. *In-depth exploration* represents the extent to which adolescents reflect on their current commitments, search for additional information, and talk with others about

their choices. *Reconsideration of commitment* refers to comparing one's present commitments with possible alternative commitments when one's existing goals, values, and beliefs are no longer satisfactory. The conceptualization of reconsideration of commitment is, on the one hand, similar to Marcia's (1966) definition of exploration, as it encompasses the investigation of possible new commitments. On the other hand, it differs from exploration in that it taps into adolescents' present attempts to change current commitments because they are no longer satisfied with their prior choices. Thus, reconsideration is undertaken within the context of one's present commitments, rather from a lack of commitment as originally hypothesized by Marcia.

In this model, in contrast to Marcia's (1966) conceptualization, it is assumed that individuals approach adolescence with a set of commitments of at least minimal strength in ideological and interpersonal identity domains (Meeus, in press; Meeus, van de Schoot, Keijsers, Schwartz, & Branje, 2010). In fact, in domains such as educational and relational identity, individuals approach adolescence with some commitments (generally internalized from parents or other authority figures) and can decide whether to maintain or to revise them. This model thus includes a dual cycle process (Luyckx, Goossens, & Soenens, 2006). Adolescents can then explore their commitments in depth and decide whether they provide a good fit with one's overall talents and potentials (the identity development and maintenance cycle). If one's current commitments are not satisfying or do not provide a good fit, they may be reconsidered in favor of other commitments (the identity revision cycle).

Previous studies conducted both with Dutch (Crocetti, Rubini, & Meeus, 2008) and Italian (Crocetti, Schwartz, Fermani, & Meeus, 2010) adolescents have indicated that the three-factor model provided a significantly better fit to the data compared to alternative one-factor (in which all identity processes were collapsed on the same latent variable) and two-factor (consisting of commitment and global exploration, combining in-depth exploration and reconsideration of commitment) models. Additionally, evidence presented in these studies suggested that commitment, in-depth exploration, and reconsideration of commitment represent distinct but interrelated processes. Specifically, commitment was strongly and positively related to in-depth exploration; that is, adolescents with strong commitments also actively explored their present choices. Moreover, in-depth exploration was positively but moderately associated with reconsideration of commitment: individuals who explored existing commitments also gathered information about potential alternative commitments. This latter finding suggests that reconsideration both reflects uncertainty about current commitments but is also involved in the process of searching for new information about relevant commitments. Commitment and reconsideration of commitment were not related, suggesting that adopting and evaluating commitments represent separate processes (cf. Luyckx et al., 2006).

Furthermore, the three identity processes were also meaningfully related to personality dimensions, psychosocial problems, and parent-adolescent relationships (Crocetti, Rubini, & Meeus, 2008; Crocetti et al., 2010). Specifically, commitment was positively related to extraversion and

emotional stability; it was positively linked to nurturing parent-adolescent relationships; and it was negatively associated with internalizing symptoms such as depression and anxiety. Thus, commitment appeared to serve as an indicator of identity consolidation and of successful identity development (cf. Schwartz, 2006, 2007). In-depth exploration was positively associated with agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience, but also negatively related to emotional stability, and positively to internalizing symptoms. Therefore, in-depth exploration seemed to be a double-edged sword, associated with curiosity but also with confusion and distress (Luyckx et al., 2008; Schwartz, Zamboanga, Weisskirch, & Rodriguez, 2009). Finally, reconsideration of commitment was negatively associated with agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience; it was linked to poor family relationships and positively associated with both internalizing and externalizing behaviors. Therefore, releasing one's commitments appears to be intertwined with disequilibrium and distress.

Crocetti, Rubini, Luyckx, and Meeus (2008) found that, using commitment, in-depth exploration, and reconsideration of commitment, and utilizing empirically-based clustering methods, it was possible to derive not only all four of Marcia's original identity statuses (achievement, foreclosure [relabelled as "closure" or "early closure" by Meeus et al., 2010], moratorium, and diffusion), but also an additional variant of the moratorium status, labeled searching moratorium. Specifically, the *achievement* status consisted of adolescents who scored high on commitment and in-depth exploration, but low on reconsideration of commitment. The *early closure* status represented individuals with moderately high scores on commitment and low scores on both in-depth exploration and reconsideration of commitment. The *moratorium* cluster consisted of individuals who scored low on commitment, medium on in-depth exploration, and high on reconsideration of commitment. The *diffusion* cluster represented individuals with low scores on commitment, in-depth exploration, and reconsideration of commitment. Finally, the *searching moratorium* cluster was comprised of adolescents high on commitment, in-depth exploration, and reconsideration of commitment. The two moratorium statuses differ in terms of the base from which reconsideration is attempted. Adolescents in the *moratorium* cluster have few commitments and are evaluating alternatives in order to find satisfying identity-related commitments. Conversely, their peers in the *searching moratorium* cluster are seeking to revise commitments that have already been enacted, and they are able to do so from the secure base provided by their current commitments.

