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Author(s): Fadjukoff, Päivi; Pulkkinen, Lea; Lyyra, Anna-Liisa; Kokko, Katja

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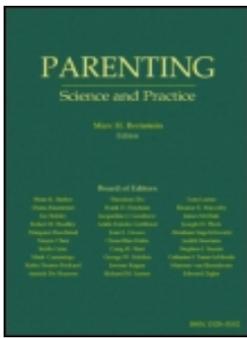
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Parental Identity and Its Relation to Parenting and Psychological Functioning in Middle Age

Päivi Fadjukoff, Lea Pulkkinen, Anna-Liisa Lyyra, and Katja Kokko

SYNOPSIS

Objective. This article focuses on identity as a parent in relation to parenting and psychological functioning in middle age. **Design.** Drawn from the Jyväskylä Longitudinal Study of Personality and Social Development, 162 participants (53% females) with children (age 36), represented the Finnish age-cohort born in 1959. Parental identity was assessed at ages 36, 42, and 50. **Results.** In both women and men, parental identity achievement increased from age 36 to 42 and remained stable to 50. The level of parental identity achievement was higher in women than in men. Achievement was typical for women and foreclosure for men. Participants' education, occupational status, and number of offspring were not related to parental identity status. As expected, parental identity achievement was associated with authoritative (indicated by higher nurturance and parental knowledge about the child's activities) parenting style. No significant associations emerged between parental identity foreclosure and restrictiveness as an indicator of authoritarian parenting style. The diffused men outscored others in parental stress. Achieved parental identity was related to generativity in both genders and to higher psychological and social well-being in men. **Conclusions.** At present, many parenting programs are targeted to young parents. This study highlighted the importance of a later parenting phase at around age 40, when for many, the children are approaching puberty. Therefore, parenting programs and support should also be designed for middle-aged parents. Specifically men may need additional support for their active consideration and engagement in the fathering role.

INTRODUCTION

Starting in adolescence, a gradual change takes place from being a recipient of care to being a provider. Such development requires a change in the view of oneself in the world (Erikson, 1959; Marcia, 2007). Identity formation is a major developmental task related to this change. Identity is a self-structure that provides a person with a sense of consistency and continuity across time and place, thus enabling and impacting personal psychosocial progress and well-being as well as commitment to guiding and caring for the next generation (Erikson, 1950, 1968). Research interest in adult identity development beyond adolescence has increased (e.g., Kroger, 2007; Kroger & McLean, 2011; Marcia, 2002), and for many people, substantial identity development takes place during the adult

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years (e.g., Cramer, 2004; Fadjukoff, Pulkkinen, & Kokko, 2005; Kroger, Martinussen, & Marcia, 2010). However, longitudinal studies on identity extending into adulthood and having several assessments of adult development are still rare. The present study focuses on the longitudinal evolution of parental identity in a representative sample of Finnish adults with children. Parental identity is here defined as identity as a parent and is measured as the firmness of commitment to the parenting domain and the degree of personal exploration in acquiring one's views on parenting issues (e.g., the ideas, values, and rules that they see important in rearing offspring).

The most widely followed operationalization in identity research is the identity status paradigm by Marcia (1966, 1993), which has proven useful to researchers of identity development from adolescence through adulthood (Kroger & McLean, 2011). Marcia (1966, 1993) and Kroger and Marcia (2011) proposed that personal identity development can be defined as four qualitatively distinct identity statuses that differ on two dimensions: exploration and commitment. In identity *diffusion*, an individual does not have firm commitments, nor is she or he actively trying to form them. In *foreclosure*, commitments are made without an exploratory phase, typically by identifying with parents or with other authorities. Persistent identity foreclosure implies difficulties in seriously considering various alternatives in life, and thus to rigidity and defensiveness, as well as to denial or distortion of information not fitting to their expectations. A person in identity *moratorium* is, in contrast, actively exploring alternative identities without having yet made commitments. Finally, in identity *achievement*, relatively firm commitments are made through a period of exploration, independent of parents or other authorities. Identity achievers have chosen their own life directions but can also understand the experiences of others and view differing opinions non-defensively and reflectively.

Marcia (1966, 2007) and Kroger and Marcia (2011) introduced a semistructured Identity Status Interview to test the validity of Erikson's concept of identity and to provide empirical indicators of the hypothesized identity structure. The scale reliability based on interrater agreement has been reasonably high across studies, around 80% (for a recent meta-analysis, see Kroger et al., 2010). Although it has been questioned whether the Marcian model fully represents Erikson's original ideas (e.g., van Hoof, 1999), this approach, with its many extensions and expansions, has long been productive and predominant in the field of identity research (Schwartz, 2001; Syed, 2012). Empirical research supports the identity status presumption of identity achievement being the most mature identity status, and diffusion the least sophisticated and adaptive status, and that identity generally develops toward achievement with age (e.g., Berzonsky & Adams, 1999; Kroger, 2003, 2007; Kroger et al., 2010; Marcia, 1993; Meeus, Schoot, Keijsers, & Branje, 2012; Schwartz, 2001; Waterman, 1999).

The domains in which identity commitment may be manifested may change along with social conditions and an individual's identity interests (Marcia, 1993). The content areas for an identity status study should be selected to ensure that the content is both meaningful to the participants during their particular age and life phase and should have some variability of choice permitted by the particular culture (Kroger, 2003; Marcia, 1993, 2001). Identity diffusion in a specific domain also suggests that the domain may not be salient for the respondent (Waterman & Archer, 1993). The number and areas of identity domains thus vary slightly within numerous studies and methods (e.g., Schwartz, 2001). Erikson (1950, 1968) considered occupational and ideological domains as key areas in identity, and Marcia (1966) further divided the ideological domain into political and religious identity domains. Later, interpersonal domains were added (Grotevant, Thorbecke, & Meyer, 1982). Thus, the concept of identity consists of both ideological

and interpersonal aspects. According to our knowledge, parental identity has not been studied within this framework as identity studies have predominantly focused on adolescence and early adulthood when one's own parenting is not yet a core issue.

Parenting is regarded as a focal life domain by most adults. It has to do with emotions, thoughts, values, and beliefs, and entails interaction both with children and with other adults around them. Rich literature exists on parenting features and styles, as well as on their relation to the well-being and development of the growing youth (see, e.g., Johnson, Berdahl, Horne, Richter, & Walters, 2014; Larzelere, Morris, & Harrist, 2013; Parke & Buriel, 2006; Skinner, Johnson, & Snyder, 2005). Skinner et al. (2005) comprehensively reviewed research on measures of parenting dimensions over several decades and concluded that the core features of parenting are warmth or rejection, structure or chaos, and autonomy support or coercion. Recent research distinguishes between parent-driven dominative and manipulative forms of control and child-centered forms of control characterized mainly by guidance and autonomy support (Grolnick & Pomerantz, 2009; Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2010). Parenting should be dynamic and modified according to the context, for instance, the age of the child (Johnson et al., 2014).

