# The relation between parental identity and children's departure among middle-aged Japanese

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## Introduction

Identity is a firm sense of sameness and continuity in the self and is constructed in each role one plays in society (Erikson, 1980). Identity development is a lifelong process, and facing crises can revise and mature identity (Marcia, 2002). The three-dimension model has been used to capture the dynamics of identity development in various life domains (e.g., education, occupation, etc.) (Crocetti et al., 2008). *Commitment* refers to making a particular identity choice and self-confidence in that choice. *In-depth exploration* refers to actively dealing with, reflecting, and discussing their commitment. *Reconsideration of commitment* refers to searching for a possible new commitment because of the dissatisfaction with their current choice. This model is suitable for capturing the identity development during adulthood in detail because it can assess the identity processes of maintenance and reconstruction. Moreover, this approach can consistently classify individuals into five identity statuses (*achievement*, *foreclosure*, *moratorium*, *diffusion*, and *searching moratorium*) based on specific combinations of these dimensions.

Parenthood in particular is one of the most important identity domains in adulthood. Children's departure, referring to children's leaving their parental home, has a significant influence on the parental role. The results of previous case studies showed that the reconstruction of parental identity is an important factor in investigating the individual differences in the effect of children's departure on psychosocial adaptation (Kroger, 2002; Mitchell & Lovegreen, 2009). However, the suggestions of these previous case studies are not sufficient to empirically understanding the relation between the identity reconstruction and children's departure.

## Purposes and Hypotheses

The purpose of this study is to examine the relation between parental identity and children's departure using cross-sectional data. First, we examined the validation of the Japanese version of the parental identity scale for a wide range of age (Analysis 1). About factor structure, the three-factor model would be a better fit than the one- or two-factor model, in line with the results of a previous study (Piotrowski, 2018). Based on the previous studies (Crocetti et al., 2008; Piotrowski, 2021), commitment would be associated with the psychosocial adaptive factors, in-depth exploration would be related to both psychosocial adaptive and maladaptive factors, and reconsideration of commitment would be associated with psychosocial maladaptive factors. Based on the previous identity status study (Piotrowski, 2021), high commitment statuses (*achievement* and *foreclosure*) would be characterized by adaptive features, low commitment statuses (*moratorium* and *diffusion*) would be characterized by maladaptive features, and *searching moratorium* status would be characterized by adaptive and maladaptive features.

Second, we examined the relationship between parental identity and children's departure, and its gender differences (Analysis 2). Because children's departure was found to have a negative impact on the foundation of parental identity (Mitchell & Lovegreen, 2009), parents who do not live with all their children would have lower scores on commitment and in-depth exploration, and higher score on reconsideration of commitment. In the identity status approach, parents who do not live with their children would be strongly represented in low commitment statuses (*moratorium* and *diffusion*), and parents who live with all their children would be strongly represented in high commitment status (*achievement*, *foreclosure*, and *searching moratorium*).

## Methods

### Participants and Procedure

We conducted a cross-sectional questionnaire survey using an online research company. Participants were 600 middle-aged Japanese parents (50% female, $M_{age}$ = 44.8, *SD* = 8.47, range = 30 – 59 years).

**Measures**

The questionnaire was constituted by parental identity (Meca et al., 2020; $\alpha$ = .86 – .91), self-concept clarity (Tokunaga & Horiuchi, 2012; $\alpha$ = .82), personality traits (Oshio et al., 2012; $r$ = .19 – .46), depression (Shima et al., 1985; $\alpha$ = .91), anxiety (Shimizu & Imae, 1981; $\alpha$ = .91), satisfaction with life (Kadono, 1994; $\alpha$ = .89), generativity (Tabuchi et al., 2012; $\alpha$ = .61 – .83), parental behavior (Kato et al., 2014; $\alpha$ = .92), and demographic variables (gender, age, region, income, work status, and status of children's departure).
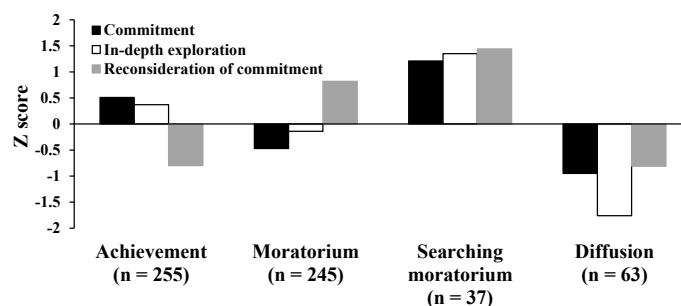
## Results and Discussion