An example related to work identity could help clarify the distinction between these two forms of moratorium. Youth who think that the work they are doing does not fit with their characteristics, standards, and goals may search for a different occupation and are therefore in a status of moratorium. On the contrary, their peers who are strongly committed to their occupation and have thought about it a great deal, but realize they may be able to find even better fitting commitments, are in a status of searching moratorium (see also Crocetti, Rubini, Luyckx et al., 2008).

Adolescents in these five identity statuses were found to differ significantly in terms of personality characteristics, psychosocial problems, and parent-adolescent relationships (Crocetti, Rubini, Luyckx et al., 2008). In particular, adolescents in the achievement status were characterized by high levels of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience, low levels of psychosocial problems, and perceived parent-adolescent warmth and trust. Adolescents in the early closure status were similar to their achieved counterparts in reporting low psychosocial problems and good communication with parents, but they were less extraverted, agreeable, conscientious, and open to experience compared to achieved adolescents. Adolescents in the moratorium and searching moratorium statuses both reported the lowest scores on personality dimensions and on parent-adolescent relationship quality. However, adolescents in the moratorium status reported more internalizing and externalizing problems compared to their peers in the searching moratorium status. Finally, adolescents in the diffusion status displayed a personality profile similar to that of adolescents in the early closure status – medium to low levels of psychosocial problems, and some ambivalence in their relationships with their parents. Overall, these descriptions of the statuses match the theoretically expected correlates of the identity statuses (Marcia, Waterman, Matteson, Archer, & Orlofsky, 1993).

Studying Identity Cross-Nationally

The criticism that the identity status paradigm misrepresented the process of identity development stimulated not only a trend toward delineating subtypes of exploration and commitment and validating the statuses based on these finer-grained dimensions, but also an emerging literature on the cross-national applicability of the identity statuses. Many of the studies that have examined identity cross-nationally used older measures that focused on Marcia's original dimensions of exploration and commitment. Moreover, nearly all of these comparisons were between the United States and another nation. For example, comparisons between American and Norwegian late adolescents (Jensen, Kristiansen, Sandbekk, & Kroger, 1998; Stegarud, Solheim, Karlsen, & Kroger, 1999) indicated that Norwegian individuals scored lower on scales for all four identity statuses. Jensen et al. explained their findings in terms of the Norwegian mixed-liberal welfare state, which stresses equality among individuals, and which may discourage youth from exploring various issues and from assuming strong commitments. Similar findings emerged when American and Swedish individuals were compared on measures of identity statuses (Schwartz, Adamson, Ferrer-Wreder, Dillon, & Berman, 2006).

Other cross-national comparisons between the United States and other countries have produced somewhat different results. Comparisons between American and South African adolescents (Low, Akande, & Hill, 2005) revealed that American individuals were less often represented in the achieved status, and more likely to be in the other identity statuses. Another study (Graf, Mullis, & Mullis, 2008) found that American adolescents scored lower than

their Asian Indian peers on diffusion, foreclosure, and moratorium.

Taken together, these studies suggest differences in identity statuses or identity processes between and among national contexts, but the exact nature of these differences is not clear and appears to vary across studies. American emerging adults appeared to exhibit a more actively constructed identity compared to their Northern European peers from Norway and Sweden, but no other consistent patterns have emerged. Thus, further studies are needed to gain a better understanding of cross-national differences on identity formation in adolescence.

Comparisons conducted between American and European samples have been especially useful in delineating the extent to which a highly individualistic and capitalist national context (the United States) may encourage identity activity more strongly compared to socialist-type national contexts where equality of economic outcomes across individuals is explicitly desired. On the other hand, comparisons across European countries would allow for examination of effects of specific between-nation differences on identity processes, holding constant the capitalist-socialist distinction. Other types of differences may be more salient between Northern and Southern European countries. For example, previous cross-national studies have suggested that Southern European countries, such as Italy, are more focused on familial togetherness and closeness, and less on individual choice and self-direction, than Northern European countries such as the United Kingdom (e.g., Manzi, Vignoles, Regalia, & Scabini, 2006). Indeed, in some Southern European countries, young people are expected to reside at home with their parents until they are married – which often does not occur until the late 20s or early 30s (Lanz & Tagliabue, 2007).

Youth from the Netherlands and Italy can be considered as two prototypes of these different European paths toward adulthood. A couple of data sources can be used to support this statement. For instance, Eurostat (2008) reported that, in 2006, the employment rate of young people aged 15–24 years was only 25% in Italy, compared to more than 60% in the Netherlands. Correspondingly, the unemployment rate was 21.6% in Italy versus 6.6% in the Netherlands. Additionally, Aassve, Billari, Mazzucco, and Ongaro (2002) reported that 68% of Italian young people aged 18–34 years were living with their parents, compared to only 27% of their Dutch peers. Italian youth, unlike their Dutch peers, postpone many primary life transitions (such as becoming employed full-time and achieving residential independence) into the late 20s and in early 30s (for a detailed documentation of this trend, see Buzzi, Cavalli, & de Lillo, 2007). Economic disparities between Italy and the Netherlands can explain some, but likely not all, of the differences in timing for transition to adulthood. In fact, it has been found that a considerable portion of Italian young adults who have economic opportunities to live independently or cohabitate with a partner still prefer to reside with their parents (Buzzi et al., 2007) and to postpone major life transitions.

