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The Early Maladaptive Cognitive Schemas and Personality Traits in Emerging Adulthood

Violeta LUNGU[1]*, Mihaela STOMFF[2]

Abstract

The purpose of this research is to identify the relationship between early maladaptive cognitive schemas and the actual tendencies to prolong of teen ageing in contemporary society. There is a psychological research proving the existence of a new developmental stage, the so-called „Millennial Generation - Young Adults Living in Their Parents' Home". They are delaying the launching process toward an autonomous adult life, with the traditional developmental tasks, such as finding a stable job, starting a family and having children. According to these studies, some of the possible causes are the reduced social pressure and the possibility to prolong the student-being state for an indefinite period. The present study has also investigated the relationship between early maladaptive cognitive schemas and personality traits (The Big Five model), describing the path through the emerging adulthood. The research was conducted on a group of 212 emerging adults, aged 22-30, highlighting meaningful relationships among personality traits and early maladaptive cognitive schemas. The study also found that these variables are predictors for an autonomous life path versus a prolonged youth.

Keywords: Early Maladaptive Schemas; Five-Factor Personality Traits; Personality Development.

1. Introduction

In the last two decade, the developing psychologists are researching young people behaviour between adolescence and young adulthood, a distinct developmental stage defined as emerging adulthood. Emerging adulthood is an age defined as an age of identity exploration and

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possibilities, but, in the same time, the emerging adults are confronting with instability and a powerful tendency to self-focus. **Identity explorations** answer to the question "who am I?" and tries out various life option, especially love and work. **Instability** present in love, work, and place of residence. **Self-focus**, as an obligation for the others to reach a lifespan low point. **Possibilities/optimism** refers to flourishing hopes and people having an unparalleled opportunity to transform their lives. [1]

Emerging adulthood is located today mainly in the "developed countries" of the West, along with Asian countries such as Japan or South Korea. In the last years, it also becomes a social category in the urban area of Romania. For example, median marriage age in Romania is 29.0 for females and 32.3 for males. In Table no. 1 we presented comparative data as an argument for existing emerging adulthood in Romania (ages of marriage and parenthood are typically calculated on country-wide basis). However, emerging adulthood is likely to become more pervasive worldwide during the 21st century, together with the increasing globalisation of the world economy. Another criterion is the big change in education as a tertiary enrolment because the rising of the education reflects economic development.

Table 1. Median Marriage Age (Females) in various countries

Developed Countries	Age	Developing countries	Age
United States	26	Egypt	21
Canada	28	Ethiopia	17
Germany	30	Ghana	21
France	30	Nigeria	18
Italy	30	India	18
Japan	29	Indonesia	21
Australia	28	Guatemala	19

Source: UN, 2009

Nevertheless, not all of the emerging adults make a successful transition, fulfilling the first criteria for their adulthood: 1. Accepting the responsibility of themselves, 2. Make independent decisions and 3. Become financial independent. The psychologists are trying to find an explanation for the *failure of the launching syndrome* because there are great costs to the society as well as for young people when they are not quite prepared to assume the tasks of their own lives according to the upper criteria. The main

question is what makes the differences between the young people who fail in their transition to an adult life and their peers who successfully made it? For sure, the causes are complex and multiple determined.

This article presents the result of a partial study within a bigger one, which is trying to find an answer to this question. First, we presume there is a connection between maladaptive schemas and personality traits.

2. Problem Statement

The **schema concept** was introduced in psychology by F.C. Bartlett in 1932 (The War of Ghosts). Lately in the '70s, A. T. Beck defined schema as "a structure for screening, coding, and evaluating the stimuli that impinge on the organism. It is the mode by which the environment is broken down and organised into its many psychologically relevant facets. On the basis of the matrix of *schemas*, the individual is able to orient himself in relation to time and space and to categorise and interpret his experiences in a meaningful way" [2].

