

Personality, Adjustment, and Identity Style Influences on Stability in Identity and Self-Concept During the Transition to University

Edward A. Johnson
Kimberly J. Nozick
University of Manitoba

Drawing on E. H. Erikson's psychosocial development theory, we hypothesized that stability within the self-concept and identity are similar and are regulated by a common set of influences. The participants in this study were 154 first-year undergraduates aged 20 years or younger. They completed surveys at two points 3 months apart. The findings demonstrated a moderate association between identity commitment and self-concept clarity, the two indices of stability in this study. For both measures, multiple regressions revealed that a diffuse-avoidant identity style reduced stability whereas healthy self-evaluation enhanced it. Conversely, variables indicative of defensiveness and self-reflection showed different relations to self-concept clarity and identity commitment. The article discusses how the meaning and regulation of stability are affected by the self-concept's developmental priority and centrality relative to identity.

That the ancient Greek injunction “know thyself” continues to have currency after 2,500 years is because it communicates an idea essential to human flourishing, namely, that by achieving a clear and enduring understanding of oneself it may be possible to guide one's life choices in ways that are more consistent with one's values and goals and, hence, fulfilling. What makes this more difficult nowadays is that individuals in Western cultures

Address correspondence to Edward A. Johnson, Department of Psychology, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada R3T 2N2. E-mail: ed_johnson@umanitoba.ca

perceive that they have vastly more freedom and choice available, and at the same time, they must try to comprehend a self that is understood to be deeper (i.e., subject to nonconscious influences) and more multidimensional than the ancients supposed (Baumeister, 1987; Taylor, 1989, 1991). Indeed, contemporary theorists have warned that the freedom to define the self through an almost limitless array of lifestyle and consumer choices may bring about fragmentation of the self (Giddens, 1991). Conversely, there is evidence that stability in one's sense of self and personal commitments is associated with greater well-being and personal effectiveness (Brickman, 1987; Campbell, 1990; Pelham & Swann, 1989). Having clearer and firmer convictions about one's beliefs, goals, and self-relevant standards may make it easier to persevere in the face of difficulties or temptations to change course and, thus, to achieve one's aims. In this way, greater stability in one's self-understanding would be expected to contribute to a greater sense of personal continuity, of feeling that one is the same person over time (cf., Chandler, Lalonde, Sokol, & Hallet, 2003). In light of the importance of personal stability for human fulfillment and the difficulties that attend it, we set out to understand how young persons achieve and maintain a stable self-understanding.

In this study, we approached this problem by examining whether a common set of psychological processes regulate stability in two distinct aspects of self-understanding, namely, the self-concept and identity. We reasoned that although the self-concept and identity represent distinct facets of the person, the psychological processes involved in achieving stability in them may be similar.

Defining and Coordinating Self-Concept and Identity

The term *self-concept* originally referred to an abstract, monolithic representation of the whole self. However, in the past two decades researchers have increasingly sought a more differentiated understanding of the self-concept, noting that it functions as an organized knowledge structure, or schema, that "contains traits, values, episodic and semantic memories about the self and controls the processing of self-relevant information" (Campbell et al., 1996, p. 141). Conceived as a knowledge structure, we can distinguish the content of the self-concept (i.e., "who or what I am"), which includes self-evaluation, from the structure or organization of the self-concept. It is the organization of the self-concept that we examine in this article.

Models of self-concept organization typically distinguish between the degree of differentiation or pluralism within the self-concept (e.g., the number of nonoverlapping categories used to describe the self) and the degree to

which the elements exhibit unity (e.g., the extent of cross-situational similarity or consistency). For instance, Linville's (1985, 1987) self-complexity model proposed that differentiation implies having several nonoverlapping aspects to one's self-concept and that this may be adaptive for coping with stress. In contrast, other theorists have argued that integration or unity in the self-concept—having a clear and consistent sense of self in different contexts—is adaptive (e.g., Block, 1961; Rogers, 1959). Some research has indicated that measures of unity show good construct validity and predict important aspects of well-being, including self-esteem, depression, and anxiety, whereas existing measures of pluralism have been found to be unrelated to one another and do not predict adjustment (Campbell, Assanand, & Paula, 2003). Accordingly, we chose to focus on the unity of the self-concept as operationalized by the Self-Concept Clarity Scale (SCC Scale; Campbell et al., 1996). Self-concept clarity (SCC) concerns the extent to which the contents of the self-concept are clearly and confidently defined, temporally stable, and internally consistent (Campbell, 1990). Evidence for the validity of the SCC Scale includes findings that high scorers exhibited less change in their self-ratings on a variety of personality traits over a 4-month period and were also more consistent in the traits they chose as self-descriptive than were individuals who reported lower levels of SCC (Campbell et al., 1996).

Whereas the focus of the self-concept is the self, a construct that is anchored in the intrapsychic experience of the individual, the construct of *identity* encompasses the relation between the individual and society. In Erikson's (1968) influential conceptualization, identity referred primarily to one's chosen occupation, as well as to one's religious and political beliefs and values. Drawing on Erikson's writings, Marcia (1966) proposed that self-exploration and commitment are the key dimensions that regulate identity development. By combining high or low levels of each dimension, Marcia distinguished four *identity statuses* that represent differences in the structure of identity: *diffuse* (low exploration, low commitment), *foreclosed* (low exploration, high commitment), *moratorium* (high exploration, low commitment), and *achieved* (high exploration, high commitment). In recent years, the emphasis in identity research has shifted toward disentangling the processes of exploration and commitment so as to understand their causes and consequences. Research on identity commitment has indicated that it captures a substantial amount of variance in *self-continuity*—the sense of being the same person in different contexts (Dunkel, 2005). In line with these developments, we focus on identity commitment as the element that best represents stability in the identity domain.