These different cultural expectations for the transition to adulthood may underlie the differences in terms of what is expected by adolescents. Italian adolescents may view the teenage years as a time of considering and reconsidering

identity alternatives, rather than as a time of beginning to consolidate a sense of identity. Adolescents in the Netherlands, who are preparing for the impending transition to adulthood, might therefore be expected to be more actively engaged in identity work compared to Italian adolescents, who likely have a great deal more time until they transition into adulthood.

The Present Study

The purpose of the present study was to examine cross-national differences in empirically extracted identity statuses between Northern (i.e., Dutch) and Southern (i.e., Italian) European adolescent samples. First, we tested whether the five identity statuses derived from commitment, in-depth exploration, and reconsideration of commitment in a previous study conducted with Dutch adolescents (Crocetti, Rubini, Luyckx et al., 2008) could also be extracted within a comparable Italian sample.

Second, we compared the distribution of Dutch and Italian adolescents across the various identity statuses. Based on cross-national differences related to the timing and nature of the transition to adulthood (Aassve et al., 2002; Eurostat, 2008; Lanz & Tagliabue, 2007), we hypothesized that Italian adolescents would display a less stable identity than their Dutch peers. In particular, given that Italian adolescents are expected to enact relevant life decisions in the late 20s or in early 30s (cf. Buzzi et al., 2007), they might perceive less pressure to make definitive commitments in adolescence. Therefore, they might be less well represented in the statuses marked by high commitments (i.e., achievement and early closure) and more heavily represented in the statuses characterized by the relative absence of commitments (i.e., moratorium and diffusion) or of exploration with current commitments (i.e., searching moratorium). We further examined whether these differences were present in both early and middle adolescent cohorts. We expect these differences to be present in both age groups, but to be larger in the older cohort that is approaching the transition from adolescence to young adulthood.

Third, we tested whether the correlates (in terms of personality characteristics, internalizing symptoms, and parent-adolescent relationships) of the identity statuses are comparable between Italian and Dutch adolescents. Given the postponement of the transition to adulthood among many Italian youth, Italian adolescents may find the moratorium statuses to be less distressing compared to their Dutch peers, for whom moratorium is part of their transition to adulthood. We further investigated whether these differences were replicated across gender and across early and middle adolescent age groups.

Method

Participants

The Italian sample was comprised of 1,975 adolescents (902 boys and 1,073 girls) attending various junior high and high

schools in the east-central region of Italy. Participants ranged in age from 11 to 19 years ($M_{\text{age}} = 14.5$, $SD = 2.4$). Two age groups were represented in the sample: an early adolescent group (aged 11–14 years) of 1,050 adolescents ($M_{\text{age}} = 12.5$ years, $SD = 1.0$) and a middle adolescent group (aged 15–19 years) of 925 adolescents ($M_{\text{age}} = 16.8$ years, $SD = 1.2$).

The Dutch sample consisted of 1,521 adolescents (706 boys and 815 girls) attending various junior high and high schools in the province of Utrecht in the Netherlands. Participants ranged in age from 11 to 19 years ($M_{\text{age}} = 14.2$, $SD = 2.2$). The same two age groups were represented in the sample: an early adolescent group (aged 11–14 years) of 880 adolescents ($M_{\text{age}} = 12.3$ years, $SD = 0.6$) and a middle adolescent group (aged 15–19 years) of 641 adolescents ($M_{\text{age}} = 16.7$ years, $SD = 0.8$).

Both the Italian and Dutch samples consisted only of Caucasian adolescents. Ethnic minority adolescents were excluded from data analysis to control for ethnicity and migration (cf. Schwartz et al., 2006). Further, the samples were comparable in terms of gender and age group composition. Additionally, adolescents in both countries attended school full-time, and they were comparable in terms of years and types of education. In both countries, high schools are differentiated into various tracks (from the highest level represented by schools that prepare pupils for university attendance to the lowest level represented by vocational schools), but there is no differentiation within the junior school system. The sampling procedure was designed to assure that students attending different high school tracks were equally represented across the Italian and Dutch samples.

Procedure

Prior to initiating the study, we obtained permission from the school principals to administer questionnaires during class time. Parents were provided with written information about the research and were asked for their consent for the adolescent to participate. After we received parental permission, students were informed about the study and asked whether they wished to participate. Approximately 99% of the students approached chose to participate. Interviewers then visited the schools and asked adolescents to fill out the questionnaire packet. This same procedure was followed for both the Italian and the Dutch samples.

