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Research Article

Individuals' Life Structures in the Early Adulthood Period based on Levinson's Theory

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Abstract

Early adulthood is one of the important milestones considered within lifelong development in the relevant literature. Adulthood is examined through various theories; however, universality of many of these is still being discussed. One of these theories is Levinson's theory of life structure. Thus, the current research aims to examine the extent to which Levinson's theory of individual life structure is valid in Turkish society. The current study, with a qualitative design, was based on phenomenology approach. Participants were selected through maximum variation sampling among purposive sampling methods. Participants included 28 young adults living in seven geographically different regions. Data collection was conducted with The Form of Individual Life Structure Evaluation developed by researchers. Data were analyzed through content analysis in NVivo8.0 software. Through content analysis, self-representation and social relationships themes were obtained based on life structure category. Current research results showed that participants accomplished the tasks of modifying their life structures in a transitional period (ages 28-33 and 40-45) of their lives and the tasks of preserving their life structures in a building period (ages 34-39) of their lives. The findings indicated that participants in a transitional period built change-oriented metaphors and those in a building period built stability-oriented metaphors.

Keywords

Levinson's theory of life structure • Life structure • Self-Representation • Social relationships • Early adulthood • Phenomenology approach

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People go through various developmental periods throughout their lives following birth. In the field of philosophy, human development seems to be viewed as a process of understanding life and adjusting in changes (Platon, 2006). According to lifelong development approach, 15 development periods starting with conception and ending with death are recognized. Early adulthood among these periods involves various developmental tasks to be accomplished (Onur, 2000). Thus, this period consists of life years that are psychologically satisfactory as well as wearing (Elkind, 1970; Erikson, 1984; Levinson, 1986; Santrock, 2006). Relevant literature refers to many theorists providing explanation about developmental tasks. Theorists such as Havighurst, vitally addressing adulthood years, as well as Bühler, Jung, Gould, Vaillant, and Erikson stand among them. Another theorist importantly considering adulthood in the relevant literature is Levinson.

Levinson (1977; 1986) and Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, and McKee (1976), explaining human development within a course of life, constructed the theory of individual life structure upon studying males in their mid-adulthood. Levinson developed his theory later (1987; 1996) adding early-adulthood females in his research (Levinson, 1996). According to Levinson, during each change period, an adult individual has psychological characteristics, social groups, and work environment characteristics particular to himself/herself. Adult development is an important connection point among disciplines such as psychology, sociology, history, and biology (Levinson, 1986, 1996). Levinson emphasizes the concepts of life course, life cycle, and life structure in his theory of individual life structure put forward upon examining adult development.

Life course consists of observable characteristics of human development through the beginning to the end of life. As life course includes fluctuations, progression, and regression, it is not a continuous process simple to be understood. Bio-psycho-social factors must be considered all together when examining the life course (Kittrell, 1998; Levinson, 1986, 1996; Minter & Samuels, 1998; O'Connor & Wolfe, 1991). The second concept considered within Levinson's theory is *life cycle* referring to the development and change in an order in the course of life. Life cycle respectively includes four seasons such as pre-adulthood (0-22), early adulthood (17-45), mid-adulthood (40-65), and late adulthood (60 and above) (Levinson, 1986, 1996). The third and last concept examined within Levinson's theory is the concept of *life structure*. *Life structure* consists of the sum of individual's experienced self-investment (self-representation/individual) and social roles (meaningful relationships with others/social). Self-investment (individual/internal) processes included individual expectations, hopes, skills, life goals, values and the meanings assigned to situations, and interpretation pertaining to them. Social (external) processes, on the other hand, encompass social responsibilities, undertaken roles, memberships, family

relationships, professional preferences, leisure activities, friendships, life styles, and the whole of socio-economic life preferences (Levinson, 1986, 1996).

According to Levinson (1986; 1996), individual life structure develops within an organized order and non-changing pattern, relative to transitional and building periods and age during early, mid, and late adulthood in a life cycle. The concept of order often refers to an adult's pattern of building and changing a structure, thus, his/her periodical change. During building periods within the life cycle, the individual accomplishes the task of building a structure. During the building period, the first and basic task of an individual is to build a life structure. His/her second task is about including goals, expectations, self-investments such as self-conception and friendships, family, children, professional life, his/her social life as in social roles in this life structure and choosing basic preferences. Individuals during adulthood accomplish a task of structure change in transitional periods. During this period, individual's first task is to review the present structure, seek opportunities of change in self-representation and social relationships and to put forward preferences fundamental for the next life structure.