The optimal mix of warm parental nurturance, autonomy support, and structure constitutes an authoritative parenting style, whereas both too permissive and too authoritarian (rigid adult-driven structure) parenting have been found less favorable (Baumrind, 1967; Larzelere et al., 2013). Authoritarianism has been related to cold and dysfunctional parenting and to create conflict between parent and offspring (Peterson, Smirles, & Wentworth, 1997). It has also been found to be associated with overall identity foreclosure (e.g., Kroger & Marcia, 2011). The authoritative parenting style has also been called child-centered parenting, in contrast to adult-centered parenting, which covers both authoritarian and too permissive or neglectful parenting styles (Metsäpelto, Pulkkinen, & Poikkeus, 2001; Pulkkinen, 1982). However, studies discussing identity and parenthood often concentrate on adolescent identity development and analyze perceived parenthood (measured through questioning the adolescent) as an antecedent or predictor of identity development in youth (e.g., Beyers & Goossens, 2008; Luyckx, Soenens, Goossens, & Vansteenkiste, 2007). In his review of longitudinal research, Meeus (2011) concluded that warm and supportive parent-adolescent relationships are associated with a more mature identity while control related to a less mature identity of the adolescent.

It has been rare to analyze parental identity from the perspective of the parent's own parenting style, well-being, and development. The father's and mother's roles have been discussed specifically in the initial transition phase to parenthood (e.g., Cast, 2004; Katz-Wise, Priess, & Hyde, 2010). Research suggests that the parenting experience has a substantial link to the salience of the family domain and brings new challenges for coping. Parenting adds a new context and dimension to an individual's identity that develops through iterative person-context transaction processes in which new challenges and conflicts trigger additional development (Bosma & Kunnen, 2001). Parenting necessitates new identity considerations and negotiations with the spouse and within a broader social context. Commitment to the new parental identity domain and successful verification of the parent's role have implications for the well-being of both individual and marital relationship. However, men specifically often find it challenging to readjust their personal needs and expectations with childcare tasks and responsibilities (for a review, see Genesoni & Tallandini, 2009). McBride et al. (2005) found that paternal involvement and fathers' investments in their parental roles were moderated by

mothers' beliefs about the role of the father. They suggest that, in parenting programs, mothers should be sensitized to notice and support paternal involvement behavior. MacKinnon and Marcia (2002), in a representative sample of Canadian women with preschool children, found identity achieved mothers to be the highest, and identity diffused mothers the lowest, in understanding children's development. Parental identity was not directly assessed in the study, but identity was measured on four other domains (occupation, religion, sex roles, and interpersonal relatedness) and summed to an overall identity.

Erikson (1950, 1968) defined personal identity as an integrative intrapsychic structure wherein successful construction is an expression of mental vitality and experienced as a sense of psychosocial well-being. Accordingly, identity commitment is essential for one's well-being (e.g., Berzonsky, 2003; Fadjukoff & Pulkkinen, 2006; Meeus, Iedema, Helsen, & Vollebergh, 1999; Sneed, Whitbourne, Schwartz, & Huang, 2012; Vleioras & Bosma, 2005). In addition, generativity—the adult's concern for and commitment to guiding and caring for the next generation—has been identified as a key developmental task and precondition for psychological well-being, particularly in middle age (An & Cooney, 2006; Erikson, 1950, 1959). Marcia (2002) depicted that identity achievement in late adolescence would lead to generativity in middle age, whereas identity diffusion would more likely be succeeded by a sense of personal and interpersonal stagnation when one feels isolated from others and finds difficulties in giving and receiving care. Generativity has been found to be associated with an authoritative, child-centered, parenting style that produces positive outcomes (Peterson et al., 1997). Parenting behavior, characterized by selfless care and concern, is an important way for adults to achieve generativity and personal well-being (An & Cooney, 2006).

Our first research question concerned the distribution of parental identity statuses from age 36 to 42 to 50 in a sample of women and men with children and the stability or changes in their parental identity through these adult years. According to Erikson (1959), people develop toward higher levels of maturity and integration as they grow older, and identity has been found to generally develop toward achievement with age (e.g., Berzonsky & Adams, 1999; Kroger, 2003, 2007; Kroger et al., 2010; Marcia, 1993; Meeus et al., 2012; Schwartz, 2001; Waterman, 1999). Therefore, we expected parental identity achievement to increase with age in adulthood in the context of becoming a parent (e.g., Cast, 2004; Katz-Wise et al., 2010). We analyzed similarities and differences in parental identity across gender, level of education, occupational status, and the number of offspring. Previous studies suggest that in interpersonal domains women have a tendency to exhibit higher identity achievement scores, whereas identity diffusion and foreclosure are more typical of men (see, e.g., Lewis, 2003, for a review). Therefore, our hypothesis was that women are more advanced than men in parental identity development. As earlier school success (Fadjukoff & Pulkkinen, 2006) and length of education (Fadjukoff, Kokko, & Pulkkinen, 2007) have been found to relate to overall identity achievement (not including parental identity), we expected that higher education and, consequently, higher occupational status would also be associated with identity achievement in the parent role.

The second research question concerned the little studied associations of parental identity with parenting style, including parenting stress, and with the parent's own psychological functioning, more specifically psychological and social well-being and generativity. Parental identity status groups were compared. Parental identity achievement was expected to be associated with authoritative and foreclosure with

authoritarian parenting. According to earlier findings concerning overall identity (e.g., Fadjukoff & Pulkkinen, 2006), we also expected that achieved parental identity would be associated with higher generativity and psychosocial well-being. As parenting in various cultures is thought to differ in mothers and fathers, and most parenting research focuses on mothers (Bornstein, 2012), gender differences were analyzed; the findings are reported separately for women and men when significant gender differences emerged.

METHOD

Participants

The study was part of the Jyväskylä Longitudinal Study of Personality and Social Development (JYLS; Pulkkinen, 2006, 2009). The initial random sample of the study consisted of 8-year-old children, 173 girls and 196 boys, born in 1959. The children were drawn from 12 randomly selected second-grade school classes in Jyväskylä, Finland; the initial participation rate was 100%. At age 50, the retention rate was 84% from the initial sample, excluding those participants who had died ($n = 12$) or refused to take part in the study ($n = 34$). The ethnically homogeneous (Caucasian) sample was, at ages 36, 42, and 50, representative of the population of Finnish citizens born in 1959 when compared with data derived from Statistics Finland on marriage rate and household composition, number of offspring, and employment status (Pulkkinen, 2006; Pulkkinen & Kokko, 2010; Sinkkonen & Pulkkinen, 1996). The sample in adulthood also represented the initial random sample in terms of child socioemotional behavior and adolescent school success as well as parental occupational status (Pulkkinen & Kokko, 2010).

