

SZENDE A. ELEKES*

THE RELATION OF OCCUPATIONAL IDENTITY, AND FAMILY BACKGROUND VARIABLES IN A HUNGARIAN SAMPLE OF EMERGING ADULTS

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Background: In the last few decades, identity formation has been postponed until the mid or late twenties (ARNETT 2000). ARNETT calls this specific period between 19–27 *emerging adulthood*. According to WATERMAN (1999), some family variables can foster or hinder the process of identity development. In our study, we investigate the relation of parenting styles described by BAUMRIND (1991), two-parent or one-parent family backgrounds, and occupational identity. Among the dimensions of identity, we will focus on occupational identity, since it has great importance in this period of life.

Method: Besides demographic variables and data regarding the participants' family background, we used the Melgosa Occupational Identity Scale (OIS), Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ). The sample consisted of 220 19–29-year-old emerging adults.

Results: According to our hypothesis, identity diffusion and moratorium show a slightly negative correlation with age. Regarding occupational identity, it seems significant whether the person could or could not find a job in accordance with their qualifications: the moratorium is higher among those who could not, while foreclosure and identity achievement is higher among those who found a job in their professional field. Regarding family background, it seems that children of divorced parents do now show higher rates of less adaptive identity statuses, but foreclosure is higher among children raised in two-parent families. Conforming to our expectations, we found that permissive parenting is related to identity diffusion, while interestingly, both the father's and the mother's authoritative parenting is related to foreclosure.

Keywords: emerging adulthood, identity formation, occupational identity, parenting styles, one-parent family

* Szende A. Elekes: Sapientia College of Theology of Religious Orders, Piarista köz 1., Budapest, H-1052, Hungary; elekes.szende@sapientia.hu.

1. Background

1.1. The theory of emerging adulthood

In the last few decades, industrial societies have gone through significant changes that have led to a longer and less structured passage to adulthood. More and more young people take part in higher education, which results in the postponement of commitments, such as the timing of marriage and parenthood (UNECE 2013; ARNETT 2000; 2006). It can no longer be sustained that the process of identity development reaches completion by the end of adolescence; instead, it is more likely that the process of exploration continues through the twenties (ARNETT 2000; 2006; 2007; ELEKES et al. 2017). The transition to adulthood seems to be increasingly challenging and prolonged as a result of social and economical changes (HENDRY & KLOEP 2010). Referring to these changes, Jeffrey ARNETT calls this period between 18 and 27 *emerging adulthood*, arguing that in modern societies a new stage of life has appeared between adolescence and young adulthood.

In contrast with Erikson, Arnett claims that the *largest part* of identity formation is taking place during this life period rather than adolescence in the areas of work, romantic relationships, and worldviews (ARNETT 2000; 2006). Many young people quit the first educational programme they started and engaged another. The first experiences gained in the area of work serve as preparation for adult professional roles. By trying different jobs, they endeavor to answer the question: What kind of work am I good at? What kind of work would be satisfying for me in the long term? Explorations in love are also more serious and intimate than those in adolescence. While in adolescence the question is: Who would I enjoy being with, here and now?, in emerging adulthood the question is more identity-focused: Given the kind of person I am, who do I wish to have as a partner through life? (ARNETT 2000)

1.2. The sociocultural conditions of ‘emerging adulthood’

ARNETT’S theory regarding this new life stage has received much criticism since its appearance, claiming that this prolonged period of exploration and the delay of entering adult roles is the privilege of a certain age-cohort in certain societies and not a universal phenomenon. Some scholars claim that this concept applies only to young people who follow higher education routes, recruited mainly from the middle class, and for others – children of parents from the worker class – the route to adulthood is shortened (HENDRY & KLOEP 2010). Studies confirmed (SMITH et al. 2015) that emerging adulthood is experienced by individuals with more education and a middle-class financial background. In this regard, there may be more and better options for middle-class young people attending higher education than those which exist for working class young people.

