

PhD Thesis

**The relations of family background factors with occupational
identity and commitment in romantic relationships at emerging
adults**

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Introduction

Currently, we are witnessing a phenomenon wherein the transition to adulthood, along with commitments typical of adulthood, are extended into the late twenties and early thirties in post-industrial societies (Erikson, 1968; Arnett, 2000). Various terms are used to refer to this phenomenon, such as 'post adolescence' (Somlai, 2007), emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000), quarter-life crisis (Robbins and Wilner, 2001), emphasizing the opportunities and challenges inherent in this life stage. Each approach highlights the central significance of prolonged identity exploration and questioning of identity in this period, that is why we believe that the identity paradigm developed by Marcia, distinguishing between diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, and identity achievement (Marcia, 1966), might be suitable for examining the formation of identity and commitments in young adulthood as well.

Two crucial pillars of adulthood are the willingness for commitment in both professional and personal life domains (Erikson, 1968; Levinson, 1978; Kopp and Kovács, 2006, etc.). The anchoring difficulties experienced by young adults manifest in both these domains. Unlike occupational identity, to our knowledge there is currently no instrument available specifically designed to examine young people's perceptions of relationship forms and relationship commitments.

In addition to underlying societal changes, several scholars point out that certain characteristics of the family of origin, the specifics of parent-child relationships, can either facilitate or hinder the process of identity exploration (Waterman, 1999b; Kroger and Marcia, 2007, etc.). In our work, among family factors, we focused on the role of family background (two-parent or single-parent), parenting styles described by Baumrind (1991), and the attachment to parents. Much of the research exploring the relationship between family factors and identity development has examined adolescents or college-aged individuals. Based on existing studies, certain associations have emerged regarding these family factors and identity, yet numerous contradictions exist within the findings.

Aims and hypotheses

Main research objectives:

- Comparing occupational identity and willingness for commitment in romantic relationships among the emerging adult age group;
- Development of an instrument suitable for investigating emerging adults' perceptions regarding relationship forms and their willingness for commitment, using the identity paradigm;
- Exploring the associations of certain family factors – such as two parent-one parent family structure, perceived parenting styles, and attachment to parents – with occupational identity and willingness for commitment in romantic relationships during this life stage (Kroger and Marcia, 2011; Waterman, 1999, etc.).

The aim of the first study is to develop the Relationship Commitment Beliefs Questionnaire (RCBQ) and examine its construct validity.

H1: The scale's internal structure is determined by four factors corresponding to Marcia's four identity statuses.

H2: We anticipate correlations between the RCBQ factors and attachment styles (Arseth et al., 2009; Sheng, 2014):

H2/a: Secure attachment style shows a positive correlation with achieved identity and foreclosure and a negative correlation with moratorium and identity diffusion.

H2/b: Avoidant attachment style shows a positive correlation with identity diffusion.

H2/c: Ambivalent attachment shows a positive correlation with moratorium.

H3: We expect correlations between the dimensions of RCBQ and Meaning in Life Questionnaire (Kiang and Fuligni, 2010):

H3/a: Presence of meaning is positively related with commitment-based identity statuses (achieved identity, foreclosure) and negatively correlated with identity diffusion and moratorium.

H3/b: Search for meaning is positively related with moratorium.

H4: Achieved identity is positively related to life satisfaction, while identity diffusion is negatively correlated with it (Schwarz, 2011, 2013).

H5: As age advances, moratorium and identity diffusion decrease, while the achieved identity status shows an increase (Waterman, 1985, 1999a).

H6: Singles exhibit higher levels of moratorium compared to those in relationships, and cohabitants show higher levels of diffusion and lower levels of foreclosure.

H7: Regular practitioners of religion demonstrate higher levels of achieved identity and foreclosure and lower levels of identity diffusion and moratorium (Markstrom, 1999).

The second study aims to explore the associations between family background (two-parent/single-parent) and parenting styles with occupational identity and relationship commitment.

H1: Occupational identity achievement increases with age, while identity diffusion and postponement of relationship commitment decrease (Waterman, 1985). The quarter-life crisis becomes apparent in the Moratorium factor (Lisznyai, 2010; Vida, 2010).

H2: There is no correlation between occupational identity and relationship commitment (Waterman, 1999b; Luyckx, 2006a).

H3: A single-parent family background is associated with lower levels of relationship commitment but has no correlation with occupational identity (Feng et al., 1999).

H4: We expect correlations between parental parenting styles, relationship commitment and occupational identity:

H4/a: Authoritative parenting style correlates positively with relationship commitment and achieved occupational identity.

H4/b: Authoritarian parenting style correlates positively with foreclosure.

H4/c: Permissive parenting style shows positive correlation with diffusion in occupational identity and postponement of relationship commitment (Berzonsky, 2004).