The constructs of self-concept and identity therefore can be conceptualized as knowledge structures that reflect the extent to which individuals

have achieved an enduring, stable self-understanding. Although our primary focus is on establishing their similarities, it is important to acknowledge their differences. Developmentally, the self-concept emerges first, in a concrete form, prior to adolescence and becomes more abstract and psychological in character during adolescence (Harter, 1999). The self-concept also acts as the locus of children's growing capacity for self-regulation, through the mechanism of internalizing parental and societal standards and evaluations. In contrast, identity is characteristically forged in adolescence and serves to link youths to the larger concerns of vocation and their place in society. Accordingly, the self-concept can be considered closer to the psychological core of the individual than identity because of its developmental and self-regulatory primacy. Nonetheless, since both constructs undergo development in adolescence, we anticipated that their stability may be regulated by a common set of factors, which we describe below.

Identity Styles and Other Antecedents of Self-Concept and Identity

Considerable research has suggested that the psychological stance that individuals take toward the task of identity development exerts an influence on identity formation and stability. Of particular interest in our context are three distinct social-cognitive orientations to identity development, known as *identity processing styles* (identity styles for short), that have been shown to underlie differences in identity formation such as Marcia's (1966) identity status categories (Berzonsky, 1989; Berzonsky & Kuk, 2000). Because identity styles represent how individuals approach the task of identity construction, we reasoned that they might also exert some influence on the process of clarifying and stabilizing the self-concept.

Individuals who use an *informational* identity style "deal with identity issues in a relatively deliberate and mentally effortful manner, intentionally seeking out, evaluating, and relying on self-relevant information" (Berzonsky, 2003, p. 132). They are self-reflective, open, conscientious, have high levels of identity commitment, and are classified as being identity achieved or moratoriums (Berzonsky, 1989; Berzonsky & Kuk, 2000; Berzonsky & Neimeyer, 1994; Dollinger, 1995). Individuals who use a *normative* identity style "deal with identity issues by more automatically internalizing and conforming to prescriptions and expectations of significant others" (Berzonsky & Luyckx, 2008, p. 206). They are conscientious and goal oriented (Berzonsky & Kuk, 2005; Dollinger, 1995), but exhibit elements of a closed personality style that includes a low tolerance for ambiguity, a strong need for structure, high levels of identity commitment, and a foreclosed identity status (Berzonsky, 2004; Berzonsky & Sullivan, 1992;

Soenens, Duriez, & Goossens, 2005). Finally, those who use a *diffuse-avoidant* identity style “strategically try to avoid dealing with personal problems, conflicts, and decisions hoping to procrastinate long enough so that situational determinants will make decisions for them” (Berzonsky, 2003, p. 131). They have an external locus of control, utilize emotion-focused coping, are prone to rumination, have low levels of identity commitment, and are usually classified as having a diffuse identity status (Berzonsky, 1989, 2003; Berzonsky & Luyckx, 2008). Based on these findings, we expected that identity commitment, and by extension self-concept clarity, would be positively associated with the informational and normative identity styles and negatively associated with the diffuse-avoidant identity style.

After reviewing the identity and self-concept literatures, we identified three additional factors that are potentially important contributors to stability in these two domains. As we discuss below, theory and research have put forward that psychological adjustment, self-reflective cognition, and defensiveness each affect the stability of the self-concept and identity.

Previous research on identity commitment and self-concept clarity has suggested that higher levels of both constructs are associated with positive psychological adjustment. For instance, identity commitment has been found to be positively associated with self-esteem, emotional intelligence, proactive coping, curiosity/exploration, and self-actualization (Beaumont, 2009; Berzonsky as cited in Berzonsky, 2003; Crocetti, Rubini, Berzonsky, & Meeus, 2009; Seaton & Beaumont, 2008). Similarly, self-concept clarity has been found to be positively associated with self-esteem and negatively associated with neuroticism (Campbell et al., 1996, 2003). Accordingly, we examined whether self-esteem makes similar positive contributions to both constructs. Along with self-esteem, we included a measure of self-compassion, which has been shown to account for variance in adjustment beyond effects due to self-esteem (Leary, Tate, Adams, Allen, & Hancock, 2007). Self-compassion, as conceptualized by Neff (2003a), involves the capacity to respond to the self with kindness following personal failures and distress, a perspective that views one’s flaws as evidence of one’s common humanity, and an ability to view negative events with calm detachment. We conceptualized self-compassion as reflecting a mature manner of protecting the self from harsh self-criticism and the destructive loss of faith in, and commitment to, self and identity that follows from it, and, hence, as a potentially important predictor of self-concept and identity stability.

Self-reflective cognition involves two distinct motives: an epistemic motive for self-understanding, which promotes reflection about the nature of the self; and an anxiety-based motive for critical self-scrutiny, which encourages rumination about the adequacy of the self (Trapnell &

Campbell, 1999). From a theoretical perspective, there is good reason to think that the two forms of self-reflection would play opposite roles in individuals' efforts to achieve clarity, consistency, and stability in identity and self-concept. A core premise of Erikson's (1968) theory of identity development is that adolescents employ their newly developed capacity for abstract thought to reflect on who they are and what is important to them and, thereby, identify a promising sense of identity to which they can commit. In contrast, rumination about personal inadequacies has been theorized to be a key element that maintains low self-esteem and poor psychological adjustment (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2000) and, following on the above discussion of adjustment, can be expected to contribute to reduced stability.

Empirical support for these proposed links between self-reflective cognition and stability in the domains of self-concept and identity is limited at present. Research has found higher levels of identity commitment to be associated with higher trait levels of self-reflection and lower levels of self-rumination (Luyckx et al., 2007; but, see Berzonsky & Luyckx, 2008, for a null result). As for self-concept clarity, two studies have examined its link to self-reflection and rumination. Campbell et al. (1996) found that the SCC Scale exhibited a large negative correlation with self-rumination and a small negative correlation with self-reflection. Lavalley and Campbell (1995) observed positive associations between both self-reflection and rumination with self-concept confusion (the inverse of clarity). Although these studies proposed that both forms of self-reflection are associated with less self-concept clarity, Csank and Conway (2004) found evidence of a more complex relationship. They observed that experimentally induced self-reflection about personally relevant traits moderated SCC in women (but not in men). Specifically, low SCC women increased in SCC following self-reflection whereas high SCC women showed a decrease in SCC. This suggests that the influence of self-reflection on SCC may be indirect, depending on both the gender and level of SCC. In order to elucidate these relationships, we examined the relationship of reflection and rumination on clarity and commitment while controlling for gender.