Young, Klosko, and Weishaar [3] provided the following comprehensive definition of an early maladaptive schema: 1. A broad, pervasive theme or pattern, 2. Comprised of memories, emotions, cognitions, and bodily, sensations, 3. Regarding oneself and one's relationships with others, 4. Developed during childhood or adolescence, 5. Elaborated throughout one's lifetime, 6. Dysfunctional to a significant degree [3]. So, early maladaptive schemas are self-defeating emotional and cognitive patterns that begin early in our development and repeat throughout life. For this reason, an individual's behaviour is not a part of the schema itself - instead, maladaptive behaviours are thought to develop as logical responses to a schema. We assumed that the behaviour leading to the failure of launch is a response to these schemes. Young identified 18 early maladaptive schemas and classified them in five hypothetical domains:

I. Disconnection and rejection. The first domain involves schemas related to violations of the basic universal needs for security, safety, and stability, and nurturance, empathy, sharing of feelings, acceptance, and respect. There are 5 schemas of this domain: 1(1). Abandonment/Instability, 2(2). 2. Mistrust/Abuse, 3(3). Emotional Deprivation, 4(4). Defectiveness/ Shame, 5(5). Social Isolation/Alienation.

II. Impaired autonomy and performance. The second domain involves schemas related to violations of the basic universal needs for autonomy and competence, which lead to expectations about oneself and the environment that interfere with one's perceived ability to separate,

survive, function independently, and perform successfully. *Schemas* in this domain often emerge when the early family environment is enmeshed, undermining of the child's confidence, overprotective, or failing to reinforce the child for performing competently outside the family. There are four *schemas* of this domain: 1(6). Dependence/Incompetence, 2(7). Vulnerability to Harm or Illness, 3(8). Enmeshment/Undeveloped Self and 4(9). Failure.

III. Impaired limits. The third domain involves schemas related to deficiencies in internal limits, responsibility towards others, or long-term goal-orientation. Schemas in this domain often lead to difficulties respecting the rights of others, cooperating with them, making commitments, or setting and meeting realistic personal goals. These schemas often emerge when early the family environment is characterized by permissiveness, overindulgence, lack of direction, or a sense of superiority. There are two schemas in this domain: 1 (10). Entitlement/Grandiosity, 2(11). Insufficient Self-control/Self-discipline.

IV. Other-directedness. The fourth domain involves schemas related to deficits in the fulfilment of the basic universal need for self-directness. These deficits lead to an excessive focus on the desires, feelings, and responses of others, at the expense of one's own needs. This focus is driven by the need to gain love and approval, maintain a sense of connection or belonging, or avoid retaliation. These schemas usually involve a suppression or lack of awareness regarding one's own emotions, needs, or wishes, and lead to difficulties in assertion or self-determination. They often emerge when children are brought up in an atmosphere of conditional positive regard or conditional acceptance: the child needed to suppress important aspects of the self in order to gain love, attention, or approval. There are three schemas in this domain: 1(12). Subjugation, 2(13). Self-sacrifice, 3(14). Approval-seeking/Recognition-seeking.

V. Over vigilance and inhibition. The fifth domain involves schemas related to violations of the basic universal need for spontaneity and playfulness. These violations may result in an excessive emphasis on suppressing one's spontaneous feelings, impulses, or choices. They also may result in a perpetual focus on meeting rigid, internalised rules and expectations about performance and ethical behaviour, often at the expense of happiness, self-expression, relaxation, close relationships, or health. These schemas often emerge from a family atmosphere that is grim, demanding, and sometimes punitive. In such families, performance, obligations, duties, and rule-bound behaviour often predominate over pleasure, relaxation, or playfulness. Children are often expected to hide emotions, avoid mistakes, and strive for perfection. There is usually an undercurrent of pessimism and worry that things could fall apart if one fails to be vigilant and careful at all

times. There are four schemas in this domain: 1(15). Negativity/Pessimism, 2(16). Emotional Inhibition, 3(17). Unrelenting Standards/Hypercriticalness, 4(18). Punitiveness.

