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Marital beliefs, ultimate concerns and relational commitment of Spanish emerging adults

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Content

Presentation	8
Motivation	8
Objectives	9
Research project	10
Structure	11
1. Introduction	14
Spanish context.....	14
Emerging adulthood	16
Social approaches	18
<i>Marital Paradigm Theory</i>	19
<i>Ultimate concerns</i>	21
Empirical integration	23
2. Marital Beliefs and ultimate concerns	25
Theoretical Framework.....	27
<i>Ultimate Concerns</i>	27
<i>Marital Paradigm</i>	28
Current Study.....	29
Methods	30
<i>Procedure and Participants</i>	30
<i>Measures</i>	32
<i>Analytic Strategy</i>	35
Results	37
<i>Background factors</i>	38
<i>Behaviors</i>	40
Discussion.....	42
Conclusion.....	46
3. Concerns, commitment and flourishing.....	48
Framework.....	49
<i>Concerns and commitment</i>	50
<i>Identity commitment</i>	51
<i>Flourishing: a matter of concerns and commitments</i>	54
Current study	54

Methods	56
<i>Participants and procedure</i>	56
<i>Measures</i>	57
<i>Analytical plan</i>	59
Results	60
<i>Bivariate results</i>	60
<i>Confirmatory Factor Analysis</i>	61
<i>Hierarchical regression model</i>	62
<i>Mediation analysis</i>	63
Discussion.....	65
4. Meaning of commitment and marriage: a qualitative examination.....	70
Theoretical framework	71
<i>Relationship commitment during emerging adulthood</i>	71
<i>Marriage trends in Spain</i>	73
<i>Sociological approaches</i>	74
Current study	80
Methods	80
<i>Study Design</i>	80
<i>Sample</i>	80
<i>Data Collection</i>	82
<i>Data analysis</i>	83
Results	85
<i>Commitment</i>	85
<i>Marriage</i>	90
Discussion.....	93
5. Conclusion.....	98
General discussion.....	100
Implications	102
Limitations and future research	103
References	105
Appendix 1. English codebook of the TRANSADULT project questionnaire	127
Appendix 2. English translation of the semi-structured interview script	152

Presentation

Motivation

The transition from adolescence to adulthood has become, for a large majority of youth, an increasingly long and diffuse process. Although most young people give importance to their family transitions and relational projects, there is little clarity on the social expectations they face and growing uncertainty about the obstacles they may encounter when implementing their life decisions, since these are highly dependent on a social and economic context that has proved very volatile in recent decades –with periods of economic crisis every few years.

The successful establishment and maintenance of long-term, committed relationships has positive effects, both for individuals (Gómez-López et al., 2019), and for society (Connolly et al., 2014). However, many factors affect decisions about romantic relationships. In Western societies, in the context of reflexive modernity, choices to commit, marry or start a family are subject to an inner dialogue where concerns are prioritized and personal projects are defined (Archer, 2012; Caetano, 2019). In addition, the beliefs about marriage and commitment, and the very meaning of these concepts, reflect larger shifts in the social and cultural domains.

Various approaches have tried to explain recent family, relational and sociodemographic trends, such as the delay in the age of having children, the rise in cohabitation and the decrease in marriage, the increase in divorce rates, and the emergence of other relational arrangements, especially among young adults, such as open relationships, hook-ups, and others. One approach that has gained popularity in framing these discussions in the West is that of emerging adulthood. In addition, in some specific contexts such as southern European

ones, priority has been given to explanations more focused on structural factors such as economic crises that have deeply marked the younger generations, overlooking the formation of beliefs and expectations around these social phenomena. Within this framework that encompasses the sociological tension between structure and agency, an exploration and synthesis of the beliefs, meanings and priorities within the framework of emerging adulthood in specific European contexts with respect to their romantic relationships and family expectations is needed.

Objectives

The general objective of the present thesis is to explore the marital beliefs, concerns (i.e., priorities) and relational commitment of Spanish young adults. I also perform a qualitative exploration of the meaning of commitment and marriage, within an integrated framework, to contrast the empirical evidence with some of the main theories and explanations of these social trends.

The aim is to better understand the relational, marital and family part of this “transitional” period, considering not only the structural factors but also young people’s reflexivity, in order to better identify the obstacles they may face in the realization of their life plans.

The three specific goals are:

- 1) To identify the different types of beliefs about marriage that exist among the Spanish population aged 18-29 years, and how they relate to their concerns (defined as their life priorities) and other socio-demographic characteristics.

- 2) To analyze the relationship between some of the concerns of young people who are in a relationship and their relational commitment, as well as the effect of this on their well-being.
- 3) To explore subjective meanings of commitment and marriage, and identify elements of cultural discourses, using framework analysis to analyze qualitative interviews of 29 Spanish emerging adults in different circumstances.

Research project

This thesis is part of the research project “TRANSADULT” financed by the University of Navarra, which aims to study different aspects of the transition to adulthood. The project consisted of three parts: developing a conceptual framework to approach the empirical study of emerging adulthood in Spain, quantitative data collection and analysis, and qualitative data collection and analysis.

First, a framework for the whole project was developed after reviewing the literature and meeting with some experts. From October to December 2020, meetings were held with Spanish and international experts in youth development, relationships and transition to adult life for the construction of the integrated framework. Some of these experts were Brian Willoughby (BYU), Juan José Zacarés and Emilia Serra (University of Valencia), Elisabetta Carrà and Matteo Moscatelli (Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore), Águeda Parra and Inmaculada Sánchez (Univeristy of Sevilla), and the *Centro Reina Sofía sobre Adolescencia y Juventud*. A questionnaire addressing sociodemographic characteristics and traditional transitions, identity from various perspectives, marital attitudes, priorities, behaviors, as well as certain well-being outcomes such as flourishing, satisfaction, depression, anxiety, was developed (see questionnaire in **Appendix 1**). Then, from May 4 to 27, 2021, a sample of

1,200 young people, representative of the Spanish population aged 18 to 32, was recruited to answer the questionnaire online and anonymously. Lastly, from the quantitative sample, 30 young people were selected to participate in semi-structured interviews to delve into topics such as: priorities, relationships and commitment, among others. All data used and presented throughout the thesis comes from this project unless otherwise stated.

Structure

The present work follows a particular structure bringing together three different studies, which address the same phenomenon from diverse perspectives and methodologies. This way of presenting doctoral research is known as thesis “by publications” or “article-based”, because each chapter corresponds to an “independent” study, but, as a whole, it seeks to address the same research question. Article-based theses are becoming increasingly common in the social sciences, especially when the nature of the investigation requires it.

This structure was selected because of the need to address the different aspects and diverse methodologies of such a complex and multifactorial issue. The advantages of this format are that it allows the results of each chapter to be taken as "independent" but together they give a more global vision of the same phenomenon. In this case, it can also be considered that they respond to a mixed-methods approach, bringing together two quantitative studies and one with a qualitative focus. This combination was made following the “expansion” justification. That is, one that “seeks to extend the breadth and range of enquiry by using different methods for different inquiry components” (Bryman, 2006)

With this structure in mind, chapter 1 presents a general theoretical introduction of the research. First, I address the specific context in which the research was carried out (Spain),

and describe the emerging adulthood framework. Then, some sociological approaches to this issue are presented in order to develop the two theoretical frameworks that provide the conceptual basis for this research. Lastly, a brief explanation of the empirical integration of these two frameworks is offered.

The next three chapters (2 to 4) correspond to three "independent" research articles, framed in the same project, and using the same data sources as indicated above ("Research project" section).

Chapter 2 contains the results of the first part of the research, which focuses on the importance of young adults' beliefs about life-long commitment such as marriage when making decisions and setting life priorities. Using a representative sample of Spanish emerging adults (ages 18-29), I explore quantitatively the relationship between beliefs about marriage and life priorities (also called *ultimate concerns*). Using latent class analysis, six different marital paradigms emerge among the population: indifferent, reject, contextual, hesitant, convinced and traditionalist. These groups are significantly different in their concerns –e.g., in the importance they assign to parenting or their professional career. The traits of emerging adults in each paradigm help explain differences in risk-taking and sexual behaviors, particularly for men.

Chapter 3 explores the role of concerns in the relational commitment of Spanish young adults that are in a romantic relationship. Using hierarchical regression model and structural equation modeling, the study approaches the relationship between concerns, commitment and flourishing, as a way to approximate how can concerns affect some well-being dimensions, and how does commitment mediate this relationship. Results suggest that marital concerns affect commitment and that they have an indirect effect on flourishing. While other

concerns, such as career ones, do not have a significant effect on relational commitment or well-being.

The fourth chapter uses framework analysis to explore qualitatively the meanings that Spanish emerging adults attribute to commitment and marriage. And to identify elements of some social and theoretical explanations in these discourses. That is, a qualitative analysis is used to see whether some aspects of theories such as individualization or deinstitutionalization of marriage are reflected in young people's interviews. In addition, these conversations also shed light on young people's beliefs and concerns in these areas and their family and relational projects.

Finally, chapter 5 contains the general conclusions and implications of this research, together with the limitations and possible future research.

1. Introduction

Spanish context

Western industrialized societies have followed certain shared sociodemographic trends in recent years, which are commonly referred to as the second demographic transition (Lesthaeghe, 2020). These changes are mainly centered on fertility patterns and family formation. However, the specificities of each context must be observed in order to understand the reasons for these changes. In this sense, an effort to analyze specific social and cultural contexts is necessary.

Some of these efforts have attempted to group societies according to different factors such as family policies, welfare state and traditional family values (Jurado-Guerrero & Naldini, 2018; Moreno Mínguez & Crespi, 2017). One example is the so-called Mediterranean model, which is characterized by rather poor family policies and a high dependency on the family in the private sphere (Calzada & Brooks, 2013; García Pereiro et al., 2014). This translates into a prolongation of the time that children stay living with their parents, i.e., a delay in the age of emancipation, of forming a couple, or having children. Men and women enter their first marriage, on average, at age of 36 and 34 respectively (INE, 2021). Spain, like other southern European countries, is strongly marked by these sociodemographic trends, resulting in one of the lowest fertility rates in the world, that is estimated at 1.3, which is far from the threshold for generational replacement (Llorente-Marrón et al., 2020).

The study of couple relationships in the Spanish context is particularly interesting for several reasons. Spanish people attach significant importance to the family and it is one of the sources of greatest satisfaction and support (González–Anleo et al., 2020). However, the family structure is increasingly changing (Moreno Mínguez et al., 2017), and in an unsustainable

way (Reher & Requena, 2019; Torres, 2015). That is, the aging of the population together with low fertility, as well as the decline and delay of marriage, are phenomena that underline the importance of understanding the attitudes and beliefs around relationships that have personal and social implications.

In addition, the so-called Express Divorce law in 2005 drastically increased the divorce rate (Jiménez-Rubio et al., 2016), with a crude divorce rate of 1.6, equal to the European Union average (Eurostat, 2020). Spain, possibly as a backlash to its authoritarian past with Franco's dictatorship, has seen very fast attitudinal change regarding divorce, cohabitation and related phenomena (Juszczak-Frelkiewicz, 2021). These perceptions often arise from a conscious rejection of traditional family structures (Tobío, 2001). Thus, the rapidity of these changes could represent not only a greater diversity of couple or family arrangements, as in other western countries like the United States, but a further weakening of the social norms surrounding marriage (Cherlin, 2004).

Moreover, these sociodemographic facts significantly affect the whole social understanding of what it means to be young. Which, in turn, have an impact on youth policies and actions aimed at helping young people. In other words, young people are not only highly vulnerable to these social changes, but are defined by these very phenomena. Traditional transitions such as emancipation, marriage, and having children have ceased to be a reference for youth, blurring the "objective" markers of the transition to adulthood and leaving some youth somewhat adrift.

Thus, it is particularly important to study these social, family and relational phenomena in this period of life characterized by important decisions and the establishment of life projects, including life as a couple. This phase has strong implications for both young people and

society (Jay, 2012). As a response to these issues, one of the frameworks that have had a great impact in recent years is the conceptualization of this stage as emerging adulthood.

Emerging adulthood

This increasingly extended period from adolescence to adulthood has been defined as "emerging adulthood" (Arnett, 2000). This framework, which has been gaining relevance in the last two decades (Nelson, 2021), has been developed in an American context from a psychological approach. The term was coined by a psychologist considering that the delay in the ages of "traditional" transitions such as finishing school, getting married or having children corresponded to a new stage of development. This delay extends the time of autonomy gained in adolescence without being considered completely "established" as an adult, socially, relationally or economically. This period is marked by five main characteristics, according to Arnett (2004):

- 1) Identity exploration, especially in the domains of love (romantic partnerships) and work (professional development),
- 2) Instability, exemplified by repeated residence changes,
- 3) Self-focused age of life, choosing what they want to do without the constraints of others,
- 4) Feeling in-between, neither adolescent nor adult, and
- 5) Age of possibilities, when people have opportunities to transform their lives.

Thus, emerging adulthood refers to the stage between 18 and 30 years, although it varies according to the cultural context. In fact, although it is a construct within the framework of developmental psychology, sociological structure seems to play an important role in its

definitions. That is, it seems to continue to be strongly defined by “traditional” social transitions such as finishing school or having children.

The term arises mainly from the perceptions of young people, mostly university students, about whether or not they consider that they have reached adulthood (Arnett, 2014). That is, it is based above all on a subjective assessment of where they think they are with respect to what they consider it means to be an adult. What is contradictory is that this evaluation, in turn, is subject to social and external factors. Arnett says the emerging adult experience depends on the opportunities available. In other words, young people who have a child at the age of 20 or who drop out of school and are unemployed or economically deprived probably do not experience these years of their lives as a stage full of possibilities nor can they engage in an active identity exploration.

Although these considerations have been commonly accepted in the literature and have attempted to be empirically evaluated (Swanson, 2016), it is not clear that they define a distinct psychological developmental stage. In this sense, the term has been criticized by some (Côté, 2014) for having a connotation of universality that is not supported empirically, especially if one considers the role played by the cultural context and social class in defining this stage. On the other hand, although emerging adulthood is defined based on the five previously mentioned characteristics, external events are emphasized as the markers of the beginning and end of the stage, with the relational and family aspect standing out. In fact, some theorists have proposed studying romantic relationships particularly in this period of life because of the importance they have and their particular challenges (Shulman & Connolly, 2013).

In this sense, the term is useful because it encompasses certain years, characteristics and sociodemographic changes that undoubtedly require special attention and that have

implications, especially in the relational area. However, such a strongly psychological approach does not help to understand the structural obstacles that many young people face and can even have negative consequences at a social and political level. Since these considerations have social implications, they reinforce some expectations associated with this period.

In conclusion, this research uses the conceptualization of "emerging adulthood" in its broadest sense and contributes to the discussion of the same term, studying a heterogeneous and representative population in a specific cultural context (Spain), as well as related attitudes and beliefs with the sociodemographic changes that define this period, without conceding that it is a distinctive stage of psychological development.

Social approaches

The delay and rejection of marriage, the diversity of relational and family trajectories, as well as the supposed difficulty in committing to a relationship during emerging adulthood have been approached from different perspectives (Reifman, 2011; Shulman & Connolly, 2013). In countries like Spain, particularly affected by various economic crises and a high rate of youth unemployment, these structural aspects have been emphasized in response to these demographic changes. And, in fact, in some cases, a disparity between expectations of family formation and reality is observed (Castro et al., 2020). For example, 42.0% of women residing in Spain between the ages of 18 and 55 have had their first child later than they considered ideal (INE, 2018). In addition, Spain is one of the European countries where a greater distance is observed between the average number of desired children (2.1) and the average number of children that they actually have (1.3) (Castro Martín, 2017). One explanation of this gap between what it is desired and achieved is that the main concerns of

young people revolve around their professional or work future (Mayseless & Keren, 2014). And that other concerns, such as family ones, are subordinated to this economic instability. But one of the questions that persists is whether these objective structural conditions simply prevent the fulfillment of these desires or if young people see as desirable something that seems so difficult to achieve, such as family stability.

On the other hand, these trends are also part of the sociological debate about individualization. Individualization, as a historical process that increasingly questions and alters the "traditional" rhythm of life, of a "normal biography", affects personal and family relationships. Especially because of the effort required to unite and coordinate individual projects (Beck-Gernsheim & Beck, 2003). But despite these difficulties, and even when marriage and family models are questioned, most young people do not aspire to a life without -family or romantic- ties (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). This requires an active effort of reflection and prioritization that could lead to a personal commitment.

However, these two major theoretical responses -structural constraints and individualized conditions- do not consider explicitly the role of young people's expectations, beliefs, and concerns in defining their vital relational project. In Spain, although marriage continues to be considered a reference in terms of relationship stability, beliefs surrounding this social institution and its implications have not been directly addressed. Furthermore, empirically, there is little evidence of what marriage and commitment mean for Spanish emerging adults.

Marital Paradigm Theory

Although there has been an effort in some countries to explore attitudes and beliefs regarding marriage (Carroll et al., 2009; Hall, 2006), its implications and consequences (Carroll et al., 2007), these aspects have been rather ignored in other contexts when studying these social

phenomena. Particularly, in contexts that have historically been more "traditional" with respect to the family, the focus has shifted in recent years to new family arrangements and diverse patterns in couple formation. Without considering that marriage continues to be a culturally accepted reference point for the majority of the population. And that the beliefs and meanings of this social institution can shed light to social and cultural forces behind individual decisions and sociodemographic changes. In order to approach this gap in relationship research in Spain, Marital Paradigm Theory was considered. This theory was developed to provide a shared framework to conceptualize, and operationalize marital beliefs (Willoughby et al., 2015).

Marital Paradigm Theory arose as an effort to explain, empirically and theoretically, an individual's marital attitudes, regardless of their relational status and their social context. And how those attitudes alter individual and relational behavior. In addition, the term paradigm tries to describe "the entirety of one's belief system regarding marriage" (Willoughby et al., 2015, p. 191), bringing together different dimensions that encompasses various aspects about the institution of marriage and marital relationships in general. These authors proposed six interconnected dimensions that can be grouped in two large systems: beliefs about getting married and about being married. The first ones refer to the time, the context and the importance of marriage and marrying. On the other hand, beliefs about being married focuses on the process, permanence and centrality of marriage while married. This intends to holistically describe how an individual views marriage, independently of their actual relationship status.