However, ARNETT himself states that emerging adulthood is not a universal stage of life, rather it is restricted to certain cultures and certain times, acknowledging that

certain cultural and historical contexts influence its development. He mentions that emerging adulthood is characteristic of youth in industrialised and postindustrialised countries, because these societies are not in desperate need for their labor (ARNETT 2007). Even within highly industrialised countries, members of cultural minorities (e.g. the Mormon church) that have certain cultural practices – for example the pressure to marry early – may experience a shorter or no emerging adulthood at all (ARNETT 2000).

1.3. Transition to adulthood: crisis?

All in all, according to ARNETT (2000), exploration, which is a main characteristic of emerging adulthood, is a positive phenomenon, since it allows young people to gain life experiences before the stabilisation of a life structure (ELEKES et al. 2017).

On the other hand, besides all the positive sides of this life stage, we find that many young people remain stuck in identity diffusion or moratorium. For example, the frequent change of educational programmes and workplaces reflects the lack of a stable occupational identity, which is a source of anxiety and depression in the life of emerging adults (DABIS & YATES 2014; LISZNYAI 2010; VIDA 2011). In the background, we find social factors like the continuously changing profile of the workforce market, the increasing number of alternatives, the big freedom of decision that young people face nowadays, which can partially explain this phenomenon. However, the question is what kind of variables are responsible for the individual variations, namely that one is having more difficulties in finding one's way, while the other fulfils the task of identity formation seemingly without any problems. In our research, we focus on some features of emerging adults' family of origin, specifically on the role of parenting styles. Among the dimensions of identity, we focus on occupational identity, since it has great importance in this period of life.

1.4. Family variables and identity

Among family variables that predict identity statuses, we note the following: parent-child attachment, the stability of the family, emotional closeness between parents and child (KROGER & MARCIA 2011), the extent of identification with parents, the availability of model figures perceived to be living successfully, and the parenting styles employed (WATERMAN 1999).

1.4.1. Parenting styles

Based on two main criteria – the extent of control and responsiveness – Diana BAUMRIND (1991), one of the most significant specialists of parenting styles, described three parenting styles:

Authoritarian parenting style means that the parent sets up clear rules and demands unquestionable obedience from the child. The parent uses punishment to control the child's behavior (BURI 1991; SALLAY & MÜNNICH 1999).

Authoritative parenting is at the same time caring, responsive, and includes clear expectations toward the child. Guidance is combined with support and flexibility, which empowers the child to discover the world freely (BURI 1991; SALLAY & MÜNNICH 1999). Permissive parents seek to assure extensive freedom to the child, and they employ relatively little control and punishment (BURI 1991).

Regarding the relationships between parental attitudes and identity development, RATNER (2014) pointed out that a caring and loving mother figure communicates to the child the sense of security that facilitates exploration and the search for identity. On a sample of adolescents, BERZONSKY (2004) found that authoritative parents, by supporting explorative behavior, foster more adaptive identity statuses, like moratorium and identity achievement. In contrast, children of permissive and authoritarian parents are more likely characterised with less adaptive identity statuses, like identity diffusion and foreclosure (BERZONSKY 2004; RATNER 2014).

1.4.2. Two-parent and one-parent families

Very few studies examine the relationship between identity development and two-parent / one-parent family backgrounds and the existing studies have yielded controversial results. OSHMAN and MANOSEVITZ (1976) compared the identity development of college student boys who grew up in two-parent families, either with their biological father or with their stepfather, to those who grew up without a father. In accordance with their assumptions, they found that boys who grew up with either their father or a stepfather showed significantly higher rates of identity achievement. These results point out the essential role of fathers in their sons' psychosocial development. JONES and STREITMATTER (1987) examined the identity development of adolescents. In contrast with the previous findings, they found that children from two-parent families show higher rates of foreclosure than children who grew up in one-parent households. A more recent study yielded the same results: college student girls from two-parent families showed higher rates of foreclosure in the area of worldview. The authors' explanation of these results was that the close parent-child relationship increases the likelihood of a child taking on parental patterns automatically (MULLIS et al. 2007).

2. Present study

In the present study, we aimed to examine the relationships between the two-parent/one-parent family background of emerging adults, the parenting style of the father and mother, as well as their occupational identity.

2.1. Hypotheses

We assumed that achieved identity increases with age, while moratorium and identity diffusion decreases.

Based on OSHMAN and MANOSEVITZ (1976), we assumed that emerging adults from two-parent families show higher rates of identity achievement.