There are some important researches which revealed significant relations between early maladaptive schemas and personality traits (five-factor model) including neuroticism, extroversion, agreeability, conscientiousness, and openness. [4, 5, 6]

We worked with the domains of EMS, and not with every scale, because we considered the correlation with personality traits as from a wider perspective, more adapted at our final aim. In addition, we worked with Romanian version of the five-factor model, because the research refers to Romanian emerging adult people.

3. Research Questions/Aims of the research

The first aim of the research is to investigate the relationship between early maladaptive schema domains and the personality trait according to the five-factor Romanian model. We presume that the cognitive schemas domains have stronger personological content than specific schemas, and, for this reason, there are stronger associations among them and the personality traits. The second purpose of the research is that there is a significant relation between the five-factor-personality traits in the emerging people, the Romanian version – „ABCD-M". [7]

4. Research Methods

4.1. Participants

Participants of this study were 212 people (112 men, 100 women) from Bucharest. The mean age of the sample was 26.01 years (SD=2.527): 26.12 years for men (SD=2.535) and 25.90 for women (SD=2.525). Participant's age ranged between 22 and 30 years.

4.2. Measure

Schema Questionnaire – Short Form (SQ-SF). The Schema Questionnaire–Short Form (SQ-SF) measures fifteen early maladaptive schemas. Early maladaptive schemas EMSs are grouped into five domains: Disconnection and Rejection, Impaired Autonomy and Performance, Impaired Limits, Other-Directedness, and Over-vigilance and Inhibition.

The respondents are asked to rate statements on a six-point Likert scale from *"completely untrue for me"* to *"it describes me perfectly"*.

ABCD-M makes a complex personality assessment, based on a psycho-lexical approach compatible with the Big-Five system.

The five scales of Romanian BF version are:

I. Extraversion (1.Activism, 2.Optimism, 3.Humor, 4.Interpersonal ability, 5.Self-affirmation). The Extraversion factor occupies the first position in the hierarchy of the Romanian factorial structure of BF, and is the best represented dimension, explaining 15.59 of the behavioural variance. It contains 30 characteristic attributes, with typical markers for the type of extroverted behaviour, with aspects of the high level of energy that involves vitality and lust for life, as well as focusing on relationship and assertiveness. The 30 descriptors show many similarities in terms of their linguistic content, with attributes describing the Extraversion dimension in other linguistic contexts such as Goldberg's markers or the Short Adjectives Checklist of Big Five (SACBIF) adjective list. There are also significant differences, especially in the orientation of some facets.

The American markers, as identified by Goldberg [8], relate to issues such as: speechless, appealing, vigorous, bold, active, courageous, vigorous, spontaneous, shy, silent, inhibited, retired, sophisticated - most of which are also found in Romanian list of attributes. In addition, some adjectives as extroverted / introverted, cheerful, silent, active, talkative - included in the Italian list (SACBIF) are not missing from the Romanian list of adjective descriptors as well. Extraversion factor appears characterized by bipolar descriptors such as: dynamic vs. passive, pessimist vs. optimist, joking vs. serious, skilful vs. unskilful, or brilliant vs. dull.

II. Maturity (1. Respect, 2. Adaptation, 3. Friendship, 4. The force of inhibition, 5. The power of self). The second factor of 14.06 in the behavioural variation differs from research in other psycholinguistic spaces in a direction that is quite different from the neurotic factor. In this sense, the significant difference is that there has not been a neurotic psychopathology factor versus the emotional balance defined as Neuroticism, but a factor that lies within the normal functioning of the psyche in the sense of maturity versus immaturity. The Maturity Scale is an element of novelty in the general context of the large-scale questionnaires because it brings to the forefront issues related to the management of aggression and negative emotions and the condition of immaturity. In the philosophy of psychic functioning, such a scale seems to be more resilient to us, because it seems to capture precisely the condition of the self, on which a neurotic profile is subsequently structured. In basic research, the Maturity - Immaturity factor, the second as a weight in the behavioural variance, was

constituted by attracting negative attributes. For the consistency of the profile, the scale has been reversed and this way it has entered into the validation of the research. The fundamental name of the scale is Immaturity vs. Inter-relational maturity. The Maturity Factor, in its positive outline, emphasizes the person's ability to respect people and society, to control their reactions as well as self-confidence. [7]

The growing-up signifies a non-reactive behaviour, capable of a healthy focus on goals, relationships, moral control, self-confidence, and trusting others.