Briefly, Levinson finalized his theory of life structure upon research with males from various professions in mid-adulthood and later research with females from various professions and stay-home females in early and mid-adulthood. As Levinson stated, marriage, work, and family may be considered an individual's central elements throughout his/her life. Levinson, as well as Buhler, Erikson, and Gould stated that individuals review their lives at the end of early adulthood and achieve the transition to mid-ages by developing different goals. Levinson's theory, as well as Erikson's theory, may be considered an ideal theory to explain the detailed and psycho-social development throughout life.

Early adulthood period was examined based on Levinson's theory in the current study. Early adulthood as a period to include and evaluate considerable preferences of spouse, family, and profession has an important place in life. Planning and activities about how to experience the adulthood as a large section of life make this period important. According to Levinson (1977; 1978; 1986; 1996), the development of individual in the early adulthood manifests itself in five periods including two building periods and three transitional periods such as, respectively, transition to early adulthood (17-22), introduction into life structure for early adulthood (22-28), the transition of age 30 (28-33), ending the life structure of early adulthood (33-40), and mid-age transition (40-45). During the mentioned building (building structure) and transition (changing structure) periods, an individual shapes his/her life structure through tasks undertaken.

A review of research on life structure indicates that Levinson (1977; 1978; 1996) interviewed males and females working in various professions during early and

mid-adulthood in detail to determine the building and transition periods within the life structure for both genders. [Smart and Peterson \(1994\)](#) found that females, with variables of pregnancy and motherhood in the early adulthood, had different life structures than males had. [Kopelman and Glass \(1979\)](#) determined the periods of building and changing structures within life structure through qualitative research with mid-age adults. [Rolland \(1987\)](#) found in research on patients with chronic diseases that life structure was formed within the periods of life cycle. [Carpenter \(1992\)](#) determined differences based on individual life structure and experiences in defining the leisure time in adulthood. [Wolfe, O'Connor, and Crary \(1990\)](#) found the life structure transformations in a study with 64 males and females in mid-age transition. They revealed that the dimensions of potential realization, degree of conflict, and transience were in a central position. In addition to those mentioned above, the researchers ([Wolfe et al., 1990](#)) determined that flexibility, complexity, and ability to make decisions independently, as changes in the life structure, contributed more in questioning the life.

[Gordon, Beatty, and Whelan-Berry \(2002\)](#) found, in their study with adult females in the period of structure change, that internal and external organizations were needed based on the variables of home, work, and family. [Green \(2006\)](#) determined the concepts of building and changing structures within life structure and the building and transition periods in Karen Horney's early adulthood period. Also, in the mentioned research, relationships with family, friend, professional life, and others in the religious environment were found to be effective on life structure. [Robinson and Smith \(2010\)](#) examined developmental crises associated with professional life and close relationships in early adulthood to focus on how developmental crises shaped the life structure. [Smithson \(2011\)](#) studied relationships among females' social relationships, meaning in life, health, and mid-age transition. Thus, the researcher determined changes in life structures of females in the mid-age transition.

As can be seen in the mentioned studies, research associated with Levinson's theory of life structure involved the development of adults. A review of the local relevant literature shows that research on adult development ([Arslan, 2008](#); [Atak, 2011](#); [Morsünbül, 2015](#); [Özden, 2014](#)) was based on Erikson's theory of psychosocial development and some studies ([Atak, 2011](#); [Eryılmaz & Ercan, 2010](#); [İlhan & Özdemir, 2012](#)) were based on Arnett's theory of emerging adulthood. It can be said that those studies commonly included the approach of periods for adult development and researchers mostly studied the adults during the transition (change) into early adulthood. Many studies conducted on adult development in Turkey have not included research based on Levinson's theory of life structure. On the other hand, a limited number of studies ([Green, 2006](#); [Levinson, 1996](#); [Robinson & Smith, 2010](#)) based on Levinson's theory of life structure, within foreign relevant literature, have

been found to consider the early adulthood. Thus, the current study is considered to significantly contribute in removing those limitations within the relevant literature and in theoretical research.