Marital Paradigm Theory provides a useful approach specially in emerging adulthood. As marriage is no longer an event occurring during this life period, studying marriage behavior is less relevant than exploring the beliefs about it. In addition, research has shown that the

way emerging adults perceive marital transitions is strongly associated with other decisions and behaviors during emerging adulthood (Willoughby & Carroll, 2016).

To understand the scope of this conceptual framework, it is necessary to apply it to different social and cultural contexts and to assess its implications. Although in modern Western industrialized societies marriage may have a similar function or meaning, beliefs and attitudes around it will strongly depend on the context in which they are studied. Mainly because, following symbolic interactionism theory (Blumer, 1986), Marital Paradigm framework suggests that meaning and relevance of social relationships, such as marriage, is a process derived from social interaction.

Symbolic interactionism adopts a principle that is the basis of relational analysis. That is, the social as a whole is a set of relations (Donati, 2006). The theory that has its origins with Mead has as a strength the idea that socialization is not a passive process, but it needs a reflexive dialogue about what is and is not important for a subject (Archer, 2012). In this sense, young people concerns are an aspect intrinsically linked to marital beliefs.

Ultimate concerns

Willoughby et al. (2015) hold that one's marital paradigm is "a compromise of one's individual adherence to a larger cultural messages and norms regarding marriage" (p. 192). For this reason, reflexivity, as the ability that allows human beings to define their own concerns and consider them in relation to their social circumstances in order to define their courses of action, is a sociological concept that could shed light on the issue of marital beliefs, attitudes and relational behaviors. Especially considering that reflexivity mediates "the role that objective structural or cultural powers play in influencing social action" (Archer, 2007b).

In this sense, people internally define what is important to them, in relation to their objective circumstances. This order of priorities and beliefs related to marriage, among other things, reflects that "individual adherence" to specific social aspects regarding marriage. In fact, some theorists (Archer, 2003) suggest that individuals prioritize their concerns through a process of inner dialogue. And that these "ultimate concerns" act as "prisms which refracts the exercise of objective constraints and enablements" (p.140).

Furthermore, considering concerns as an aspect intrinsically related to marital belief systems is useful not only because they reflect structural limitations, but also because they are a key element in understanding the commitments that, in turn, define people's identity.

When one cares about something, one has a challenge to make a commitment. And an active commitment, defines a personal identity. In this sense, we are who we are because of what we care about and the commitments we make accordingly. In other words, in delineating our ultimate concerns, we define ourselves (Archer, 2000).

Theoretically, considering the "ultimate concerns" of young adults is not only useful to shed light on the relationship between agency and structure, but it also serves to address the issue of commitment and relational identity. In this sense, they are a key aspect in the stage of emerging adulthood, in which young people have difficulties in prioritizing and accommodating their concerns. And the commitments they make define their personal, relational and social identity (Archer, 2007a). Thus, to consider concerns together with marital beliefs is a good approximation to better understand not only meanings around marriage but also relational commitment, identity and structural constraints.

Empirical integration

Even though these two frameworks, marital paradigm theory and ultimate concerns, are two approaches that have been conceptualized theoretically and empirically in different ways, this research assumes that the integration of both is possible and useful. With this in mind and with the empirical limitations that this implies, an effort has been made to adapt some of these concepts and measures.

In particular, one of the dimensions of the marital paradigm is that of "marital centrality". This concept explores "how relatively central being married is to how one organize one's life roles" (Hall & Willoughby, 2016). The measure developed by the authors requires assigning a percentage of importance to these four areas to add up to a total of 100: marriage, parenting, career and leisure/hobbies.

The relative value is key because it forces respondents to order or prioritize among vital areas. This, in turn, is a possible way of empirically approaching "ultimate concerns". Specifically, it is a way of measuring the importance of one aspect over another. Thus, this dimension of the marital paradigm - marital centrality - which has been defined and measured in this way, is a way of talking about "concerns."

Although this approach does not imply an exhaustive exploration of concerns, it can be assumed that these four areas represent particularly relevant aspects in this period of life, when young people must accommodate their attitudes and projects and decide many times between conflicting goals (Konstam, 2019; Shulman & Connolly, 2013). Therefore, with this measure, it is possible to refer to the percentage allocated to marriage or career as "marital concerns" or "career concerns". That is, we will use the dimension and measure of marital centrality to quantitatively approach the concerns of Spanish emerging adults.

In conclusion, this work is an attempt to bring together marital paradigm theory, ultimate concerns and commitment from a sociological perspective. And to shed some light on the beliefs and meanings of commitment and marriage, as well as social explanations of these phenomena in the particular context of emerging adulthood in Spain. This thesis contributes to the debate between structural and individualistic approaches in youth studies, which has been subject of many discussions (Furlong et al., 2006, 2011; Leccardi, 2020; Nico & Caetano, 2021; Woodman, 2009), by considering beliefs and concerns of young adults as reflexively defined in accordance to their social circumstances. Next three empirical chapters present a particular aspect of marital beliefs, concerns and commitment with distinct methodological approaches.

2. Marital Beliefs and ultimate concerns

When it comes to romantic or intimate relationships, marriage is still the gold standard in the minds of most individuals, even in industrialized countries (Willoughby & James, 2017). In Spain, marriage continues to be the preferred option when it comes to future living and couple arrangements (Castro-Martín et al., 2008; González-Anleo & López-Ruiz, 2017), despite the fact that after the COVID pandemic, expectations about emancipation have diminished a bit (Simón et al., 2021). As in other Southern European countries, Spanish trends in family transitions are characterized by a prolonged period of coresidence with parents, which usually ends in marriage (Buhl & Lanz, 2007). Even though many young adults still consider marriage as a goal, no study in Spain has explored, systematically, how emerging adults think about marriage and the importance they place on it and their future.

Emerging adults might perceive that the time to make decisions about adult life and commitment is too far in the distance. However, recent research has emphasized the impact of beliefs on behavior during this life period (Hall, 2006). Willoughby & Dworkin (2009) found that young adults with stronger desires to marry were less likely to engage in risky behaviors such as binge drinking, drug consumption, or sexual activity. In addition, Carroll and colleagues (2007) reported that emerging adults with a relatively close marital horizon (those who anticipate marriage in their near future) were less supportive of nonmarital cohabitation and permissive sexual values. A desire for early marriage was also linked to lower rates of substance use (Carroll et al., 2007). These findings have led to the development of the Marital Paradigm Theory (Willoughby et al., 2015). This theory conceptualizes the way individuals view marriage as an institution, and it offers general insights into the perceptions of emerging adults toward future commitment and how these may impact their behaviors (Willoughby & Carroll, 2016).

Sooner or later, life pushes young people to discriminate and prioritize between competing goals, such as marriage, parenting, leisure, and career, shaping what some have called their “ultimate concerns” (Archer, 2003). These concerns are at the basis of the process of orienting action (Caetano, 2019) since they help them set goals, plan life paths, and regulate behavior (Ranta et al., 2014). In some ways, ultimate concerns are ways of giving priority to some aspect of life over others, and is expressed in attitudes, choices, behaviors, and relationships during emerging adulthood (Keldal & Şeker, 2021) –which, in turn, predict later relationships and well-being in adulthood (Fincham & Cui, 2010).

Some of the concerns of emerging adults are related to beliefs about intimate relationships – within their social context, culture, family of origin, and social relations. However, prioritizing concerns is not an easy task, especially for young adults, and may be subject to multiple influences. For example, the postponement of commitment and marriage could be subordinated to professional development (Shulman & Connolly, 2013). Also, religious beliefs (Dollahite et al., 2012) or experiences such as parental divorce could shape their relational beliefs (Willoughby et al., 2020).

The purpose of the present study is twofold. First, we explore the marital paradigms of Spanish emerging adults and the background differences between them, especially regarding their concerns. Second, we examine a series of characteristics and behaviors potentially associated with each paradigm. Using a nationally representative sample of Spanish emerging adults from 18 to 29 years old, this is the first study to our knowledge that explores the underlying structure of marital beliefs in young people in Spain, linking these to other concerns and specific behaviors.

Theoretical Framework

Ultimate Concerns

Within a specific social context and through a reflexive inner dialogue, we prioritize the things we care about, our concerns (Archer, 2000). Subjective beliefs, which always occur within a particular social context and are affected by prior experience, lead people to care more about some things than others. For instance, one's beliefs and cares with respect to her own relationships are partially shaped by previous relationships and family background. In a broad sense, concerns could be defined as the combination of needs, dispositions, and aspirations, that serve us to elaborate projects considering our context (Caetano, 2019). What matters most to us is ultimately what leads us to prioritize goals, make decisions, commit to something, or elaborate certain projects: "ultimate concerns are sounding-boards, affecting our (internal) responses to anything we encounter, according to it resonating harmoniously or discordantly with what we care about most" (Archer, 2012)p. 22). In this sense, our system of beliefs disposes us towards certain attitudes or intentions that, if reflexively defined and prioritized, become actions or projects –providing circumstances are propitious.

For young people, delineating and prioritizing concerns is of utmost importance, as they face the challenges of establishing romantic relationships and making decisions about life as a couple (Konstam, 2019). This requires active and subjective deliberation, within objective constraints. In terms of their relational project, their beliefs and (subsequently) their concerns are a sort of "compromise of one's individual adherence (or lack thereof) to larger cultural messages and norms regarding marriage" (Willoughby et al. 2015, p. 192). Exploring the marital belief system of Spanish young adults could allow us to better understand their concerns and the obstacles they encounter to achieve their goals.

Marital Paradigm

As emerging adults delay family transitions, marital beliefs become a central aspect of their life project, and a key component of their current attitudes and future decisions. From a symbolic interactionist perspective (Blumer, 1986), the relevance given by individuals to objects, people, and relationships is a process derived from social interaction. Romantic relationships, as some of the most socially charged (or meaningful) forms of social interaction, derive their significance from a process of subjective meaning-making that reaches all the way to childhood and adolescence. Applied to marriage, “symbolic interactionism would suggest that each individual develops a personal meaning toward the institution of marriage through interactions with family, friends, and the larger culture” (Willoughby et al., 2015).

Willoughby and colleagues (2015) developed a conceptual framework to approach individuals’ views on marriage, considering its underlying dimensions. The authors affirm that each person’s marital paradigm is made up of two belief systems: one about getting married, one about being married. Beliefs about being married are based on the findings of Hall (2006) and seek to capture the individual’s opinion about what marriage would be like if one gets married. It comprises beliefs on three dimensions: the process, the permanence, and the centrality of marriage. Beliefs about getting married, derived from *marital horizon theory* (Carroll et al., 2007), deal with the expectations and future plans regarding marriage (Willoughby & Carroll, 2016), and are composed of three interconnected dimensions: the timing, the salience, and the context that are appropriate, according to the individual, for getting married.

Considering these six dimensions within a particular social context, marital paradigms are a useful tool to investigate the concerns of emerging adults regarding their relational and family

projects. We can expect every emerging adult to hold a particular set of marital beliefs. Willoughby & Hall, using a sample of American college students, found that these individual beliefs can be grouped into three paradigms: Enthusiast, Delayer, and Hesitant (Willoughby & Hall, 2015). Most emerging adults fell under the Hesitant type, characterized by a desire to marry coupled with doubts towards it. These findings suggest that marital beliefs are complex, beyond positive or negative attitudes. It also highlights the difficulty in delineating the concerns of emerging adults and understanding what they care about –i.e. their marital concerns. The current study seeks to explore this typology in a different socio-cultural context, considering the heterogeneity of the Spanish population.

Current Study

The primary aim of the present research is to explore the marital beliefs of Spanish young adults. Secondly, we explore how such paradigms might be (i) related to other concerns, (ii) influenced by differences in young people's sociodemographic background, and (iii) associated with specific behaviors.

With respect to our main research question, we hypothesize that there are, at least, three different classes beyond just negative and positive beliefs about marriage Hesitant (Willoughby & Hall, 2015). Specially, given of the heterogeneity of the sample:

H1: More than three different marital paradigms will be found in Spanish young population.

We expect the context to play an important role in delineating these beliefs because of the impact of economic and labor difficulties on the family transitions of young people: since the 2008 crisis in Spain, marriage and family have been delayed and subordinated to economic stability (Moreno Mínguez et al., 2012).

Our second goal is to explore how concerns, sociodemographic and background characteristics are associated with marital paradigms. We anticipate positive beliefs about marriage to be positively related to parenting concerns, showing a family orientation in their concerns (Hall & Willoughby, 2016). In this regard, our second hypothesis is:

H2: Concerns will be significantly different between groups, where more positive beliefs about marriage will be associated to higher family concerns.

Furthermore, age, living arrangements, occupation, and relationship status will be related to at least some marital beliefs. Particularly, undertaking some of the traditional roles of adulthood may lead to consider marriage as a more approachable goal (Carroll et al., 2009). In this sense, we expect younger adults who live with their parents, are full-time students or remain single to hold more negative or distant beliefs towards marriage. Having divorced parents would also be linked to less overall marital importance (Willoughby et al., 2020). In addition, we expect that women and people who are more inclined to religion will have more positive views of marriage (Blakemore et al., 2005).

With respect to the association between marital paradigms and young people's behaviors, we explore the relationship between marital beliefs, risk-taking and sexual behaviors, for men and for women. We expected that positive beliefs about marriage, will lead to fewer risk-taking behaviors (Willoughby & Dworkin, 2009), and less frequent engagement in sexual intercourse (Carroll et al., 2007).

Methods

Procedure and Participants

A cross-sectional sample of 946 Spanish young adults from 18 to 29 years old was used. This was taken from a representative sample of the Spanish population between 18 to 32 years

old, with an estimated sample error of 2.88% for a confidence level of 95%, but we restricted the age to under 30 following the prevailing consensus in emerging adulthood studies (Arnett, 2014). Individuals were recruited during May 2021 and were asked to answer an online questionnaire; sampling quotas included regional variation in Spain (using 8 Nielsen areas, common in this type of data collection effort) as well as variation in the size of habitat (to include youth in less populated towns and cities below 20,000 inhabitants). We also imposed quotas for sex and age of the interviewees; resulting group sizes are within the expected margin of error. The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Navarra, who funded the project, and responses were anonymous.

Table 1 shows a full summary of the sociodemographic characteristics of the participants. The sample is equally distributed by sex and similarly, by age group (18-20, 21-23, 24-26, 27-29), the average age is 23.8 (SD=3.3). In terms of religiosity, young Spanish people showed little attendance to religious services, 52% never attending (1 on a scale from 1 to 6). Respondents were primarily single (48%), including those who said were in a casual relationship while 40% were in a committed relationship. Most of them were working (31%) or studying (35%). More than half of the sample still lived with their parents (59%) and 20% with a partner. Regarding family structure, most of their parents are still together (77%) and only 3% of youth in our sample are parents themselves.

Table 1. Descriptive characteristics of the sample

Variable	n	%	Mean
Age			23.8
Religiosity^a			1.8
Sex			
Men	476	50.3	
Women	470	49.7	
Relationship status			
Single	454	48.0	
Committed relationship	379	40.1	
Engaged	33	3.5	
Married	18	1.9	
Other	62	6.6	
Occupation			
Only working	297	31.4	
Only studying	328	34.7	
Working and studying	208	22.0	
Looking for a job	106	11.2	
Other	7	0.7	
Living arrangements			
Alone	56	5.9	
With a partner	194	20.5	
With parents	555	58.7	
Other	151	14.9	
Parents divorced			
Yes	217	22.9	
No	729	77.1	

^aParticipation in religious acts from 1 to 6. 1=I do not participate, 6 = several times a week

Measures

Marital paradigm.

We translated and adapted the measures used by Willoughby and colleagues when developing marital paradigm theory (Willoughby & Hall, 2015; Willoughby, Medaris, et al., 2015). A first professional translation (English to Spanish) was carried out in Spain. Back-translation to English, by a professional, followed. Discrepancies in meaning were resolved,

finally, by one professional translator and research teams in both Spain and the United States. We considered two dimensions¹ for the beliefs about getting married, as follows:

Marital salience. Six items to evaluate the extent to which respondents consider marriage as an important goal. The items include the following: “getting married is more important to me than having a successful career”, “getting married is more important than my educational pursuits and achievements”, “getting married is among my top priorities during this time in my life”, “all in all, there are more advantages to being single than to being married (reversed)”, “getting married is a very important goal for me” and “I would like to be married now”. The items were measured on a 6-point scale from very strongly disagree to very strongly agree.

Marital context. Five items in the same 6-point scale approach the beliefs about the context under which marriage should or should not take place. Those are: “money and finances are a major barrier to getting married”, “I need to have certain amount of money saved before getting married”, “my parents believe that I do not have enough money right now to marry”, “couples should be able to afford their own wedding before they get married” and “finances are a major factor I consider when thinking about getting married”.

Regarding beliefs about being married, we evaluated three dimensions:

Marital roles. Three items approaching gender roles expectations such as “in an ideal marriage, the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home”, “husbands should have the final say when there are disagreements about the family”, and “wives should have most of the say with decisions about housework and childcare”.

¹ Originally, we also included the marital timing dimension but did not include it in this analysis because only 7% of the sample gave a response to the question about an ideal age of marriage.

Marital permanence. This dimension evaluates to what extent participants believe in the permanence of marriage. Items included “Personal happiness is more important than putting up with a bad marriage (reverse coded)” and “Marriage is for life, even if the couple is unhappy”.

Concerns. Lastly, using the dimension of marital centrality (Hall & Willoughby, 2016), we approached marital concerns by asking how much importance young adults expected to place on marriage. In addition, we also approached other dimensions of their future life such as parenting, career, and hobbies. They were asked to prioritize by assigning a percentage to each life dimension, adding up to a combined total of 100.

Background and demographic factors.

Several control measures were used such as age (continuous) and a dummy variable for sex (woman=1, man=0). Relationship status was coded as a dummy for single (not single=0). Regarding occupational status, we used working=1, not working=0. We also controlled for the relationship of their parents (divorced parents=1) and whether they live with their parents (living with parents=1). We measured religiosity using the frequency of their participation in religious ceremonies from “I do not participate in any religious act” (1) to “many times per week” (6).