The third study aims to explore associations between parenting styles, attachment to parents, occupational identity, and relationship commitment.

H1: We expect parenting styles to correlate with identity statuses:

H1/a: Authoritative parenting style is positively correlated with Achieved identity, Foreclosure, and Family patterns factors.

H1/b: Permissive parenting style positively correlates with Diffusion and Postponement of commitment factors.

H1/c: Authoritarian parenting style also shows a positive correlation with Diffusion and Postponement of commitment factors (Berzonsky, 2004; Elekes et al., 2018).

H2: Correlations are expected between parenting styles and dimensions of attachment to parents:

H2/a: Both authoritative and permissive parenting styles are negatively correlated with attachment anxiety and avoidance to parents, indicating a secure attachment pattern.

H2/b: Authoritarian parenting style shows a positive correlation with attachment anxiety and avoidance, indicating an insecure attachment pattern (Quintana and Lapsley, 1987; Ratner, 2014).

H3: Dimensions of attachment to parents are associated with identity statuses:

H3/a: Attachment anxiety and avoidance to mother and father negatively correlate with Achieved identity, Foreclosure, and RCBQ's Family patterns factors.

H3/b: Attachment anxiety and avoidance to mother and father positively correlate with Moratorium, Diffusion, and RCBQ's Postponement of commitment and Search and doubt factors (Sheng, 2014; Arseth et al., 2009).

H4: Attachment anxiety and avoidance mediate the relationship between parental parenting styles and identity statuses (Ratner, 2014).

Method

Between 2016 and 2019, three empirical studies were conducted. The self-administered questionnaire package was made available on online platforms, reaching participants through snowball sampling method.

Sample and Instruments

The first study included unmarried individuals aged 19–29 ($n = 405$, 46% male, $M = 23$ years). The Relationship Commitment Beliefs Questionnaire (RCBQ) was developed following the structure of the Melgosa Occupational Identity Scale. For exploring construct validity, the Adult Attachment Questionnaire (Collins & Read, 1990), Meaning in Life Questionnaire (Steger & Frazier, 2006; Martos & Konkoly-Thege, 2012), Life Satisfaction Scale (Diener et al., 1985; Martos et al., 2014), and indicators of religiosity were administered.

In the second study, relations between parenting styles, two-parent/one-parent family background, and identity statuses were examined among 19–29-year-olds ($n = 219$, 22.8% male, $M = 24$ years). The questionnaire included demographic data, religious and family background information, Parental Authority Questionnaire (Buri, 1991; Makkos, 2017), Relationship Commitment Beliefs Questionnaire (Elekes et al., 2017), and an adapted version of the Melgosa Occupational Identity Scale for young adults (Melgosa, 1987; András, 1995). In the third study we investigated correlations between parenting styles, attachment to parents, and identity variables ($n = 200$, 36% male, $M = 24$ years). Alongside demographic data and indicators of religiosity, the questionnaire included the Parental Authority Questionnaire, Melgosa Occupational Identity Scale, Relationship Commitment Beliefs Questionnaire, and the parental subscales of Experiences in Close Relationship Scale (Fraley et al., 2011; Jantek & Vargha, 2016).

Data analysis

For data processing we utilized the SPSS program. Exploratory factor analysis and principal component analysis with Varimax rotation were used to investigate the factor structure of the RCBQ. Internal consistency measures were examined for questionnaire reliability. Pearson correlation, independent samples t-test, one-way ANOVA, and post hoc Tukey's correction were applied for assessing associations and comparing group means. Non-parametric tests (Spearman correlation, Mann-Whitney, Kruskal-Wallis test) were used to verify relationships due to deviations from normality. Cluster analysis was conducted based on RCBQ dimensions, and chi-square tests were used to explore associations between clusters and qualitative variables (gender, marital status, religiosity). Simple and multiple linear regression analyses were

employed to examine the impact of family factors on identity. Mediation analysis was conducted using Hayes Process to investigate the relationship between parenting styles, attachment to parents, and identity, assuming attachment mediates the relationship between parenting styles and identity.

Results

Development of the Relationship Commitment Beliefs Questionnaire

Exploratory Factor Analysis

The items of the Occupational Identity Scale (Melgosa, 1987; András, 1995) served as the basis for developing the RCBQ. The purpose of the scale is to examine how thoroughly unmarried young people think about the desired form of romantic relationship, whether they drift from day to day, are ready for future commitment, and if so, what motivates them: family patterns or individual considerations. The principal component analysis revealed the presence of four factors, three of which range from good to excellent reliability. The *Postponing commitment* factor ($\alpha = .864$) can be associated with identity diffusion based on the identity paradigm, *Family patterns* factor ($\alpha = .873$) corresponds to foreclosure, the *Search and doubt* factor ($\alpha = .697$) relates to the moratorium. The Postponing commitment factor encompasses diffusion and reversed items regarding commitment readiness. The fourth factor (consisting of three items) was excluded based on the factor analysis, resulting in a final scale of 17 items.