Levinson's theory could be said to differ from the theories of researchers such as Buhler, Gould, and Erikson in a few aspects. One of those aspects is about the assumptions associated with different cultures. Mentioned theories are assumed to be found within societies prioritizing relative individualism; however, Levinson's theory of life structure is assumed to be found within societies with relative collectivism prioritized and also within societies with individual roles socially controlled. Secondly, Levinson's theory of life structure focuses on the concept of change instead of development, despite being based on the approach of periods as other theories do, when explaining the adulthood. In other words, how an adult individual psycho-socially changes rather than develops is in the center. Levinson stated that an adult individual went through successive building and transitional periods throughout their lives and their lives were on constant change. Thirdly, contrary to other theorists' view of a separate psycho-social development task in each development period, Levinson's theory of life structure included structure building and structure changing tasks during the early adulthood period. Those characteristics mentioned above make Levinson's theory of life structure worth to be studied.

According to [Levinson's \(1996\)](#) theory, early adulthood is an ideal period for studying the concept of life structure. Early adulthood includes psycho-social development domains such as development of self, emotional development, marriage and family life, social relationships, professional life, and career organization. Individual during the early adulthood is supposed to accomplish tasks assigned to him/her within the mentioned domains to complete his/her psycho-social development. During this period, plans and activities about mid and late adulthood are put forward. This period includes building and transitional times of an individual's life structure. These successive building and transitional periods include the whole of early adulthood ([Levinson, 1996](#)). When tasks are accomplished during this period, important changes occur in self-representation, social relationships, and professional and family lives. As such, studies associated with life structure may contribute significantly in the fields of adult psychology, professional and occupational counseling, and family and marriage therapy.

Consequently, many studies on career development, life goals, life crises, and transitional periods, based on Levinson's theory of life structures, have been conducted. However, most of those studies were conducted in relatively individualistic cultures. Hence, it will be important to review Levinson's theory of life structure in relatively collectivistic Turkish society and examine it based on the dynamics of Turkish

society. In this context, the findings of the current study are thought to contribute in inter-cultural psychology and local relevant literature. For practical purposes, experts working in the areas of professional and occupational counseling and family and marriage therapy may provide healthier psychological support, within protective and preventive mental health, for individuals to better accomplish developmental tasks during building and transitional periods in early adulthood. Thus, the current study examining a different culture and individual differences in terms of life structure is significant.

Based on the results, limitations, and suggestions found in research within the relevant literature, the current study aims to examine individual life structures of individuals, based on Levinson's theory of life structure, during early adulthood. Sub-questions of the current study based on the above-mentioned general purpose are as follows:

1. What are the self-representations of participants during early adulthood, based on Levinson's theory?
2. What are the social relationships of participants during early adulthood, based on Levinson's theory?

Method

Model

An interpretive phenomenological design, as a qualitative research approach, was used in the current study to examine the life structures of individuals during early adulthood. Interpretive phenomenological design is stated to be a research model to study the meanings attributed on states and situations based on individual experiences and perceptions (Creswell, 2003). In this context, based on subjective experiences of individuals during early adulthood, how they perceived the phenomenon of life structure and how they viewed this phenomenon in their lives were examined.

Participants

The participants for the current study were selected through maximum variation sampling among purposive sampling used in interpretive phenomenological design. Purposive sampling is defined as selecting rich sources of information that present opportunity for an involved research; maximum variation sampling, on the other hand, is described as forming the sample among various similar situations (Patton, 2002). Participants included 28 individuals, with ages 28-45 ($X = 34.46$; $S = 4.76$), living in seven different regions in Turkey. 43% of the participants were females and 57% were males. 25% (7) of the participants were employed in education, 25%

(7) in healthcare, 18% (5) in technical, 14% (4) in finance, and 18% (5) in security professions. 28% (8) of the participants lived in Siirt, 14% (4) lived in Elazığ, 11% (3) lived in Manisa, 11% (3) lived in Balıkesir, 14% (4) in Adana, 11% (3) in Konya, and 11% (3) lived in Rize. The education levels of the participants were as follows: 4% (1) secondary, 14% (4) a two-year institution, 57% (16) university, 18% (5) MA, and 7% (2) PhD.

Measures

The semi-structured Individual Life Structure Evaluation Form was used in the current research to collect data. The form, based on Levinson's (1978; 1986; 1996) theory of life structure, was created by the researchers. In addition, questions in similar qualitative studies (Carpenter & Patterson, 2004; Gordon et al., 2002; Rickards, 2005; Robinson & Smith, 2010; Smithson, 2011; Stumpf, 2012; Wolfe et al., 1990) were examined when creating the current form. The first section on the form consists of eight questions about gender, age, profession, etc. The second section consists of fourteen questions of individual life structure on life goal, life structure, the order of structure building and changing, energy sources, leisure time, etc. Following are three items on the measure: "What would your life be like if you were to make an analogy between your life and a thing or situation?", "How do you presently use most of your time and energy?", and "If you were able to change everything you have experienced in your life so far, what would you change in the first plan?"