### Analysis 1: Development of the Parental Identity Scale

As a result of confirmatory factor analyses, the three-factor model showed better model fit than the one-factor ($\Delta\chi^2$ = 1718.50, $\Delta df$ = 3, $p$ < .001) and two-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2$ = 1302.44, $\Delta df$ = 2, $p$ < .001). Furthermore, the three-factor model fits well across gender and age groups. Commitment was positively related to adaptive personality traits ($r$ = .09 – .24), satisfaction with life ($r$ = .37), generativity ($r$ = .20 – .35) and supportive parenting ($r$ = .41), and negatively related to psychosocial problems ($r$ = -.22, -.30). In-depth exploration was positively related to conscientiousness ($r$ = .09), satisfaction with life ($r$ = .29), generativity ($r$ = .17 – .31) and supportive parenting ($r$ = .40), and negatively related to self-concept clarity ($r$ = -.21). Reconsideration of commitment was positively related to agreeableness ($r$ = .22), neuroticism ($r$ = .18) and psychosocial problems ($r$ = .42, .43), and negatively related to self-concept clarity ($r$ = -.39), satisfaction with life ($r$ = -.14), generativity ($r$ = -.10 – -.17) and supportive parenting ($r$ = -.28).

Using a latent profile analysis, we found that the four-profile model was the best (Figure 1). The result of a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) showed that a significant main effect of identity status emerged (Wilks' $\lambda$ = .09; $F$ (60, 1713.3) = 35.67, $p$ < .001, $\eta^2$ = .55). Post hoc analyses showed that individuals in the high-commitment clusters had higher scores on satisfaction with life, generativity, and supportive parenting than those in the low-commitment statuses. Furthermore, those in the searching moratorium scored the highest on depression and anxiety.

**Figure 1**. *Z-scores for commitment, in-depth exploration, and reconsideration of commitment for the four statuses.*



Our results showed meaningful relations between parental identity and each factor, suggesting that the three-factor model is generally valid. The age range of participants in this study was wider than previous studies and thus, our results expanded the knowledge of validation of the parental identity scale.

### Analysis 2: The Relation Between Parental Identity and Children's Departure

The results of MANOVA showed the significant main effect of experience of children's departure (Wilks' $\lambda$ = .97; $F$ (1, 580) = 6.70, $p$ < .001, $\eta^2$ = .03) and interaction effect between gender and status of children's departure (Wilks' $\lambda$ = .98; $F$ (1, 580) = 3.40, $p$ = .02, $\eta^2$ = .02). Fathers who lived with some of their children displayed higher commitment and in-depth exploration. Results of chi-square test demonstrated that parents who did not live with their children were overrepresented in diffusion (Adjusted Standardized Residual; ASR = 3.01), while parents who lived with all their children were less likely to show the diffusion cluster (ASR = -2.72).

These findings may reflect the fact that the father's parental identity is more unstable and immature than mother's one (Fadjukoff et al., 2016). Therefore, there might be strong relations between father's parental identity and children's departure.

## Conclusion

Our findings contribute to understanding the development and revision of parental identity. In the future research, we should focus on the gender differences of the effect of children's departure on parental identity for the practical suggestions.

## Main Reference

Erikson, E. H. (1980). *Identity and the life cycle*. Norton.

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