Measures

Identity

Identity commitment, in-depth exploration, and reconsideration of commitment were measured using the *Utrecht-Management of Identity Commitments Scale* (U-MICS). This measure has been validated for use in the Netherlands (Crocetti, Rubini, & Meeus, 2008) and in Italy (Crocetti et al., 2010). The U-MICS consists of 26 items with a response scale ranging from 1 (*completely untrue*) to 5 (*completely true*). Thirteen items index the target processes in one ideological domain (education), and 13 items index

the target processes in one interpersonal domain (friendship). We focused on these two domains because extant literature indicates that, for early and middle adolescents, education and friendships are among the most important identity domains (cf. Bosma, 1985). Sample items include: "My education/best friend gives me certainty in life" (commitment; 10 items), "I think a lot about my education/best friend" (in-depth exploration; 10 items), and "I often think it would be better to try to find a different education/best friend" (reconsideration of commitment; 6 items). Although the U-MICS assesses identity in different domains, the instrument can be employed to measure overall identity, summing responses across the two domains. Indeed, using confirmatory factor analyses, Crocetti, Rubini, and Meeus (2008) and Crocetti et al. (2010) demonstrated the internal validity of the three-dimensional model across domains in different gender, age, and ethnic groups. Using Cronbach's alphas, in the present study the reliability of the U-MICS subscales was found to be adequate, with values of .82 and .89 for commitment, .72 and .84 for in-depth exploration, and .69 and .86 for reconsideration of commitment in the Italian and Dutch samples, respectively. Despite these differences in internal consistency reliability coefficients, the scoring algorithm was found to fit equivalently between the Dutch and Italian samples (Crocetti et al., 2010).

Personality

A shortened version of the *Big Five questionnaire* (Dutch version by Gerris et al., 1998; Italian version by Klimstra, Crocetti, Hale, Fermani, & Meeus, 2011) was used. Participants were asked to rate 30 items (6 items for each factor) on a 7-point scale, ranging from 1 (*does not apply to me at all*) to 7 (*applies to me very well*). Sample items include: talkative (extraversion); sympathetic (agreeableness); systematic (conscientiousness); nervous (emotional stability); and versatile (openness to experience). Cronbach's alphas were .70 and .82 for extraversion, .71 and .85 for agreeableness, .72 and .83 for conscientiousness, .72 and .81 for emotional stability, and .65 and .75 for openness to experience, in the Italian and Dutch samples, respectively.

Depression

The *Children's Depression Inventory* (CDI; Kovacs, 1985) was used to measure subclinical depressive symptoms. Data about the psychometric properties of the Dutch and Italian versions of the CDI are provided by Timbremont and Braet (2002) and Kovacs (1988), respectively. The CDI consists of 27 items, each responded to on a 3-point scale: 1 (*false*), 2 (*a bit true*), and 3 (*very true*). A sample item is "I am sad all the time." Cronbach's alphas were .88 and .92 in the Italian and Dutch samples, respectively.

Generalized Anxiety Symptoms

The Generalized Anxiety Symptoms (GAD) subscale from the *Screen for Child Anxiety Related Emotional Disorders* (SCARED; Birmaher et al., 1997; Dutch version by Hale, Raaijmakers, Muris, & Meeus, 2005; Italian version by Crocetti, Hale, Fermani, Raaijmakers, & Meeus, 2009) was used to assess general anxiety symptoms. The GAD consists of seven items scored on a 3-point scale: 1 (*almost never*), 2 (*sometimes*), and 3 (*often*). A sample item is: "I worry about whether others will like me." Cronbach's alphas were .76 and .86 in the Italian and Dutch samples, respectively.

Parental Trust

The trust subscale from the short version of the *Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment* (IPPA; Armsden & Greenberg, 1987; Nada-Raja, McGee, & Stanton, 1992) was employed to measure the extent to which adolescents trust that their parents respect and accept their feelings and wishes. This subscale consists of three items for paternal trust and three items for maternal trust scored on a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*completely untrue*) to 6 (*completely true*). A sample item is: "My father/mother respects my feelings." Cronbach's alphas were .77 and .86 for paternal trust, and .77 and .88 for maternal trust, in the Italian and Dutch samples, respectively. The IPPA has been used in prior research with Dutch-speaking samples (e.g., Buist, Deković, Meeus, & van Aken, 2002) and has been recently validated with Italian-speaking adolescents (San Martini, Zavattini, & Ronconi, 2009).

Results

Analyses proceeded in three steps. First, preliminary analyses were conducted to test whether, in the Italian sample, it would be possible to extract the same identity status cluster solution that had already been validated in a Dutch sample. Once this had been demonstrated, the sample was collapsed across nationality, and adolescents were classified into identity statuses using cluster analysis. Second, similarities and differences in the identity status distributions of Italian and Dutch early and middle adolescents were examined using chi-square tests. Finally, the profiles of the identity statuses were investigated using Multivariate Analyses of Variance (MANOVA) in which identity statuses, nationality, gender, and age groups were the independent variables and personality, internalizing symptoms, and parent-adolescent relationship dimensions were the dependent variables.¹

¹ All analyses were also conducted separately for the two identity domains of education and friendship. Results did not differ significantly from those for global identity dimensions, and as a result, only results for global identity dimensions are presented here.