Procedure

Trips for research purposes to the cities of Konya, Manisa, Balıkesir, Adana, Rize, Elazığ, and Siirt in seven different geographical regions in Turkey were organized. The preference on the mentioned geographical region was based on various problems and the classification of SES and cultural units in the region were taken into account. Cities were chosen based on the level of development and variety in population. In addition, settlements, thought to include rich sources of information and similarities, were considered. Thus, locations, with relative individualism and collectivistic cultural structure, where individuals with different characteristics in early adulthood lived were chosen (Şengül, Eslemian, & Eren, 2013). Data collection took almost six months (February to August 2014) in total. First of all, a field research on rich sources of information, transportation, and voluntarism was conducted. Consequently, interviews with 28 individuals with various professions in early adulthood were contacted for interviews. Interviews were conducted in participants' work places. During the interviews, required conditions for therapeutic communication such as respect, empathic understanding, transparency, close interest, and effective listening were provided and basic therapeutic skills such as structuring, motivating, content and

emotion reflection, individualizing the goal and problem, feedback, and summarizing were put forward (Voltan-Acar, 2009). Through the therapeutic skills exhibited during the interviews, the participants were able to easily express their own feelings and thoughts. Hence, more validity and reliability were contributed in the research.

Validity and Reliability

Validity in qualitative research means that the researchers are able to measure anything in their mind and the results of the research are generalizable to similar environments and situations. Reliability, on the other hand, means confirmability and stability in qualitative studies (Sözbilir, 2011). Multiple data sources such as voice recordings, written transcripts, and mutual evaluations following interviews were used in the current research to provide validity. Special notes taken were shared with the participants prior to finalizing the interviews in the current study. Participants were offered opportunity for additional comments and questions; thus, some light was shed on unclear points. Feedback and evaluation from the participants about the efficiency of the interview, researchers' roles, etc. were received at this point.

To provide validity in the current study, checks such as comparing the research findings obtained through interviews and Levinson's (1986; 1996) theory of individual life structure as the theoretical framework were compared throughout the research. Content analysis on the findings was conducted based on Levinson's theory. Hence, according to Miles and Hubermann's (1984) reliability formulae, $reliability = (agreements / (agreements + disagreements)) \times 100$, a 70% level of reliability must be provided. Upon running the formulae mentioned, 80% agreement between the researchers was found. Thus, the scoring reliability was found to be on high levels. Besides, research procedure in the current study was detailed well and this would contribute in reliability, too. LeCompte and Goetz (1982) stated that researcher's position such as participant observing, gaining experience, etc. would be revealed and external reliability would be provided. In the current study, an empathic and flexible attitude was exhibited and all types of messages, whether verbal or non-verbal, were meticulously recorded as data.

Data Analysis

Data in the current study were analyzed through content analysis with NVivo8.0 software. Persons' attitudes, beliefs, values, and thoughts can be revealed through content analysis (Stemler, 2001). All recordings in the current study were deciphered and added in the software. First of all, the category of life structure as the theoretical core was organized in Tree Node with a hierarchical relationship. Later, themes and sub-themes were assigned under this category and they were coded. Then, relevant sub-theme and source texts consisting of participants' views were associated. Data

obtained through this process were put into visual form with more details, thus, more comprehensibility. Also, participants' quotes were directly incorporated to exemplify the procedure mentioned above.

Limitations

The current study aimed to reveal, based on Levinson's theory of life structure, the life structures of individuals in early adulthood in seven different regions in Turkey. Hence, it is not possible to generalize into Turkey in general. However, results obtained may form a basis for further research as those seven different regions had rich sources of information with various characteristics. The current research is a cross-sectional study. The participants in the current study were adults with ages ranging between 28 and 45, failing to represent the entire population. Based on Levinson's theory of life structure as the theoretical framework in the current study, the mentioned age levels were preferred as they were considered within the early adulthood. The concepts of life structure, life course, and life cycle in the current study are limited to Levinson's theory of individual life structure. The current research is a qualitative design with a phenomenology approach. Maximum variance sampling as a purposive sampling method and semi-structured interview technique for data collection were used in the current research. Thus, these limitations must be considered when comparing and generalizing the results.