At the opposite pole, the growing-up means infantilism, self-centering, insensitive and unstable relationships, vanity, and reactivity, which, precisely because of the immaturity, fails to cope with the dynamics of the existential relations. Such an infantile condition of the ego, in the face of the social relational task, brings to the surface the inability to manage in an adaptive manner the relationship with the others as well as the negative emotions associated with egocentrism as a central aspect.

III. Agreeability (1.Altruism, 2. Romantic, 3. Emotional warmth, 4. Empathy, 5. Honesty). Agreeability covers 14.02 of behavioural variation. However, there are some differences between the Romanian research data and the descriptive adjectives in the bipolar range of scales appearing in other cultures. Some authors call it an "*accommodation factor*". Thus: altruist vs. cynic, affective vs. revengeful, sympathetic vs. individualist, hospitable vs. selfish, nonviolent vs. suspicious for the Italian list (SACBIF); gentle, cooperative, sympathetic, warm, confident, considerate, pleasant, agreeable, generous, generous, gentle, gentle, non-impatient, distrustful, selfish, uncooperative, uncaring; gentle, kindly, tenderly, cute, charitable, sympathetic, approached, to the lack of heat, uncaring, cruel, heartless, rough, unimpaired, cold. [7]

IV. Conscientiousness (1. Will and perseverance, 2. Spirit of perfection, 3. Rationality, 4. Planning, 5. Self-discipline). This factor covers 10.12 of the behavioural variance. This domain refers to self-control, perseveration, improvement, self-organization, fulfilment of duties, and planning. In other cultural environments this factor is described by bipolar adjectives: scrupulous vs. imprecise, accurate vs. disordered, diligent vs. inconstant (SACBIF); organized, systematically, accurate, practical, clean, efficient, attentive, quiet, conscious, prompt, vs. disorganized, negligent, unsystematic, ineffective, untruthful, impractical, inconsistent, hazardous, careless; Organized, ordered, clear, clean, effective, planned, systematically, precise, self-disciplined, reliable, vs. non-trustworthy, impractical, undisciplined. [7]

V. Self-actualization (1. Deepening, 2. Tolerance, 3. Refining, 4.Independence, 5. Creativity). In the mentality of specific Romanian culture, the Self-actualization is a significant factor for behaviour as it covers 8.73% of the behavioural variation. The specificity of the fifth factor in the Romanian culture implies attitudinal and motivational aspects that support the generating in the human spirit of what Maslow called self-actualization behaviour defined by meta-needs. Such people are constantly concerned with personal development and, in relation to themselves and with the professional environment, they appear creative, motivated by curiosity and evolutionary transformation. The factor differs substantially from the bipolar terms expressing this set of motivations and attitudes in other cultures. For example, the Italian instrument denotes the "mental opening versus mental opacity" with adjectives such as - unconventional vs. traditional, responsive vs. nonresponsive, eclectic vs. conservative, creative vs. conventional (SACBIF). The instrument created by Goldberg denotes the "intellect" factor and is described by bipolar adjectives such as: intellectual, creative, complex, imaginative, bright, philosophical, artistic, profound, innovative, introspective, unintentional, simple, unsophisticated, non-reflexive, without observer spirit, without interrogations, superficial. Wiggins's variant denotes the "openness to experience" factor and describes it by philosophical tendencies, preference for abstract, imaginative, reflexive, literary interests, tendency to ask questions, individualistic, unconventional, open-minded versus non-reflexive, non-complex, non-imaginative, non-abstract, without asking questions. [7]

4.3. Procedure

The present study is a part of a wider research project on the relationships of maladaptive cognitive schemas of developing of the Romanian emerging adults people. After receiving information about the study from the research team, the interested people in participating have received the instruments for completion and instructions at home or email.