Preliminary Analyses: Identity Clusters in the Italian Sample

Although our objective was to compare identity statuses between Italian and Dutch adolescents, we first needed to examine whether, in the Italian sample, we could replicate the five-status solution from the previous Dutch study (Crocetti, Rubini, Luyckx et al., 2008). To examine this, we conducted cluster analyses following the same procedure employed by Crocetti, Rubini, Luyckx et al. (2008) with the Dutch sample. First, because outliers can have an impact on the results of a cluster analysis (Norušis, 2009), we omitted 65 (i.e., 3.3% of the sample) univariate and/or multivariate outliers (i.e., participants who scored more than 3 *SD* away from the sample mean on one or more of the identity variables). In the next step, we standardized the scores for the identity dimensions and, following Gore's (2000) two-step approach, we conducted hierarchical cluster analyses using Ward's method and based on squared Euclidian distances. In order to test whether the five identity statuses validated in the Dutch study also provided the best fit to the Italian data, we compared cluster solutions with two, three, four, five, six, and seven clusters on the basis of three criteria: theoretical meaningfulness of each cluster, parsimony, and explanatory power (i.e., the cluster solution had to explain approximately 50% of the variance in each of the identity dimensions). On the basis of these criteria, in the Italian sample a five-cluster solution was also found to be the most acceptable. On the one hand, solutions with fewer numbers of clusters failed to extract theoretically meaningful identity statuses and explained less than 50% of variability in at least one of the identity dimensions. On the other hand solutions with six or seven clusters violated the principle of parsimony, because they included clusters that represented slight variations of other clusters and did not extract any new clusters that could be matched to a specific identity status as proposed by Marcia.

Findings indicated that the five-cluster solution that emerged in the Italian sample strongly resembled the five-cluster solution found in the Dutch study. Specifically, the first cluster ($n = 367$; 19.21% of the sample) consisted of adolescents scoring high on commitment and in-depth exploration, but low on reconsideration of commitment. The second cluster ($n = 512$; 26.81% of the sample) was comprised primarily of individuals with moderately high scores on commitment, low scores on in-depth exploration, and low scores on reconsideration of commitment. The third cluster ($n = 448$; 23.46% of the sample) was composed of individuals who scored low on commitment, moderate on in-depth exploration, and high on reconsideration of commitment. The fourth cluster ($n = 316$; 16.54% of the sample) consisted of adolescents scoring high on all three dimensions – commitment, in-depth exploration, and reconsideration of commitment. The fifth cluster ($n = 267$; 13.98% of the sample) consisted of individuals scoring low on all three dimensions. Thus, we found, in sequence, clusters representing achievement, early closure, moratorium, searching moratorium, and diffusion – as obtained in the Dutch study (Crocetti, Rubini, Luyckx et al., 2008).

As a validity check on this five-cluster solution, we conducted a MANOVA on the three identity processes by cluster. Results indicated that the five-cluster solution explained substantial percentages of variance (63% of variability in commitment, 59% in in-depth exploration, and 55% in reconsideration of commitment). Finally, we tested the replicability of the five-cluster solution by splitting the sample into two random halves and reconducting the cluster analyses. Findings indicated that these same five clusters were replicated in each of the two random subsamples. Levels of agreement between the classification performed in the total sample and those conducted in the two subgroups, computed using Cohen's (1960) kappa, indicated substantial levels of agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977), with values of .77 and .76 for the first and second subsamples, respectively.

After having verified that the five identity statuses found by Crocetti, Rubini, Luyckx et al. (2008) could be replicated in the Italian sample, we proceeded to combine data across the Italian and Dutch samples. Within the total sample ($N = 3,496$), we omitted 200 univariate and/or multivariate outliers (5.7% of the sample). Thus, we performed the cluster analysis following the same procedure described above. The five identity clusters obtained in the total sample are shown in Figure 1.

Distribution of the Dutch and Italian Adolescents across the Five Identity Statuses

To examine the distributions of Dutch and Italian adolescents across the five identity statuses, we conducted chi-square tests. These tests were conducted separately for the early and middle adolescent cohorts. Findings indicated large differences by nationality in the distribution of participants across the five identity clusters both in the early, $\chi^2(4, N = 1817) = 206.40, p < .001$, Cramér's $V = .34, p < .001$, and in the middle adolescent, $\chi^2(4, N = 1479) = 129.57, p < .001$, Cramér's $V = .30$,

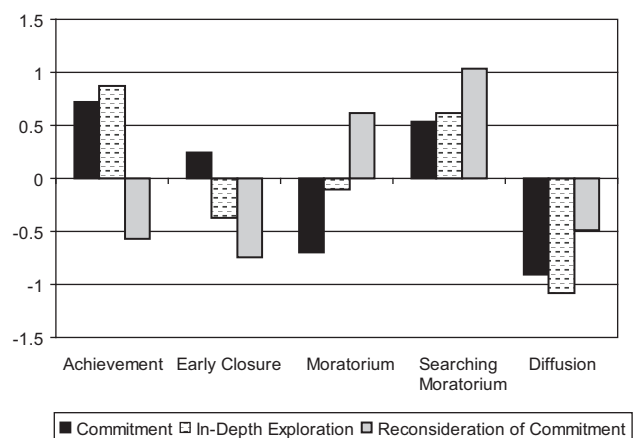


Figure 1. Z-scores for commitment, in-depth exploration, and reconsideration of commitment for the five statuses (z-scores were calculated across the two national samples).