Findings

This section includes the systematically presented results obtained in relation to the sub-purposes of the research. A holistic approach was employed to examine the categories, themes, and sub-themes emerging. In this context, when presenting the organized themes and quotes from the first interviews, codes assigned on the participants were used. Upon the content analysis, four sub-themes each under the categories of life structure and self-representation were found (Figure 1).

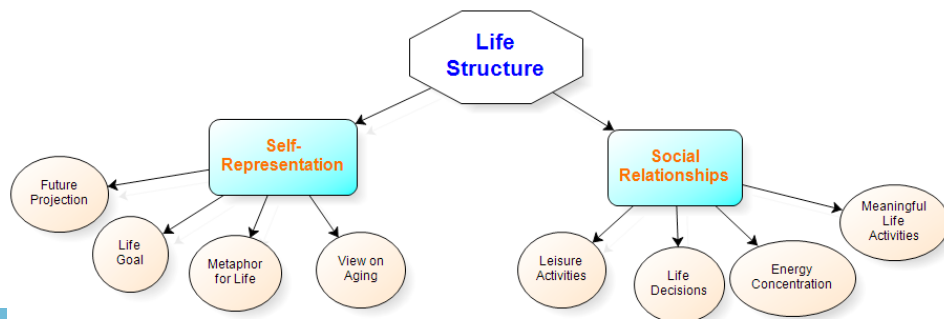


Figure 1. Themes and sub-themes associated with the category of life structure.

Findings Associated with the Theme of Self-Representation

Future projection. Almost all ($n = 25$) participants stated that they imagined the future to be the time when they would like to *complete a task or work left unfinished*. Their future projection was seen to include progress and education in career. A participant's quote about future is as follows: "Assistant professorship has been my dream. I have never been able to begin my PhD although I had completed my masters long ago. I want to do that. Also, I want to open a private kindergarten when I get retrieved. As I prefer to have the management to be in my own hands, I believe I am more successful in individual activities." Participants' future projection respectively included the following: "a happy future" ($n = 7$), "peace in the family" ($n = 5$), "contribution in the community" ($n = 3$), and "improving the belief system" ($n = 2$). A participant (K22) briefly expressed their future projection in following words: "I want to have my time away from anyone in a vacation village. My job is tense and tiring. I always deal with problems. No time for myself. Therefore, I want a peaceful life in future."

Life goal. More than half of the participants ($n = 17$) stated that they developed their life goals in relation to improving the life conditions for those in close relationships. A participant expressed the following: "My life goal is about only my daughter from now on. It is about her future. Her happiness is my goal." Another important life goal stated by the participants was about "leading a pious life" ($n = 8$). A participant (K2) stated the following about their life goal: "Allah sent us to this world to lead the life He appreciates. My life goal is to lead a good life and be useful to others within the time Allah defines." Other than these, participants' life goals respectively included: "raising children" ($n = 6$), "being happy" ($n = 5$), "being useful to others" ($n = 3$), "spending time" ($n = 2$).

Metaphor for life. Participants' views on the metaphor for life as analogy between a thing or situation and the life were elicited. Almost all participants ($n = 8$) within a building period (ages 34-39) were found to develop a stability-oriented metaphor about life such as "water, rose, Noah's pudding, season." A participant explained his/her view as: "Life is like Noah's pudding. Very different things are included. All make me happy. Life is beautiful despite all." On the other hand, more than half the participants ($n = 11$) within a transitional period (ages 28-33 and 40-45) were found to develop a transformation-and-change-oriented metaphor such as "machine, train, road, tree." A participant (K24) stated the following about this "Life is like a machine. Constantly working – I get so tired. It could be about always developing or coping with difficulties all the time."

View on aging. Half the number of participants ($n = 14$) were found to have positive views of aging and the other half ($n = 12$) had negative views of it. Positive

views of aging were expressed as follows: "being mature and experienced" and "understanding life better." A participant's (K12) view about this was as follows: "The value each age brings onto a person is different. I can view life with more maturity, as a whole, and rationally in forty-five. A person gets experienced by age. I think I will be more experienced and patient." On the other hand, "being weary" and "deteriorating physical health" were among examples of negative views. K8 expressed views on this as follows: "Life tires a person. Job is before family and other social activities; therefore, age of 45 is more tiring and loaded on one's shoulders." A spouse, children, administration, etc. will increase responsibility and tiredness." Two participants, on the other hand, stated no views on aging and they said that they viewed it neutrally.