Of the JYLS participants, 82% had children at age 36. Having been born in 1959, their period of entering adulthood family roles dated back to the late 1970s and to the mid-1980s. As described by Fadjukoff et al. (2007), the mean age of entering cohabitation or marriage was 21.8 years ($SD = 4.0$) for women and 23.6 years ($SD = 4.7$) for men, and the age of having their first child was 25.6 ($SD = 4.6$) for women and 28.5 years ($SD = 4.3$) for men. The gender difference was statistically significant.

The present study focused on those 162 JYLS participants (86 women, 76 men) who had children at age 36 and who had taken part in semi-structured psychological interviews at ages 36, 42, and 50, representing early mid-adulthood, mid-adulthood, and beginning of late mid-adulthood (Lachman, 2004). In the context of the interview, the participants filled out several self-reports on, for example, parenting and psychosocial well-being. Additionally, they had returned a mailed Life Situation Questionnaire (LSQ; Pulkkinen, 2006). The participants who had taken part in all interviews did not differ in their identity status frequencies from those who had participated in fewer interviews. However, the participants with children differed from their childless counterparts. As expected, parental identity diffusion was more typical for childless participants, $\chi^2(3, N = 184) = 14.52, p = .004$, at age 36, $\chi^2(3, N = 184) = 33.60, p < .001$, at age 42, and $\chi^2(3, N = 184) = 16.67, p = .009$, at age 50, reflecting that the parenting domain was not salient for them (Waterman & Archer, 1993). In particular, men who had no children at all ages were more likely diffused in parental identity than their counterparts who had children. In women, the association was significant only at age 42, when all identity-diffused women were childless. As reported by Kokko, Pulkkinen, and Mesiäinen (2009), childless men were typically less educated and childless women more highly educated than their counterparts with children.

Procedures

Parental identity was assessed using the Marcian (1966) semistructured interview at ages 36, 42, and 50. A series of questions was asked about the participant's personal opinions and sources of these opinions. The opening question was: "Do you have an opinion about how to rear children?" Thereafter, the participants were asked about how they had acquired their view, for example, whether they had ever thought about the issue, whether they had had conflicting ideas about the issue, whether they had had influential people around or other sources for opinions, and how they had ended up with their present views. Each participant's identity status was assessed using two criteria: the firmness of personal commitment (no/yes) and the absence (-) or presence (+) of a period of exploration or identity crisis. The status was first coded by the interviewers and later, on the basis of transcriptions, by one person unaware of the interviewer's coding, a process which provided coherence across the interviewers. After the double coding, coding differences were checked, discussed, and corrected if deemed necessary to avoid interviewer effects in the coded data. Consensus coding was used for data analysis. The rate of full agreement between an interviewer (there were about 15 different interviewers each time) and the second coder varied from 73 to 93% at the various ages. The procedure is described in detail by Fadjukoff et al. (2005, in press). Because commitments had often been made years prior to the interviews with the middle-aged participants, many coding differences were due to difficulties by the informants—and shared by the interviewees—in interpreting whether the participants' commitments were acquired from others (foreclosure) or as the result of exploration (achievement).

The level of education of each participant, inquired about in the LSQ, was coded according to the highest degree obtained as follows: 1 = *no occupational education or short courses (lasting for no more than 4 months)*, 2 = *lower vocational education*, 3 = *vocational college or polytechnic*, and 4 = *university*, based on the International Standard Classification of Education (UNESCO, 2006). The educational trajectories and Finnish educational system are described in detail by Kokko, Pulkkinen, Mesiäinen, and Lyyra (2008). The occupational status of the participants, based on LSQ information about occupational titles at age 50, was categorized into 1 = *blue-collar* (e.g., cleaners and factory workers), 2 = *lower white-collar* (e.g., nurses and technicians), and 3 = *higher white-collar occupations* (e.g., teachers, managers, and physicians). The categorization of the titles was based on the existing coding scheme of Statistics Finland. Family income or its changes were not available. However, both level of education and occupational status are strongly interrelated with household income, as confirmed by the Official Statistics of Finland (2015). Number of offspring was asked in the interviews at ages 27, 36, 42, and 50.

Parenting style was assessed at ages 36 and 42 as part of an interview by means of a 28-item Child Rearing Practices Questionnaire (Metsäpelto & Pulkkinen, 2003; Pulkkinen, 1996) that concerned parents' behaviors, attitudes, goals, and child-rearing values and measured parenting in general rather than the parenting of one particular child. In addition, its items measuring parenting stress were asked at age 50. Responses were given on a scale from 1 = *not at all* to 4 = *very much*. Four scales were formed (for the procedure, see Metsäpelto & Pulkkinen, 2003). The emergent factors were labeled *nurturance* (10 items including, e.g., parent's expression of appreciation, encouragement of independence, showing affection, and respecting the child's opinions; Cronbach $\alpha = .84$ at age 36, $\alpha = .86$ at 42); *restrictiveness* (10 items including demands for obedience by the child and punitiveness; $\alpha = .75$ at 36, $\alpha = .66$ at 42); *Parental knowledge about*

the child's activities (three items including parents' awareness of the child's friends and whereabouts, and the parent's knowledge about the child's daily schedule; $\alpha = .58$ at 36, $\alpha = .73$ at 42); and *parenting stress* (four items referring to situations when parents are overwhelmed by the demands of parenting, e.g., "I often feel that the task of upbringing is too much for me;" $\alpha = .76$ at 36, $\alpha = .77$ at 42, $\alpha = .75$ at 50).

Psychological well-being was assessed in the context of the interview at ages 36, 42, and 50 using the short version (Ryff & Keyes, 1995) of the Scales of Psychological Well-Being (Ryff, 1989), which includes 18 items such as "I think it is important to acquire new experiences that challenge the way I think about myself and the world," and "The demands of everyday life often get me down," (reversed). Responses were given on a scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*. Cronbach's alphas for the average scores calculated for the 18 items were .72 at age 36, .75 at 42, and .77 at 50. An earlier study based on the same data at ages 36 and 42 found that the structure of well-being, and psychological well-being as a part of total well-being, was the same across genders and time (Kokko, Korkalainen, Lyyra, & Feldt, 2013). As concluded by McDowell (2010), the internal structure and stability over time of this 18-item scale have been extensively studied and validated, and it has been widely used, also in several national surveys.