Behaviors.

Risk-taking behaviors. We asked “in the last month, how many times have you participated in the following activities”: getting drunk (mean=0.88, SD=2.14) and drug consumption (mean=0.47, SD=2.5). Both numerical variables range from 0 to 30.

Sexual partners. The number of sexual partners you have had in your life (mean= 3.8, SD=6.9). One third (32%) of the sample reported not having had sexual intercourse.

Risky sexual behavior. We asked: “Have you had unprotected sexual relations with someone other than your partner?” and 80% of the sample answered no.

Pornography use. “How often do you use your phone to watch porn or content related?” On a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 is “nothing” and 4 is “a lot” (mean=1.8, SD=0.88).

Analytic Strategy

In order to confirm the validity and structure of our marital paradigm measures, an exploratory factor analysis was carried out with the four scale measures (salience, permanence, roles, and context). We then removed two items: one for marital salience (“All in all, there are more advantages to being single than to being married”) for high uniqueness (0.74) and one for marital permanence (“Marriage is for life, even if the couple is unhappy”) for cross-loading above .3. Then, a four-factor structure was corroborated with a confirmatory factor analysis. The model suggested adequate fit, $X^2(84) = 258.425$, $P < 0.001$; comparative fit index=0.972 and a root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)=0.05.

Latent Class Analysis (LCA).

Then, to identify different subgroups according to the marital beliefs of the Spanish youth, the five dimensions of the marital paradigm were entered into a latent class model and sequential models were tested from two to seven classes. Different class solutions were examined according to theoretical consistency and fit indices, such as the Bayesian information criterion (BIC). All analyses were carried out using STATA 16.1.

Results from the LCA support hypothesis 1, namely, that more than three different classes of marital concerns exist among Spanish young adults. Table 2 presents LCA results for different class models.

Table 2. Statistics fit for latent class analysis

	Latent classes					
	2	3	4	5	6	7[^]
BIC	17259.49	16786.33	16732.18	16674.15	16322.18	16593.63
AIC	17181.86	16679.58	16596.32	16509.18	16128.09	16399.54
Entropy	0.860	0.867	0.801	0.788	0.846	0.805
Class frequency						
1	82.24	77.06	11.21	9.3	8.88	-
2	17.76	17.23	67.97	60.04	7.72	-
3		5.71	15.12	20.72	60.25	-
4			5.71	4.76	15.54	-
5				5.18	5.07	-
6					2.54	-
7						-

[^]Convergence not achieved

Although there is no consensus about the best statistical criteria for choosing the best class solution, the BIC is considered the most reliable fit statistic in LCA (Weller et al., 2020). This indicator, with the Akaike information criterion (AIC), suggested a six-class solution. Other diagnostic criteria were examined such as the entropy and class size. With this suggested solution, we assigned each case to a specific class based on their posterior class membership probabilities. And the lowest value on the off-diagonal of the average latent class posterior probability was acceptable, above 0.80.

Using the three-step approach, we decide on the number of classes before including any auxiliary information, such as covariates (Nylund-Gibson et al., 2014). Following this recommendation, we first describe each class, and then we add some predictors in order to identify background variables that could be associated with a specific paradigm. Subsequently, we run multiple regression models to assess differences by class on behaviors and attitudinal variables. These models controlled for background and contextual factors such as gender, age, relationship status, occupation.

Results

Table 3 shows the description of the measures used for the latent class analysis and the mean for the total sample. Six classes were suggested following the LCA and even though the sixth class represented only 2.5% of the sample, it seems to make sense as a theoretically distinct group. As shown in the table, we labeled the six groups according to these variables. The indifferent group (8.9%) comprised emerging adults that scored the lowest in each dimension, showing a certain indifference toward the idea of marriage with almost no expected importance of marriage in their life plans (marital concern mean=7.76, SD= 9.28). This result was significantly different from all the other groups ($p < 0.000$), except for the reject group. The reject group (7.7%) also had a low score in marital salience but they showed stronger beliefs in terms of permanence or roles. Specifically, their beliefs of marital roles were significantly different from all groups ($p < 0.000$). This suggests that rejection comes from their beliefs towards marriage and not from indifference as the first group.

The contextual group was the bigger group, including 60% of the sample. This group showed some of the lowest means in terms of permanence and salience but one of the highest in terms of context. The importance given to financial stability and economic context to get married is the defining characteristic of this contextual group. Even so, the mean difference of marital context was not significant in comparison with the hesitant and the convinced group.

The second-largest group was the hesitant (15.5%). This class presented a general ambiguity regarding marriage. The beliefs of this group could be situated in between the other groups in terms of salience or permanence, differing significantly from the convinced group ($p < 0.000$). It showed one of the highest scores in terms of marital concerns, even though this was not significantly different from the convinced and traditionalist. It also showed common beliefs about context or roles similar to the indifferent or contextual.

The convinced group (5%) showed the highest score in terms of marital salience and it was significantly different from all other groups ($p < 0.000$) and also had a high score of marital concerns, with the hesitant and traditionalist. In terms of permanence and context, it is also similar to the traditionalist group. The traditionalist group was the smallest of all with just 2.5% of the sample. This group shows some inconsistencies and is not particularly inclined towards marriage in terms of marital salience but it is mostly characterized by its high score in marital roles, being the highest and significantly different from all groups ($p < 0.000$). It also has the highest score in marital permanence, showing a traditional idea of marriage.

Table 3. Marital paradigm measurements and means by classes

	# items	Scale	Alpha	Total	Indifferent	Reject	Contextual	Hesitant	Convinced	Traditionalist
N				946	84	73	570	147	48	24
%				100	8.88	7.72	60.25	15.54	5.07	2.54
Marital salience	5	1-6	0.88	1.92	1.17	1.66	1.52	3.23	3.81	3.21
Marital context	5	1-6	0.77	4.34	2.22	4.16	4.62	4.63	4.26	3.98
Marital permanence	2	1-6	0.48 ^a	1.84	1.61	2.20	1.62	2.14	2.83	3.06
Marital roles	3	1-6	0.82	1.29	1.04	2.37	1.07	1.06	2.10	4.10
Marital concerns	1	0-100		16.51	7.76	12.03	13.66	29.61	27.92	25.29

^aCorrelation coefficient

Background factors

Next, we explore some of the sociodemographic and background characteristics that could be associated with belonging to one of these classes. First of all, we describe each class as a function of their other concerns, age, religiosity, sex, and other variables. Table 4 shows the mean of parenting, career, and leisure concerns of each class. Specifically, the hesitant and convinced group have a significant higher score regarding their parenting concerns than all groups except for the traditionalist one. With respect to career concerns, the indifferent, reject and contextual class have a significant higher mean compared to the hesitant, convinced and traditionalist group. And leisure concerns follow a similar pattern, where the indifferent and

reject group have a higher score and differ significantly from the hesitant and the convinced ones. The mean age and religiosity of each group are shown. With respect to religiosity, some differences exist, mainly between hesitant, convinced, and traditionalist groups as more religious compared to the indifferent, reject, and contextual groups. Regarding age, no significant differences between groups were found even though the traditionalist group seems slightly younger.

The indifferent group is mostly composed of women (60%) and the traditionalist by men (83.3%), with a significant correlation between sex and group ($\chi^2(5) = 44.9, p < 0.000$). Relationship status also seems to be significantly correlated with class. Most of the traditionalist group is single (87.5%) followed by the reject group (65.8%). Within the convinced group, more people are married and engaged compared to the other groups.

The convinced and traditionalist have a higher proportion of people working while the reject and contextual have a higher proportion of full-time students. But occupation and group membership are not significantly correlated. Parents' divorce does not appear to be related to the group either, and there are no major differences between groups. In terms of living arrangements, the convinced group live more on their own than other groups. Also, they live more with a partner together with the hesitant group. And even a great proportion of young adults live with their parents, the traditionalists are the ones who have the highest proportion, followed by the reject and the contextual group.

Table 4. Concerns and background mean and proportions by class

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Indifferent</i>	<i>Reject</i>	<i>Contextual</i>	<i>Hesitant</i>	<i>Convinced</i>	<i>Traditionalist</i>
Mean							
Parenting concerns	18.8	15.0 ^b	15.6 ^b	18.0 ^b	23.1 ^a	27.0 ^a	17.9
Career concerns	32.7	38.3 ^b	36.0 ^b	34.8 ^b	24.0 ^a	23.2 ^a	26.3 ^a
Leisure concerns	31.9	38.9 ^b	36.3 ^b	33.5 ^c	23.2 ^a	21.9 ^a	30.5
Religiosity	1.8	1.4 ^a	1.6 ^a	1.6 ^a	2.0 ^b	2.9 ^c	2.9 ^c
Age	23.8	24.5	23.5	23.6	24.5	24.3	23.0
Proportion (%)							
Women*	49.7	60.7	24.7	54.9	46.3	33.3	16.7
Relationship status							
Single*	48.0	52.4	65.8	47.9	33.3	39.6	87.5
Committed relationship*	40.1	31.0	30.1	44.2	43.5	31.3	0.0
Engaged*	3.5	4.8	1.4	1.8	8.2	10.4	4.2
Married*	1.9	1.2	0.0	0.5	5.4	10.4	4.2
Occupation							
Only working	31.4	33.3	26.0	29.1	36.1	43.8	41.7
Only studying	34.7	27.4	42.5	37.0	27.2	27.1	41.7
Working and studying*	22.0	32.1	19.2	22.1	23.1	14.6	0.0
Looking for a job	11.2	4.8	11.0	11.2	13.6	12.5	16.7
Living arrangements							
Alone*	5.9	6.0	5.5	5.4	3.4	16.7	12.5
With a partner*	20.5	20.2	11.0	17.0	35.4	35.4	12.5
With parents*	58.7	59.5	63.0	61.4	50.3	37.5	70.8
Divorced parents	22.9	23.8	20.6	24.7	19.7	16.7	16.7

Note: Proportion within each class (%).

Differing superscripts represent means which significantly differed ($p < .05$).

* Pearson chi-square significant ($p < .05$).

Behaviors

Lastly, we investigated behaviors depending on the class. We ran multiple regression models for each outcome. We did it hierarchically to see, first, the direct effect of class membership and then controlling for other variables such as sociodemographic, background influences (religiosity and parental divorce) and current status (relationship, employment and living situation). Then, we compute adjusted means for each class. Given the significant differences

in class composition by gender and in some behaviors, we explored these results for men and for women separately, as shown in tables 5.1 and 5.2.

In terms of risk-taking behaviors, the first two refer to the number of times in the last month that participants have gotten drunk or used illegal drugs. In both behaviors, there are small differences and the convinced group showed the lowest frequency for men and women. However, these differences were not significantly different between groups. Namely, that membership to a class does not explain these differences even without controlling for anything else. Regarding sexual behaviors, group membership partially predicted the number of sexual partners even when adding the controlling variables, with the convinced and traditionalist group having the lowest number of sexual partners, significantly different from the indifferent group that had the highest number of sexual partners (6.4). However, these differences were only significant for men.

With respect to risky sexual behavior, that is, having unprotected sex with someone other than your partner, we ran a logit model and predicted the probability of engaging in this behavior. For men and for women, the convinced group showed a low predicted probability with no significant differences between groups. And in terms of pornography use, we only see class differences for men and not for women. Specifically, the reject and hesitant group had a significant higher predicted mean than the indifferent group.

Table 5.1. Predicted mean of behaviors by class for men

	<i>Indifferent</i>	<i>Reject</i>	<i>Contextual</i>	<i>Hesitant</i>	<i>Convinced</i>	<i>Traditionalist</i>
N=	33	55	257	79	32	20
Last month frequency						
Getting drunk	0.65	0.95	1.02	0.89	0.17	1.74
Drug consumption	1.15	0.52	0.39	0.28	0.07	0.68
Sexual partners ever	6.42	2.52*	4.51	3.64	2.29*	1.85*
Risky sexual relations^a	0.18	0.19	0.2	0.16	0.07	0.06
Pornography use	1.94	2.41*	2.15	2.35*	2.03	2.15

Note: Analyses controlled for age, relationship status, employment status, religiosity, living with parents and parent's marital status.

^aPredicted probability.

*Significant differences with respect to the indifferent class ($p < 0.05$).

Table 5.2. Predicted mean of behaviors by class for women

	<i>Indifferent</i>	<i>Reject</i>	<i>Contextual</i>	<i>Hesitant</i>	<i>Convinced</i>	<i>Traditionalist</i>
N=	51	18	323	68	16	4
Last month frequency						
Getting drunk	0.97	1.07	0.84	0.69	0.25	0.52
Drug consumption	0.75	0.71	0.45	0.71	-0.02	0.31
Sexual partners ever	3.06	3.75	3.89	3.46	0.96	1.75
Risky sexual relations^a	0.19	0.2	0.21	0.26	0.06	0.25
Pornography use	1.4	1.43	1.39	1.31	1.21	1.26

Note: Analyses controlled for age, relationship status, employment status, religiosity, living with parents and parent's marital status.

^aPredicted probability.

Discussion

Our results showed great heterogeneity in terms of marital beliefs in the Spanish young population. Latent class analysis suggested six different groups of emerging adults according to the beliefs they hold regarding marital salience, context, permanence, roles, and concerns. According to our first hypothesis, we did find more than three groups beyond positive and negative beliefs towards marriage. Specifically, the contextual, the hesitant, and the

traditionalist hold mixed beliefs while the indifferent showed no relevant esteem towards it. Furthermore, 60% of the sample belong to the contextual group, characterized by the high importance given to the marital context. This is consistent with reports in Spain that emphasize the postponement of marriage and family formation due to the economic situation (Simón et al., 2021). The increase in unemployment and job insecurity in the context of the economic crises may be factors strongly influencing marital beliefs.

Regarding our second hypothesis, we found significant differences in the concerns of each group. The groups with the highest marital concerns (hesitant and convinced) were also the groups with the highest parenting concerns, showing a more familial disposition. People that hold a more positive paradigm, expect to give more importance to parenting, suggesting a relation between marital beliefs and family-oriented attitudes (Hall & Walls, 2016). Also, the indifferent or negative beliefs and concerns about marriage were related to higher concerns in other dimension such as career and leisure. An inverse relationship exists between marital beliefs and recreational and professional aspirations among Spanish emerging adults. That is, the higher their inclination towards marriage, the lower their expected leisure and career importance, suggesting a reciprocal relationship between beliefs about marriage and beliefs in other areas of one's life (Keldal & Şeker, 2021; Willoughby & Carroll, 2016). The inverse pattern of expected centrality between parenting and career for men and women illustrates some of the dilemmas young adults must face in this life period and how marital beliefs serve in the definition of their concerns (Ranta et al., 2014; Shulman & Connolly, 2013). In this sense, marital beliefs do not directly assess their expectations and concerns but could be helpful to understand their future life plans (Guzzo, 2009; Willoughby, 2014).

In terms of the socio-demographic composition of each group, religiosity is highly related to more positive and traditional beliefs about marriage, predicting membership in almost all

groups compared to the indifferent group. The relation between religion and attitudes towards relationships, marriage, fertility is consistent with previous findings (Adsera, 2006; Dollahite et al., 2012; Fuller et al., 2015; Willoughby, Hall, et al., 2015). We expected age to be positively related to more positive beliefs about marriage, as previously suggested (Willoughby, Medaris, et al., 2015). However, we did not find a significant association, suggesting little variability in emerging adulthood as a life period.

On the contrary, relationship status did appear to be importantly related to class membership. The hesitant and the convinced group were made up of fewer single people than the indifferent group. The convinced group had more married and engaged individuals than any other group. This finding suggests that having a romantic partner is associated with expectations about future relationships (Lanz & Tagliabue, 2007). In addition, being a woman was associated with indifference towards marriage while being a man predicted rejection and more traditional views of marriage. There is a lack of knowledge of gender differences in marital beliefs among emerging adults, especially in the Southern European and Spanish context. However, some researchers have found these apparently contradictory ideas of men rejecting marriage but embracing a more traditional idea of marital commitment (Leonhardt et al., 2020; Stanley, 2002). Furthermore, Spanish young men showed consistently more traditional views regarding couple relationships than women while women appeared to give less importance to having a partner (Ballesteros et al., 2019). In the last decades, Spain has adopted strong feminist policies devoted to promoting gender equality (Bustelo, 2016) and women had adopted a more ambivalent attitude towards marriage (Moreno Mínguez et al., 2019), thus explaining their more indifferent and contextual beliefs about marriage.

In general, occupation did not show a significant correlation with the different marital groups. Even though employment has been seen as a prerequisite for marriage (Carroll et al., 2009), only to be working and studying appears to be related to the different classes, with a higher proportion in the indifferent class. This result suggests that people who is dealing with other life tasks such as working and studying at the same time, are not concerned about family transitions. In terms of their living arrangements, living alone, with a partner or with parents is related to marital paradigms, suggesting that traditional transitions matter when it comes to marital dispositions. Despite previous research about the negative consequences of parental divorce (Cui & Fincham, 2010), there was no association between parents' separation and marital beliefs. In Spain, parental divorce does not seem to affect relationship expectations (Smith-Etxeberria et al., 2020).

With respect to attitudes and behaviors, risk-taking behaviors were statistically similar between the six groups even before controlling for other variables with some small differences specially for men. The results suggest that for Spanish young adults the beliefs they hold regarding marriage do not affect specially their current lifestyle in contrast with findings of emerging adults in other socio-cultural contexts (Willoughby & Dworkin, 2009). Probably due to the weakening of social norms in favor of marriage and the growing diffusion of other relationship options (Dominguez-Folgueras & Castro-Martin, 2013), which causes marital beliefs to lose their normative role. In this same direction, non-significant differences were found for sexual behavior between groups, even though the traditionalist and convinced had a lower estimated mean number of sexual partners and lower probability of engaging in risky sexual relations. In this regard, some researchers had found that the level of engagement in hooking up was not associated with expectations for involvement in future committed relationships (James-Kangal et al., 2018). In general, membership to a group slightly

explained differences only for the number of sexual partners and pornography use. However, this explanatory power only holds for men and not for women. Results suggest that marital beliefs regulate more men's behavior than women's, but additional empirical research is needed to substantiate this finding.