Finally, a number of authors have questioned whether the process of maintaining identity stability and commitment in the face of change requires, in part, a reliance on distortion and denial. Kroger (2007), for instance, has noted that remarkably few adolescents seriously reflect on their identity. She argued that this is because people generally find it easier to assimilate new experiences to existing self-conceptions because assimilation permits selective ignoring of uncomfortable truths. Thus, assimilative processing promotes identity stability even as it increases the disparity between self-perception and reality (Bosma & Kunnen, 2001). These ideas

suggest that stability is maintained and deepened in part through the conservative influence of defensive self-enhancement (or defensiveness for short), defined broadly as a nonconscious positivity bias in the processing of self-relevant information (Paulhus, 1998). To the best of our knowledge, however, there is relatively little direct evidence bearing on this proposition. Although Phillips (2009) found no relationship between identity style and scores on the Marlowe-Crowne measure of social desirability, he did not examine the relationship with identity commitment or use other measures of defensiveness. As for self-concept clarity, Csank and Conway (as cited in Csank & Conway, 2004) obtained evidence that higher SCC scores are associated with higher levels of defensiveness as measured by the *K* scale of the MMPI. To explore the possibility that SCC and identity commitment are influenced by defensiveness, we included measures of self-deceptive enhancement and denial in this study.

Design of This Study

In this study, we used a cross-sectional design to assess the influence of identity styles, psychological adjustment, self-reflective processing, and defensiveness on identity commitment and self-concept clarity. We hypothesized that self-concept clarity and identity commitment, as indices of stability, would: (a) be positively correlated; and (b) show similar positive relationships to all the variables except diffuse-avoidant identity style and rumination, where negative associations were expected. Three months after collecting the cross-sectional data, we measured self-concept clarity again, in order to explore: (a) whether self-concept clarity is as temporally stable as developmental theory suggests; and (b) if the same processes that contributed to its formation also explain any changes in self-concept clarity.

METHOD

Participants

The sample consisted of 160 first-year undergraduates (123 women, 37 men), aged 20 years or younger, enrolled in introductory psychology at the University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. Data on the ethnic composition of the students indicated that approximately 62% self-identified as White/European, 20% as Asian, 4% as Aboriginal/Metis, and 14% as other. Sixty-eight percent indicated that English was their first language. The mean age was 18.42 and ranged between 17 and 20.

Procedure and Measures

Our survey assessed several constructs as part of a larger longitudinal study examining adjustment to university in young persons. The transition to university has been identified as an important context for studying identity development (Kunnen, Sappa, van Geert, & Bonica, 2008). We collected three waves of self-report data: two in the fall semester and one in the winter semester. This study reports data collected in the first and third waves. All of the measures listed below were administered early in the fall semester during the first wave. The SCC Scale was readministered 3 months later, early in the winter semester. Testing was conducted in groups of approximately 30 students. Participants received course credit in exchange for participation.

Identity Styles and Commitment

The Identity Style Inventory (ISI3; Berzonsky, 1992) includes measures of the three identity styles along with a 10-item measure of commitment. The Commitment scale (sample item: "To live a complete life, I think people need to get emotionally involved and commit themselves to specific values and ideals") has been shown to be internally consistent (Cronbach alpha of .71) and temporally stable, with a 2-week test-retest reliability of .89 (Berzonsky, 1997). The Diffuse-Avoidant scale contains 10 items, (sample item: "I'm not really thinking about my future now; it's still a long way off"). The Informational scale has 11 items (sample item: "I've spent a great deal of time thinking seriously about what I should do with my life"). The Normative scale has 9 items (sample item: "I prefer to deal with situations where I can rely on social norms and standards"). The ISI3 was administered using a slightly modified scale that ranged from 1 (*not at all like me*) to 7 (*very much like me*). Cronbach alphas were .75, .76, .65, and .69, respectively, which are consistent with values reported elsewhere (Berzonsky, 1997, 2003).

Self-Reflective Cognition

To assess self-reflective thinking, we used the 24-item Reflection and Rumination Questionnaire (RRQ; Trapnell & Campbell, 1999). Participants responded to all items on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The Self-Reflection subscale contains 12 items (sample item: "I often love to look at my life in philosophical ways"), as does the Self-Rumination subscale (sample item: "Sometimes it is hard for me to shut off thoughts about myself"). Cronbach alphas were .90 and .89, respectively.

Self-Esteem

Global self-esteem was assessed using Rosenberg's (1965) 10-item Self-Esteem Scale (RSE), which employs a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 4 (*strongly disagree*). Total scores were reversed so that higher scores reflect greater self-esteem. The RSE showed very good internal consistency (Cronbach alpha = .88).

Self-Compassion

The 26-item Self-Compassion Scale (SCS; Neff, 2003b) was administered using a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*almost never*) to 7 (*almost always*). Neff (2003b) conceptualized self-compassion as a higher-order construct consisting of three lower-level bipolar constructs; namely, self-kindness (vs. self-judgment), common humanity (vs. isolation), and mindfulness (vs. over-identification). Research using the SCS has shown that self-compassion contributes to positive responses to distressing negative events over and above the effects of self-esteem (Leary et al., 2007). As recommended by Neff (2003b) the 13 negatively valenced items were reverse scored and added to the 13 positively valenced items to provide a total self-compassion score (Cronbach alpha = .91).