Table 1. Percentages of participants in the different identity statuses by age and nationality

	Achievement (%)	Early closure (%)	Moratorium (%)	Searching moratorium (%)	Diffusion (%)
Early adolescents					
Italian	19.6	18.7	24.2	26.8	10.7
Dutch	18.7	36.7	12.9	8.5	23.1
Total	19.2	26.6	19.3	18.8	16.1
Middle adolescents					
Italian	14.3	16.4	37.7	15.3	16.3
Dutch	20.9	36.9	16.9	10.5	14.8
Total	17.0	24.9	29.1	13.3	15.7

$p < .001$, age groups. As shown in Table 1, within the early adolescent group, Dutch adolescents were more likely to be classified into the early closure or diffused clusters than their Italian peers, whereas Italian adolescents were more strongly represented in the moratorium and searching moratorium clusters. Within the middle adolescent group, Dutch adolescents were more represented in the early closure and achievement statuses compared to their Italian counterparts, who were more likely to be in the two moratorium statuses.

Interestingly, the distributions of Dutch and Italian adolescents in the diffusion and achievement statuses differed across the early and middle adolescent groups. Specifically, in the early adolescent group, more Dutch than Italian participants were classified into the diffused status, whereas in the middle adolescent cohort, more Italian than Dutch adolescents were classified into the diffused status. Moreover, the difference in the number of Dutch and Italian adolescents in the achieved status was larger in the middle adolescent cohort: The percentage of Dutch participants in the achievement cluster moderately increased with age, whereas the percentage of Italian participants in the achievement cluster decreased with age.

Profiles of the Identity Statuses in the Italian and Dutch Groups

A further research aim was to ascertain whether the profiles of the five identity statuses were consistent across the Italian and Dutch groups. To accomplish this, we performed a MANOVA on personality, internalizing symptoms, and parent – adolescent relations as dependent variables and with the five identity clusters, along with nationality (Dutch vs. Italian), gender, and age groups as independent variables. This allowed us to examine the main effect of identity status and to test whether this was qualified by nationality, gender, age group, or some combination of these variables. At the multivariate level, a significant main effect of identity status emerged, Wilks' $\lambda = .88$, $F(36, 12174) = 11.50$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .03$. This effect was qualified by a significant Status \times Nationality interaction, Wilks' $\lambda = .96$, $F(36, 12174) = 3.37$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .01$. None of the other two- or three-way interactions were statistically significant.

Results of follow-up univariate analyses indicated that all of the dependent variables differed significantly across identity statuses (see Table 2). Significant univariate effects

were further examined with Tukey's Honestly Significant Difference (HSD) post hoc analyses. Specifically, for three of the nine dependent variables (extraversion, emotional stability, and depression), only main effects of identity status classification emerged. Pairwise comparisons indicated that adolescents in the achievement and early closure statuses scored highest on extraversion, followed by their diffused and searching moratorium peers, and with participants in the moratorium status scoring lowest. Adolescents in the early closure and diffused statuses exhibited the highest emotional stability, followed by those in the achievement and then searching moratorium statuses, and with those in the moratorium status reporting the lowest scores. Adolescents in the moratorium and searching moratorium statuses scored the highest on depression, followed by their peers in diffusion and in the achievement status. Early closed adolescents scored lowest on depression.

For the other six dependent variables (i.e., agreeableness, $F(4, 3296) = 12.58$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .01$; conscientiousness, $F(4, 3296) = 2.60$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 < .01$; openness to experience, $F(4, 3296) = 9.33$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .01$; generalized anxiety, $F(4, 3296) = 9.13$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .01$; paternal trust, $F(4, 3296) = 8.52$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .01$; and maternal trust, $F(4, 3296) = 11.13$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .01$), significant Identity Status \times Nationality interaction effects emerged. Specifically, findings (see Table 2) indicated that, in the Dutch sample, the searching moratorium and moratorium statuses differed significantly on generalized anxiety and maternal trust (with searching moratorium individuals scoring lower on both variables than individuals in the moratorium status). In the Italian sample differences between the moratorium statuses were larger and involved also personality dimensions. In particular, Italian adolescents in searching moratorium scored higher on agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness compared to their peers in moratorium. Furthermore, in the Italian sample, the searching moratorium cluster appeared similar to the achieved status: these clusters did not differ significantly from one another on conscientiousness, openness to experience, and paternal trust.

Discussion

The present study was designed to ascertain the cross-national validity of an empirically-derived identity status model, originally developed with Dutch adolescents, in a sample of Italian

Table 2. Univariate analyses of covariance and post hoc cluster comparisons based upon Tukey Tests for the five identity statuses (in italics are reported findings for the Italian and Dutch samples separately for the variables in which a Significant Status \times Nation interaction was found)