The construct validity of RCBQ

In the first study, we examined the correlations between the RCBQ factors and certain psychological factors such as adult attachment styles (secure, ambivalent, avoidant), presence and search for meaning, and life satisfaction. Consistent with the hypotheses, the Postponing commitment factor showed a moderately strong positive correlation with avoidant attachment style, a mild negative correlation with secure attachment, while the Search and doubt factor displayed associations with both ambivalent and avoidant attachment, indicating uncertain attachment patterns. Family patterns factor showed a mild positive correlation with secure attachment and a mild negative correlation with avoidant attachment. It seems that secure attachment might predispose individuals to automatically adopt family patterns regarding marriage. Consistent with the assumptions, the Postponing commitment factor demonstrated a negative correlation with the presence of meaning and life satisfaction. The Search and doubt factor showed a positive correlation with searching for meaning, and mild negative correlation with life satisfaction, and finally, the Family patterns factor showed positive associations with both the presence and the search for meaning and life satisfaction.

Results of the cluster analysis

According to the cluster analysis performed by the dimensions of RCBQ, the sample is divided into two groups based on the mean values of Postponing commitment and Family patterns factors. In the first cluster, comprising more than two-thirds of the participants, the mean of Family patterns factor is higher, while the mean of Search and doubt, as well as Postponing

commitment are lower compared to the other cluster. Thus, individuals belonging to this cluster were named Commitment-Seekers. In the second cluster, the average value of Postponing commitment is higher, the level of Search and doubt is moderate, while the mean of Family patterns is lower compared to the first cluster. Participants in the second cluster were named Delayers. Among the examined demographic variables, marital status and religiosity are significantly associated with cluster membership: the majority of individuals in the Commitment-Seekers group are in a relationship, and significantly more of them indicated that religion is 'very important' to them, whereas in the Delayers group, significantly more individuals mentioned that religion is 'not important at all' to them. Singles are represented in roughly equal proportions in the two clusters, suggesting that singles can likely be classified into at least two different 'profiles': the Delayers might be less bothered by the fact of not having a relationship in their lives, while those in the Commitment-Seekers group might experience more tension due to the absence of a relationship.

Demographic variables and identity statuses

Age, gender and identity statuses

In the first study, in line with the assumption, we found that Postponing commitment is mildly negatively correlated with age. In the second study, along with Postponing commitment, the Search and doubt factor, as well in the domain of occupational identity, Diffusion and Moratorium also show mild negative correlations with age, indicating a decrease in their levels as age advances. However, the first study revealed that, after grouping by gender, Postponing commitment decrease with age only among women, while for men, there is no correlation between Postponing commitment and age. Contrary to our assumption, the achieved occupational identity is not related to age. This means that a decrease in the level of diffusion does not automatically signify an increase in the level of identity achievement. In line with our expectations, within the Moratorium subscale of Occupational Identity Scale, career crisis peaks at ages 18, 21, and then at 24–26, these being the periods when a young person needs to make decisions regarding career formation (Lisznyai, 2010; Vida, 2010). However, significant differences between the individual age groups were not established.

Marital status and relationship commitment

In both the first and second study, singles show significantly higher values on Postponing commitment and Search and doubt factors compared to those who have a romantic relationship or are engaged. Additionally in the first study, those who have a relationship (not living

together) scored significantly higher on Family patterns factor than those who cohabit with their partners.

Religiosity and relationship commitment

Consistent with our assumption, the level of Postponing commitment and Search and Doubt decrease parallel to the increase of religiosity. In other words, the more religious an individual is, the lower the degree of commitment delay in relationships and the level of uncertainty regarding personal life. Correspondingly, with the importance of religiosity, the level of Family patterns factor increases: the more religious someone is, the more inclined they are towards commitment in relationships, adopting family patterns and values related to marriage.

The relation of occupational identity and relationship commitment

Contrary to the expectation, the second study showed that there is a range of weak to moderately strong correlations between the corresponding factors of the Occupational Identity Scale and the Relationship Commitment Beliefs Questionnaire: therefore Diffusion correlates with Postponing commitment, Foreclosure correlates with Family patterns, and Moratorium and Diffusion correlate with Search and doubt. It is likely that the same factors (such as certain family influences or personality traits, etc.) explain the relationship between young adults' occupational identity and their commitment in relationships, manifesting as hesitation in commitment in both professional and relationship domains for some, heightened influence of family patterns on both professional and personal life for others, while some individuals simultaneously experience intense searching in both professional and relationship aspects.