Defensiveness

We used abbreviated 10-item versions of two scales from the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding (BIDR; Paulhus, 1991) to measure defensiveness. The Self-Deceptive Enhancement (SDE) scale measures the tendency to endorse an overly positive view of the self (e.g., "I am a completely rational person"). The Denial scale measures the tendency to deny common, but undesirable, thoughts and impulses (e.g., "I never regret my decisions"). In their review of research on self-deceptive styles, Paulhus and John (1998) concluded that the SDE and Denial scales both reflect the operation of nonconscious biases that present the self in an overly positive light and, hence, warrant being labeled measures of defensiveness. On both scales, participants respond to each item on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*not true*) to 7 (*very true*). In order to isolate variance associated with rigidly positive self-descriptions, we followed Paulhus's (1998) recommendation to score the responses dichotomously (i.e., 6 or 7 on positively keyed items or 1 or 2 on negatively keyed items receive a score of 1 with all other responses receiving a score of 0). Although the coefficient alphas for the SDE and Denial scales in this study were low (.39 and .56, respectively), when adjusted for the shortened length of the scales the estimated full-scale

reliabilities of .56 and .72 are close to values that are typically obtained with these scales (Paulhus & Reid, 1991).

Self-Concept Clarity

The 12-item SCC Scale (Campbell et al., 1996) was used to measure how clearly, confidently, and consistently participants could describe themselves. Sample items include statements such as “I spend a lot of time wondering what kind of person I really am” (reverse-keyed item) and “In general I know who I am and where I am headed in life.” Items were scored using a scale that ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The SCC Scale demonstrated good internal consistency with Cronbach alpha values of .85, and .87 in the first and third measurement waves, respectively.

RESULTS

Preliminary Analyses

We initially examined the study variables for accuracy of data entry, missing or out-of-range values, and fit between their distributions and the assumptions of multiple regression analysis. Of the 160 participants, one gave several out-of-range values on the RRQ and was removed from further analyses. Another five participants were missing data on one or more of the scales and were dropped from the analysis, leaving a total of 154 participants for analysis. To improve distributions, RSE, SDE, and denial scores were square root transformed.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 provides the means, standard deviations, and possible and actual ranges for all study variables. For most variables, the range of scores obtained spanned almost the whole range of possible scores. Table 2 provides the intercorrelation matrix for the study variables. As predicted, scores on the two dependent variables, identity commitment and self-concept clarity, were significantly positively correlated ($r = .29, p < .001$, at the time of the initial data collection).

Table 2 also reveals the presence of several large correlations among the independent variables. Specifically, correlations with absolute magnitudes greater than .5 were observed between informational style and self-reflection, and between self-compassion and both self-rumination and self-esteem. These findings support the idea that a small number of dimensions tapping the broader constructs of self-exploration, psychological

TABLE 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Possible and Actual Ranges of Scores for Study Variables

<i>Variable Name</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Range</i>	
			<i>Possible</i>	<i>Actual</i>
Gender	.23	.42	0–1	0–1
Informational style	48.77	7.90	11–77	27–69
Normative style	40.75	7.52	9–63	21–57
Diffuse-avoidant style	35.70	8.60	10–70	14–57
Identity commitment	47.60	9.72	10–70	20–69
Baseline SCC	52.08	12.05	12–84	20–79
Follow-up SCC	54.01	12.32	12–84	24–83
Change in SCC	1.92	8.32	–72–+72	–31–+31
Square root SDE	1.29	.70	0–3.16	0–2.83
Square root denial	1.54	.66	0–3.16	0–2.83
Self-reflection	34.85	8.85	12–60	13–57
Self-rumination	42.71	7.98	12–60	21–59
Square root self-esteem	5.17	.56	3.16–6.32	3.32–6.32
Self-compassion	99.27	22.37	26–182	29–154

Note. SCC = self-concept clarity; SDE = self-deceptive enhancement.

adjustment, and defensiveness identified in the introduction underlie several of the independent variables and could provide an appropriate and parsimonious representation of them.

Data Reduction

Following the recommendations of Judd and Sadler (2003), we used principal components analyses to evaluate the feasibility of reducing the nine independent variables to a smaller set of factors. An initial assessment of the factorability of the correlation matrix revealed that the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) ratio fell below the recommended value of .6 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Examination revealed that the analysis was unsuccessful in accounting for variance associated with the diffuse-avoidant and normative identity styles. After removing these variables, the seven-item correlation matrix showed good evidence of factorability (KMO = .65). We determined that extracting three components provided a good solution, accounting for 71% of the variance. We used oblique rotation to create components showing simple structure. As shown in Table 3, self-esteem and self-compassion showed high positive loadings, and rumination a high negative loading on the first component. We labeled this component Healthy Self-Evaluation to capture the elements of psychological adjustment encompassed by

TABLE 2
Intercorrelation Matrix for Study Variables

Variable	Norm.	D-A	Rum.	Refl.	SE	SDE	Den.	SC	Comm.	SCC1	SCC2	Gender
Informational	.34***	-.10	.02	.54***	.13	.09	.01	.18*	.42***	-.01	-.02	.05
Normative		.15	-.02	-.04	.19*	.07	-.02	.14	.58***	.12	.16*	.12
Diffuse-avoidant			.08	-.12	-.14	-.00	-.27**	-.09	-.27**	-.33***	-.34***	.27**
Rumination				.09	-.41***	-.34***	-.20*	-.58***	-.09	-.60***	-.43***	-.07
Reflection					.00	-.02	.03	.08	.22**	-.16*	-.13	-.06
Self-esteem						.17*	.05	.52***	.32***	.49***	.42***	.00
Self-deceptive enhancement						.29***	.33***	.12	.34***	.35***	.11	
Denial								.15	.11	.25*	.33***	-.26**
Self-compassion									.21**	.49***	.40***	.19*
Identity commitment										.29***	.27**	-.04
Self-concept clarity T1											.77***	-.09
Self-concept clarity T2												-.16*