The scales of *social well-being*, constructed by Keyes (1998), were administered during the interview at ages 42 and 50. They consisted of 15 items representing five components of positive social functioning, such as "My community is a source of comfort," and "People do not care about other people's problems," (reversed). Responses were given on a scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*. Cronbach's alphas for the average scores calculated for the 15 items were .77 at age 42 and .79 at age 50.

Generativity, the adult's concern for and commitment to guiding and caring for the next generation, was identified by Erikson (1950) as a key developmental task and precondition of psychological well-being in middle age. The Generativity Scale developed and tested in three adult samples from different age groups (average ages 21, 48, 69) by Ryff and Heincke (1983) was used in the present study at ages 42 (as a part of the interview) and 50 (included in the LSQ). The scale comprised 10 items, such as "I am concerned about providing guidance and direction to younger people," and "The average person does not have the time to be concerned about the welfare of others," (reversed). Responses were given on a scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*. Cronbach's alphas for the average scores calculated for the 10 items were .72 at age 42 and .73 at age 50.

The time-invariance property of the scales measuring parenting styles, well-being, and generativity was confirmed by comparing CFA-models in different time points with and without equality constraints (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2011). The time-invariance hypothesis holds if the χ^2 -difference test result is not statistically significant (nurturance, $p = .687$; restrictiveness, $p = .872$; parental knowledge, $p = .966$; parenting stress, $p = .396$; social well-being, $p = .162$; generativity, $p = .345$).

Data Analyses

The analyses were conducted in two phases according to the research problems. The identity categories were measured on a nominal scale. Therefore, the distribution of parental identity statuses was analyzed through cross tabulations of identity statuses at ages 36, 42, and 50, comparing the distributions across gender, occupational status, and

education. χ^2 -test (or the exact χ^2 -test, when needed) was used to measure the significance of differences. The adjusted standardized residuals (ASR) with the cutoff value ± 1.96 were used to find the cells with more cases (typical) or fewer cases (atypical) than expected by chance (Bergman, Magnusson, & El-Khoury, 2003). For testing the significance of the changes in the parental identity status between age levels, Cochran's Q-test was used in three and the McNemar test in two ages.

The differences of parenting style and the parent's own psychological functioning between the identity status groups across ages 36, 42, and 50 were analyzed by profile analyses using repeated-measures multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). The analysis included evaluation of interaction (i.e., mean level changes of the dependent variables with age in each identity status group) and the evaluation of the main effects (i.e., mean level differences as well as their change with age). Pairwise group differences were specified with the parameter estimates of the MANOVA models. The effect size and the power of the tests were also scrutinized. The associations between parental identity statuses and the number of offspring at different ages were analyzed with analysis of variance (ANOVA). Pairwise group differences were specified with the Bonferroni multiple comparison test. As the numbers of diffuse and moratorium identities were very small in the sample, and because both categories are characterized by uncommitted parental identity, moratorium was combined with diffusion for these analyses at age 36. At age 42, parental diffusion existed only in men and was non-existent at age 50.

Gender differences in the parenting and well-being variables were tested using *t*-tests for independent samples. To relate to the existing parenting literature, which often is gendered and refers specifically to mothers (Bornstein, 2012), analyses were carried out and findings are reported for women and men separately.

RESULTS

Parental Identity Distributions and Change From Age 36 to 50

Great majorities of both men and women were committed in their parental identity through either the foreclosure or achievement status, as shown in Figure 1. At age 36, two-thirds of men were rated foreclosed in their parental identity, which significantly exceeded the foreclosure frequency of women, in whom parental identity achievement was slightly more frequent than was foreclosure, $\chi^2(3, N = 162) = 5.56, p = .015$. Corresponding significant gender differences continued at ages 42 and 50: The majority of women, about 7 out of 10, had an achieved parental identity at ages 42 and 50, whereas about half of the men continued with the identity foreclosure, which persisted as the most frequent parental identity status for men. Women thus clearly outnumbered men in parental identity achievement, with men being more frequently in foreclosure or diffusion at age 42, $\chi^2(3, N = 162) = 17.87, p < .001$, and in foreclosure at age 50, $\chi^2(1, N = 162) = 10.38, p = .001$. At age 42, diffused parental identity was at its highest: 7% of men compared to about 2% of women had a diffused parental identity at age 36, and none at ages 42 and 50. Less than 2% had a moratorium parental identity at ages 36 and 42, and no one at age 50.

As was earlier described, identity diffusion was associated with childlessness in the JYLS data, and the frequency of identity diffusion in the present sample was, therefore, low. In the present subsample of women and men with children, the number of offspring was not found to be associated with concurrent or later parental identity status at any age. At age 36, the mean number of children was two for both genders and had increased

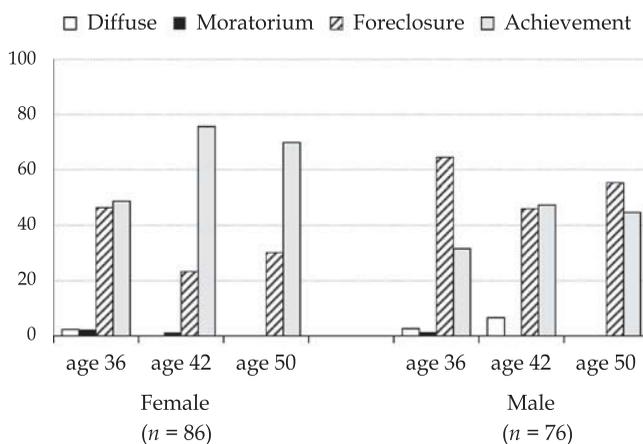


FIGURE 1

Distributions of parental identity status at ages 36, 42, and 50 in women ($n = 86$) and men ($n = 76$) with children.

only slightly by age 50, when women averaged 2.2 and men 2.4 children. The gender difference was not significant. Early parenthood (having children by age 27) also was not related to later parental identity status. Likewise, neither the level of education nor the occupational status of the participant was associated with parental identity at any age level in this sample, as confirmed with χ^2 -testing.

Figure 2 highlights individual variation in the longitudinal patterns of parental identity stability and change. Overall, stable achievement (34%) was the most typical pattern for women and stable foreclosure (24%) for men. About two-thirds of the achieved women and foreclosed men at age 36 remained in the same category at ages 42 and 50. Over time, 42% of women and 36% of men remained stable in their parental identity, but great variation and fluctuation emerged in the developmental identity patterns. However, significant changes in the distributions were found along the hypothesized sequence toward increasing parental identity achievement across the three ages both for women, Cochran's $Q(2, N = 81) = 15.60, p < .001$, and for men, $Q(2, N = 68) = 7.37, p = .025$. Only a small fraction of participants (0–4%) changed from foreclosure or achievement at age 36 to diffusion or moratorium at age 42.