	Identity statuses					<i>F</i> (4, 3296)	η^2
	Achievement <i>n</i> = 600	Early closure <i>n</i> = 851	Moratorium <i>n</i> = 781	Searching moratorium <i>n</i> = 539	Diffusion <i>n</i> = 525		
Personality							
Extraversion	4.88 ^a	4.83 ^a	4.45 ^c	4.57 ^{bc}	4.72 ^{ab}	9.71***	.01
Agreeableness	5.56 ^a	5.31 ^b	5.06 ^c	5.33 ^b	5.00 ^c	42.27***	.05
<i>Italian</i>	<i>5.64^a</i>	<i>5.27^b</i>	<i>5.09^c</i>	<i>5.44^b</i>	<i>4.86^d</i>	<i>43.57***</i>	<i>.08</i>
<i>Dutch</i>	<i>5.47^a</i>	<i>5.33^{ab}</i>	<i>4.95^c</i>	<i>4.98^c</i>	<i>5.14^{bc}</i>	<i>19.96***</i>	<i>.05</i>
Conscientiousness	4.43 ^a	4.14 ^b	3.98 ^c	4.26 ^b	3.86 ^c	21.38***	.02
<i>Italian</i>	<i>4.41^a</i>	<i>4.05^b</i>	<i>3.96^b</i>	<i>4.29^a</i>	<i>3.66^c</i>	<i>22.52***</i>	<i>.05</i>
<i>Dutch</i>	<i>4.46^a</i>	<i>4.20^b</i>	<i>4.02^b</i>	<i>4.15^b</i>	<i>4.05^b</i>	<i>7.70***</i>	<i>.02</i>
Emotional stability	4.21 ^b	4.41 ^a	3.97 ^c	4.09 ^{bc}	4.43 ^a	9.41***	.01
Openness to experience	4.83 ^a	4.46 ^b	4.44 ^b	4.72 ^a	4.28 ^c	31.07***	.01
<i>Italian</i>	<i>4.86^a</i>	<i>4.37^b</i>	<i>4.45^b</i>	<i>4.79^a</i>	<i>4.10^c</i>	<i>34.29***</i>	<i>.07</i>
<i>Dutch</i>	<i>4.79^a</i>	<i>4.54^b</i>	<i>4.42^b</i>	<i>4.50^b</i>	<i>4.43^b</i>	<i>7.92***</i>	<i>.02</i>
Internalizing symptoms							
Depression	1.24 ^{bc}	1.21 ^c	1.39 ^a	1.36 ^a	1.26 ^b	22.72***	.03
Generalized anxiety	1.62 ^b	1.52 ^c	1.77 ^a	1.79 ^a	1.51 ^c	15.75***	.02
<i>Italian</i>	<i>1.88^{ab}</i>	<i>1.80^b</i>	<i>1.87^{ab}</i>	<i>1.91^a</i>	<i>1.66^c</i>	<i>14.34***</i>	<i>.03</i>
<i>Dutch</i>	<i>1.33^b</i>	<i>1.34^b</i>	<i>1.50^a</i>	<i>1.41^b</i>	<i>1.38^b</i>	<i>9.51***</i>	<i>.07</i>
Parent-adolescent relationships							
Paternal trust	4.69 ^a	4.60 ^a	4.28 ^{bc}	4.43 ^b	4.24 ^c	25.37***	.03
<i>Italian</i>	<i>4.83^a</i>	<i>4.68^a</i>	<i>4.40^{bc}</i>	<i>4.61^{ab}</i>	<i>4.18^c</i>	<i>14.37***</i>	<i>.03</i>
<i>Dutch</i>	<i>4.53^a</i>	<i>4.55^a</i>	<i>3.95^b</i>	<i>3.85^b</i>	<i>4.30^a</i>	<i>25.02***</i>	<i>.07</i>
Maternal trust	4.99 ^a	4.84 ^a	4.59 ^b	4.66 ^b	4.62 ^b	31.70***	.04
<i>Italian</i>	<i>5.18^a</i>	<i>5.04^{ab}</i>	<i>4.75^{cd}</i>	<i>4.92^{bc}</i>	<i>4.68^d</i>	<i>12.83***</i>	<i>.03</i>
<i>Dutch</i>	<i>4.77^a</i>	<i>4.72^a</i>	<i>4.12^b</i>	<i>3.85^c</i>	<i>4.56^a</i>	<i>33.03***</i>	<i>.09</i>

Note. *** $p < .001$. A cluster mean is significantly different from another mean if they have different superscripts. Response scales: personality (1–7), internalizing symptoms (1–3), parent-adolescent relationship (1–6).

adolescents. A further aim of this study was to compare the prevalence and correlates of these statuses across these two very different European countries. Large community samples of early and middle adolescents from Italy and from the Netherlands participated in the study.

Results indicated that the five identity statuses (i.e., achievement, early closure, moratorium, searching moratorium, and diffusion), extracted originally from the Dutch sample and derived from specific combinations of levels of commitment, in-depth exploration, and reconsideration of commitment (Crocetti, Rubini, Luyckx et al., 2008; Crocetti, Rubini, & Meeus, 2008), could also be extracted in a sample of Italian youth. Given that the same identity status cluster solution emerged from both samples, we examined whether the profiles of these statuses in terms of personality, internalizing symptoms, and parent-adolescent relationships were comparable in the two national contexts. Findings highlighted substantial differences in identity status distributions and profiles between Italian and Dutch youth.