This research was carried out in compliance with Art. 7, 8, 10 and 11 of the Code of Ethics of the profession of psychologist with the right to free practice adopted by Decision 4CN/2013 by the College of Psychologists in Romania as well as with the provisions of Appendix 2, Part 1: Preamble of the Disciplinary Procedure Code. [16] The participants were informed about the objectives pursued and were explained the content of the tests used and on fact that the participation was voluntary with due observance of the data confidentiality and of the assessment outcomes. Moreover, was brought to the participants' attention that they could withdraw from the research at any

time without any negative repercussion on them. The consent protocol consisted of the free choice of participants to deliver or not the filled in questionnaires to the assessors (authors of research). They had the opportunity to choose between the opportunity to further collaboration or withdrawal from the group subject to research.

5. Findings

5.1. Descriptive statistics

Means, standard deviation for ABCD-M and SQ-SF are shown in Table 2. For ABCD-M there are presented the values obtained in our study (N=212) and the values obtained in the developing instrument in Romania for emerging population cluster between 18 and 35 years (N=1397). We consider proxies the evidence of validity.

Table 2. Means and dispersions for sample (ABCD-M and SQ-SF)

Total (N=212)			**N=1397**	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Self-actualization	115.46	18.013	111.14	16.45
Conscientiousness	112.18	22.870	107.06	16.38
Extraversion	105.83	15.525	111.14	16.17
Agreeableness	107.06	16.869	105.68	15.79
Maturity	110.35	16.455	100.12	20.75
Disconnection/Rejection	62.64	13.98		
Impaired Autonomy and/or Performance	50.69	12.06		
Impaired Limits	27.96	5.93		
Other-Directedness	63.46	13.22		
Over vigilance/Inhibition	83.47	21.04		

5.2. Inferential statistics

Table 3. Correlation (Pearson) between early maladaptive schemas domains and personality traits

	Disconnection/ Rejection	Impaired Autonomy and/or Performance	Impaired Limits	Other-Directed-ness	Overvigilance/ Inhibition
Extraversion	-.853**	-.591**	-.136*	-.656**	-.800**

	.871**	.486**	.115	.643**	.723**
Maturity	-.543**	-.379**	-.213**	-.400**	-.523**
Agreeableness	-.644**	-.449**	-.229**	-.432**	-.636**
Conscientiousness	-.585**	-.747**	-.266**	-.400**	-.549**
Self-actualization					

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

As the above table shows the archived correlation coefficient between early schemas domain and personality extraversion is high significant and inverse. Also, the personality maturity is in direct and significant correlations with Disconnection/Rejection, Impaired Autonomy and/or Performance, Other-Directed-ness, Over vigilance/Inhibition schemas domains (ABCD-M maturity scale brings to the forefront aspects related to the management of aggression and negative emotions and the condition of immaturity.). The agreeableness personality is in a significant and inverse significant connection with all five schemas domain, the Conscientiousness and Self-actualization, too.

Table 4. Correlation (Pearson) between super-factors of ABC-M

	Extraversion	Maturity	Agreeableness	Conscientiousness
Extraversion	…			
Maturity	-.801**	…		
Agreeableness	.646**	-.551**	…	
Conscientiousness	.660**	-.622**	.522**	…
Self-actualization	.633**	-.546**	.491**	.542**

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As can be seen in Table 4, there is relatively large correlations between the Extraversion factor and the Surface Agility (.64), Conscientiousness (.66), and Self-actualization (.63), as well as between Agreeability factor and Consciousness factor (.52) and Self- (.49). We also notice the great correlation between Conscientiousness and Self-actualization (.54). Unlike these relationships, the relationship between Maturity and the rest of the factors is relatively low, and it seems to be a relatively independent area of the other four. The close values of the correlations obtained by us and those obtained by the authors [7] of the test are considered to be validator information.