The pairwise analyses on identity stability and change were focused on the foreclosure and achievement statuses due to the low frequencies of diffusion and moratorium statuses yielding an insufficient amount of data for these statistical procedures. Among women, the McNemar exact test revealed significant parental identity change from age 36 to 42, $p < .001$, extending also from age 36 to 50, $p = .015$. Achieved parental identity increased significantly in relation to foreclosure which, correspondingly, diminished significantly. In addition to the stably achieved women, two thirds of women with foreclosed parental identity at age 36 were categorized as identity achieved at ages 42 and 50. No significant changes took place between ages 42 and 50.

Among men, the identity change toward achievement was initially similar to women, but less pronounced and stable. Identity achievement increased and foreclosure decreased from age 36 to age 42, $p = .004$. However, no significant changes between the statuses were found in men between ages 36 and 50, or between ages 42 and 50. About

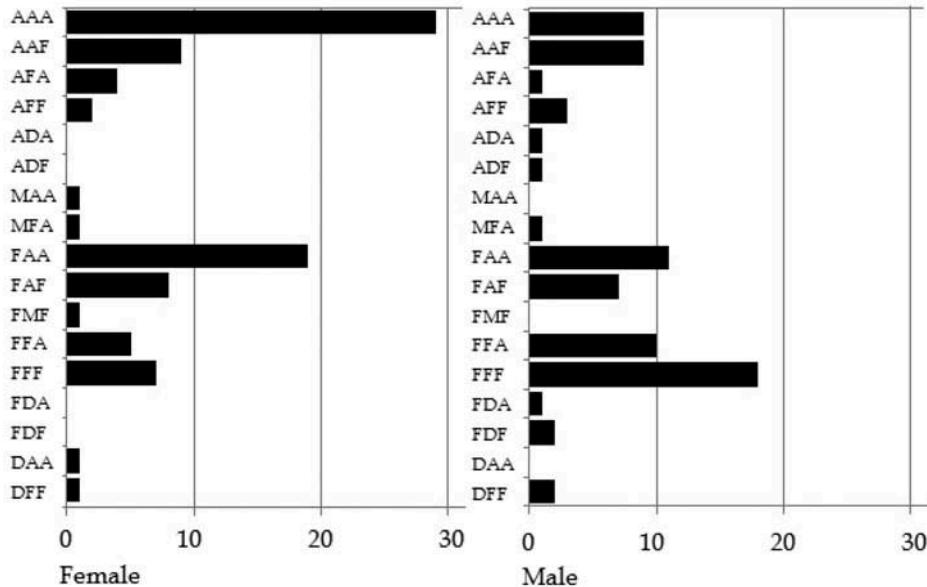


FIGURE 2

Numbers of women ($n = 86$) and men ($n = 76$) with children in the possible patterns of parental identity stability and change from 36 to 42 to 50. A = achievement, M = moratorium, F = foreclosure, D = diffusion (e.g., AFA = achievement at age 36, foreclosure at age 42, and achievement at age 50).

80% of the identity achieved men at age 36 remained achieved at age 42, but nearly half of them turned to foreclosure at age 50.

Associations of Parental Identity With Parenting Style and Parental Well-Being

Parental identity was expected to be associated with parenting styles and parental psychosocial well-being. Due to low numbers in moratorium and diffusion at age 36 (in total, 4 women and 3 men), these categories representing non-commitment to parental identity were combined for these analyses. At age 42, the diffusion category consisted of 5 diffused men. (The only non-committed woman at age 42 was not included in the analyses.) At age 50, there were no diffusion or moratorium ratings. Thus, the analyses at age 42 in women, and at age 50 in men and women, were run for only the two categories of achievement and foreclosure.

The findings confirmed the hypothesis for nurturance as seen in Table 1. The descriptives are presented in Table 2 for females and Table 3 for males. No interaction effects of parental identity status with age emerged for nurturance. The main effects revealed that parental identity achievement, measured at any age, was consistently associated with high nurturance and diffusion (the category existing only at age 36 in women and at ages 36 and 42 in men) with low nurturance. At age 36, the foreclosed and achieved women did not differ in their level of nurturance, whereas at the age of 36 foreclosed men were below the achieved but above the diffused men in their nurturance. At ages 42 and 50, foreclosed parental identity was related to lower levels of nurturance. No age effects were detected. The mean level of nurturance was higher in women than in men at age 42, $t(159) = 2.82, p = .005$.

TABLE 1
Associations of parental identity to parental behavior, parental well-being, and generativity in women ($n = 86$) and men ($n = 76$)

Parental Identity at age	Nurturance at ages 36 and 42			Restrictiveness at ages 36 and 42			Parental knowledge at ages 36 and 42			Parental stress at ages 36, 42, and 50			Psychological well-being at ages 36, 42, and 50			Social well-being at ages 42 and 50			Generativity at ages 42 and 50				
	Effect	F	η^2 (Pow)	Difference	F	η^2 (Pow)	Difference	F	η^2 (Pow)	Difference	F	η^2 (Pow)	Difference	F	η^2 (Pow)	Difference	F	η^2 (Pow)	Difference	F	η^2 (Pow)	Difference	
<i>Females</i>																							
36	T*G	<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>	
	T	<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		5.0**	.11 (80)	36 < 42				16.7***	.17 (.98)	42 < 50				5.8*	.07 (.66)	42 > 50	
	G(3)	6.0**	.13 (.87)	a, f > d		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		42 < 50			<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>
	T*G	<i>ns</i>		2.8†	.07 (.54)	a < f		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>				<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>	
	T	<i>ns</i>		7.3**	.08 (.76)	36 < 42, only in group a		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>				<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>	
42	T	<i>ns</i>						13.9***	.27 (1.0)	36 < 42				18.0***	.18 (.99)	42 < 50				19.9***	.20 (.99)	42 > 50	
	G(2)	2.9†	.04 (40)	a > f		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		42 < 50			<i>ns</i>					<i>ns</i>		5.0*	.06 (.60)	a > f	
	T*G	<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		6.4*	.07 (.71)	a > f, only at age 42		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>				<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>	
	T	<i>ns</i>		11.1***	.12 (.91)	36 < 42		20.1***	.34 (1.0)	36 < 42				9.1**	.10 (.85)	42 < 50				16.7***	.17 (.78)	42 > 50	
	G(2)	3.3†	.04 (43)	a > f		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		42 < 50			<i>ns</i>					<i>ns</i>		4.1*	.05 (.52)	a > f	
<i>Males</i>																							
36	T*G	<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>	
	T	<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		4.2*	.12 (.72)	36 < 42				<i>ns</i>				<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>	
	G(3)	4.4*	.11 (.74)	a > f, d		<i>ns</i>		10.2***	.24 (.98)	a, f < d				<i>ns</i>				<i>ns</i>		3.0†	.08 (.57)	a, f > d	
	T*G	<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>				<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>	
42	T	<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		4.4*	.12 (.74)	a, f < d				4.6*	.11 (.76)	a > f, d				13.3***	.27 (1.0)	a > f	
	G(3)	6.9**	.17 (.91)	a > f, d		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>				<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>	
	T*G	<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>				<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>	
50	T	<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		5.6*	.08 (.64)	36 < 42		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>				<i>ns</i>		11.4***	.14 (.91)	42 < 50	
	G(2)	3.5†	.05 (46)	a > f		3.3†	.05 (43)	a > f		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>				<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>	