Note. Gender is coded 0 = female, 1 = male. Norm. = normative; D-A = diffuse-avoidant; Rum. = rumination; Refl. = reflection; SE = self-esteem; SDE = self-deceptive enhancement; Den. = denial; SC = self-compassion; Comm. = identity commitment; SCC1 = self-concept clarity T1; SCC2 = self-concept clarity T2; T1 = Time 1 administration; T2 = Time 2 administration. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

TABLE 3
Oblique Rotation of Principal Components Analysis of Seven
Independent Variables

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Factor Loadings</i>		
	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>
Self-esteem	.840		
Self-compassion	.824		
Rumination	-.740		
Reflection		.881	
Informational identity style		.869	
Denial			.879
Self-deceptive enhancement			.674

Note. Loadings < .3 not displayed for the sake of clarity.

positive self-evaluation, as reflected in self-esteem, and an accepting, nonjudgmental attitude regarding one's limitations reflected in the positive loading for self-compassion and the negative loading for rumination. Self-reflection and informational style both loaded positively and highly on the second factor. Accordingly, we called the second component, Self-Exploration. Finally, denial and self-deceptive enhancement both loaded positively and highly on the third factor; hence, we called it Defensiveness. Scores on the three components were saved for use in the regression analysis.

Multiple Regression Analyses

Three multiple regressions were conducted using a common set of predictors to account for variance in identity commitment and self-concept clarity at time one and changes in self-concept clarity at Time 2. In all three regressions, gender was included as a control variable. The other predictor variables entered into each equation included factor scores on the three principal components along with scores on normative and diffuse-avoidant identity styles. The standardized beta values found in each of the three equations are listed in Table 4.

Contributors to Identity Commitment

The multiple regression of identity commitment scores on the predictor variables accounted for 51% (adjusted) of the variance in commitment scores, which was statistically significant, $F(6, 147) = 27.29, p < .001$. Positive predictors of identity commitment included the normative style and both the

TABLE 4
Multiple Regression Analysis Summary of Standardized Beta Values for Study
Variables Predicting Identity Commitment and Self-Concept Clarity at Time 1 and
Change in Self-Concept Clarity at Time 2

Predictor	Commitment	SCC at T1	Change in SCC at T2
Gender	-.044	-.099	-.079
Normative identity style	.567***	.110 [†]	.117*
Diffuse-avoidant identity style	-.294**	-.261***	-.110 [†]
C1 Healthy self-evaluation	.128*	.577***	.060
C2 Self-exploration	.225***	-.204***	-.057
C3 Defensiveness	.017	.163**	.139*

Note. Factor loading scores were used for the three principal components in each of the regressions. C = component; SCC = self-concept clarity; T1 = Time 1 administration; T2 = Time 2 administration.

[†] $p < .06$, * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Healthy Self-Evaluation and Self-Exploration factors. The sole negative predictor of commitment was the diffuse-avoidant style.

Contributors to Baseline Self-Concept Clarity

The multiple regression of baseline self-concept clarity scores on the predictor variables accounted for 54% (adjusted) of the variance in self-concept clarity scores, which was statistically significant, $F(6, 147) = 30.72$, $p < .001$. Positive predictors of self-concept clarity included the Healthy Self-Evaluation and Defensiveness factors. The normative style displayed a near-significant positive association. The two negative predictors of self-concept clarity were the diffuse-avoidant style and the Self-Exploration factor.

Change in Self-Concept Clarity

Before considering the regression findings, it is important to note that the self-concept clarity scores showed a high degree of stability over the 3 months. First, as seen in Table 2, the two sets of clarity scores were highly correlated, $r = .77$, $p < .001$. Second, relative to their baseline self-concept clarity scores, participants showed a small, but significant, increase at follow-up (M change = 1.95), $t(152) = -2.88$, $p < .01$ (two-tailed), $d = .16$. Third, this group-level stability was largely replicated at the individual level, where over three-quarters of the participants exhibited a change in clarity of less than 10 points. These findings indicate that stability in clarity scores was the norm. However, there was also individual variability in the degree and

direction of change shown. Although most of the sample showed an increase in clarity, a third actually decreased, and 20% showed a large change of 10 points or more (either positive or negative). Thus, although the first transitional months at university result in greater stability and clarity of identity for most young people, there is a substantial minority that emerges more uncertain about themselves.

After baseline self-concept clarity scores were entered into the regression, the remaining variables accounted for a significant portion of change in self-concept clarity, $F(6, 146) = 2.87, p < .05$. As shown in Table 4, significant positive predictors of increased self-concept clarity included the normative identity style and the Defensiveness factor whereas the diffuse-avoidant style was a near-significant negative predictor.

DISCUSSION

The primary purpose of this study was to examine whether the forms of stability found in young adults' identities and self-concepts are similar and reflect common processes from the domains of identity styles, psychological adjustment, self-reflective cognition, and defensiveness. Overall, we found that, although identity commitment and self-concept clarity are regulated by a number of common influences, they also differ sharply in specific ways.

Similarities in the Structure of Identity and Self-Concept

As hypothesized, identity commitment and self-concept clarity were significantly positively correlated at baseline and follow-up. This is consistent with a similar correlation observed between commitment and clarity that used a different measure of identity commitment (Crocetti, Rubini, & Meeus, 2008). Apparently, committing to an identity and achieving self-concept clarity in young adulthood both involve a common process of defining and stabilizing the self that persists over time.

Three variables showed a common influence on both commitment and clarity. The diffuse-avoidant identity style contributed negatively to stability while healthy self-evaluation and the normative identity style contributed positively.