Identity Status Distribution of Italian and Dutch Adolescents

Perhaps the most striking difference between Italian and Dutch adolescents emerged with regard to the moratorium and searching moratorium statuses. In both the early and middle adolescent cohorts, half of the Italian adolescents were classified into one of these statuses, compared to about one-fourth of the Dutch adolescents. On the other hand, Dutch adolescents were more often classified as early closed in both age groups.

These findings are consistent with those of previous cross-national comparisons in which Italian adolescents were found to display higher levels of emotional distress compared to their Dutch peers (Currie et al., 2008). In fact, as confirmed by a wide range of literature (e.g., Luyckx et al., 2008; Meeus et al., 1999), the identity instability typical of the moratorium status is strongly associated with low levels of well-being. The higher levels of moratorium and searching moratorium found in the Italian sample, then,

might partially explain the higher levels of distress found in other studies that have used Italian samples. Moreover, as Côté and Schwartz (2002) have noted, and as Meeus et al. (2010) have reported empirically, being in moratorium does not guarantee that the person will move into identity achievement. Indeed, in the older cohort of Italian adolescents, diffusion and early closure were *more* prominent than in the younger cohort, whereas theory and prior cross-sectional (cf. Meeus, 1996, for a study with Dutch adolescents; cf. also Al-Owidha, Green, & Kroger, 2009) as well as longitudinal (Meeus et al., 2010) research would suggest that the frequencies of these statuses should decrease with age.

This pattern of findings indicates the possible presence of some barriers to identity development among Italian adolescents, perhaps associated with the extended transition to adulthood (Lanz & Tagliabue, 2007). Indeed, in Italy this transition occurs later than in Northern European and North American countries. So, whereas Dutch adolescents may be more pressed to achieve a stable identity because they will soon take on adult roles, Italian adolescents can remain “on hold” (Côté & Allahaar, 1994) for a longer period of time. Furthermore, Italian families do not seem to push offspring toward greater independence. On the contrary, many Italian families might be characterized as “hotel” families (Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1999): youth who live with parents enjoy a lot of freedom, do not have to contribute to the household, and receive financial support from their parents (Scabini, Marta, & Lanz, 2006). This situation creates a context in which Italian adolescents can spend more time experimenting with different roles and identity alternatives before making enduring choices (this explains their predominance in the moratorium statuses). Furthermore, they can also return to a “less mature” status (i.e., diffusion) in middle adolescence, because they still have a long time until they must assume adult commitments.

Profiles of the Identity Statuses across Nations

Findings suggested that adolescents in the five identity statuses displayed distinct profiles in terms of personality characteristics, internalizing symptoms, and parent-adolescent relationships. Interestingly, most of these differences were moderated by nationality. In particular, the searching moratorium status appeared to be more adaptive in the Italian group (i.e., Italian youth in this status exhibited levels of conscientiousness, openness to experience, and paternal trust compared to their peers in achievement) than in the Dutch sample, in which searching moratorium was more similar to the classical moratorium status. In line with the reasoning presented above, we would argue that in a context such as Italy, which is less structured and in which development occurs later, the searching moratorium status, typified by the attempt to revise current commitments, can be more adaptive and socially accepted. These findings provide empirical support for the *paradigm of reversibility* proposed by the Italian sociologist Ricolfi (1984). This paradigm

underscores that, in conditions of greater uncertainty and instability, youth are more likely to experiment with different alternatives, to rethink their choices, and to modify these commitments in various identity areas (i.e., education, work, friendship, love). Thus, continuous identity revisions appear to represent an important step in identifying fulfilling commitments – much more so than in a context where adult commitments are enacted in the early 20s.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The present findings should be considered in light of some important limitations. The first limitation concerns the cross-sectional design, which does not allow us to test whether differences in the distribution of early and middle adolescents across the identity statuses reflect longitudinal changes or cohort differences. Therefore, future studies should use a longitudinal design to track identity status transitions over time. Meeus et al. (2010) found, in a five-wave longitudinal study conducted with Dutch adolescents, that 63% of adolescents remained in the same identity status over time. It would be interesting to test whether these findings would also emerge in the Italian context.

A second limitation of this study relates to the lack of a measure aimed at directly assessing cultural differences between Italian and Dutch adolescents. For instance, measures tapping into independent and interdependent self-construal (e.g., Lalwani & Shavitt, 2009; Markus & Kitayama, 1991) and cultural values might help to explain national-level differences in the distribution and correlates of identity statuses.

A third limitation concerns the fact that we only collected quantitative data. Future investigations could integrate the present findings with qualitative data to provide a more comprehensive account of the adolescents' views. This would be valuable to better understand differences among youth from various European countries.

Conclusion

Despite these limitations, the present study strongly supports the identity status model and suggests that the model can be empirically derived in similar ways across two very different European countries. At the same time, the results suggest that the identity statuses have quite different meanings and correlates in countries characterized by more versus less structure, and earlier versus later transition to adulthood, and a greater focus on individual autonomy versus on family connectedness (cf. Aassve et al., 2002; Lanz & Tagliabue, 2007; Manzi et al., 2006). In particular, the classical and searching moratorium statuses may be used for very different purposes in Italy than in the Netherlands. It is hoped that these results inspire additional studies, across a greater range of countries, examining the empirical viability, structure, and functions of the identity statuses.

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