Note. Parental Identity, a = achievement, f = foreclosure, d = diffusion (at age 36 diffusion+moratorium). T = time; Age at measurement; G = group; parental identity status, 2 (a,f) or 3 (a,f,d) levels; T*G = time-group interaction. F: test value for F -test. *ns* = non-significant, † $p < .10$ suggestive but not significant, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. η^2 and (Pow): effect size and power of the F -test.

TABLE 2
Means (*M*) and standard deviations (*SD*) of parenting behavior, parental well-being, and generativity in relation to parental identity groups at ages 36, 42, and 50 for females

Measured at age	Parental identity at age 36						Parental identity at age 42						Parental identity at age 50					
	Diffusion/Moratorium (<i>n</i> = 4)		Foreclosure (<i>n</i> = 40)		Achievement (<i>n</i> = 42)		Foreclosure (<i>n</i> = 20)		Achievement (<i>n</i> = 65)		Foreclosure (<i>n</i> = 26)		Achievement (<i>n</i> = 60)					
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>				
Nurturance	2.9	.39	3.4	.47	3.4	.40	3.2	.46	3.4	.42	3.3	.50	3.4	.40				
Restrictiveness	2.7	.26	3.4	.42	3.5	.35	3.3	.37	3.5	.42	3.3	.43	3.5	.40				
Parental knowledge	2.0	.55	2.4	.41	2.3	.37	2.2	.41	2.3	.39	2.3	.35	2.3	.42				
Parental stress	3.2	.19	3.5	.44	3.4	.50	3.4	.38	3.4	.49	3.4	.49	3.4	.46				
	3.2	.69	3.4	.52	3.4	.53	3.4	.47	3.4	.54	3.2	.53	3.5	.49				
	1.7	.77	1.7	.39	1.9	.50	1.7	.33	1.8	.50	1.7	.41	1.8	.49				
	2.0	.50	1.5	.45	1.6	.43	1.6	.44	1.6	.45	1.5	.44	1.6	.46				
	1.6	.72	1.4	.42	1.4	.47	1.4	.39	1.4	.47	1.3	.34	1.5	.50				
Psychological well-being	3.1	.24	3.3	.24	3.2	.28	3.2	.22	3.2	.28	3.2	.31	3.3	.24				
	2.9	.24	3.3	.29	3.2	.28	3.1	.29	3.3	.29	3.2	.35	3.2	.26				
	3.2	.42	3.2	.32	3.2	.31	3.2	.32	3.3	.30	3.2	.29	3.2	.32				
Social well-being	2.5	.41	2.9	.35	2.9	.34	2.8	.31	2.9	.37	3.0	.41	2.8	.32				
	3.0	.48	3.0	.34	3.0	.35	3.0	.36	3.0	.34	3.0	.39	3.0	.33				
Generativity	2.9	.21	3.2	.34	3.3	.31	3.1	.33	3.2	.32	3.1	.38	3.2	.30				
	3.0	.42	3.0	.35	3.1	.31	2.9	.35	3.1	.31	3.0	.40	3.1	.29				

TABLE 3
Means (*M*) and standard deviations (*SD*) of parenting behavior, parental well-being, and generativity in relation to parental identity groups at ages 36, 42, and 50 for males

Measured at age	Parental identity at age 36						Parental identity at age 42						Parental identity at age 50					
	Diffusion/ Moratorium (<i>n</i> = 3)		Foreclosure (<i>n</i> = 49)		Achieve- ment (<i>n</i> = 24)		Diffusion (<i>n</i> = 5)		Foreclosure (<i>n</i> = 35)		Achieve- ment (<i>n</i> = 36)		Foreclosure (<i>n</i> = 42)		Achieve- ment (<i>n</i> = 32)			
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Nurturance	2.9	.42	3.2	.42	3.5	.33	2.9	.43	3.2	.47	3.4	.28	3.2	.47	3.4	.30		
Restrictiveness	2.9	.46	3.2	.43	3.4	.39	2.8	.55	3.2	.41	3.4	.37	3.2	.46	3.4	.36		
Parental knowledge	2.6	.26	2.5	.38	2.3	.42	2.3	.33	2.5	.40	2.4	.40	2.5	.39	2.4	.40		
Parental stress	2.7	.35	2.5	.36	2.4	.30	2.4	.14	2.5	.36	2.5	.35	2.5	.31	2.4	.37		
Psychological well-being	2.6	.84	3.0	.45	3.0	.62	2.8	.17	3.0	.54	3.1	.53	2.9	.54	3.2	.47		
Social well-being	2.8	1.0	3.1	.54	3.3	.48	2.8	.45	3.1	.56	3.3	.53	3.1	.57	3.2	.53		
Generativity	2.8	.80	1.6	.48	1.7	.43	2.1	.43	1.7	.60	1.6	.45	1.7	.57	1.6	.50		
	2.6	.29	1.5	.50	1.6	.63	2.5	.65	1.6	.58	1.5	.46	1.6	.57	1.7	.57		
	2.2	.38	1.4	.37	1.6	.59	1.9	.78	1.5	.44	1.5	.46	1.5	.52	1.5	.42		
	2.9	.33	3.2	.31	3.2	.35	3.1	.32	3.1	.33	3.3	.31	3.2	.34	3.2	.31		
	2.8	.27	3.1	.31	3.2	.34	3.0	.18	3.1	.33	3.2	.30	3.1	.36	3.1	.28		
	3.0	.27	3.2	.26	3.2	.35	3.0	.17	3.1	.26	3.3	.31	3.2	.29	3.2	.30		
	2.7	.23	2.8	.34	3.0	.33	3.0	.30	2.7	.31	3.0	.29	2.8	.37	2.9	.32		
	2.7	.13	2.9	.36	3.1	.44	2.9	.37	2.8	.33	3.2	.36	2.9	.40	3.0	.37		
	3.2	.53	3.1	.36	3.3	.35	3.1	.37	3.0	.36	3.3	.30	3.2	.33	3.2	.40		
	3.2	.36	3.0	.42	3.3	.42	3.1	.43	3.0	.43	3.2	.41	3.1	.43	3.1	.44		