The relations of family background factors and identity statuses

Two-parent/ one-parent family background and identity

The second study showed that contrary to the assumption, being raised in a single-parent family and parental divorce are not associated with a higher level of Postponing commitment. However, among the youth raised in two-parent families, both Family Patterns and Foreclosure are significantly higher compared to those with a single-parent background. This suggests that young individuals brought up in two-parent families are more open to parental influence and ready to follow family patterns in both career choices and commitment in romantic relationships (Jones & Streitmeier, 1987; Mullis et al., 2007).

The relations of authoritative parenting and attachment to parents with Foreclosure and Family patterns

The second and third study confirmed that the authoritative parenting style of both parents is not associated with Identity achievement, but with Foreclosure and Family patterns in terms of

both occupational identity and relationship commitment (Cakir & Aydin, 2005; Yousefi, 2012). Therefore, a parent characterized by authoritative parenting, setting boundaries and in the same time, being flexible with their expectations, can serve as a guiding figure and role model for their child in career choices and can also prove to be a positive example in terms of their romantic relationships. Moreover, in line with our assumption, based on the third study, attachment anxiety and avoidance to both parents show a negative correlation with Foreclosure (Sheng, 2014), as well as with Family Patterns, but they are not associated with Identity achievement. Based on these findings, the concept of foreclosure is worth refining: the scales in the items do not emphasize the unreflectiveness of the decision-making but rather the parental guidance accompanying the process. What was considered a less adaptive identity status in Marcia's time today when much fewer reference points are available, identifying with parental values is understandable in case of positive family influences and patterns.

The relations of permissive and authoritarian parenting styles with Diffusion and Postponing commitment

The second and third studies confirmed that the permissive parenting style of the mother shows a positive correlation with stagnation and difficulties in commitment both in occupational identity and relationship commitment (Berzonsky, 2004; Sharma & Mittal, 2017). The third study revealed that the authoritarian parenting style of the mother also correlates positively with identity diffusion (Rageliene & Justickis, 2016; Sharma & Mittal, 2017). It seems that neither excessive, autocratic control nor the absence of boundaries do not facilitate healthy identity development in youth (Quintana & Lapsley, 1987; Sallay & Münnich, 1999).

The relations of attachment anxiety with Moratorium, and Search and Doubt

The third study confirmed the assumption that attachment anxiety to both parents show a moderate positive correlation with Moratorium and Search and Doubt. This result suggests that insecure attachment to parents might incline young people towards getting stuck in a state of commitment-less exploration, subjectively experienced as a state of uncertainty. Sheng (2014) explains this correlation by suggesting that being stuck in a moratorium, intensive and prolonged exploration, might reflect uncertainty and anxiety.

Variance explained by family factors

In the second and third studies, linear regression analyses were used to examine how family factors predict identity statuses. In the second study, multiple linear regression analyses examined the combined effects of two-parent/single-parent family backgrounds and parenting styles on identity variables. Four of the tested models proved to be significant; family factors explained 7.4–17.7% of the variance of Foreclosure, Family patterns, Diffusion, and

Postponing commitment. In the third study, parenting styles explained 1.5–11.5% of the variance of identity statuses, while dimensions of attachment to parents explained 1.8–9.3% of the variance of identity statuses.

The mediating role of attachment in the relationship between parenting styles and identity

In the third study, it was hypothesized that attachment anxiety and avoidance towards parents mediate the relationship between parenting styles and identity statuses. Fourteen models were tested, of which two demonstrated mediating effects. In one model, the predictor was the mother's authoritative parenting style, the outcome variable was the Family patterns factor of the RCBQ, and the mediator variable was attachment avoidance towards the mother. In this case, the authoritative parenting style of the mother influences Family patterns through reducing attachment avoidance, which then has a slight positive effect on Family patterns. The multiple model explained variance by 11%, and the indirect effect was minimal ($\beta < .100$). In the other model, the predictor was the father's authoritative parenting style, the outcome variable was the Family patterns factor of the RCBQ, and the mediator variable was attachment anxiety towards the father. In this case, the authoritative parenting style influences Family patterns through reducing attachment anxiety, which then has a slight positive effect on Family patterns. The multiple model explained variance by 7%, and the indirect effect was also minimal ($\beta < .100$). Since mediation was observed in only two models and the effect was minimal, the mediation hypothesis is considered partially supported (Ratner, 2014); it seems that parenting styles exert a direct impact on identity.

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List of publications related to the dissertation

Hungarian scientific articles in Hungarian journals (3)

1. Petik, K. S., **Elekes, S.**, Kézdy, A.: Döntés - elköteleződés - fogalom.
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2. **Elekes, S.**, Mikuska, P., Komlósi, P.: A pályaidentitás, párkapcsolati elköteleződés és családi háttértényezők összefüggései a készülődő felnőtté válás idején.
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