6. Discussions and limits of study

The present study investigated two aspects: 1. The relationship between EMS domains and personality traits, and 2. The relationships among the five factors, according to the Romanian version of the emerging adults' cluster.

The result of the first part of the research revealed, as we presumed, a significant correlation between EMS and personality traits. The most significant relationship was between Extraversion and Disconnection/Rejection domain (-.853). This correlation is very large, but the domains have summarized the psychological content of all schemas from the first EMS domain.

Thus, the *Extraversion*, which refers to individual differences in preference for social interaction and activity, has a negative relationship with 1. The perceived instability or unreliability of significant others for emotional support and connection; 2. The expectation that the others will hurt, abuse, humiliate, manipulate, or intentionally take advantage of them; 3. The expectation that one's needs for nurturance, empathy, and protection will not be fulfilled by the others; 4. The belief that, if exposed, the one might be inwardly defective, flawed, and unlovable to the significant others; 5. The feeling that one is isolated from the world, different from the others, and/or not part of any community.

The correlation of extraversion with *Over vigilance/Inhibition* domain is impressive, too (.-800) and confirms a negative relationship with the belief that one must strive to meet very high, internalised standards of behaviour and performance, the belief that one must inhibit spontaneous emotions and actions, often to avoid disapproval by others or feelings of shame.

The correlation with *Other directness* was also significant and negative (-.656). Extraversion excludes the belief that one has to surrender control to others in order to avoid negative consequences, the excessive focus on meeting the needs of others at the expense of one's own gratification, etc.

Impaired autonomy and performance domain has a negative significant correlation with extraversion, as well (-.501). That means Extraversion denied the belief that one is incapable of handling daily responsibilities in a competent and independent manner, showing exaggerated fears that an imminent and unpreventable catastrophe (financial, natural, medical, criminal) will strike at any moment, and the belief that one is fundamentally inadequate in areas of achievement compared to peers..

The smallest correlation recorded for *Impaired Autonomy and/or Performance* domains. *The maturity/immaturity* scale has positive and significant correlation with most EMS domain, and less with Impaired Limits.

Agreeableness correlated in a significant way with all EMS domains. *Conscientiousness* and *Self-actualization* also correlated in a significant way with all EMS domains, too.

Findings achieved by us were consistent with other studies. Muris [4] and Grebot [9] found that neuroticism was positively related to the all maladaptive schemas [3]. These maladaptive basic schemes have been successfully identified in patients suffering from different types of psychopathology [10, 11, and 12] and interpersonal problems [13].

The second assumption of the study was that correlation among scales of the Five-Factor Romanian model in emerging adulthood. We compared our result with the data of psychometrical qualities of ABCD-M. There are some similarities, but also some statistical differences. These data draws our attention on representativeness of the sample and on the limits of this study.

The inclusion criteria were very simple: age between 22 and 30 years, Romanian citizenship, no disabilities or debilitating disease, no criminal record. As indicated, based on the inclusion criteria, subjects were recruited for the study following announcements in social media. They were informed and educated regarding the study and provided with an informed consent electronic letter. The voluntary nature of participation was emphasised in addition to maintenance of his/her confidentiality. There were no known or anticipated risks associated with this study. The consent letter was signed prior to subjects' participation, if the inclusion criteria established was obtained. There were no incentives offered to the participants to engage in the described study. There were no additional costs that would have been the responsibility of the subjects as a consequence of participation in the study.

Limits of study

First, the main limits of study are represented by insufficient literature in this matter, especially using the Romanian version of the Five Factors model. Second, the data reveals some issues in the representativeness of the sample.

7. Conclusions

As the study findings revealed, there are significant relationships between domains of maladaptive schema and personality traits. These findings are consistent with other results reported in researches made by Muris [4], Sava [5], Thimm [6] and others. We chose to relate to these

studies because the tools and the research approach are similar in terms of both sample and design,

We consider this study a good start to investigate the relationship between EMS and personality traits of the emerging adults in Romania, as we find a phenomenon similar to that in Europe, the failure to start life in the youth.

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