No interaction effects of parental identity with age at ages 36 and 50 were found. The main effect of parental identity suggested a trend of age-36 foreclosure being associated with higher restrictiveness and age-36 achievement with lower restrictiveness in women (Tables 1, 2, and 3). A significant interaction effect of Parental identity status and Age was revealed for restrictiveness in women: restrictiveness increased significantly from age 36 to 42 only in the women who were in the achieved group at age 42. No main effects of parental identity group were found at age 50, but the main effect of age indicated an increase of restrictiveness between ages 36 and 42 in women. Neither interaction effects nor main effects of parental identity or age were detected for restrictiveness in men. Men were significantly more restrictive than women at ages 36, $t(153) = -3.86, p < .001$, and 42, $t(159) = -3.02, p = .003$.

No associations emerged between age 36 or age 42 parental identity status and parental knowledge. However, a significant interaction effect indicated that age 50 parental identity achievement was related to high parental knowledge, measured at age 42 in women (Table 1). In men, the main effect of parental identity group suggested that age 50 achievement could be related to higher parental knowledge. A moderate time effect pointed to an increase in parental knowledge from age 36 to age 42 in men as seen in Table 2. However, women were significantly more aware of their children's everyday lives than men at ages 36, $t(152) = 5.09, p < .001$, and 42, $t(159) = 2.88, p = .005$.

No interaction effects of parental identity status with age emerged for parental stress (Table 1). A main effect of parental identity status was found only for men, for whom parental stress was highest in the identity diffusion group (Table 3). Specifically, age 36 diffusion explained 24% of the level of parental stress, measured at ages 36, 42, and 50. The effect size was smaller for age 42 diffusion, and no main effect was detected for age 50 identity status when diffusion was non-existent. In contrast, parental identity was not associated with parental stress at any age in women, but the time effect highlighted that parental stress increased significantly over the measured time in all female groups. No gender differences emerged in the level of parental stress.

Parental identity status was associated with psychological well-being only in men as shown by significant main effects in Table 1. No significant interaction effects or age effects were found. Men who were identity achieved at age 42 outscored foreclosed and diffused men in psychological well-being (Table 3). No gender differences emerged in the level of psychological well-being at any age.

Similarly, associations of parental identity status with social well-being were found only in men (Tables 1 and 3). No interaction effects emerged. Main effects of parental identity groups revealed that age 36 diffused men scored lower in social well-being than other men. For age 42 identity statuses, the achieved male group significantly outscored the foreclosure group; the status category explained 27% of the variability of their social well-being. However, at age 50, the achieved and foreclosed male groups did not differ from each other in generativity. No associations emerged between parental identity status and social well-being in women at any age. However, a time effect indicated that the mean social well-being increased from age 42 to 50 in women and in men. No gender differences emerged in the level of social well-being.

No interaction effects were found for generativity. Main effects of age 42 parental identity status were detected: the achievement group outscored the foreclosed group in generativity in both men and women, as seen in Tables 1, 2, and 3. A corresponding group difference was found between age-50 identity achieved and foreclosed women. Additionally, a significant time effect was found due to decreasing mean generativity

scores from age 42 to age 50 in all female groups. The gender differences in the level of generativity were nonsignificant.

DISCUSSION

Parental identity formation was longitudinally analyzed in a cohort group (born in 1959) of Finnish women and men with children across ages 36, 42, and 50. As expected, parental identity developed toward achievement in early middle adulthood after age 36, when foreclosure was frequent in both men and women. Parental identity achievement increased from age 36 to 42 and remained stable thereafter. This development was explicit in women, of whom a great majority had an achieved parental identity at ages 42 and 50. In men, achievement also increased from age 36 to 42 but did not exceed foreclosure at any age. Confirming our hypothesis, the level of parental identity achievement was at all ages higher in women than in men. Stable achievement across the three measurements was the most typical identity pattern for women, and stable foreclosure for men. Diffusion played a minor and decreasing role, and moratorium was nearly nonexistent in both genders. Participants' education, occupational status, and number of offspring were not related to parental identity status in this sample of men and women with children. We expected parental identity to be associated with parenting style and with the parent's own psychological and social well-being and generativity. Confirming the hypothesis, parental identity achievement was associated with authoritative parenting style (indicated by higher nurturance and parental knowledge about the child's activities). However, restrictiveness as an indicator of authoritarian parenting style was not associated with parental identity foreclosure. Identity commitment was consistently associated with low parental stress, and identity diffusion with high parental stress in men. Achieved parental identity was, as expected, related to generativity in both genders but was associated to higher psychological and social well-being only in men.

The high salience of parenting as a domain of adult responsibilities and roles, and a key area in adult identity, was demonstrated in the absolute majority of participants being committed in their parental identity either through achievement or foreclosure (Waterman & Archer, 1993). Foreclosure status characterized parental identity in men and achieved identity in women, which has earlier been found typical for other interpersonal identity domains (Lewis, 2003). Women are often socialized into the parenting role (from little girls with dolls) and intimately experience gestation and birthing processes and still, most often, take on the primary role in daily child caregiving (Genesoni & Tallandini, 2009; McBride et al., 2005). Therefore, it can be expected that they are more likely than men to explore the parenting role and practices prior to and within the decision to become a parent as well as more fully once a child is born. Although 42% of women and 36% of men remained stable in their parental identity over time, the findings highlight great variation and fluctuation in individual identity patterns, including regressive patterns, such as achievement-achievement-foreclosure or foreclosure-achievement-foreclosure. Corresponding foreclosure-achievement shifting cycles have earlier been found in other identity domains (e.g., Fadjukoff, Pulkkinen, & Kokko, 2016; Pulkkinen & Kokko, 2000; Valde, 1996), indicating that shifting awareness of one's own agency in the commitment process is not uncommon and that identity is constantly reformulated with age (e.g., Marcia, 2002).

It is noteworthy that the most intensive parental identity progression took place between ages 36 and 42 although most participants had their first children well before

age 36, women, on average, 3 years earlier than men. High levels of parental identity foreclosure at age 36 possibly reflected the tendency of parents to acquire traditional family roles following the birth of a child (Katz-Wise et al., 2010). However, women's pronounced identity development as compared to men could not merely be explained by their head start because men's identity development stagnated at 42. Foreclosed parental identity remained stable more often in men than in women up to age 50, whereas achieved parental identity remained more often stable in women than in men. Frequently stable foreclosure suggests that men are more conservative in their parenting opinions, adopting parenting opinions from their families of origin and other valued sources, whereas women are more independent in their opinions about parenting. As mothers often are more involved in the daily childcare duties (Genesoni & Tallandini, 2009), their parental challenges seem to have triggered their identity development, whereas fathers more often have retained their earlier acquired views. In further research, it would be interesting to analyze younger age cohorts to see whether increasingly active father roles change this traditional composition.