We expected a significant relationship between parenting styles and occupational identity: based on BERZONSKY (2004), we assumed that authoritative parenting is related to identity achievement, while authoritarian and permissive parenting is related to less adaptive identity statuses.

2.1. Sample and method

Participants numbered 227 people between the ages of 18 and 29 who completed the test battery. The data of 220 persons who fit the age criteria and answered every question were included in the analysis.

The data collection took place in February–March 2017. The battery was available on online surfaces and was spread by the snowball sampling method. Data were analysed using SPSS 17.0 statistical program.

The Research Ethics Committee of the Károli Gáspár University approved the research.

2.3. Instruments

Demographic variables: in the first part of the test battery, we asked for the age, educational level, family status, economical activity of the participants, and whether they could find a job in accordance with their qualification. Besides this, also included was whether they grew up in a two-parent or a one-parent family, how old they were when their parents divorced, and whether their mother/father did or did not remarry.

Melgosa Occupational Identity Scale (OIS: MELGOSA 1987; Hungarian version: ANDRÁSI 1995): this instrument measures the occupational identity according to MARCIA'S (1966) identity paradigm. In our research, we used the revised version of the scale (ANDRÁSI 1995) in order to investigate the occupational identity of young adults who have already chosen an occupation (e.g. 'At the present moment I don't know exactly what career direction I want, but I am examining several perspectives'). The scale has 28 items that describe identity diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium and identity achievement, forming four subscales. Respondents must choose on a 5-point Likert scale (1 – strongly disagree, 5 – strongly agree) whether they agree or not with the statements.

Out of the four subscales, three have excellent reliability: identity achievement ($\alpha=0.846$), moratorium ($\alpha=0.807$), foreclosure ($\alpha=0.768$), while the identity diffusion subscale has an acceptable reliability ($\alpha=0.591$).

Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ, BURI 1991; Hungarian version: MAKKOS 2017): this questionnaire measures the participants' perception of parental styles described by Diana Baumrind (authoritative, authoritarian, permissive), separately for the mother and the father. The scale combines a total of 60 items (30–30 for each parent). Out of the 30 items, ten items describe each parenting style. The

statements refer to the person's childhood; for example, 'As I was growing up, my father/mother gave me a clear direction for my behaviors and activities, but he/she was also understanding when I disagreed with him/her' or 'As I was growing up, my father/mother seldom gave me expectations and guidelines for my behavior'. Participants may mark on a 5-point Likert scale (1 – strongly disagree, 5 – strongly agree) to what degree the statement applies to them and their parents. The six subscales have excellent reliabilities: mother permissive ($\alpha = 0.782$), mother authoritative ($\alpha = 0.891$), mother authoritarian ($\alpha = 0.910$), father permissive ($\alpha = 0.869$), father authoritative ($\alpha = 0.924$), father authoritarian ($\alpha = 0.930$).

3. Results

The participants in the study numbered 50 men (22.7%) and 170 women (77.3%). There were no significant differences between men and women regarding the subscales of the Occupational Identity Scale. The mean age of the participants was 24.09 (SD = 3.32). More than one third of the participants were studying, one third employed, the others either worked and studied simultaneously, or worked occasionally. Among those already working, 58% found a job according to their qualification.

More than two-thirds of the participants (153 persons) grew up in two-parent families with their biological parents; one-third grew up in one-parent families (67 persons). In the most cases, the cause of the single-parent family background is divorce (83.6%), in some other cases, the death of one parent. The age of the participants at the time of the divorce or death showed a high diversity (min = 0; max = 18; M = 6.8; SD = 5.14). In most cases (73%), the parent remarried.

The one-way ANOVA did not yield any significant differences in identity statuses depending on the educational level and economic activity; in contrast, it seems relevant whether the person could or could not find a job according to his or her qualification: the t-test showed that moratorium is significantly higher among those who could not find a job in their professional field ($t(152) = -4.767$, $p < 0.001$), while those who could find a job showed higher rates of foreclosure ($t(152) = 3.922$, $p < 0.001$) and achieved identity ($t(152) = 2.173$, $p < 0.05$) (Table 1).