Several limitations should be noted. First, as a cross-sectional sample was used, causal pathways are not possible to determine. Longitudinal studies are needed to understand the context where marital beliefs are developed and their stability and effects. As the sample is representative of the Spanish population, their heterogeneity and distribution may not apply to specific groups or other contexts.

Marital beliefs are complex and multidimensional, therefore other measurements and dimensions, such as marital timing, should also be considered in future research. In this sense, to evaluate their concerns more broadly, a mixed approach should also be considered. Notwithstanding these limitations, this study is a valuable first attempt to capture the heterogeneity of marital beliefs and concerns of Spanish emerging adults.

Conclusion

Marital beliefs have been ignored in the study of emerging adulthood in Spain but results from this study suggest relevant implications. First of all, marital beliefs are a complex matter beyond positive and negative spectrum, and emerging adults show great heterogeneity in this regard. This means that marriage should not be disregarded as a single issue, affecting all young adults equally. Second, the marital paradigm is a good way to approach the concerns of the young population, in order to understand the obstacles they face in making decisions and future life plans. This understanding would allow researchers and policymakers to engage in actions that favor the achievement of the goals that matter to them. Lastly, social

institutions, such as marriage, have an impact in individual behaviors, so understanding the beliefs and expectations of emerging adults is a helpful approach to assess their well-being.

3. Concerns, commitment and flourishing

The idea of emerging adulthood has been widely accepted in the social sciences in the past decades, as a new life stage between adolescence and adulthood, characterized by exploration, instability and a focus on the self (Arnett, 2014). During this period, young individuals gain autonomy and, at the same time, look to establish long-term, committed, intimate relationships. In this sense, even though most young adults desire long-term committed relationships, “long term commitment seem to be in conflict with the constant refining and redefining of the self” (Konstam, 2019). Also, romantic aspirations and commitments of many young adults might seem threatened by their social and economic conditions.

In this context, a new romantic stage has been proposed during the period of emerging adulthood, taking into account relational instabilities, the postponement of long-term commitments such as marriage, and the difficulty to commit that characterize emerging adults (Shulman & Connolly, 2013). However, this apparent lack of commitment does not necessarily relates to negative or low expectations for involvement in future committed relationships, including marriage (James-Kangal et al., 2018).

For instance, in Spain, the majority of young women and men wants to live with a couple and have a family (Ballesteros et al., 2019) and marriage continues to be a fundamental milestone in the formation of the family for Spanish young people (Moreno Mínguez et al., 2012). However, most of them still live with their parents, the average age at first marriage is rising and marriage rates are declining.

It is not clear if the postponement of family transitions and romantic commitments is only a response to the competing demands of this life period and current socioeconomic difficulties or if it is mainly due to a lack of interest. This paper seeks to explore if the commitments of

emerging adults respond directly to what matters to them, i.e. their concerns, and what other factors -sociodemographic, transitional, relational- influence their commitment in a relationship. In addition, this study sheds light on how the priorities and commitment of emerging adults can lead them to flourish. Commitments of emerging adults have been deeply studied from a psychosocial perspective (i.e. identity formation) but less has been said about the concerns and other social factors that may be influencing their commitments and how these affect their flourishing through this life period. The main aim of this study is to explore the relationship between the concerns of Spanish emerging adults, their relational commitment and their flourishing, measured in five important dimensions: happiness and life satisfaction; mental and physical health; meaning and purpose; character and virtue; social connectedness (VanderWeele, 2017).

Framework

A broad consensus exists in the social sciences pointing at the delay and de-standardization of relational trajectories as one of the key changes characterizing the transition to adulthood in contemporary industrialized societies (Billari et al., 2019). These changes are, nonetheless, shaped by social, political, and economic context. In Spain, as in other Southern European countries, transitional pathways are defined by the late leaving from the parental home – usually through cohabitation or marriage (Moreno Mínguez, 2018). In fact, the mean ages for emancipation and parenthood are among the highest in Europe.

These trends, heavily shaped by culture, have coincided in recent decades with poor economic conditions derived from the recent crises of 2008 and 2020: instability and uncertainty have become common experience of young people in Spain (Simón et al., 2021), with youth unemployment reaching a high of 55.45% in 2013 and currently at 34.80% (World

Bank, 2022). When available, jobs for youth are usually precarious, temporary, and part-time, paying low wages. These structural conditions of the youth labor market hinder their possibilities of emancipation and family formation.

In this context, young adults must make life-shaping decisions in the realm of work and family. In a contemporary society characterized by the weakening of traditional structures and social ties, in which normative “life histories” are all suddenly called into question and have to be renegotiated (Beck et al., 2003), and where decisions and commitments are left to the individual, youth must make use of their reflexivity to define their concerns and life projects (Caetano, 2014).

As the traditional pathways to family formation are rejected, most young people still seek “emotional commitment” (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). Among the consequences of this transformation and the abundance of choice and freedom “is that individuals are required to engage in an ongoing effort of introspection to establish their preferences, to evaluate their options” (Illouz, 2012). Romantic commitments are increasingly based on one’s values and concerns: “values and valuations guide our actions, and our actions have consequences for our well-being” (Sayer, 2011, p. 27); namely, not all options affect their well-being in the same way.

Concerns and commitment

Personal concerns express that which is most important to the person at a given point and are defined by the combination of needs, dispositions and aspirations (Caetano, 2019). Concerns shape our relationship with the world, defining the contours within which we make life plans. In this context, authors have defined ultimate concerns as commitments towards specific aims, situated in a particular context, which condition the course of action chosen by the

individual (Archer, 2007b). In this sense, to develop a specific concern is a “challenge to make a commitment, providing circumstances are propitious” (Archer, 2012, p. 105). In sum, our cares define the way we engage with the world and who we end up becoming; our personal identity: “who we are is a matter of what we care about most and the commitments we make accordingly” (Archer, 2003, p.120). Individuals make choices, use resources, and incorporate roles into their identity, according to their priorities (Hall & Willoughby, 2016); and, in this process of committing to something, can find meaning and purpose.

Identity commitment

From a psychosocial perspective, commitment contributes to the process of identity formation by connecting the choices that individuals make, with the self-confidence they derive from the result of their actions (Crocetti et al., 2008). In this view, identity is developed in a process of exploration and commitment, and a well-developed identity is the end result of youth’s ability to act following the goals, values, and beliefs to which they are committed. Identity formation is not a global process, but is developed in specific domains such as occupation, love, friendship, religion, etc. (Luyckx et al., 2014; Schwartz et al., 2013). In this study, we focus on long-term partnerships as one of the key developmental tasks of this life period, given the salience that the relational domain appears to have among emerging adults (Vosylis et al., 2018).

Social factors and identity commitment.

Identity commitment is not just a matter of concerns but it is also affected by several social factors. On the one hand, identity development is linked to adult roles. As young people experience traditional markers of adulthood and commit to adult roles, they may develop a more stable identity (Benson & Furstenberg, 2006; Macmillan, 2006). For example, in

emerging adulthood, research suggest that role transitions such as emancipation, completing formal education and getting a job facilitate identity commitments (Piotrowski et al., 2020). In addition, having “solved” some developmental tasks, like choosing a career, could facilitate the assumption of interpersonal commitments.

When it comes to romantic and intimate bonds, the relationship between commitment and gender is far from clear. On the one hand, there is a perception that men are more “commitment-phobic” than women (Stanley, 2002). This has been sociologically explained by two main factors: time and options constraints (Illouz, 2012). Women that work and want motherhood will be willing to commit earlier than man for “fertility reasons”. Also, due to the age and educational differences, educated woman have fewer partners to choose from than men. These reasons may explain why women show higher levels of commitments. However, even though young women appear to desire committed relationships more than men, women appear to be less satisfied, and thus less committed, by their romantic or marital experiences (Illouz, 2019). In this sense, evidence is not consistent regarding gender differences in relational commitment.

Family and parental relations also play a role in commitment development. Research on parental divorce and marital conflict shows that parental divorce affects romantic relationships of emerging adults through a negative attitude toward marriage and lack of commitment; marital conflict is also associated with lower levels of relationship quality (Cui & Fincham, 2010).

Even though religious participation is declining among emerging adults (McNamara Barry et al., 2010), religion seems to be a factor influencing commitment. Normative beliefs and adherence to religious norms predict commitment in romantic relationships (Etcheverry &

Agnew, 2004). In terms of identity, some scholars have found a link between commitment and religious orientation (Padilla-Walker et al., 2008).

Considering the increase in open relationships and casual sexual, and the multiplicity of dating options, emerging adults appear to have less motives to enter a committed relationship or stay in it. In this sense, previous relationships and sexual experiences may be associated with attitudes toward committed relationships. Some scholars have found that hooking up is associated with attaching less importance to current involvement in committed relationships but not with expectations for future involvement (James-Kangal et al., 2018). On the other hand, previous romantic relationships appear to be negatively associated with commitment (Merolla et al., 2004). Even though further research is needed to understand the outcomes of these previous experiences, engaging in sexual relationships may harm the development of skills for navigating committed romantic relationships (Claxton & van Dulmen, 2013).

Not much attention has been given to the role of beliefs and concerns in the process of identity commitment (Wängqvist et al., 2016). However, romantic beliefs have been strongly linked to intimacy development (Montgomery, 2005) and positive beliefs toward marriage seem to lead to stronger commitment which, in turn, leads to positive relationship outcomes (Willoughby, 2014). In this sense, the importance one gives to long-term commitments (marriage, having children) might affect one's investment and commitment in the relational domain. Namely, we expect that marital and family concerns will predict relational commitment. On the other hand, professional concerns may decrease interpersonal among young adults, who navigate a context in which it is increasingly difficult to integrate career and life plans (Shulman & Connolly, 2013).

Flourishing: a matter of concerns and commitments

Commitment is particularly relevant for the well-being of emerging adults. Sociologically, committing to goals, values and beliefs helps “counteract” the lack of structural support (Schwartz et al., 2005). A coherent identity prevents risky behaviors and is related to healthy lifestyles and life satisfaction (Schwartz et al., 2013). Namely, the statuses and styles derived from high commitment are positively associated with indicators of subjective well-being and mental health (Schwartz et al., 2015).

Personal flourishing is thus dependent on one’s ability to form stable commitments. Human flourishing is enhanced when individuals are engaged in the pursuit of personal projects (Little et al., 2017) which, in turn, are based on personal concerns. This is why high satisfaction approximates a sustainable *modus vivendi*, based on a hierarchy of concerns (Archer, 2003; Carrà, 2020). However, less is known about the way in which concerns affect directly well-being: some concerns can be positively related to flourishing, others can be self-harming and harmful to others, or not have a particular effect on well-being (Sayer, 2011). Considering that one’s projects can have a profound effect on health, happiness and life satisfaction, meaning and purpose, character and virtue, and close social relationships (VanderWeele, 2017), we expect that concerns will be related to some dimensions of flourishing, mediated by commitment. To explore the concerns of emerging adults is to acknowledge what is most important to them, what will lead them to commit and, directly or indirectly, to flourish.

Current study

The current study seeks to explore the concerns of Spanish emerging adults currently in a relationship, their association with commitment, and the direct and indirect effects of

concerns on flourishing. It adds to existing research by investigating the reasons why young adults commit to certain ultimate concerns; in this respect, concerns are seen as pivotal factors in their identity (Archer, 2012) and in the configuration of their commitments. We also explore the role of commitment in mediating the relationship between concerns and flourishing. We approximate concerns with a measure that asks young people to distribute 100 points, by importance, to marriage, children, work or leisure from the marital paradigm developed by Willoughby et al. (2015). Finally, commitment is measured using the Utrecht-Management of Identity Commitments Scale (U-MICS) (Crocetti et al., 2008).

We aim to answer the following research questions:

- 1) How are family and professional concerns related to relational commitment and what other factors influence the commitment of emerging adults?
- 2) What specific concerns matter for each dimension of flourishing?
- 3) How does relational commitment mediate the association between ultimate concerns and flourishing?

We hypothesize that family concerns will be positively related to commitment for those currently involved in a relationship while professional concerns will have a negative relationship with commitment. Regarding the other factors associated with relational commitment, we expect that women will be more committed than men and age will also be positively affecting commitment. Transitions, such as finishing education, being a full-time worker, and religiosity, will also positively predict relational commitment. Parental conflict, being in a previous committed relationship and number of sexual partners will have a negative effect. In addition, we expect that family concerns will have a positive effect on flourishing, mostly mediated by commitment.

Methods

Participants and procedure

A representative, cross-sectional sample of 1,200 young adults between 18 to 32 years old was collected during May 2021, in Spain. Individuals were asked to answer an online, anonymous questionnaire and the data collection was approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Navarra. In order to evaluate relational commitment accurately, a subsample of 670 emerging adults currently in a relationship was selected for this study (55.8% of the original sample). More than 90% of them were born in Spain and more than 85% were heterosexual.

The mean age of the selected sample was 26.3 in contrast to the mean age of the whole sample (25.3 years old). Over half of the sampled individuals were women (54.5%). All of them reported having a partner, 67.6% said they were dating formally, 7.8% were engaged, 15% lived together and almost 10% were married.

Regarding the five traditional markers of adulthood, more than half of our respondents had already finished their studies (62%), and emancipated from the parental home (59%). Half of them are full-time workers (49.6%). Only 8.5% reported having children. 3% of the sample had experienced parental divorce and 17% had never had sexual intercourse. 46% said they have been previously in an exclusive relationship, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive characteristics of the sample

	N	670
Sociodemographic		
Age (mean)		26.3
Women (%)		54.5
Religiosity (mean) ^a		0.7
Relationship status		
Committed relationship (%)		67.6
Engaged (%)		7.8
Cohabiting (%)		15.1
Married (%)		9.6
Traditional markers		
Finishing school (%)		62.09
Working (%)		49.55
Leaving home (%)		58.81
Children (%)		8.51
Financial independence (mean)		61.66
Other relations		
Parental conflict (mean)		2.20
Previous relationship (%)		46.12
Sexual partners (mean)		4.66

^aParticipation in religious acts from 1 to 6. 1=I do not participate, 6 = several times a week

Measures

Commitment. For measuring identity commitment in the relational domain, we used the *Utrecht-Management of Identity Commitments Scale (U-MICS)* that evaluates three identity process: commitment, in-depth exploration and reconsideration of commitment (Crocetti et al., 2008). The measure is validated in Spanish (Llorent & Álamo, 2018), specifically for the relational domain (best friend) but the scale has also been used in the romantic domain for emerging adults (Vosylis et al., 2018). Considering that our sample includes only people in a relationship, the questions were about the respondent's partner. In this study we consider the *commitment* factor, consisting of five items such as “my partner gives me security in life”,

“my partner allows me to face the future with optimism”, “my partner gives me self-confidence”, “my partner makes me feel sure of myself”, “my partner gives me security for the future”. Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree); the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was 0.91.

Concerns. Following Marital Paradigms Theory (Willoughby et al., 2015), we use the dimension of marital centrality to approach the relative importance respondents place or will place on aspects such as marriage or career (Hall & Willoughby, 2016; Willoughby, Hall, et al., 2015). Specifically, we asked respondents to indicate how much importance they expected to place on the following aspects of their life in the future: marriage, parenting, career, and personal leisure/hobbies. Individuals had to assign a percentage to each aspect, for a total of 100%. In the present paper, we use the marriage and parenting measures to approximate marital and parenting concerns respectively. In addition, we use the career measure to approach professional concerns. Marital concerns range from 0 to 70 (mean=16.6, SD=13.2), parenting concerns range from 0 to 90 (mean=19.7, SD=14.5) and career concerns from 0 to 90 (mean=31.6, SD=14.3).

Flourishing. We use the “Flourish” measure, translated to Spanish (VanderWeele, 2017) based on five central domains: happiness and life satisfaction, mental and physical health, meaning and purpose, character and virtue, and close social relationships. Each dimension is comprised of two separate items and the measure consists of those 10 items with a reliability coefficient of 0.87 and a mean of 6.85 (SD= 1.37).

Other measures

In addition to sex (with a dummy for women=1) and age (18 to 32), we control for other measures when predicting commitment, such as:

Religiosity. Measured using the frequency of participation in religious ceremonies, from “I do not participate in any religious act” (0) to “many times per week” (5) (mean=0.71, SD=1.1)

Previous relationships. Dummy variable that takes the value of 1 if respondent have had any previous committed or exclusive relationship.

Sexual partners. How many sexual partners have you had? 17% of the sample reported 0 partners (mean= 4.6, SD= 7.3).

Traditional markers. We created dummy variables for the traditional markers of adulthood, namely, residential (leaving home=1, children=1), educational (finishing school=1), and professional (working=1) transitions. Also, we measure financial independence by asking them what percentage of their expenses they pay by themselves from 0 to 100 (mean= 61.66, SD=34.96).

Parental conflict. We asked participants to rate the following statement: “The relationship between my parents has been happy” from 1 “Strongly agree” to 4 “Strongly disagree” (mean=2.2, SD=1).

Analytical plan

First, bivariate associations were explored by comparing young adults with high commitment and low commitment. Then, we ran confirmatory factor analysis in order to corroborate the one single factor structure of commitment. After confirming and predicting the commitment factor score, a hierarchical regression analysis was specified to compare the amount of variance explained by concerns after accounting for all other variables. Lastly, a mediation model was carried out to test the association of concerns, commitment and the five dimensions of flourishing. All analyses were conducted using STATA 16.

Results

Bivariate results

We explored the bivariate relation between commitment and all the other independent variables. We divided the sample into high and low commitment, where those who have low commitment are those below the sample mean (4.4) and high commitment, those above the sample mean. Those with low commitment were 40.6% and 59.4% had high commitment. Table 2 shows the results of the mean and proportions tests between the two groups. In terms of sociodemographic characteristics such as age, gender and religiosity, there are no significant differences between both groups, even though the high commitment group shows a slightly higher mean of religiosity. Regarding the traditional transitions to adulthood, those in the low commitment group have a higher proportion of people working full-time and with children, and a bit higher average of financial independence. However, none of these variables appear to be significantly different between groups. For the relational variables, there is a significant difference ($p < 0.05$) in terms of the proportion of people who reported having been in a previous relationship. More than half of the people in the low commitment group have had a partner before their actual relationship. In addition, those in the low commitment group have a significant higher mean number of sexual partners ($p < 0.01$). In terms of their concerns, both groups have a similar order of concerns, that is, career first, parenting second and marriage third. Nevertheless, the high commitment group has a lower mean for the career concern, and a higher mean for the marital and parenting concerns, compared to the low commitment group. These differences are significant. Lastly, the high commitment group has a significantly higher average for flourishing, compared to the low commitment group.