Neither early parenthood nor the number of offspring was related to the parental identity status at any age in these participants with children, although diffusion was more typical for the childless JYLS participants, reflecting non-salience of the parenting domain to them (see Waterman & Archer, 1993). Contrary to our hypothesis and earlier findings regarding overall identity based on the JYLS data (Fadjukoff et al., 2007; Fadjukoff & Pulkkinen, 2006), parental identity status also was not associated with the level of education or occupational status. The non-significant associations show that higher occupational status or education do not increase identity achievement in parenting, although it was earlier found to have an effect on overall identity across five other domains (religious beliefs, political ideology, occupational career, intimate relationships, lifestyle; see Fadjukoff et al., 2007). The finding highlights the salience and commitment to parenting as a domain of adult responsibilities and roles that various parenting challenges occur in families independent of the parents' occupational or educational level. However, the field of study or knowledge gained from work or social interest areas were not analyzed and could be more influential than the level of study. Possible support for parenting and parental identity through, for example, educational or other human-related studies or work would be an interesting topic for further research and could provide valuable information for parenting education.

The results supported our hypothesis of parental identity achievement being associated with authoritative, child-centered, parenting (Baumrind, 1967; Metsäpelto et al., 2001): Identity achievement was consistently related to high nurturance. Associations to parental knowledge were more inconsistent. Participants' parental knowledge of their children's whereabouts was reflected in later higher parental identity achievement at age 50 rather than in identity achievement preceding the parental knowledge. The hypothesis regarding the association between parental identity foreclosure and restrictiveness was not confirmed as the associations did not reach significance. Contrary to other women, restrictiveness increased from age 36 to age 42 in age 42 achieved women. The minor results in respect to restrictiveness can be interpreted to reflect the lack of clear distinction in the measure between authoritarian control on the one hand and supportive structure on the other, which has been emphasized by Grolnick and Pomerantz (2009) and Soenens and Vansteenkiste (2010). Thus, although dominating, intrusive control would emerge in the extreme on the restrictiveness scale, the parent's ability to optimize structure and autonomy support according to the

context, a positive feature of child-centered parenting competence (Johnson et al., 2014), would not emerge in the opposite end but in the middle of this scale.

Non-committed (diffusion or moratorium) parental identity was detrimental and was associated with the lowest level of nurturance. Additionally, diffused men outscored others in parental stress. Parental identity status was related to parental well-being most explicitly at age 42, when parental identity achievement was associated with good psychological and social well-being in men and with high generativity in both women and men. These results imply that identity commitment as an intrapsychic structure (Erikson, 1950, 1968) can be supportive of everyday parenting actions, specifically in men, who often face challenges in readjusting their personal life with fathering responsibilities (Genesoni & Tallandini, 2009). The gender differences might indicate different cultural expectations related to the mothering and fathering roles and related differences specifically between female and male foreclosed parental identity. Additionally, the findings suggest that there is a period in life around age 40 when parenting content is more meaningful than earlier or later and when parenting identity is thus more interconnected with general well-being. Associations between personality traits and parenting stress have also been detected to be most significant at around age 40 (Rantanen, Tillemann, Metsäpelto, Kokko, & Pulkkinen, 2015). Identity consists of several domains of which parenting is only one, and the focus of identity commitment and interest may change over the life course (Marcia, 1993). The results seem to highlight the importance of parental identity to many participants during the period when the children were in their adolescence, often a challenging time for parenting.

A limitation in the study, and challenge in the analyses, was the bimodal distribution of parental identity statuses and thus low number of participants in diffusion and moratorium categories. This limitation was reflected as a low significance of findings in differences between the statuses. However, the low frequency of diffusion and moratorium parental identity statuses was not due to selective sampling. Our participants represented their Finnish age-cohort group with children and for whom parenting is a key area of identity commitment. Another limitation was the long time span between the measurements, which did not enable detailed information about timing of the changes in parental identity and well-being. The Marcian method for measuring identity did not enable finer distinctions in the level of commitment and exploration within each status. Moreover, all measures were not studied at all ages: For instance, parenting styles were not studied at age 50. This exploratory study did not focus on detailed information on individual parental well-being measures, which deserve more attention in future research. Further study is needed too to investigate grounds for gender differences in the associations of parental identity, parenting style, and parental well-being. Additionally, the differences between the children's gender, age, and other characteristics and their possible impacts on parental identity fell outside the scope of this investigation.

In this study the associations of parental identity status with parenting styles and parental well-being in different phases of life were observed in a group-based approach. In the future, a person-centered approach with latent transition analysis could bring complementary insights about moving and staying between the parental identity statuses in the three time points, and possible latent groups following certain kind of patterns. Levels of parenting styles and parental well-being could be further compared in these parental identity trajectory groups.

However, the present study does provide a broad overview of parental identity, which despite its salience for the majority of adults with children, has seldom been

investigated. The study highlights the significant role of parental identity in both parenting behavior and parental well-being and, significantly, points to exploratory findings to be further examined. A special strength of this study is that it was based on longitudinal data that covered several measurement points over 14 years in middle adulthood.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE, APPLICATION, AND POLICY

The present study confirmed parenting as a key domain in adulthood in which mature identity achievement was much more typical for women than for men. Reflected by foreclosure in parental identity, fathers rely more on others in their parenting and need additional support for active consideration and engagement in the fathering role. At present, many parenting programs are targeted to young parents. However, this study highlights the importance of a later parenting phase at around age 40 when, for many, children are approaching puberty. Continued support of mothers and fathers of school-aged children should be considered in future family policies through schools or in conjunction with organizations that arrange extra-curricular activities for youth. Implications of parental identity diffusion are specifically associated with male well-being, implying that family issues should be taken into consideration and constructive parental involvement encouraged particularly when clinically treating men with children, which would also benefit their daughters and sons for whom fathers certainly matter.

ADDRESSES AND AFFILIATIONS

Päivi Fadjukoff, Agora Center, University of Jyväskylä, P.O. Box 35, 40014 University of Jyväskylä, Finland, E-mail: paivi.fadjukoff@ju.fi, phone +358 50 5181410. Lea Pulkkinen, Anna-Liisa Lyyra, and Katja Kokko are also at the University of Jyväskylä.

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