Although the negative influence of the diffuse-avoidant style on identity commitment is well established (e.g., Berzonsky, 2004), its association with reduced self-concept clarity is new. It suggests that many of the same patterns exhibited by diffuse-avoidant individuals that create unstable identity commitments have similar effects on self-concept clarity. These include a

tendency to adopt procrastination, avoidance, and excuse-making practices with respect to decisions; the use of emotion-focused coping rather than problem-focused coping; and having a lower need for cognition and cognitive complexity (Berzonsky, 1992; Berzonsky & Ferrari, 1996). Use of the diffuse-avoidant style has been shown to interfere with activities important for first-year university students' ability to achieve greater maturity, namely, to develop academic autonomy, achieve satisfying interpersonal relationships, and increase educational involvement (Berzonsky & Kuk, 2000, 2005). In sum, reliance on a diffuse-avoidant orientation encompasses a pattern of behavior that interferes with the ability to make choices and meaningfully commit to them and, thereby, develop a distinct identity and maintain a clear and consistent self-concept.

Commitment and clarity both exhibited a significant positive relationship with healthy self-evaluation. We contend that healthy self-evaluation, which includes self-esteem, self-compassion, and the relative absence of rumination, likely contributes to personal stability in multiple ways. First, high self-esteem plays a role insofar as one is unlikely to make a firm commitment to a sense of self that is dissatisfying. On the contrary, considerable research on cybernetic control theory has indicated that perceiving aspects of oneself as falling below a personally relevant standard prompts dissatisfaction and motivation to change (Carver & Scheier, 1982). Conversely, when failures or other disappointments do arise, self-compassion along with a tendency not to ruminate over such things may be essential to avoiding a downward spiral and persevering with personally important goals and consolidating one's identity (Luyckx et al., 2007).

The final similarity is the normative style's positive contribution to commitment and clarity, which replicates (Berzonsky, 2003, 2004) and extends (Nurmi, Berzonsky, Tammi, & Kinney, 1997) previous research. The reason that normatively oriented individuals possess more stable self-concepts and identity commitments may result from their conservative approach to regulating self-definition which involves: (a) identification with the values and behavioral expectations of authority figures and an inclination to adopt a collective sense of identity (Berzonsky, 1994); and (b) a relatively closed attitude to values and behaviors that differ from their own (Berzonsky & Sullivan, 1992).

Divergences in the Regulation of Identity and Self-Concept Stability

Berzonsky (2003) has suggested that there are different routes to identity commitment: one (normative) that involves an unreflective process of assimilating parental standards and expectations of one's group or community; and another involving a more autonomous, self-reflective approach

to gathering and deliberating on identity-relevant information. We also found evidence for both routes with respect to commitment. However, in the case of clarity, our findings showed that greater self-reflection tends to undermine the clarity and stability of the self-concept.

Why does self-reflection enhance stability in the realm of identity, but undermine it in the realm of self-concept? Developmental theory suggests that it occurs in part because the self-concept is a “core,” constitutive element of the psyche that is formed earlier in development than identity (Erikson, 1968; Harter, 1999). As a constitutive component of the psyche, the self-concept necessarily consists of many tacit attitudes and beliefs whose operation occurs largely outside of awareness. Tacit beliefs normally enter awareness only when contradicted in experience. Self-reflection on tacitly held, but potentially untenable, beliefs may destabilize the self-concept. That is, focal attention to beliefs and attitudes that normally operate in a subsidiary way to facilitate goal-directed activity may create a kind of figure-ground reversal that can disrupt agency and effective functioning, similar to how a skilled pianist’s attending to his or her finger movements can disrupt skilled play (cf., Polanyi, 1968). Also, bringing hitherto tacit elements of the self-concept into focal awareness may create dissonance within the self-concept and, thereby, reduce its clarity and stability.

In contrast, the process of reflecting on one’s identity entails that focal attention be in part directed outward, away from the self, to identify the societal niches that offer the greatest opportunity for personal fulfillment and satisfaction of basic needs. This search is typically guided by the subsidiary operation of the self-concept so that primarily those occupations or ideologies that are congruent with one’s self-concept stand out as intrinsically interesting or compelling. Since this process does not require focal attention to the subsidiary elements that guide the search, the process of reflection need not destabilize identity, but rather helps the individual to clarify and concretize an undefined future. In order to validate this explanation, future research needs to examine how specific episodes of self-reflection affect the stability of the self-concept and identity.

This explanation may also help explain why defensiveness showed a significant positive relationship with clarity, but none to commitment. A degree of defensiveness may be necessary to maintaining the stability of core, constitutive elements of the psyche—and whereas the developmentally early self-concept is core, the adolescent identity is less so. This also fits with the idea that tacit elements of the self-concept come into awareness through experiences in which their truth or validity are challenged. In such cases, a defensive response is likely if the belief challenged represents an important element of the self-concept. In this way, defensive responses such as self-deception may be effective in maintaining the stability of the self-concept

in the face of threat (cf., Johnson, 1995), but may be unnecessary for the maintenance of identity commitments.

Stability and Change in Self-Concept Clarity

Consistent with the line of argument we have pursued, self-concept clarity, as a developmentally early, core element of the psyche showed a high degree of stability during the study interval, both at the group and individual levels. These findings support the conception of self-concept clarity as a highly stable aspect of the self-concept in most young persons, even during a major life transition such as beginning university.

To a lesser degree, self-concept clarity also exhibited change, primarily in the direction of greater clarity accruing over time. This indicates that students are largely able to manage the myriad academic, recreational, and social options available to them and make choices that leave them clearer about themselves. However, the fact that some students' clarity levels declined during the interval indicates that the maintenance of self-concept clarity during the transition to university is not a given. Rather, it appears that maintaining self-concept clarity in the face of novel experiences and situational influences requires an active response. Passivity, in the form of diffuse-avoidance, contributes to reduced clarity over time. Interestingly, however, the findings also revealed that the active response that increased clarity over time was not healthy self-evaluation, which contributed to baseline clarity, but rather the separate but distinctly conservative influences of defensiveness and the normative identity style. Specifically, defensiveness functions to maintain stable, positive self-evaluations at the expense of fidelity to the truth, whereas the normative style may promote stability by the use of cognitive filters that are relatively closed to novel ideas or perspectives. This again may reflect the idea that the self-concept is a core element of the psyche, and therefore, its stability is more essential for functioning and hence is carefully guarded through these mechanisms. In his review of defensive self-enhancement, Paulhus (1998) described defensive self-enhancement as a mixed blessing, and this phrase aptly captures our view of both the normative and defensive influences on clarity. Although clarity is usually associated with good psychological adjustment, in our study the link to adjustment was seen only at baseline assessment and not for increases to clarity. This raises the question of whether increasing clarity in the context of the novel ideas and opportunities typical of the transition to university is entirely or always optimal. Further research is needed to identify the adaptive significance of the conservative influences of defensiveness and normative identity style for increases in self-concept clarity.