Table 2. Mean and proportion tests between low and high commitment groups

	Low commitment	High commitment	Pr(T > t)*
N	272	398	
Sociodemographic			
Age mean	26.6	26.1	0.156
Women %	55.2	54.0	0.774
Religiosity mean	0.7	0.7	0.610
Traditional markers			
Finishing school %	63.6	61.1	0.505
Working %	52.9	47.2	0.147
Leaving home %	58.8	58.8	0.994
Children%	10.3	7.3	0.171
Financial independence mean	63.2	60.6	0.355
Relations			
Parental conflict mean	2.3	2.2	0.111
Previous relationship %	51.5	42.5	0.022
Sexual partners mean	5.8	3.9	0.001
Career concerns mean	30.1	27.8	0.020
Marital concerns mean	17.5	20.2	0.010
Parenting concerns mean	20.5	23.5	0.007
Flourishing total mean	6.6	7.1	0.000

*p-value for the two-tailed proportion or mean difference test

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

We carried out a confirmatory factor analysis to confirm the validity of the commitment measure. We specified commitment as a latent variable constructed by five items of the scale allowing to covariate the two items referring to self-confidence (“my relationship makes me feel sure of myself” and “my relationship gives me self-confidence”) and the two items regarding the future (“my relationship gives me security for the future” and “my relationship allows me to face the future with optimism”). For those in a relationship, the general model showed good fit $\chi^2(3)=5.24$, $p=0.155$ with a comparative fit index (CFI) of 0.999 and a root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA) of 0.033. Having confirmed

commitment as a latent variable, we predicted the factor score, with a minimum value of -2.88 and a maximum of 0.53, with a standard deviation of 0.6.

Hierarchical regression model

To test the association between concerns and commitment (accounting for other relevant factors in emerging adulthood) a hierarchical regression analysis was run with commitment (factor score) as the dependent variable². Sociodemographic variables such as age, gender and religiosity were included in the first step as covariates. In the second and third step, the traditional transitions to adulthood and the relational variables were added as predictors respectively. In step 4, we added career concerns and in step 5, also family concerns (marital and parenting), to see their effect separately.

Table 3 displays the standardized results of each step of the hierarchical regression analysis predicting commitment. Sociodemographic variables do not appear to significantly affect commitment. And this first block only accounts for less than 1% of the variance of commitment. Regarding the traditional markers of adulthood (Model 2), being in a full-time job is slightly related negatively to relational commitment while leaving the parental home is positivity associated to commitment. When adding the relational variables (Model 3), parental conflict and sexual partners appear to have a significant negative effect over commitment, *ceteris paribus*. When adding career concerns in step 4, it shows a strong significant and negative effect over relational commitment. The change in the R² value is significant. However, the effect of career concerns disappears when adding family concerns. That is, in the complete model with all concerns, only marital concern is positively associated

² In order to account for probable bias when using factor scores, the same models with commitment as a composite score were also tested and results were practically equal.

with commitment. The fully adjusted model accounted for 7% of the variance in commitment.

Table 3. Standardized results from hierarchical regression

	1	2	3	4	5
Sociodemographic					
Age	-0.054	-0.121 *	-0.101	-0.107	-0.105
Woman	-0.061	-0.072	-0.064	-0.061	-0.064
Religiosity	0.008	0.002	-0.011	-0.018	-0.037
Traditional markers					
Finishing school		0.103	0.101	0.086	0.086
Working		-0.099	-0.119 *	-0.123 *	-0.123 *
Leaving home		0.136 **	0.134 **	0.123 *	0.114 *
Children		-0.006	0.000	-0.019	-0.030
Financial independence		-0.018	0.003	0.003	0.009
Other relations					
Parental conflict			-0.099 **	-0.093 *	-0.087 *
Previous relationship			-0.066	-0.061	-0.056
Sexual partners			-0.094 *	-0.061	-0.076
Career concerns					
				-0.127 **	-0.053
Marital concerns					
					0.095 *
Parenting concerns					
					0.087
Constant	0.256	0.438	0.547 **	0.751	0.485 *
R2	0.006	0.022	0.048	0.062	0.071
Change in R2		0.016	0.026	0.015	0.009
F-test	1.34	2.13	5.94 ***	10.14 **	3

*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Mediation analysis

To test the effect of career, marital and parenting concerns over flourishing and the role of commitment in this association, we specified a mediation model using structural equation modeling as shown in figure 1, including sociodemographic, transitional, and relational variables as covariates.

Figure 1. Mediation model

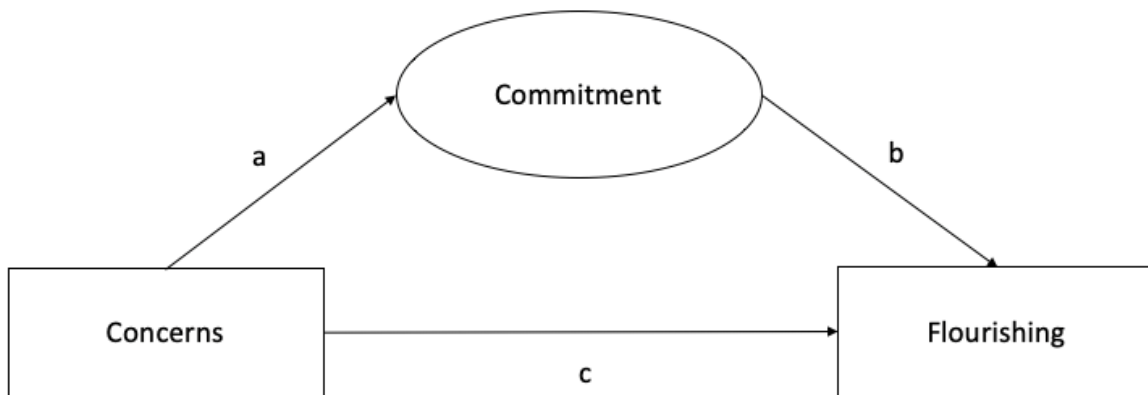


Table 4 shows the direct, indirect, and total effect of concerns and commitment on flourishing and its five dimensions separately. The direct effect of concerns on commitment is not shown in the table because results are practically invariable with respect to those shown in table 3. Commitment has a total positive significant effect on flourishing. The effect appears to be stronger in the happiness and life satisfaction (1), meaning and purpose (3) and close social relationships (5) dimensions than in the mental and physical health (2) and character and virtue (4) dimensions.

Regarding concerns, there is a positive effect of parenting concerns over flourishing, that is not mediated by commitment. This is also true for the happiness and life satisfaction (1) dimension. On the other hand, marital concerns have an indirect effect on total flourishing, mediated by commitment. However, the total effect is slightly significant ($p= 0.053$). The direct effect of parenting and marital concern is mainly through the dimension of meaning and purpose (3).

Career concerns appear to be negatively related to total flourishing but the effect is not significant for any dimension.

Table 4. Mediation model results with concerns as predictor, commitment as mediator, and the five flourishing dimensions as outcomes

	Path ^a	Flourishing total	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Direct effect							
Commitment	b	0.21 ***	0.23 ***	0.09 *	0.18 ***	0.09 *	0.18 ***
Direct effect							
Career concerns	c	-0.03	-0.05	-0.05	0.01	0.00	-0.04
Marital concerns	c	0.06	0.05	0.00	0.09 *	0.08	0.01
Parenting concerns	c	0.09 *	0.07	0.02	0.15 ***	0.05	0.05
Indirect effect							
Career concerns	a*b	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01
Marital concerns	a*b	0.02 *	0.02 *	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.02
Parenting concerns	a*b	0.02	0.02	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.02
Total effect							
Career concerns	a*b + c	-0.04	-0.06	-0.05	0.00	0.00	-0.05
Marital concerns	a*b + c	0.08	0.08	0.01	0.11 *	0.09 *	0.03
Parenting concerns	a*b + c	0.11 *	0.09 *	0.03	0.17 ***	0.06	0.06

*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Flourishing dimensions: (1) Happiness and life satisfaction; (2) mental and physical health; (3) meaning and purpose; (4) character and virtue; (5) close social relationships

^aAs shown in figure 1

Note: Standardized coefficients

Discussion

This study shows some factors associated with the commitment and flourishing of Spanish emerging adults. Specifically, it addresses the role of concerns in relational commitment and in flourishing for those emerging adults that are in a committed relationship.

First of all, it is worth noting that the hierarchy of concerns is similar for all Spanish emerging adults regardless of their commitment level, that is, career, parenting and marriage. This is consistent with research showing that many emerging adults engage more in work than in love, especially if they come from middle class families (Mayseless & Keren, 2014).

Furthermore, the transition to adulthood in Spain in the last decades has been mostly defined by economic crisis and high youth unemployment making work an especially relevant area of concern for young adults. However, our results show that marriage and parenting concerns are higher for those that are more committed in their relationship and career concerns are higher for those with low commitment. In this case, it is not clear if the more people emphasize the importance of family, the more likely they are to commit. Or if people adjust some of their concerns to their circumstances (Salmela-Aro et al., 2007).

In general, it seems that family concerns matter to relational commitment. Placing a high importance on marriage has an effect on commitment for those in a relationship. In this sense, concerns matter to commitment when they address the same life dimension. Namely, career concerns do not affect relationship commitment, supporting a segmentation model where work and love are not related (Facio & Resett, 2014).

Regarding other factors that influence commitment, literature is scattered and diverse and comes mainly from an identity development perspective (Bosma & Kunnen, 2001). In this sense, the findings here shed some light on the contextual factors that have an effect on the relational commitment of emerging adults.

When it comes to traditional transitions to adulthood, finishing education or leaving school have none significant effect on relational commitment. However, emancipation from the parental home affects positively the commitment of those in a relationship. These results suggest that traditional markers are meaningful for the development of one's identity (Benson & Furstenberg, 2006) but the "familial" transitions, such as establishing an independent household, appear more relevant when it comes to an identity commitment (Shanahan et al., 2005).

On the contrary, having a full-time job decreases the commitment in a relationship. As we have seen, competing concerns such as career and marriage do not negatively affect commitment. But in practice, dedication to work could undermine the dedication to a partner. Young adults that focus on their career may be less committed in their relationships, and research has found that only a minority of individuals make strong commitments in both love and work (Luyckx et al., 2014). In this sense, balancing work and relationships is a complex task that needs special attention when it comes to emerging adulthood (Seiffge-Krenke & Luyckx, 2014).

Parental conflict has a significant negative effect on commitment. This finding is in line with the large literature on the influence that parents' relationship has in their children's relationships (Amato & DeBoer, 2001). Specifically, social learning theory suggest that children learn their relational behavior from their caregivers' social interactions and relationships (Rhoades et al., 2012). Thus, a poor relationship between the parents translates into less committed relationships.

Number of sexual partners is associated to lower commitment within a romantic relationship. Previous research has shown that hooking up is associated with less favorable attitudes toward current relationship involvement (James-Kangal et al., 2018). This finding is consistent with the idea that emerging adults prioritize exploration over committed relationships (Arnett, 2014) and also it could signify that the availability of other "options" diminishes commitment to the actual partner.

In addition, the study contributes to the research about well-being in emerging adults by highlighting the importance of commitment for flourishing. Commitment in a relationship predicts flourishing for emerging adults mainly because of the measure's social relations component (VanderWeele, 2017). But also, as considerable research has established, identity

commitments provide individuals with a sense of direction and purpose (Berzonsky & Cieciuch, 2016) and is associated to a better adjustment in this particular life period (Nelson & Padilla-Walker, 2013). Regarding the relationship between concerns and flourishing, career concerns do not seem to matter when it comes to flourishing. Marital concern has a positive indirect effect on flourishing mediated by commitment. This result suggests that if one has a concern and is able to make a commitment to it, they will develop a more solid identity that will allow them to find a place for themselves in society (Archer, 2007b). On the other hand, parenting concern has a direct effect only over commitment. There may be a direct relation between a generative concern and a broad conception of well-being for emerging adults (Lawford & Ramey, 2015). In general, results suggest that the effect of concerns on flourishing has to do with the meaning and purpose dimension. Well-defined concerns relate to a sense of one's purpose in life, that is, in itself, valuable outcome especially during emerging adulthood (Hill et al., 2016).

Finally, a number of limitations to this study should be borne in mind. First of all, the cross-sectional nature of the data does not allow to make any causal inference and longitudinal studies are needed to understand the directionality of the effects and the complex relationship between concerns, commitment and flourishing. Regarding the self-reported variables, concerns measure was adapted from marital paradigm theory (Willoughby et al., 2015) and may have excluded other areas relevant for emerging adults. Further studies should consider open measurements to allow young people to express their ultimate concerns more accurately and to explore the process of the definition of their concerns. In addition, even though a psychosocial construct was used to approach commitment, it may not express the extent to which a person is socially and relationally engaged (Donati, 2013). Further studies are needed to address this interesting question.

In summary, this study makes important contributions to our understanding of the factors that lead emerging adults to commit and flourish, especially considering the role of their family and professional concerns of emerging adults in a relationship in large representative Spanish sample. Young adults that have a higher marital concern are more committed in their romantic relationships. In this sense, those who commit less may not have family or marriage among their ultimate concerns, but this is not insignificant to their well-being. Results suggest that some priorities are more relevant to their well-being than others.

4. Meaning of commitment and marriage: a qualitative examination

The period of youth has undergone major changes in recent decades. The time between adolescence and adulthood, which only seems to be getting longer by the year, has been defined as a distinctive life stage called *emerging adulthood* (Arnett, 2000, 2014). This approach sometimes emphasizes the subjective or rather, psychological aspect that characterizes these years (Andrew et al., 2006; Macmillan, 2006). However, this period is still often defined by sociodemographic phenomena such as leaving the parental home, forming a couple, having children or establishing a family (Benson & Furstenberg, 2006). In other words, *emerging adulthood* is still strongly defined by relational aspects and family decisions.

Although there are common patterns in most Western industrialized countries with respect to sociodemographic and family transitions (Billari & Liefbroer, 2010; Buhl & Lanz, 2007), important contextual and cultural differences exist (Tagliabue et al., 2014). In particular, it has been noted that in contexts where traditional values have historically prevailed, where there has been a strong increase in gender equity in individual institutions such as the labor market but persistent low levels of gender equity within the family (McDonald, 2000), there has been a strong delay in family transitions –marriage and parenting. This is the case in Spain and other Southern European countries, characterized by high age at first marriage and very low fertility rates.

Several theoretical explanations have attempted to address cultural, social and economic changes involved in these phenomena. For example, individualization theory emphasizes that young people today must construct their biography in highly uncertain contexts (Woodman, 2009), plagued by structural obstacles such as economic instability, which might prevent them from realizing their life projects.

The Spanish context is particularly perplexing: on the one hand, family is still seen as the most relevant social institution, the one they most highly value and resort to in case of need (González-Anleo & López-Ruiz, 2017); on the other hand, young people are taking longer to make family transitions themselves (establish their own household, commit to a partner). To shed light on this apparent contradiction, we explore the beliefs and priorities of young people; these have not been deeply considered in prior literature.

This study aims to qualitatively explore commitment and marriage in Spanish emerging adults, to identify key elements underlying the beliefs of youth, and how they make sense of their own options and life decisions. Knowing what matters to youth and the meanings they attribute to commitment or marriage, in this cultural crossroad between tradition and modernity in Spain, can help us clarify cultural discourses and obstacles present in this life period, as they experience them.

Theoretical framework

Relationship commitment during emerging adulthood

In emerging adulthood, romantic relationships generally refer to a particular bond characterized by higher dedication, intensity, specific expressions of affection and initiation in sexual encounters (Collins et al., 2009). The possibilities to establish a relationship may vary in terms of commitment, shared experiences, frequency, duration, feelings involved or subjective experience. Romantic relationships in emerging adulthood could mean hook-ups, non-exclusive relationship, casual dating, long-term commitment, marriage, cohabitation, among others arrangements. In this sense, the idea of romantic relationships in contemporary societies is connected, on the one hand, to strong emotions and feelings, and on the other, to the possibility of choosing within a wider range of options. Although diverse arrangements

are chosen, most emerging adults consider decisions about partnering and committing to an exclusive long-term relationship during this life period (Carroll et al., 2007).

Thus, commitment becomes one of the central elements defining youth romantic relationships, and its meaning has been found to be dynamic, depending on the context of the relationship (Konstam et al., 2019). Relationship commitment is a key predictor of relationship quality (Willoughby, 2014) and well-being for emerging adults (Schwartz et al., 2015).

Commitment has been conceptualized in different forms and its varying meanings have been explored from different approaches (Rhoades et al., 2010; Rusbult et al., 2001). The social structures that make commitment desirable or more available to some people than others have been studied from a sociological perspective (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Illouz, 2012). Moreover, one of the most common focus in youth studies establishes that young adults at this stage are supposed to engage in exploration in the romantic domain. According to a psychosocial perspective, people establish their relational identities through the interplay between exploration and commitment (Marcia, 1988; Schwartz, 2001). Following this theory and if exploration is a distinctive trait of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000), low commitment in relationships is expected. In addition, some research has documented the difficulty of establishing committed relationships in emerging adulthood, due to the uncertainties and the dilemmas young adults face in this time period, such as establishing a professional career that might not be compatible with the plans of a partner (Shulman & Connolly, 2013).

However, in the Spanish context, the majority of young adults are in a committed relationship. According to a study of the *Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas* (CIS, 2021), 51.8% of young people between 18 and 24 years old are in a relationship. From 25 to 34, 74% reports maintaining an affective and sexual relationship with a person with whom they

share a common project. In this last group, more than half have been together for more than 4 years. In Spain long-term, committed relationships are not rare during emerging adulthood. What is increasingly rare is that these relationships lead to marriage. Although marriage is still a widespread practice, people marry much less frequently and, if they do, they do so later in life.

