RECS-E: Repeated Exploration and Commitment Scale in the domain of Education.

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RECS-E

Repeated Exploration and Commitment Scale – domain of Education

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Abstract. In this concept document the Repeated Exploration and Commitment Scale in the domain of Education is introduced briefly. The purpose of the instrument is to asses exploration and commitment development in intensive longitudinal research designs. The theoretical framework is explained, and the instrument itself is presented in both a Dutch (original) and English (translated) version.

Introduction

The repeated exploration and commitment scale in the domain of education is designed for repeated, frequent assessment of exploration and commitment in intensive longitudinal research designs. This version of the instrument is focused on the domain of education. However, the questions can be easily adapted to apply to other identity relevant domains.

Theoretical Background

The main hypothesis underlying this instrument is that the nature of identity commitments depends on the time-scale on which it is measured. This instrument was developed, because to date, there are no instruments available that measure identity on a sufficiently small time-scale to allow for frequent longitudinal assessment.

Lichtwarck-Aschoff, Bosma, van Geert & Kunnen (2008) argued that identity can be conceptualized and measured on different time-scales (e.g. macro, meso, micro). If one is interested in identity on a macro-time scale, it may be suitable to measure identity with identity interviews like Marcia's Ego Identity Status Interview (1993) or the Groningen Idenity Development Scale revised (Bosma, Kunnen & van der Gaag, 2012). These instruments require an individual to reflect on a broad range of issues in past, present and future, and in several domains of life like friendship, family, education, career, ideology, etc. This captures the content of identity commitments; beliefs about the self and environment, interests, goals etc. This qualitative information serves as a basis to identify the strength of commitments and the amount of exploration.

When frequently assessing development over time, measurements on a smaller time scale may be needed. A smaller time-scale in case of a questionnaire implies that the reflection required to answer the questions is limited to a smaller time-frame, and to narrower, concrete topics. The U-MICS (Crocetti, Rubini & Meeus, 2008) is a good example. This instrument requires reflection about the present and future, applied to particular elements in the environment (i.e. friends, school), in two (or three, in case there is an intimate relation) domains.

For frequent, say weekly or daily assessment over a prolonged period of time, like months or years, the measurements need to be even more concrete, and small in number, in order to reduce the impact such reflections may have on the processes of exploration and commitment itself. We introduce a measure that applies to a particular environment, is directed to the here and now, and captures different aspects of both exploration and commitment.

Model Underlying RECS-E

It may be the most realistic to think of distinctions between time-scales as a gradual continuum, instead of an absolute distinction between two or three categories. However, we do propose that some qualitative differences are present between identity on a macro-level, and identity on a meso-level. We posit that identity on a macro-level consists of commitments to the content of identity (goals, interests etc.). Identity on a meso-level is a translation of this content of identity, to choices for particular environments (these friends, this school, this ideology). On a meso-level, these environments or contexts are the subject of exploration and commitment.

This macro/meso distinction is already implicitly present in the different existing methods to assess identity. Some methods, like the GIDS and ISI, could be said to have a macro-level focus, while the U-MICS has a more meso-level focus. The RECS-E also has a meso level focus, but the reflections are smaller in scope and do not include the future. We have included a bare minimum amount of questions that would still measure the different aspects of exploration and commitment. In figure 1 the model is illustrated, and what aspects are assessed by the RECS-E.

Existing Identity Constructs and RECS-E Items

In appendix I and II an overview of the RECS-E items is presented. Item E1 ('exploration of fit') asseses the amount of exploration regarding the fit between the chosen commitment, and own interests, goals and preferences. This is related to the 'exploration in depth' construct introduced by Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens and Beyers (2006). Item E3 ('exploration of alternatives') measures to what extent a participant has been looking for alternatives to their current commitment, this is related to the 'reconsideration' construct introduced by Crocetti et al. (2008). Item C1 ('commitment to choice') can be considered an aspect of identification with commitment (Luyckx et al., 2006), this item reflects how confident the participants are of the commitment they have already made. Item C2 ('commitment to fit'), indicates how well a person feels that the chosen commitment fits him or herself, and can be considered a different aspect of the 'identification with commitment' construct (see also figure 1). Item E2 ('exploration of self') represents an exploration of own interests and future goals, which has been found an important factor in studies on identity development specifically in the domain of education and career (Germeijs & Verschueren, 2006), and is partly (i.e. exploring future goals) present in the 'exploration in depth' construct of Luyckx et al. (2006).

Figure 1. Hypothetical model of identity on two time-scales and its relation to the different RECS-E items. Item E3 and C1 asses commitment to contexts on a meso level, while items E1 and C2 asses the fit between the macro level identity commitments and the meso level commitments to contexts. Note that on a macro level, only exploration is measured. In this model, assessing the strength of commitment on a macro level requires assessing the content of identity commitments, which requires a more elaborate procedure, like an identity interview.

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Appendix I and II:

I.   *RECS-E - Dutch version (original)*

II.   *RECS-E - English version (translated from Dutch)*

I   **RECS-E**
                                    Dutch version

Beantwoord de volgende vragen over de afgelopen week:

Code	Item	Helemaal niet 1	2	3	4	5	Heel erg 6
E1	Ben je bezig geweest met de vraag of deze studie bij jou past?	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
E2	Ben je bezig geweest met het onderzoeken van je interesses en ambities op het gebied van studie/beroep?	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
E3	Ben je op zoek geweest naar alternatieven voor deze studie?	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
C1	Sta je achter het doen van juist deze studie?	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
C2	Heb je het gevoel dat deze studie bij je past?	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

RECS-E
English version

Answer the following questions about last week:

Code	Item	Not at all 1	2	3	4	5	Very much 6
E1	Have you asked yourself whether this education is right for you?	○	○	○	○	○	○
E2	Have you been investigating your interests and ambitions in the domain of education/career?	○	○	○	○	○	○
E3	Have you been searching for alternatives to this education?	○	○	○	○	○	○
C1	Do you stand by your choice for this particular education?	○	○	○	○	○	○
C2	Do you feel that your education is fitting for you?	○	○	○	○	○	○