Table 1
Identity statuses of the participants who found or did not find a job in accordance with their qualifications

	Found a job according to their qualifications		Did not find a job according to their qualifications		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
<i>Identity achievement</i>	20.73	7.08	18.16	7.48	2.173	152	0.031
<i>Moratorium</i>	20.77	7.91	26.78	6.43	-4.767	152	0.000
<i>Foreclosure</i>	13.72	5.24	10.61	4.23	3.922	152	0.000
<i>Identity diffusion</i>	12.03	3.84	12.86	4.19	-1.265	152	0.208

In our *first hypothesis*, we assumed that identity achievement increases by age, while diffusion decreases. The results are shown in *Table 2*. We can confirm that in the area of occupational identity, moratorium and diffusion show a slight decrease ($r = -0.201$ and $r = -0.178$, $p < 0.01$); in contrast, no significant relationship exists between age and identity achievement. Our first hypothesis is partially confirmed.

Table 2
Identity statuses depending on the participants' age

		<i>Identity achievement</i>	<i>Moratorium</i>	<i>Foreclosure</i>	<i>Identity diffusion</i>
<i>Age</i>	<i>p</i>	-0.084	-0.201	0.024	-0.178
		0.213	0.003	0.722	0.008

We used the t-test to examine our *second hypothesis* regarding the relation between two-parent/one-parent family background and occupational identity. Those who grew up in two-parent families scored significantly higher on the foreclosure subscale ($t(218) = 2.33$; $p < 0.05$); moratorium tends to be higher among those who grew up in single-parent families ($p = 0.06$). Regarding the other subscales, we did not find any significant differences (*Table 3*). There was no difference in the occupational identity of those whose parents divorced and whose one parent died. Nor did any difference exist between those whose parent remarried after the divorce/death, and those whose parent did not. Our second hypothesis, confirming that emerging adults who grew up in two-parent families show more adaptive identity statuses, was not confirmed.

Table 3
The relation of occupational identity and family background

	<i>Two-parent family</i>		<i>Single-parent family</i>		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
<i>Identity achievement</i>	20.28	7.103	19.48	6.92	0.778	218	0.434
<i>Moratorium</i>	22.69	7.33	24.78	7.99	-1.891	218	0.060
<i>Foreclosure</i>	12.84	5.19	11.13	4.54	2.330	218	0.021
<i>Identity diffusion</i>	12.35	3.78	12.05	3.87	0.490	217	0.625

In our *third hypothesis*, we assumed that there are significant relations between perceived parenting styles and identity. According to the results, the mother's permissive parenting style is significantly associated with identity diffusion ($r = 0.219$, $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, foreclosure is associated with the authoritative parenting style of both the mother ($r = 0.249$, $p < 0.001$) and the father ($r = 0.327$, $p < 0.001$) (*Table 4*). Our second hypothesis was partially confirmed.

Table 4
The relation of parenting styles and occupational identity

	<i>Mother permissive</i>	<i>Father permissive</i>	<i>Mother authoritative</i>	<i>Mother authoritarian</i>	<i>Father authoritative</i>	<i>Father authoritarian</i>
<i>Foreclosure</i>	0.034	0.008	0.249*	0.056	0.327*	0.109
<i>Identity diffusion</i>	0.219*	0.011	-0.003	0.003	-0.032	0.001

* $p < 0.001$

4. Discussion

In our *first hypothesis*, we assumed that identity achievement increases with age, while identity diffusion and moratorium decreases. Our hypothesis was partially confirmed. In accordance with WATERMAN (1985; 1999), we found that moratorium and identity diffusion show a slight decrease with age. However, in contrast to Waterman's research, we did not find any increase in identity achievement, which is in accordance with our previous results (ELEKES et al. 2017). One explanation to this finding may be that diffusion and identity achievement are not the two poles of one scale; rather, they are relatively independent constructs. This means that the decrease of identity diffusion does not lead automatically to the increase of identity achievement. WATERMAN (1999) remarks that during adolescence, we can witness the intense decrease of identity diffusion, while the development of identity achievement can be observed in later years.