Marriage trends in Spain

The majority of Spanish young people expect to live in some kind of partnership, and more than half expect to marry someday (González-Anleo & López-Ruiz, 2017). But life as a couple has experienced important shifts. A few years ago, marriage was the most common way to leave home and start a family. Nowadays, it is becoming a less common path to family formation, especially for emerging adults. Spain's mean age at first marriage is among the highest in the European union. People enter their first marriage, on average, at age of 39.5 and 36.7 for men and women respectively (INE, 2021). It also has one of the lowest marriage and fertility rates in Europe.

During emerging adulthood, almost no one enters marriage, and most do so after a period of cohabitation. Cohabitation was not as widespread in Spain as in other European countries but we have seen a rapid increase in the prevalence of couples living together (Dominguez-Folgueras & Castro-Martin, 2013), and not only as a previous step to marriage but as its alternative (Di Giulio et al., 2019). However, it is not clear if marriage and cohabitation have become exchangeable in terms of expectations. In Spain, cohabitation is not regulated at the national level but economic and legal differences exist between marriage and cohabitation, whether registered as a civil union or not.

Another change in family trends has been the increase in separations and divorce. Spain has legally approved divorce in 1980 but research suggest that the so-called Express Divorce Law, passed in 2005, was positively associated with divorce rates in the short run (Jiménez-Rubio et al., 2016). There is also evidence that the considerable simplification of divorce filling procedures affect negatively marriage (Stevenson, 2007).

The secularization process in Spain have also affected family transitions. Around 58% of the population identify themselves as catholic, but of all the religious people more than half never or almost never assist to religious services. It is among the countries with more liberal family-related legislation and nowadays, almost all marriages are not religious (Dominguez-Folgueras & Castro-Martin, 2013). In addition, this really strong secularization process has pushed marriage out of the public discourse. Despite the functionality and the high appreciation of the family, it does not exist in the public agenda (Torres, 2015). In this sense, it is noteworthy that the research about marriage in emerging adulthood in Spain is scarce.

Sociological approaches

These tendencies find a place within the emerging adulthood framework (Arnett, 2000; Reifman, 2011). Apparently, the idea of a long-term commitment, starting a family, having children is incompatible with a stage of exploration, instability, and focus of the self. However, the idea of “emerging adulthood” is based on the premise that adulthood as a life stage is increasingly understood in psychological terms. And this notion might be ignoring social structural obstacles during this prolonged transition to adulthood (Côté, 2014). Some research has highlighted that “the distinction between objective and subjective, between social and psychological dimensions is not particularly useful as it fails to consider the complex ways in which role transitions are enacted and interpreted in the dynamic processes

that characterize the transition to adulthood” (Macmillan, 2006, p. 25). In this sense, some other sociological explanations are to be considered when approaching romantic commitment and marriage in young adulthood.

These rapid cultural changes, in terms of family and partnership formation, have been occurring in Spain as in most western countries. Concepts such as post materialism, democratization or deinstitutionalization have been developed to explain these trends (Álvarez-Miranda, 2020), and many times they are even used interchangeably, because they are strongly intertwined. Some of these theories include the second demographic transition (SDT), deinstitutionalization of marriage, individualization and pure relationships. And a focus on structural, economic constraints have also prevailed.

Second demographic transition

The theory of the second demographic transition has been developed to explain demographic changes such as low fertility and increasing diversity of union types since 1986 (Lesthaeghe, 2014). After several revolutions such as the contraceptive and sexual revolution together with the rising women education and employment levels, postponement of partnership and fertility has been the overall outcome in western societies. SDT theory, rather than a purely descriptive analysis of demographic behaviors, emphasizes the ideological changes and the new approach to marriage centered on the individual and his or her self-realization. One of the mechanisms to explain these trends is that, as population become wealthier and more educated, their attention shift from basic needs to more self-realization individual values, closely related to “post-materialism” theory (Inglehart, 1990).

Even though this theory has been criticized and the link between post-material values and family changes has not found consistent empirical support (Zaidi & Morgan, 2017), SDT is

useful as the cultural component allows to explain and predict these tendencies of family formation.

Individualization

Another common explanation of these changes that goes hand in hand with the SDT theory, has to do with the process of modernization. For (Beck-Gernsheim & Beck, 2003), the institutions of modern society are oriented to the individual and not to the group. In this sense, ‘individualization’ is a term for a “sociological phenomenon, imposed on people by institutions, that has ambiguous and difficult to predict effects on attitudes” (Woodman, 2009). On the one hand, individualization opens up choice but at the same time it limits the possibility of making choices, removing external references and increasing risk. This individualization process does not necessarily mean that agency is empowered, but that institutions such as the family, employment and community potentially become more fragmented, and personal life comes to appear less predictable (Furlong et al., 2011).

Under individualized conditions, individuals are forced to seek justifications for their actions within themselves. This mechanism has been defined as “internal reference”(Beck-Gernsheim & Beck, 2003), affecting behavior without considering other external entities, such as the others, social expectations or norms, religion (Strandell, 2018). Individuals are in charge of the process of evaluating and choosing a partner and a partnership type. Also, life conditions must be renegotiated in each case.

Hand in hand with the theory of individualization, some sociologists have focused on the relationships that arise in these circumstances. For example, Bauman talks about the frailty that characterizes human bonds in contemporary societies and the difficulty of establishing permanent commitments in such changing circumstances (Bauman, 2013). Giddens, on the other hand, coined the term “pure relationship” to describe relationships that are not anchored

in any external conditions of social or economic life and that exists for their own sake (Giddens, 1991). Pure relationship cannot exist without reciprocity and trust, and commitment has a central role to play. A person only commits to another person, for whatever reason, when he or she decides so.

Deinstitutionalization

These phenomena have led some researchers to argue that the social norms regulating behavior within marriage have lost their strength (Cherlin, 2004). According to this theory and similar to the individualization approach, marriage success is now based on emotional satisfaction and subjective perceptions instead of social rules or expectations. Some examples to support this argument include cohabitation, same sex marriage and the rising number of children outside marriage.

Although this thesis has had a lot of impact in family studies, others have argued that all these alternative forms do not imply a loosening of the norms that marriage involves. If marriage was deinstitutionalized, “we would see great variation in how people acted when married and thought about marriage” (Lauer & Yodanis, 2010). However, all these trends represent other forms to organize relationships but not deep changes in the institution of marriage. Actually, they would imply its recognition.

To accurately conceptualize these changes, an exploration of the meanings, beliefs and discourses around marriage is called for. It can be illuminating to explore whether marriage as a social institution still has a shared meaning and common expectations, and how commitment is understood within marriage, among today’s youth.

Marital paradigm theory

According to symbolic interactionism, the way people think about and define the institution of marriage has implications for behavior regarding that institution (Hall, 2006), suggesting

also that one's individual set of beliefs is, in part, a product of larger cultural interpretations. In this sense, marital attitudes are defined as the individual meaning and expectations an individual holds toward both marriage in general and their own future marital relationship (Willoughby, 2010).

Following this theory, Willoughby et al. have developed a framework that aims to describe the entirety of one's belief system regarding marriage (Willoughby et al., 2015). In this conceptual model, the authors have distinguished two main dimensions: beliefs about getting married, such as the salience (the importance of marriage and marrying), timing (ideal age at marriage) or the context (e.g. what economic context marital transitions should occur within). And beliefs about being married, such as beliefs about the permanence (e.g. under what circumstances marriages can be dissolved), the process (e.g. gender roles within a marriage), and the centrality (the relative importance one places on marriage). Even though each person holds a marital paradigm, and regardless of one's personal predisposition toward marriage, emerging adults encounter situations that invoke a specific symbolic meaning of marriage, sometimes about getting married and sometimes about being married.

Marital Paradigm Theory proposes that, in emerging adulthood, beliefs about marriage may be of particular importance affecting many short-term behaviors and long-term decisions (Willoughby & Carroll, 2016), such as getting someone to commit in a relationship. And these behaviors have consequences for well-being.

Economic factors

All of these cultural and social explanations encompass in some way structural conditions. However, this decline or postponement in committed relationships and marriage has been directly attributed to a lack of favorable economic conditions, rising unemployment or precarious employment conditions in the youth labor market. For example, research has

found a negative effect of rising house prices on the probability of marriage. In Spain after 2005, the housing boom and subsequent crash in Spain had significant consequences on family formation (González-Val, 2022). Marriage, closely linked to the idea of starting a family and having children, is still culturally associated with solid financial basis. In addition, weddings have become more prominent and expensive over recent decades (Carter & Duncan, 2017).

Even though it is true that Spain has suffered economic crisis that has affected especially young population (García & Echaves, 2017), this may not explain entirely these trends. First, following individualization theory, commitment should not be anchored in any external conditions. Thus, economic factors would not be a significant constraint to establish a partnership. Second, this approach assumes that this social and economic constraints prevent the achievement of certain goals, previously and reflexively defined. In order to know the degree of hindrance or limitation given by the economic and social structures, we must know what matters most to them, i.e. their life priorities or ultimate concerns (Archer, 2000, 2003). Exploring the personal meaning young people place on marriage and commitment can help to gain insight into their concerns and some of the structural obstacles they face. Considering that “no one can have an ultimate concern and fail to do something about it” (Archer, 2007b), if people reflexively define their concerns in relation to their social circumstances, they will be aware of some structural limitations. The importance attributed to these aspects can shed light on cultural discourses about marriage and commitment and help design policies and interventions aimed at better helping young people reach their expectations and life goals.

Current study

The main aim of this study is to delve into the meanings and discourses around marriage and commitment of Spanish emerging adults, in order to understand some of the motivations and personal concerns behind the sociodemographic trends we observe in this particular social context. Also, to identify elements of the hegemonic social explanations behind the lack of commitment, relationship dissolution and inability or unwillingness to commit in the long-term through the social institution of marriage.

Methods

Study Design

A qualitative descriptive design (Sandelowski, 2010) was used to generate an accurate and in-depth account of how young people (ages 18 to 32) perceive relationships, specifically their conceptions about commitment and marriage. This type of design is especially suited to research situations where researchers want to use a low level of interpretation of the events studied (Sáinz et al., 2019), focuses on discovering the nature of the specific events under study (Stanley, 2016). Therefore, this approach enabled us to ensure descriptive validity (Maxwell, 1992), that is, to gain an accurate understanding of participants' thoughts and beliefs, expressed in their own words and, minimizing researcher bias. Furthermore, the adoption of a qualitative descriptive approach was consistent with the primary goal of describing and understanding discourses, its meanings and subjective perceptions conveyed by the participants.

Sample

This study is part of a larger data set exploring emerging adulthood. After collecting a quantitative representative sample of 1,200 Spanish emerging adults from ages 18 to 32, we

asked if they were willing to participate in an online interview. Among those who agreed to participate (53%), we created three age groups, considering three key stages of emerging adulthood: the transition to higher education or completion of studies (18 to 20), the period after completing one's education, a period of important decision-making in the relational and occupational spheres (25 to 28) and one around what is considered by many (Nelson, 2021) the end of the period (30 to 32). In this sense, purposeful sampling was used, in order to obtain cases deemed rich in information for the purpose of saturating the data. To be able to observe nuances that correspond to each stage, we considered three different type of variables according to each age group.

For the first group (ages 18 to 20) we selected people with high and low indecision. As it is a decisive stage, due to the breadth of options about continuing their studies, what to study or what to do in the coming years, we focused on the first and last quartiles in the Career Decision-making Difficulties Questionnaire (Lozano, 2007), which respondents had completed in the quantitative part of the study. For the second group (ages 25-28), we considered their relational status (they had to reported being in a relationship), relational identity, and occupational identity according to the U-MICS scale (Crocetti et al., 2008) and we focused on four profiles, those who had "achieved" some sense of identity in both areas, those who had a "diffuse" sense of identity in both areas, and those who were high in one domain and low in the other. We focused on this to capture the heterogeneity of exploration and commitment in these two key life-stage domains of work and family (Luyckx et al., 2014; Vosylis et al., 2018). Lastly, for the older group, we selected them according to their identity resolution, using the ISRI scale (Côté, 2016). That is, we selected the ones who considered themselves adults (high in adult and social identity) and those with low adult and social

identity. Our final sample consists of 14 Spanish women and 15 Spanish men from diverse sociodemographic backgrounds but most of them in a committed relationship, divided in three age groups: 8 from 18 to 20, 13 from 25 to 28 and 8 from 30 to 32, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive characteristics of the sample

	Total
Sample	29
Sex	
Women	14
Men	15
Relationship status	
Single	5
In a relationship*	23
Married	1
Age	
18-20	8
25-28	13
30-32	8

*Formally dating, cohabiting or engaged

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were developed by the authors, as shown in the Appendix 2, and conducted by an external group of professionals in July of 2021. We obtained audio recording of 30 participants, but one of them was incorrectly recorded, so only 29 are used in our analysis. All interviews were conducted in Spanish, and online, which allowed interviewing people from various parts of the country; they lasted around 45-60 min. Interviews were transcribed by research assistants and revised by two members of the research team. The interview covered topics such as adult identity, maturity, priorities, indecision, and relationships. In this article, we focus on the relationship section. Follow-up prompts were

used to allow interviewees to expand on their answers and ensure interviewers got the most information about all intended topics. Before the interviews, we obtain informed consent and authorization to record responses. All methods were approved by the University of Navarra Ethics Board.

Data analysis

Framework analysis was used for data management (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). The overall objective of this approach is “to identify, describe, and interpret key patterns within and across cases of and themes within the phenomenon of interest” (Goldsmith, 2021). This method of qualitative data analysis has been selected mainly due to the nature of the data and the research questions. As Ritchie and Spencer (1994) established, one of the types of questions that can be helpfully addressed by framework analysis are contextual. That is, questions with the aim of identifying the form and nature of what exists. Also, because, “sitting within the family of broadly ‘thematic’ approaches, it provides a flexible but structured approach to data management and data analysis; which is especially suitable for studies where there is a specific research focus, a relatively large amount of qualitative data that needs to be managed, and where a team is working together on the process of data analysis” (Midgley et al., 2015). The analysis was supported by the NVivo 22 qualitative software package.

Considering the iterative and collaborative process of framework analysis, the study was supported by an experienced academic in qualitative analysis (SC). We followed the five stages of Framework Analysis, as outlined by Ritchie and Spencer (1994):

- i. Familiarizing ourselves with the data, through listening to interviews, reading transcripts, and data analysis meetings;

- ii. Developing a framework through which our data could be organized;
- iii. Indexing the data, through systematically coding each ‘chunk’ of text from the transcripts to one (or more) of the categories in the framework;
- iv. Charting the data which involves summarizing the data in each category for each participant into a table;
- v. Mapping and interpretation (the analytic phase of data analysis).

We followed recommendations indicating that the initial identification of a priori issues to guide category development, followed by testing out the categories on a proportion of the data set with the aim of revising them, in light of emergent data-driven issues (Parkinson et al., 2016) was a good process in developing a framework. Researchers listened to interviews, in order to familiarize themselves with the data (stage one). Moreover, on this point, two researchers (CS and SC) applied, separately, descriptive coding to each transcript in which general topics were identified. After a few meetings, we mixed thematic codification with theoretical categories in order to develop the initial framework (stage two). To further refinement of the framework, we revised transcriptions with the initial coding list (half the data set by each researcher and discuss the coding process). Once all of the interviews had been coded to the framework (stages three and four), a stable and robust framework had been developed. Then, the members of the team who coded data (CS and SC) individually explored the data, and discussed them looking for similarities, differences, and “patterns of meaning” (Smith et al., 2009). At this point, from a deductive approach, we tested how theory fitted with our emerging themes (stage five). This led to further refining of our themes, which were after discussed with others team members, in order to test the credibility and the clarity of the interpretation, thereby increasing our confidence in the robustness of our thematic

structure to understand and represent the young discourse. Table 2 shows the initial categories and the final framework, after all the process.

Table 2. Framework identification stages

Initial framework	Final framework
Commitment	Commitment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationship • Rules, common framework • Union • External factors • Take a step • Inertia, time • Individual decision • Feelings and happiness • Others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) What does commitment mean? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationship dynamics b) What does it take to commit? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exogenous factors • Internal reference
Marriage	Marriage
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nothing • A piece of paper • Union and stability • Symbol or social meaning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Being married b) Getting married c) Paper <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meaningless • Meaningful

Results

Commitment

When talking about commitment, we approached two main themes in the interviews: what does commitment mean and what does it take to commit. If they said they were in a relationship, we asked them to describe their commitment and how did they make the decision to commit. Three main aspects of commitment were identified using framework analysis: relationship dynamics, exogenous factors and internal reference.

What commitment means: relationship dynamics

When we asked to define commitment in a relationship in general, almost all of the participants (25) described dynamics of a couple's relationship, such as respect, support, and "being there". Namely, they didn't seem to distinguish between being committed and being in a relationship. Rather it seemed that being in a relationship is almost completely intertwined with their understanding of being committed, being in a couple implies a sort of commitment. For example, for this young woman commitment is:

"Act like... like you should, like a couple. As soon as you are with a partner, you have to stop doing other things. Like, to flirt and go with other boys. That's what I mean." (Group 1, woman #28, in a relationship)

However, it is not only that commitment is implicit in a relationship but it also implies certain rules defined by both of the partners.

"I believe that my commitment... it is inherent to this relationship. (...) I cannot conceive relationships without a commitment on the part of both of us, really. For me a commitment is a matter of trust, above all. And commitment also for me is to establish a framework, some rules and comply with them." (Group 2, woman #25, in a relationship)

In this sense, commitment meant following a certain agreement, not necessarily explicit:

"In a relationship, there are some rules that... Let's see, they're not rules, they're not strict, but that's it. It is like a rule of living together and each couple, in the end, adapts them to what they like and to what they understand that they are capable of accepting and complying." (Group 2, man #29, in a relationship)

More than half of the participants talked about commitment as being there for their partners, giving each other support and respect.