Findings associated with the Theme of Social Relationships

Leisure activities. More than half number of participants (n = 19) stated that they had leisure time with "family members and close friends." A participant (K19) said, "I save my leisure time for my children and friends. If possible I like to drive a car." Similarly, another participant (K12) stated the following: "I usually have a day off during weekend. I save it for my family to have activities such as picnic, shopping, etc." In addition to those mentioned above, participants included travel (5), personal development (5), reading (3), and watching movies (2) among their leisure activities. A participant's (K27) view associated with personal development is as follows: "I involve in sports and sometimes read books. I do activities related with my field. I do planning for my future."

Energy concentration. Almost all participants (n = 24) stated that they used most of their energy and time in their *professional life*. A teacher participant (K11) stated the following: "I use them for my students at school. Most of my time is spent here. I am tired when I go home. Next day is just the same." A law enforcement official (K20) stated the following about this: "My time is dedicated to my job. I do not have time for myself, my family, and my friends. People in other professions do not work as we do. I see my family for so little in six days of the week." Other important concentration of time and energy is on *family and friends* (n = 12). Another participant (K6) stated the following in relation to this: "I save half of my time for my family and the other half for my friends." In addition to those mentioned, participants' concentration of time and energy was found to be on *hobbies* (n = 2) as well.

Life decisions. More than half the number of participants (n = 19) stated that *family members* were influential on life decisions. A participant (K1) stated the following in relation to this: "My family is the first factor. If you asked me before marriage, I would say it was I. But now, my children are influential, too. It is not easy to decide about an important issue." Six participants stated that *someone's personal*

stand and perspective were influential in making life decisions. K6 expressed his/her view on this as follows: “The influential factor that guides my life is most of the time me. I willingly entered and left the group, once I was a member of. One day, I decided to smoke, I did for three years, and I left it on my own free will.” In addition to the factors mentioned above, *belief system* (n = 5) and *profession* (n = 4) were also included. A participant stated the following about the belief system: “No human being influences my decisions. Spiritual realities affect them. My religion is very important and I stick to it.”

Meaningful life activities. More than half the number of participants (n = 17) indicated that activities with their *spouses and children* were more efficient and satisfactory. A participant (K8) stated the following: “I have a two-year old daughter. Life is better with her. There is much difference between before and after her. I found joy with her. I live more meaningfully now.” Another important view about the meaningful life activities is indicated as *organizing the belief system* (n = 10). A participant (K26) stated the following about this: “I am a believer. I try to make life meaningful by sticking to my religion. I read books. I mostly refer to belief-oriented sources to strengthen spirituality.” Other meaningful life activities respectively included *personal development* (n = 4), *relationships with friends* (n = 4), *professional life* (n = 3), *helping relief organizations* (n = 1), and *hobbies* (n = 1).

Discussion

Self-Representation

Dreams valuable in people’s lives are built as future projections in adolescence and early adulthood. The current research examined the type of future that individuals in early adulthood projected in relation to their self-representations. Hence, individuals in early adulthood may be said to have the *completion of their unfinished educational and career activities* as their future projection in the first plan. Many studies (Hedlund & Ebersole, 1983; Kittrell, 1998; Levinson, 1996; Minter & Samuels, 1998) supporting this finding are available in the relevant literature. Levinson et al. (1976) found in a study with males in early adulthood that a peaceful life style was in the first plan among their dreams. Levinson (1996), in a study with females in early adulthood, found that the future projection shaping the individual life structure was an important factor in one’s professional life. Promotion and professional competence were included as unfinished activities in the mentioned study. Hedlund and Ebersole (1983) determined that the content of future projection differed moving from concrete phenomena to abstract phenomena in early adulthood as age increased. Kittrell (1998) stated that middle-aged males sustaining their careers had dreams about improving their jobs and houses. Thus, individuals in the early adulthood can be said to venture to materialize past dreams about future and to have progress in this.

Another finding in the current study was that individuals in early adulthood had *living with those in close relationships* and *establishing a religious life style* as life goals. Relevant literature includes many studies (Demirel, 2013; Grouzet et al., 2005; İlhan, 2009; Kasser & Ryan, 1996, 2001; Schwartz, 2012) on life goals. Based on Levinson's theory, the life goal of *living with those in close relationship*, among primary findings of the current research, may be considered within Grouzet et al.'s (2005) internal life goals and Schwartz's (2012) benevolence value group. On the other hand, the life goal of *establishing a religious life style* may be considered within Grouzet et al.'s (2005) goal of spirituality and Schwartz's (2012) tradition value group. In addition to those mentioned above, İlhan (2009) determined that the dimension of material achievement, within the framework of assistance for family, was associated with internal life goals. Thus, in Turkish society considered as a collectivistic culture (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2000), life goals are shaped within a mutually dependent self-representation.