Regarding occupational identity, it seems to be an important factor whether one could or could not find a job in consonance with one's qualification. It is understandable that moratorium is higher among those who could not find work, since they more likely experience that they are not in the right place and they are still searching for a more satisfying alternative. Another explanation for this phenomenon of individuals experiencing high moratorium is that they are less determined to find a job or workplace conforming to their qualifications. It is also interesting that individuals who could find a job in their qualification show higher rates of identity achievement and foreclosure. It is likely that identity statuses that presume some kind of commitment – identity achievement, foreclosure – foster a more conscious, purposeful job search.

In our *second hypothesis*, based on the results of OSHMAN and MANOSEVITZ (1976), we assumed that individuals who grew up in two-parent families show more adaptive identity statuses, like identity achievement. In contrast with our expectations, we found that not identity achievement but rather foreclosure is more characteristic of individuals with a two-parent family background. This result is in accordance with the results of JONES and STREITMATER (1987) and MULLIS and colleagues (2007), who also pointed out that children from two-parent families are more likely

foreclosures. An explanation to this might be that in two-parent families, the emotional closeness to the parents may predispose young people to the automatic acceptance of parental patterns.

In our *third hypothesis*, we assumed that the parents' authoritative parenting style is related to more adaptive identity statuses, the permissive parenting style correlates with identity diffusion, while the authoritarian parenting style is associated with foreclosure. Our hypothesis was partially confirmed. The mother's permissive parenting style is slightly but significantly related with identity diffusion. This means that in case of the mother being permissive, having few expectations and no control of the child, the latter shows few signs of exploration and commitment. This corresponds with the results of BERZONSKY (2004), who found that the permissive parenting style is the predictor of identity diffusion. However, it is surprising that the authoritative parenting style of both the mother and the father is related to foreclosure rather than identity achievement. The aforementioned explanation can work for this result as well: a warm, loving parent, who sets rules and expectations but is open to discuss their decisions with the child, may serve as a role model and guide for the child even in the area of occupational choice.

We must confront our results with MARCIA's (1966) classical theory; James Marcia considered identity achievement to be the most adaptive identity status while foreclosure was a less adaptive state. Interestingly, our results show that more positive family variables – two-parent family background, authoritative parenting style – are associated with foreclosure rather than identity achievement. The main difference between these two statuses is that identity achievement is preceded by a so-called 'crisis', when the parents' values and options are questioned. In light of our results, we must reconsider what we think about foreclosure. To understand these differences, we must adapt a sociocultural perspective. In the United States of the 1960s, when James MARCIA worked and created his theory (1966), revolting against parents and questioning traditional values seemed a desirable and mature option for an adolescent. This huge desire of the youth to say no to traditional values and find their own way was manifested mostly in the hippie movement. In contrast, our postmodern era is characterised with many fewer reference points that may help young people lead their lives and make decisions. As ARNETT and colleagues (2011) note: 'Contemporary contours of diffuse social, economic, and cultural conditions present new challenges because people must lead their lives without a "route map," ' (8). It is therefore understandable that in the case of positive parental patterns and influence, young people are prone to identify with parental values – in MARCIA's (1966) terms, they are foreclosures.

Our study points to the important role of parents in their children's healthy identity development. It seems that mature identity can hardly be reached without the active parental engagement, especially the mother's engagement, in their child's life. Nowadays, we may notice trends that suggest children should be reared in complete freedom, with no or few restrictions on the part of the parent. Parents, in order to satisfy every need of the child, do not say 'no' or set rules or expectations towards

them. In fact, empirical results show that the optimal parenting style is not at all totally permissive, but involves control, expectations, and limits on the part of the parent, combined with warmth, love, and sensitivity at the same time.

Therefore, we advocate for the governmental financial support of parent training programs and education (e.g. the PET developed by Thomas Gordon), based on empirical studies, which draw attention to the basic principles of parenting in the wider society while teaching effective parenting techniques.

4.1. Future directions

In the future, it would be interesting to investigate how parenting styles are related to other dimensions of identity (e.g. world view, relational). It would be worthwhile to explore in a larger sample the differences between identity statuses depending on the time that passed after the divorce/loss of one parent, the difference made by a step-parent, and the role of other family variables (e.g. parent-child attachment) in identity formation.

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