“Commitment for me is above all respect. And knowing that I can trust that person. Respect and trust. Because in the end what prevails is the most important thing, which is that we are well, we love each other and we have that trust.” (Group 3, woman #27, in a relationship)

Other topics that came out less often in this theme were about communication and taking decisions together. However, it is worth noticing that, in terms of duration, commitment is assumed to exist as long as they are together, not explicitly related to lasting or staying for life. For example, this young man expressed quite tellingly the ambiguous sense of permanence most attach to their relational commitments:

“not thinking that... that this will be another relationship, but that... you have to be in the relationship, not necessarily thinking that it will be for the rest of your life, but... but being aware that... why not? Why am I not going to be with that person all my life?” (Group 2, man #24, in a relationship)

On the other hand, only the one married man explicitly mentioned that commitment was linked to the idea of life-long duration:

“having enough confidence in the other person that you are going to be able to share the rest of your life.” (Group 2, man #21, married)

What does it take

Exogenous factors

When discussing factors that lead to one’s commitment to a relationship, one type of dynamics that emerged was not directly dependent on the subject. That is, commitment was seen as a more gradual and unconscious process than a decision one makes. For example, this young man one day realized that he was committed in his relationship, and that this was what he wanted:

“Like, it was not a decision I made. It was just something that suddenly I said ‘well I am committed to this girl’. I mean, no... she's who I want... one day I said, I was thinking about it and I said ‘she's who I want to spend the rest of my life with’. No, I didn't realize how I got there. I mean, that was not a decision that I made. I just said ‘this is what I want’. (Group 1, man #5, in a relationship).

For this woman, the reason to commit was:

“because everything happened that way. It really was something that happened. Me, well, it wasn't something I was looking for because I still considered myself very young, but... well, it was something that gradually occurred.” (Group 2, woman #22, in a relationship).

Around eight people mention that they did not make the decision, that it just happened to them or simply a matter of time. That to make a commitment you need time to know the other person or that at some point you just know. Also, one participant said that the time apart was a decisive factor to commit in his relationship. And another mention something about knowing her partner's family.

Just a couple of them mentioned something about income or being able to buy a house, but not directly as a matter of commitment but more about being engaged³.

Internal reference

On the other hand, the majority of the interviewees (22), pointed out internal factors that are needed to commit or that led them to commit in their relationships. These internal factors varied from feelings, happiness, or wants. Specifically, half of them were directly related to feelings such as happiness, satisfaction, comfort. The other half of the respondents that enter this category of internal reference talked more about knowing what they wanted, deciding,

³ In Spanish, there's no distinction between being committed and being engaged.

being in a good point in their life, or that the relationship gave them something. All of these responses had in common that commitment was something merely subjective, that arose from oneself, something that one wants or pursues for its own sake. However, some of them emphasized that to commit you need to care about it, to know what you want, like a personal concern. But even these concerns, or preferences, were related to the feelings the relationship had on them.

For instance, this man said that what it takes to commit in a relationship was:

"Well, I wanted it. Like, I wanted to commit. I had already enjoyed my youth and I believed that I did not need to meet new girls. Personally, I wanted to have a stable relationship (...) You have to assess if you're happy and if happiness comes, in part, from that relationship. If so, then continue." (Group 1, man #10, in a relationship)

Or according to this woman, she made the decision to commit based on how she felt:

"Because I really was very comfortable. I mean, it was a matter of comfort and also a matter of... this person making me happy (...)"

But when asking her what is needed to commit she said that:

"You have to know exactly what you want and what you need at that moment..." (Group 2, woman #25, in a relationship).

Although most participants referred to themselves at some point when talking about commitment, proportionally, more women than men emphasized this more internal or subjective aspect that is needed to commit in a relationship, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. References proportions according to sex, relational status and age group

	<i>Total</i> <i>n=29</i>	<i>Women</i> <i>n=14</i>	<i>Men</i> <i>n=15</i>	<i>Single</i> <i>n=5</i>	<i>Relation</i> <i>n=23</i>	<i>Married</i> <i>n=1</i>	<i>18-20</i> <i>n=8</i>	<i>25-28</i> <i>n=13</i>	<i>30-32</i> <i>n=8</i>
What does commitment mean									
Relationship dynamics (e.g. being there)	86.2	85.7	86.7	100	82.6	100	87.5	100	62.5
What does it take to commit?									
Exogenous factors (e.g. it happens)	44.8	50	40	0	56.6	0	37.5	38.5	62.5
Internal reference (e.g. It made me happy)	72.4	92.9	53.3	60	78.3	0	75	76.9	62.5
<i>Marriage</i>									
Being married	41.4	35.7	46.7	40	39.1	100	25	38.5	62.5
Getting married	20.7	21.4	20	20	21.7	0	25	23.1	12.5
Paper									
Meaningless bureaucracy	27.6	35.7	20	0	34.8	0	12.5	23.1	50
Meaningful symbol	31	50	13.3	40	30.4	0	37.5	30.8	25

Marriage

After some questions about relationships and commitment, we directly asked them what marriage means to them and responses were generally straightforward. During the second step of the framework analysis, first we identified some aspects of marriage that were constantly emerging, such as the legal aspect or the symbolism. However, it seemed to us that some responses referred to marriage as a specific day or event, and others spoke of marriage as something more stable or enduring over time. It is for this reason, and considering marital paradigm theory (Willoughby et al., 2015), that we distinguished two types of

meanings to build the final framework: one that captures the meaning of being married and the other that refers to the act itself of getting married. In addition to this distinction, a recurring theme was whether marriage is "just a piece of paper." For some, this piece of paper carries certain implications or symbolizes something else, while for others it is just a piece of paper without much importance. We used these four themes (being married, getting married, a meaningless bureaucracy, and a meaningful symbol) to build the framework to analyze marriage meanings; some responses applied to more than one category.

Being married

7 men and 5 women talked about marriage as being together, as a greater union. These participants said that marriage was about two people deciding to be together, supporting each other and sharing goals or having things in common, more or less permanently or at least stably. And it does not necessarily imply a wedding:

Well, I'm not exactly married to him. But then I always tell him that we are practically married. We have been together for 10 years, 8-9 years now. So, I'm already married to him. Maybe he has not put the ring on me and we have not had a wedding. We haven't, but I'm practically married to him. So, I think that marriage is like... a commitment. (Group 2, woman #19, in a relationship)

Getting married

On the other hand, six persons alluded to a specific day or ceremony, without mentioning a greater meaning outside of this act. For these respondents, marriage is more like a celebration that one can or cannot do and it does not make much difference.

For example, this young man said that:

Well, it's a... traditional way, but also pretty and... I don't give it too much importance. Yes, it is true that it is important because it is a day... well, it is like a couple's day, right? It's like putting the seal and... celebrating with your loved ones and hers. A ceremony at the end is an act of union. And well, in that sense, you look forward to it, right? (Group 1, man #10, in a relationship)

A paper without meaning

Around 8 participants emphasize the legal aspect of marriage but in a dismissive way –as a meaningless bureaucracy. They do not consider that marriage makes any real difference, other than signing a piece of paper. In this sense, it is unnecessary for a couple.

“Well, practically a piece of paper, nothing more. Because I don't see the difference between being married and not being married, because for practical purposes you do exactly the same thing. So, you get married... I'm not talking about the event, the wedding itself, which you can do because you feel like having a wedding and celebrating it and so on. But about the marriage itself, I don't find any difference other than the legal one” (Group 2, woman #17, in a relationship)

A paper with meaning or a symbol

Some of the people that also highlighted the legal aspects of marriage, did mention some benefits associated with it, such as inheritance, taxes, childbearing, social recognition, etc. Respondents did not seem to know exactly what legal implications it has, but there is some perception that it brings some kind of value –as a meaningful symbol.

“Well... this is going to be very political, but I think that the only reason I really want to get married is that if something happens to me, my partner has the right to claim my part of the house, that it is also his house... That is to say, for me a marriage is not really something

more than an administrative procedure. So that... at the legal level, in front of the tax authorities or whoever, it is very clear that I have my life linked to this person and that if anything happens to me, this person has this power of decision, of responsibility over me really. That's what it is for me, isn't it? That trust of saying ok, I trust you to the point of saying that, as an individual, if something happens to me tomorrow, you are going to be in charge, not my parents, I hand over to you that... to be my guardian in that case.” (Group 2, woman #25, in a relationship).

In this category, some people mention a symbol associated to marriage, like a commitment or a social value:

“Tradition. Marriage is a tradition. It's not more than a piece of paper that says that you have married a person, that you are together... But, whatever you do, it has that value as a couple, right? Of wanting to be with each other for life.” (Group 1, woman #28, in a relationship).

Discussion

Social expectations around relationships and marriage have deeply changed in most western societies (Willoughby & James, 2017). Emerging adults are not expected to commit in a relationship, let alone to get married during this life period. Actually, some theorists have proposed a transitional emerging adult romantic stage, occupied by specific developmental life tasks such as set and pursue individual life plans (Shulman & Connolly, 2013). But this approach fails to consider that in countries like Spain, long-term committed relationships are a reality for most emerging adults. This fact is, in part, due to their understanding of what does a committed relationship entail and due to the postponement or rejection of marriage.

The decline of marriage and fertility, described by the SDT and explained by a cultural shift to individual values, represents a complex mixture of meanings, personal circumstances, and social structures. This study has identified some of these factors that can apply to the Spanish context, by qualitatively exploring the meanings of marriage and commitment among emerging adults.

First of all, regarding the meaning of commitment, the dynamics that emerged the most point to two main elements of individualization theory: pure relationships and internal reference. Specifically, commitment is seen as something inherent to the relationship, replacing any kind of external anchors. That is, relationships exist for their own sake and depend absolutely on reciprocal commitment, as a matter of trust. These elements suggest that the "pure relationship" conceptualization accurately describes the processes underlying romantic relationships for Spanish emerging adults. This type of relationships presupposes commitment that, in turn, has to be understood as a "phenomenon of the internally referential system" (Giddens, 1991).

In this sense, following individualization theory, "internal reference" is proposed as the main mechanism that links individualized values with commitment. As some argue, an internal reference *disembeds* individuals from social contexts by attributing actions to internal factors, such as desires, goals, emotions, as opposed to structural or social factors (Beck-Gernsheim & Beck, 2003; Strandell, 2018). And even though these mechanisms have been highlighted in highly individualized social contexts, like in Sweden (Ohlsson-Wijk et al., 2022; Strandell, 2018), they also seems to be present in Spanish culture.

However, another somewhat contradictory discourse emerged, emphasizing exogenous factors that led someone to commit. But this "inertia" can also respond in some way to the individualization theory, if we consider that this exogenous force is "in significant part driven

by a divestment to the individual of the responsibility for managing the partial and contradictory demands made by institutional change and social desynchronization” (Woodman & Vanderharst, 2021).

On the other hand, economic constraints (one of the most common approaches in the literature) does not seem to hold up when it comes to discourses about commitment. Namely, young adults do not seem to consider economic conditions as relevant to commit or not to a relationship. Furthermore, these elements did not come up explicitly when we talked about marriage either, just as a consideration maybe for family formation (more linked to the idea of parenthood). But for these young people, if one is mature or responsible enough to commit or get married, economic conditions should not be an impediment, if commitment is what one really wants. Even though structural factors do matter (Moreno, 2012), commitment has to do more with knowing what one wants and cares about. In this sense, their concerns are to be considered when studying relationships. That is, something that matters to them and leads them to commit (Archer 2003, 2007). In terms of concerns, marriage did not emerge as an explicit concern for any emerging adult. Rather, they talked about marriage as something distant and external, not as a personal project or concern.

Results also suggest that Marital Paradigm theory is a useful framework to approach marital attitudes and beliefs in the Spanish context, by acknowledging that one’s marital paradigm is composed of separate beliefs regarding getting married and being married. And that some meanings emerge in concrete situations. Also, this theory, based on symbolic interactionism, proposes that one’s marital paradigm is, in part, product of larger cultural interpretations of marriage (Willoughby et al., 2015). As such, these responses shed light on some cultural discourses around marriage. Particularly, the expression of “a piece of paper” seem to represent a generalized understanding of marriage, that has focused on the legal institution

more than their social meaning. This is consistent with previous research highlighting the legal-practical reasons people associate with marrying, although they are not entirely known to them (Strandell, 2018; Willoughby & James, 2017).

In this sense, results also partially support the deinstitutionalization theory (Cherlin, 2004; Lauer & Yodanis, 2010) because many young adults did not seem to distinguish between marriage or cohabitation. That is, apart from the ceremony or a legal aspect, almost no participant highlighted any distinctive element of marriage in terms of the relationship. Regarding being married, just 7 people mentioned something about a greater union, but there was little explicit conviction of permanence or stability (Leonhardt et al., 2020). Even though Spain has a history of traditional and family values (Moreno Mínguez, 2021), the institution of marriage may be experiencing radical changes and societal expectations associated with it may be weakening.

We did not find any significant difference in terms of age, relational status, or sex. Only the difference between men and women regarding the centrality of the internal reference as a mechanism to commit stands out. Almost all the women underlined this aspect while only half of men mentioned it directly. As “women have been enjoined both by feminism and by therapy to clarify their values and preferences and to build relationships that conform to and suit those values” (Illouz, 2008), the internal reference takes a central role when it comes to commit.

In general, commitment and marriage were not issues directly related to each other. Only a couple of people mention explicitly that marriage was about commitment. But for these Spanish young adults, commitment had nothing to do with the idea of marriage.

In conclusion, many of the main elements of the most common approaches to sociodemographic and relationship changes in western societies can be applied to the Spanish

context, with some particularities. Specifically, individualization and deinstitutionalization of marriage may be phenomena affecting emerging adults in Spain. But economic and structural factors do not represent salient elements in young people discourses when thinking about romantic relationships. And marriage doesn't have a very clear place in their concerns and life plans.

Even though these findings make relevant contributions to relationships and family studies, some limitations must be considered. First, although the diversity of the sample can be a strength, the selection based on different quantitative variables as well as the focus on people who were in a relationship may affect some of the findings. In addition, the sample size limits the scope of the results and the generalization of the conclusions. Furthermore, given the diversity of the country, future research should consider local contexts or communities with other shared cultural traits. Limitations of framework analysis should also be noted (Parkinson et al., 2016). However, a qualitative exploration of the meanings of commitment and marriage for young Spaniards enriches the understanding of major sociodemographic trends that particularly mark this period of life in this social context.

5. Conclusion

As each chapter presents its own discussion, the purpose of this last section is to present a general conclusion, highlighting the particular ideas and contributions of each study, and then to point out the general implications and limitations of this thesis. In line with the objectives of this research, three studies were conducted to explore in a comprehensive manner, using both quantitative and qualitative methods, the concerns, beliefs and meanings surrounding marriage and its relationship to commitment as a fundamental part of young people's individual and relational well-being.

This exploration becomes necessary as a way of integrating two fundamental aspects of sociological theory, especially in the study of youth and in these sociodemographic phenomena: structure and agency. By looking at the concerns and beliefs of young people, we observe not only the objective obstacles they face in trying to realize their personal and family projects. But we can also identify how these beliefs and meanings are affected by the context.

In the first study, a great heterogeneity of marital beliefs was found among young Spaniards. In particular, six marital paradigm groups presented differences regarding the meaning of marriage and the importance attributed to this and other aspects of life. In this sense, an intrinsic relationship between marital beliefs and both family and professional concerns was confirmed.

On the other hand, it seems that the delay or rejection of marriage among young Spaniards is attributed in an important way to the context. That is, most young adults emphasize economic and structural conditions as a very important factor that seems to affect the order of their concerns. Another finding is that in terms of beliefs, concerns and implications, important differences between men and women emerge. Not only do women generally show greater

indifference to marriage in general, but men seem to be more influenced in their behaviors by these more familiar orientations.

In the second study, the association between concerns and other social factors with relational commitment was explored, and their relationship with flourishing. First of all, regardless of their commitment level, in general the order of concern of Spanish young adults is similar: career, parenting and marriage. However, those who are more committed in their relationships give more importance to both marriage and parenting than those who are less committed.

In terms of concerns, only marital concerns seem to have a significant effect on the level of commitment. That is, despite the context, people who have a concern seek to carry it out. On the other hand, other factors negatively affect commitment, such as work or parental conflict. And regarding well-being, commitment is an important predictor of all flourishing dimensions. But it is interesting how family concerns also have an effect on flourishing. In particular, parenting concern has a direct effect on the dimension of meaning and purpose.

The third study presented in chapter 4 used a qualitative approach to explore meanings and discourses of commitment and marriage. Following framework analysis, the discourses about the meaning of commitment emphasized two aspects of sociological explanations in line with the individualization theory that have not been explored in the Spanish context: on the one hand, that commitment is intrinsic to the understanding of being in a relationship. And that this commitment is a phenomenon of the internally referential system (Giddens, 1991), particularly for women. In this sense, people talk about making a commitment in two different and somewhat contradictory ways: one external to the subject and one completely internal. For some of them, commitment was not an explicit decision while for others it was consciously aligned with their concerns.

In terms of marriage, a distinction between getting married and being married was found. Since for some young people "being married" does not imply a wedding, and marriage is "just a piece of paper", the results partially support the deinstitutionalization thesis. That is, marriage as a social institution has lost some of its functions, if there is no obvious difference between being married and not being married. Although some of the young people did mention an added value of getting married, in general marriage did not emerge as a vital concern. And it is not clear that economic reasons play a major role in their "indifference" towards marriage. In terms of a couple's relationship, commitment is a fundamental part of the relationship while marriage is something more "accidental", which seems neither necessary nor distinctive.

General discussion

First of all, the results of this thesis give a comprehensive vision of the concerns and meanings about a relevant area of emerging adulthood: romantic relationships. In addition, this research addresses an overlooked issue in the study of Spanish youth, which is marital belief. Understanding how these beliefs are configured, and how they are related to both priorities and commitment, is key in this life period, in an adverse social and economic context. In this sense, exploring beliefs and concerns serves as a mediatory mechanism between structure and agency (Archer, 2003).

Secondly, the theory of the marital paradigm appears as a valuable tool to comprehensively approach the beliefs around marriage, both personally and socially. The conceptualization of what Spanish young people understand by marriage helps to better understand their concerns and vital projects, but also the discourses and cultural notions around it. In general, in Spain, the contextual dimension stands out in importance while the traditional roles are completely

rejected. And in terms of importance, marriage is not among the ultimate concerns of the young population. However, marital concern does have an important role when committing to a relationship.