Like all research, our study is not without limitations. First, it is a correlational study that precludes claims of causation. Second, we relied entirely on self-report measures, and therefore, shared method variance likely contributed to the findings and needs to be considered when interpreting the results. Third, our follow-up assessment did not measure identity commitment, which precludes evaluating its relative stability and change influences. On the issue of reliability, we note that the abbreviated measures of SDE and Denial we employed did not meet conventional levels of internal consistency. This lower reliability may have reduced the magnitude of effects that these variables might otherwise have demonstrated. Finally, because the sample was comprised of undergraduate students only, and specifically those who were aged 20 or younger, we do not know if the results of our study will generalize to other populations.

Summary and Conclusions

Taken together, these findings suggest that identity commitment and self-concept clarity tap a common element of personal stability that transcends their distinct developmental trajectories and functions within the psyche. This self-definitional stability is aided by the presence of self-esteem but diminished by the tendency, found among those who use a diffuse-avoidant style, to evade life choices and planning that would give greater shape and definition to their identity and self-concept. Identity commitment and self-concept clarity also showed clear differences. Perhaps because of its developmental primacy and more fundamental place in the psyche, the clarity and stability of the self-concept is regulated by various dispositions that have the net effect of protecting the self from potentially destabilizing criticism and promoting its virtues, even to the point of distortion. In contrast, the regulation of identity commitment appears to reflect a more diverse set of influences that includes adhering to socially prescribed norms and engaging in self-reflection. This is consistent with the diversity of ways that identity is achieved and expressed in locating the individual within the ever-widening matrix of family, culture, and society.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research was supported by a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada institutional grant to Edward Johnson. We thank Joshua Gray, Ross McCallum, Janine Oleski, and Maggie Penfold for their help in collecting the data used in this article. Portions of this research have been reported in Kimberly Nozick's psychology honor's thesis.

REFERENCES

- Baumeister, R. F. (1987). How the self became a problem: A psychological review of historical research. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *52*, 163–176.
- Beaumont, S. L. (2009). Identity processing and personal wisdom: An information-oriented identity style predicts self-actualization and self-transcendence. *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research*, *9*, 95–115.
- Berzonsky, M. D. (1989). Identity style: Conceptualization and measurement. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, *4*, 268–282.
- Berzonsky, M. D. (1992). *Identity Style Inventory (ISI3): Revised version*. Unpublished manuscript, Department of Psychology, State University of New York, Cortland, NY.
- Berzonsky, M. D. (1994). Self-identity: The relationship between process and content. *Journal of Research in Personality*, *28*, 453–460.
- Berzonsky, M. D. (1997). [Reliability data for the third revision of the Identity Style Inventory (ISI3)]. Unpublished raw data.
- Berzonsky, M. D. (2003). Identity style and well-being: Does commitment matter? *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research*, *3*, 131–142.
- Berzonsky, M. D. (2004). Identity style, parental authority, and identity commitment. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *33*, 213–220.
- Berzonsky, M. D., & Ferrari, J. R. (1996). Identity orientation and decisional strategies. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *20*, 597–606.
- Berzonsky, M. D., & Kuk, L. S. (2000). Identity status, identity processing style, and the transition to university. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, *15*, 81–98.
- Berzonsky, M. D., & Kuk, L. S. (2005). Identity style, psychosocial maturity, and academic performance. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *39*, 235–247.
- Berzonsky, M. D., & Luyckx, K. (2008). Identity styles, self-reflective cognition and identity processes: A study of adaptive and maladaptive dimensions of self-analysis. *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research*, *8*, 205–219.
- Berzonsky, M. D., & Neimeyer, G. J. (1994). Ego identity status and identity processing orientation: The moderating role of commitment. *Journal of Research in Personality*, *28*, 425–425.
- Berzonsky, M. D., & Sullivan, C. (1992). Social-cognitive aspects of identity style: Need for cognition, experiential openness, and introspection. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, *7*, 140–155.
- Block, J. (1961). Ego—Identity, role variability, and adjustment. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, *25*, 392–397.
- Bosma, H. A., & Kunnen, E. S. (2001). Determinants and mechanisms in ego identity development: A review and synthesis. *Developmental Review*, *21*, 39–66.
- Brickman, P. (1987). *Commitment, conflict, and caring*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Campbell, J. D. (1990). Self-esteem and clarity of the self-concept. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *59*, 538–549.
- Campbell, J. D., Assanand, S., & Paula, A. D. (2003). The structure of the self-concept and its relation to psychological adjustment. *Journal of Personality*, *71*, 115–140.
- Campbell, J. D., Trapnell, P. D., Heine, S. J., Katz, I. M., Lavalley, L. F., & Lehman, D. R. (1996). Self-concept clarity: Measurement, personality correlates, and cultural boundaries. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *70*, 141–156.
- Carver, C. S., & Scheier, M. F. (1982). Control theory: A useful conceptual framework for personality—Social, clinical, and health psychology. *Psychological Bulletin*, *92*, 111–135.
- Chandler, M., Lalonde, C., Sokol, B., & Hallett, D. (2003). Personal persistence, identity development, and suicide: A study of Native and Non-Native North American adolescents. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development*, *68*(2).