Demirel (2013) found a positive effect between internal life goals and participation in community and being entrepreneurial. Levinson (1996) determined that individuals in early adulthood exhibited life goals set towards themselves. Kittrell (1998) examined the goals in relation to life structure within dreams and found that the autonomous self-structure encountered in individualistic cultures was effective in defining goals. Hence, it can be said that results obtained in the current research and those in the foreign literature are not compatible; however, those in local literature are. This may be due to different self-representation in individualistic and collectivistic societies. In individualistic cultures, people individually develop goals and in collectivistic cultures, people try to support others' goals. Studies conducted on self-representation in Turkey yielded various results. In some studies, individualism was found to influence life goals and, in some others, collectivism was found effective (İmamoğlu, 2003; Kağıtçıbaşı, 2005; Özdemir, 2012). Variety in research results may be due to use of different methods, sampling, and analysis techniques preferred. Samples in mentioned studies varied among adolescents, university students, and various age groups in early adulthood. In studies with similar samples to the sample in the current research, family was found to be effective in defining life goals (Koydemir & Mısır, 2015). Thus, it can be said that individuals in early adulthood in Turkish society, considered to be a collectivistic culture, define their life goals considering individuals in close relationships with them.

Another result in the current study indicated that metaphors (analogy for life) developed by individuals in early adulthood were associated with building and transitional periods within individual life structure. Participants (ages 28-33 and 40-45) in a building period were found to develop stability-and-order-oriented metaphors such as *water*, *rose*, *Noah's pudding*, and *season* and participants (ages 34 to 39)

in a transition period were found to develop transformation-and-change-oriented metaphors such as *machine, train, road, and tree*. It was concluded that participants in a transition period defined a *change-oriented* metaphor and participants in a building period defined a *stability-oriented* metaphor. A review of the relevant literature indicated that [Gregory and Waggoner \(1996\)](#) found that individuals (ages 22 to 28) within the introduction to a life structure in early adulthood as a building period defined order-oriented metaphors. [Barker \(2000\)](#) stated that, in middle-age period when interpersonal relationships and experiences increased, often metaphors about changing life were used. In addition, the mentioned study examined the relationship between the metaphors for death and life. [Levinson \(1996\)](#) found that the metaphor used by an adult was associated with this adult's period of life structure. In other words, [Levinson \(1996\)](#) stated that metaphors involving change and development referred to (the transition) a change of structure period and metaphors involving constancy and stability referred to a period of building structures (settlement). Hence, a relationship between metaphors defined by the individuals in early adulthood and the life structure period that they are in can be mentioned.

Another finding in the current research indicated that individuals in the early adulthood had positive views of aging such as *being mature and experienced* and negative views of life such as *negativity and being weary*. A review of relevant literature indicated that [Stumpf \(2012\)](#) determined positive views of aging in middle-aged adults. [Göktaş, Tekin, Akkaş, and Şendil \(2010\)](#) found that adults' negative views of aging were emphasized. [Karadeniz et al. \(2009\)](#) concluded, in a study with individuals in transition to early adulthood, that males had negative views of aging and females had positive views of it. [Levinson \(1978\)](#) found different views of aging based on the developmental period that an adult is in. In the mentioned study, it was stated that adults (ages 33-39) in a building period viewed aging positively and adults (ages 28-33) in a transition period viewed it negatively. On the other hand, individuals in middle-aged transition period were found to positive views of aging. As can be seen above, individuals in various periods and different genders may have varying views of aging. Hence, this could be interpreted as follows: individuals in early adulthood had positive views of aging and they could see aging as a tool for maturation. This phenomenon can be explained with individuals viewing life positively and themselves as more mature when tasks of building and changing a structure were accomplished.

Social Relationships

Findings indicated that more than half number of the participants in early adulthood stated that they had leisure time with *family members and close friends*. According to [Kelly \(1987\)](#), leisure time fell under three categories including leisure

time independent of working, dependent of working, and complementary of working. Leisure time with family members and close friends is independent of working. Carpenter and Patterson (2004) determined that life style, work, and close friends were effective in defining leisure time in early adulthood. Muğan-Akıncı (2013) found that saving time for family members and friends was preferred when it was about leisure time. Tatlıdil (2009) stated that close friends were influential in defining leisure time during adulthood. As can be seen, findings in the current study are mostly compatible with the findings in the relevant literature.