- Crocetti, E., Rubini, M., Berzonsky, M. D., & Meeus, W. (2009). Brief report: The Identity Style Inventory—Validation in Italian adolescents and college students. *Journal of Adolescence, 32*, 425–433.
- Crocetti, E., Rubini, M., & Meeus, W. (2008). Capturing the dynamics of identity formation in various ethnic groups: Development and validation of a three-dimensional model. *Journal of Adolescence, 31*, 207–222.
- Csank, P. A. R., & Conway, M. (2004). Engaging in self-reflection changes self-concept clarity: On differences between women and men, and low- and high-clarity individuals. *Sex Roles, 50*, 469–480.
- Dollinger, S. M. C. (1995). Identity styles and the five-factor model of personality. *Journal of Research in Personality, 29*, 475–479.
- Dunkel, C. S. (2005). The relation between self-continuity and measures of identity. *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research, 5*, 21–34.
- Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity: Youth and crisis*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton.
- Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and self-identity: Self and society in the late modern age*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Polity.
- Harter, S. (1999). *The construction of the self: A developmental perspective*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Johnson, E. A. (1995). Self-deceptive coping: Adaptive only in ambiguous contexts. *Journal of Personality, 63*, 759–790.
- Judd, C. M., & Sadler, M. S. (2003). The analysis of correlational data. In M. C. Roberts, & S. S. Iardi (Eds.), *Handbook of research methods in clinical psychology* (pp. 115–137). Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Kroger, J. (2007). Why is identity development so elusive? *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research, 7*, 331–348.
- Kunnen, E. S., Sappa, V., van Geert, P. L. C., & Bonica, L. (2008). The shapes of commitment development in emerging adulthood. *Journal of Adult Development, 15*, 113–131.
- Lavallee, L. E., & Campbell, J. D. (1995). Impact of personal goals on self-regulation processes elicited by daily negative events. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 69*, 341–352.
- Leary, M. R., Tate, E. B., Adams, C. E., Allen, A. B., & Hancock, J. (2007). Self-compassion and reactions to unpleasant self-relevant events: The implications of treating oneself kindly. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 92*, 887–904.
- Linville, P. W. (1985). Self-complexity and affective extremity: Don't put all of your eggs in one cognitive basket. *Social Cognition, 3*, 94–120.
- Linville, P. W. (1987). Self-complexity as a cognitive buffer against stress-related illness and depression. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 52*, 663–676.
- Luyckx, K., Soenens, B., Berzonsky, M. D., Smits, I., Goossens, L., & Vansteenkiste, M. (2007). Information-oriented identity processing, identity consolidation, and well-being: The moderating role of autonomy, self-reflection, and self-rumination. *Personality and Individual Differences, 43*, 1099–1111.
- Marcia, J. E. (1966). Development and validation of ego identity status. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 3*, 551–558.
- Neff, K. D. (2003a). Self-compassion: An alternative conceptualization of a healthy attitude toward oneself. *Self and Identity, 2*, 85–101.
- Neff, K. D. (2003b). The development and validation of a scale to measure self-compassion. *Self and Identity, 2*, 223–250.
- Nolen-Hoeksema, S. (2000). The role of rumination in depressive disorders and mixed anxiety/depressive symptoms. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 109*, 504–511.

- Nurmi, J. E., Berzonsky, M. D., Tammi, K., & Kinney, A. (1997). Identity processing orientation, cognitive and behavioural strategies and well-being. *International Journal of Behavioral Development, 21*, 555–570.
- Paulhus, D. L. (1991). Measurement and control of response bias. In J. P. Robinson, P. R. Shaver, & L. S. Wrightsman (Eds.), *Measures of personality and social psychology attitudes* (pp. 17–59). New York, NY: Academic Press.
- Paulhus, D. L. (1998). Interpersonal and intrapsychic adaptiveness of trait self-enhancement: A mixed blessing?. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 74*, 1197–1208.
- Paulhus, D. L., & John, O. P. (1998). Egoistic and moralistic biases in self-perception: The interplay of self-deceptive styles with basic traits and motives. *Journal of Personality, 66*, 1025–1060.
- Paulhus, D. L., & Reid, D. B. (1991). Enhancement and denial in socially desirable responding. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 60*, 307–317.
- Pelham, B. W., & Swann, W. B. Jr. (1989). From self-conceptions to self-worth: On the sources and structure of global self-esteem. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 57*, 672–680.
- Phillips, T. M. (2009). Does social desirability bias distort results on the ego identity process questionnaire or the identity style inventory? *Identity: An International Journal of Research and Theory, 9*, 87–94.
- Polanyi, M. (1968). Logic and psychology. *American Psychologist, 23*, 27–43.
- Rogers, C. R. (1959). A theory of therapy, personality, and interpersonal relationships, as developed in the client-centered framework. In S. Koch (Ed.), *Psychology: A study of a science* Vol. 3, (pp. 184–256). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Rosenberg, M. (1965). *Society and the adolescent self-image*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Seaton, C. L., & Beaumont, S. L. (2008). Individual differences in identity styles predict proactive forms of positive adjustment. *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research, 8*, 249–268.
- Soenens, B., Duriez, B., & Goossens, L. (2005). Social-psychological profiles of identity styles: Attitudinal and social-cognitive correlates in late adolescence. *Journal of Adolescence, 28*, 107–125.
- Tabachnick, B. G., & Fidell, L. S. (2007). *Using multivariate statistics* (5th ed.). New York, NY: Allyn & Rose.
- Taylor, C. (1989). *Sources of the self*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Taylor, C. (1991). *The malaise of modernity*. Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Anansi.
- Trappnell, P. D., & Campbell, J. D. (1999). Private self-consciousness and the five-factor model of personality: Distinguishing rumination from reflection. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 76*, 284–304.

Copyright of Identity is the property of Taylor & Francis Ltd and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.