Another finding associated with the theme of social relationship indicated that most participants saved *most of their energy for their work and family*. Within the relevant literature, Levinson (1978) stated that there were three concentrated energy factors in an adult's life. These included marriage, work, and family life. In addition to those mentioned above, Levinson (1996) found that education life and career development involved important energy concentration for an individual in early adulthood. Green (2006) found that family life as well as career life was a concentrated energy factor for an adult. Unlike findings in the relevant literature, the energy concentration found mostly on professional life in the current study may be associated with socio-economic situation. Individuals in early adulthood may be said to have most of their time working to economically increase their welfare level. Based on the mentioned finding and research in relevant literature, it can be concluded that individuals in early adulthood save most of their energy for their professional and family lives.

Another finding obtained in the current study indicated that *family members of more than half the number of participants were influential on important life decisions*. Based on this, it can be said that individuals in early adulthood consulted with their spouses, siblings, and parents when making life decisions. In this context, family was found often to be in the center of participants' lives. According to relevant literature, Markus and Kitayama (1991) found that individuals with the autonomous self-structure encountered in individualistic cultures were themselves more influential in making decisions. Researchers emphasized, however, that others were more influential when individuals with relational self-structure encountered in collectivistic cultures made decisions. According to Kağıtçıbaşı (2000), self-structure could vary based on demographic variables in collectivistic cultures. In those cultures, as the socio-economic level increased, emotional dependency, instead of becoming individualistic, increased and autonomous self was found to be more dominant. Hence, it can be seen that individual's increasing welfare level may be associated with not only economic factors but also his/her dependency on others. Thus, close family members being influential in participants' decisions seem to be very understandable.

Another finding in the current research indicated that individuals' meaningful life activities in early adulthood respectively involved *family*, *religious life*, *personal development*, and *friendships*. Participants' responses provided some clues on their value preferences (Schwartz, 2012). Hence, it may be said that activities with family and friends may be associated with dependency value; activities within a pious life may be associated with the value of tradition; and activities within personal development may be associated with the value of stimulation. Many studies (Aygün & İmamoğlu, 2002; Hitlin, 2003; Schwartz, 2012), indicating that primarily dependency value in early adulthood was preferred, are available in relevant literature. A review of studies based on Levinson's theory of life structure indicated that Iso-Ahola, Jackson, and Dunn (1994) found that meaningful activities such as having time family were more important in middle-age transition than they were in early adulthood. Levinson (1996) found that adults prioritized meaningful life activities such as having time with spouse and children and dedication to religion. Gibson (1996) concluded that men and women in early adulthood paid attention to personal development. Based on this and studies in relevant literature, it may be said that meaningful and satisfactory life activities of individuals in early adulthood included family and personal development.

Results and Suggestions

The current research revealed that findings associated with life structure in many studies conducted over different cultures were mostly compatible with findings about individuals in early adulthood in Turkey. An important results of the current study indicated that adults in a building period had the task of building a structure and adults in a transition period had the task of changing a structure. Hence, examining the mentioned tasks in future studies may help better test Levinson's theory of life structure. Another important result in the current study indicated that participants (ages 33-34) in a building period were found to develop stability-oriented metaphors and participants (ages 28-33 and 40-45) in a transition period were found to develop change-oriented life metaphors. This finding showed a relationship between life metaphor and life structure. It would be useful for future studies to examine the mentioned relationship.

Another significant result of the current study indicated that the center of life in individuals in early adulthood included family. Various studies found the center of life including profession, family, and marriage. Hence, it would be contributive to examine the center of life in adults in various age periods. In the current study based on phenomenology approach among qualitative designs, individuals in early adulthood were examined. In line with the relevant literature, healthier results may be obtained in studies to be conducted based on various qualitative designs such as grounded theory and with various age groups such as mid-adulthood, to explain life structure. The current research was based on a cross-sectional design and adults between ages

of 28 to 45 were examined. Within the lifelong development approach, preferring a longitudinal method as well, when examining individuals in early adulthood, may help introduce life structure in a healthier fashion. In addition, it may be helpful to conduct research on building and transitional periods with various adult age groups such as middle and later ages to obtain healthier and more holistic results.

As far as it can be known, as the current study was the first conducted on the concepts of life structure, life course, and life cycle in Turkey, the number of variables were kept limited and only the mentioned variables were involved. Future studies may be conducted, within the relevant literature, to see how mentioned variables can interact based on gender, age, and profession characteristics.

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