Furthermore, both marital beliefs and family concerns are related to commitment, and in a broad sense to relational identity. All these aspects –beliefs, concerns, commitment, and identity– are particularly relevant in this period of life in the relational domain, and are closely related to each other. However, in social research it is not easy to address and integrate all these dimensions. Therefore, this work is an attempt to encompass these aspects together, theoretically and empirically.

In addition, the contrast between quantitative and qualitative findings is striking. On the one hand, in the quantitative approach to marital beliefs and the application of the marital paradigm to the sample of young Spaniards, the contextual dimension particularly stands out, that is, the importance that young people give to the context for the rejection or delay of the marriage is a relevant aspect for the majority of the sample. On the other hand, in a more qualitative analysis this reason does not emerge explicitly. In other words, in the young people's discourse on marriage, the economic or structural part does not seem to be so directly present. This is why measuring beliefs and attitudes and contrasting them with discourses, which may have some more cultural elements, gives a complementary vision of the phenomenon.

Lastly, this research contributes to the study of emerging adulthood in non-American contexts. Considering a wide sample and an age range of 18 to 32 years, the diversity of beliefs and values on an issue that has traditionally defined this period, i.e. marriage, is observed. As well as the heterogeneity of relational conditions. In this sense, it is difficult to cover in this term a wide variety of relational circumstances. However, the more subjective

part – or internal reference – emerges and plays a role in the understanding of commitment, as opposed to exploration, as a distinctive feature of this period. In this sense, emerging adulthood is a useful term for designating this period if we consider the specific context and the living conditions that profoundly influence the length of this stage in Spain.

Implications

These findings have implications in a theoretical but also practical level. First of all, this research is theoretically relevant as an effort to integrate two sociological approaches that are constantly in confrontation with each other in youth studies: one that emphasizes the structural conditions that determine this period, and another that focuses on individual agency as a determinant of certain outcomes and decisions. In contrast, by considering beliefs and concerns as a central aspect, the assumption is that young people reflexively define their life projects considering the circumstances. And that their beliefs reflect to some extent cultural messages and objective constraints. Moreover, it is a way of empirically approaching these issues.

Another important implication is the adaptation to Spanish and the application of the marital paradigm in a specific European context. This effort allows the possibility to explore in a consistent and integrated way the beliefs surrounding marriage, as well as to make comparative analyses.

A real understanding of the concerns of young people in terms of relationships and family formation allows both researchers and policymakers to identify the concrete obstacles they face and to carry out actions aimed at encouraging or supporting these goals and projects. In addition, beliefs, concerns and commitment have implications for behaviors and flourishing.

This is why the exploration of the relationship between these variables is useful to promote well-being.

This study also highlights some important gender differences. Which implies that beliefs or that social institutions such as marriage affect both men and women differently. Although this thesis has not focused on exploring this, the results suggest that this consideration is important when addressing this issue.

Limitations and future research

Despite the interesting results and contributions of this thesis, several limitations should be considered. First, the cross-sectional nature of the data only allows us to explore associations between variables and not to make causal inferences. Longitudinal analysis would allow a better understanding of the directionality of these relationships and the dynamics of concerns, beliefs, and commitment over time. On the other hand, despite being a representative sample of Spanish youth, the collection through an online panel may exclude certain groups of the population. In addition, the qualitative analyses come from a purposive sample, so the application of the results to other contexts may also be limited.

As this research has been based primarily on two theoretical frameworks – ultimate concerns and marital paradigm theory –, its evaluation or application in other contexts may be difficult. Although the integration of several theories is useful, this, in turn, may simplify its complexity leaving out certain aspects of each one. In addition, the limitations of the instruments and the quantitative approach must be considered. That is, even if the used measurements are adapted, they may not encompass the breadth of the concepts.

On the other hand, since this is a first application of the marital paradigm to the Spanish context and a rigorous back-translation process was carried out, it is possible that some

nuances may be misunderstood or approximating different realities. In addition, as a first validation, there is no possibility of contrasting these results. Finally, being an article-based thesis, the chapters follow the criteria of academic articles, which may prevent the extension or discussion of some theoretical points.

From the present thesis, several lines of future research are proposed. In addition to dealing with the previously mentioned limitations, in the future, concerns should be approached in a broader way and not only as part of the marital paradigm. Namely, the development, contrast and validation of other measurements would be very useful.

Comparative analysis also should be done between different groups, and social context, to better understand the cultural aspects of these phenomena. For example, applying these theories to other Southern European countries would shed light on the particularities of these contexts and would allow a better definition of young people's needs. Finally, to understand how these attitudes develop throughout this stage, it would be useful to analyze them longitudinally and consider the different life transitions and experiences. The implications for well-being and relational satisfaction should also be further explored.

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Appendix 1. English codebook of the TRANSADULT project questionnaire

Variable name	Variable Values	Variable label
<i>Sociodemographics</i>		
<i>numid</i>	Respondent ID	Numeric
<i>weight</i>	Sample weight	Numeric
<i>area</i>	Area	Numeric
<i>townsize</i>	Town size	1= less than 20000 2= 20000 - 100000 3= More than 100000
<i>birthdate</i>	Date of birth	dd/mm/yy
<i>age</i>	Age at June 1st, 2021	Numeric
<i>agegr</i>	Age group	1= 18-20 2= 21-23 3= 24-26 4= 27-29 5= 30-32
<i>womanyn</i>	Sex; dummy if woman	0= men 1= woman
<i>sorient</i>	Sexual orientation	1= Heterosexual 2=Gay 3= Lesbian 4= Bisexual 5= Trans 6=Other
<i>heterosexyn</i>	Dummy if heterosexual	0= not heterosexual 1= heterosexual
<i>edufather</i>	Highest education level completed father	1= none 2= basic education (16 years) 3= high school 4= undergraduate 5= grad school 6= dont know
<i>edumother</i>	Highest education level completed mother	1= none 2= basic education (16 years) 3= high school 4= undergraduate 5= grad school 6= dont know
<i>class</i>	What social class would you say you and your family belong to	1= Low 2= Medium-low 3= Medium 4= Medium-high 5= High

<i>religservices</i>	How often do you participate in religious services	0= do not participate 1= just special occasions 2= once a year 3= once a month 4= once a week 5= several times a week
<i>occup</i>	What is your occupation?	1= working 2= studying 3= working and studying 4=looking for a job 5= temporary leave 98= other
<i>workeryn</i>	Dummy if works fulltime	0= does not work 1= works full time
<i>studentyn</i>	Dummy if they study, either part time or full time	0= not students 1= students
<i>studfinishedyn</i>	Dummy if they have finished their studies	0= studying 1= finished studies
<i>studfinishyr</i>	Year they finished studying	Numeric
<i>course</i>	Current course	
<i>edu</i>	Highest education level completed	1= none 2= basic education 3= secondary school 4= high school 5= undergraduate 6= grad school
<i>inst</i>	Educational institution type	1= public 2= private 3= dont know
<i>living</i>	Who do you live with?	1=Alone 2 =With partner 3=With flatmates (professional) 4=With flatmates (students) 5=College/residence 6=With parents 7=With other relatives
<i>emancipationyn</i>	Dummy if does not live with parents	0= lives with parents 1= does not live with parents
<i>emanciptime</i>	When did you stop living with your parents?	1= less than 6 months 2= between 6 months and 1 year 3= between 1-3 years 4= between 3-5 years 5= more than 5 years
<i>emancipreason</i>	Main reason to continue living with your family	0= i dont live with them 1= unemployed, economic instability 2= im fine, like living with them

		3= im young, still studying 4= help them 6= dont know 98= other
<i>emancipidealage</i>	Ideal age to emancipate	0= no ideal age numeric
<i>financindep</i>	Percentage of expences you pay	
<i>divorceyn</i>	Have your parents been divorced?	0= No 1= Yes
<i>divorceage</i>	At what age did your parents divorce?	Numeric
<i>sibling</i>	How many siblings do you have?	numeric
<i>spanishyn</i>	Born in Spain	0= No 1= Yes
<i>livespainyrs</i>	Years living in Spain	Numeric
<i>disabilityyn</i>	Do you have any disability?	0= No 1= Yes
<i>disabilitydegree</i>	Degree of disability officially recognized	0= not officially recognized Numeric
<i>reducedmob10</i>	Reduced mobility	0= No difficulty 1-10 scale
<i>interviewyn</i>	Participation in online interview	0= No 1= Yes
<i>Relationship status variables</i>		
<i>relstatus</i>	Relationship status	1= single, not interested in dating 2= single, interested in dating 3= casually dating 4= formally dating 5= engaged 6= cohabiting 7= married 8= separated (widow/divorce) 9= other
<i>singleyn</i>	Dummy if single	0= in a relationship 1= single
<i>marriedyn</i>	Dummy if married	0= not married 1= married
<i>partnerbeforeyn</i>	Have you been in a exclusive relationship before?	0= No 1= Yes
<i>partnerbeforenum</i>	How many times have you been in a exclusive relationship?	Numeric
<i>childyn</i>	Do you have children?	0= No 1= Yes
<i>childnum</i>	How many children do you have?	Numeric

<i>relengthyrs</i>	How long have you been in your relationship: years	Numeric
<i>relengthmonth</i>	How long have you been in your relationship: months	Numeric
<i>agemarried</i>	Age at which got married	Numeric
<i>agestartliving</i>	At what age you started living with your partner	Numeric
Relational outcomes		
<i>partnersupphelp</i>	My partner really tries to help me	1= strongly disagree 7= strongly agree
<i>partnersuppemohelp</i>	I get the emotional help and support I need from my partner	1= strongly disagree 7= strongly agree
<i>partnersuptalk</i>	I can talk about my problems with my partner	1= strongly disagree 7= strongly agree
<i>partnersupwill</i>	My partner is willing to help me	1= strongly disagree 7= strongly agree
<i>relsatintimacy</i>	The physical intimacy you experience	1= very dissatisfied 2= dissatisfied 3= neither satisfied nor dissatisfied 4= satisfied 5= very satisfied
<i>relsatconflicts</i>	How conflicts are resolved	1= very dissatisfied 2= dissatisfied 3= neither satisfied nor dissatisfied 4= satisfied 5= very satisfied
<i>relsatequality</i>	The amount of relationship equality you experience	1= very dissatisfied 2= dissatisfied 3= neither satisfied nor dissatisfied 4= satisfied 5= very satisfied
<i>relsatcommunicate</i>	The quality of your communication	1= very dissatisfied 2= dissatisfied 3= neither satisfied nor dissatisfied 4= satisfied 5= very satisfied
<i>relsatrelationship</i>	Your overall relationship with your partner	1= very dissatisfied 2= dissatisfied 3= neither satisfied nor dissatisfied 4= satisfied 5= very satisfied
<i>relsatis</i>	Relationship satisfaction mean	Numeric
<i>relstabtrouble</i>	How often have you thought your relationship (or marriage) might be in trouble?	1= very frequently 2= frequently 3= sometimes

		4= occasionally 5= never
<i>relstabending</i>	How often have you and your partner discussed ending your relationship (or marriage)?	1= very frequently 2= frequently 3= sometimes 4= occasionally 5= never
<i>relstabbrokenup</i>	How often have you broken up or separated and then gotten back together?	1= very frequently 2= frequently 3= sometimes 4= occasionally 5= never
<i>relstab</i>	Relationship stability mean	Numeric
<i>Relational identity</i>		
<i>idrelsecurity</i>	My relationship gives me security in life	1= totally disagree 2= disagree 3= neither agree nor disagree 4= agree 5= totally agree
<i>idrelconfidence</i>	My relationship gives me self-confidence	1= totally disagree 2= disagree 3= neither agree nor disagree 4= agree 5= totally agree
<i>idrelsure</i>	My relationship makes me feel sure of myself	1= totally disagree 2= disagree 3= neither agree nor disagree 4= agree 5= totally agree
<i>idrelfuture</i>	My relationship gives me security for the future	1= totally disagree 2= disagree 3= neither agree nor disagree 4= agree 5= totally agree
<i>idreloptimism</i>	My relationship allows me to face the future with optimism	1= totally disagree 2= disagree 3= neither agree nor disagree 4= agree 5= totally agree
<i>idrelfindout</i>	I try to find out a lot about my relationship	1= totally disagree 2= disagree 3= neither agree nor disagree 4= agree 5= totally agree
<i>idrelreflect</i>	I often reflect on my relationship	1= totally disagree 2= disagree 3= neither agree nor disagree

		4= agree 5= totally agree
<i>idreleffort</i>	I make a lot of effort to keep finding out new things about my relationship	1= totally disagree 2= disagree 3= neither agree nor disagree 4= agree 5= totally agree
<i>idrelopinions</i>	I often try to find out what other people think about my relationship	1= totally disagree 2= disagree 3= neither agree nor disagree 4= agree 5= totally agree
<i>idreltalk</i>	I often talk with other people about my relationship	1= totally disagree 2= disagree 3= neither agree nor disagree 4= agree 5= totally agree
<i>idreldifferent</i>	I often think it would be better to try to find a different relationship	1= totally disagree 2= disagree 3= neither agree nor disagree 4= agree 5= totally agree
<i>idrelinteresting</i>	I often think that a different relationship would make my life more interesting	1= totally disagree 2= disagree 3= neither agree nor disagree 4= agree 5= totally agree
<i>idrellooking</i>	In fact, I am looking for a different relationship	1= totally disagree 2= disagree 3= neither agree nor disagree 4= agree 5= totally agree
<i>Marital Paradigm</i>		
<i>partnerexpect</i>	Expected partnership type	1= living with a partner 2= marry, living together first 3= marry, not living together first 4= partner without living together 5= open relationship 6= stay single 7= dont know
<i>expmarryyn</i>	Dummy if they expect to marry	0= not expecting to get married 1= expecting to marry
<i>religmarryn</i>	When you think about marriage, do you think of religious marriage?	0= No 1= Yes
<i>expmar_age</i>	At what age do you expect to marry?	Numeric
<i>idealagemaryn</i>	Do you think there is an ideal age to get married?	0= No 1= Yes

<i>idealagemar</i>	Ideal age for someone to get married	Numeric
<i>values_marr</i>	How important is marriage to you?	Numeric (%)
<i>values_par</i>	How important is parenting to you?	Numeric (%)
<i>values_car</i>	How important is your career to you?	Numeric (%)
<i>values_hob</i>	How important are your hobbies to you?	Numeric (%)
<i>marsalcareer</i>	Getting married is more important to me than having a successful career	1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= somewhat disagree 4= somewhat agree 5= agree 6= strongly agree
<i>marsalpursuits</i>	Getting married is more important than my educational pursuits and achievements	1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= somewhat disagree 4= somewhat agree 5= agree 6= strongly agree
<i>marsalpriorities</i>	Getting married is among my top priorities during this time in my life	1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= somewhat disagree 4= somewhat agree 5= agree 6= strongly agree
<i>marsalsingleinv</i>	All in all, there are more advantages to being single than to being married	1= strongly agree 2= agree 3= somewhat agree 4= somewhat disagree 5= disagree 6= strongly disagree
<i>marsalgoal</i>	Getting married is a very important goal for me	1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= somewhat disagree 4= somewhat agree 5= agree 6= strongly agree
<i>marsalnow</i>	I would like to be married now	1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= somewhat disagree 4= somewhat agree 5= agree 6= strongly agree
<i>marconbarrier</i>	Money and finances are a major barrier to getting married	1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= somewhat disagree 4= somewhat agree

		5= agree 6= strongly agree
<i>marconsaved</i>	I need to have certain amount of money saved before getting married	1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= somewhat disagree 4= somewhat agree 5= agree 6= strongly agree
<i>marconenough</i>	My parents believe that I do not have enough money right now to marry	1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= somewhat disagree 4= somewhat agree 5= agree 6= strongly agree
<i>marconafford</i>	Couples should be able to afford their own wedding before they get married	1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= somewhat disagree 4= somewhat agree 5= agree 6= strongly agree
<i>marconfactor</i>	Finances are a major factor I consider when thinking about getting married	1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= somewhat disagree 4= somewhat agree 5= agree 6= strongly agree
<i>marpermhappyinv</i>	Personal happiness is more important than putting up with a bad marriage	1= strongly agree 2= agree 3= somewhat agree 4= somewhat disagree 5= disagree 6= strongly disagree
<i>marpermdivorceinv</i>	It is okay to divorce when a person's needs are no longer met	1= strongly agree 2= agree 3= somewhat agree 4= somewhat disagree 5= disagree 6= strongly disagree
<i>marpermlife</i>	Marriage is for life, even if the couple is unhappy	1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= somewhat disagree 4= somewhat agree 5= agree 6= strongly agree
<i>marrolesachiever</i>	In an ideal marriage, the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home	1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= somewhat disagree 4= somewhat agree

		5= agree 6= strongly agree
<i>marrolesdisagree</i>	Husbands should have the final say when there are disagreements about the family	1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= somewhat disagree 4= somewhat agree 5= agree 6= strongly agree
<i>marrolesdecisions</i>	Wives should have most of the say with decisions about housework and childcare	1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= somewhat disagree 4= somewhat agree 5= agree 6= strongly agree
<i>Social Support</i>		
<i>friendsupphelp</i>	My friends really try to help me	1= strongly disagree 7= strongly agree
<i>friendsuppcount</i>	I can count on my friends when things go wrong	1= strongly disagree 7= strongly agree
<i>friendsupshare</i>	I have friends with whom I share my sorrows and joys	1= strongly disagree 7= strongly agree
<i>friendsuptalk</i>	I can talk about my problems with my friends	1= strongly disagree 7= strongly agree
<i>Familiar Context</i>		
<i>famsupphelp</i>	My family really tries to help me	1= strongly disagree 7= strongly agree
<i>famsuppemohelp</i>	I get the emotional help and support I need from my family	1= strongly disagree 7= strongly agree
<i>famsuptalk</i>	I can talk about my problems with my family	1= strongly disagree 7= strongly agree
<i>famsupwill</i>	My family is willing to help me	1= strongly disagree 7= strongly agree
<i>parentshappy</i>	The relationship between my parents has been happy	1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= agree 4= strongly agree
<i>motherexample</i>	My mother is an example to me	1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= agree 4= strongly agree
<i>fatherexample</i>	My father is an example to me	1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= agree 4= strongly agree

<i>inf_car</i>	How much has your parents' opinion influenced your career decision?	numeric (0-100)
<i>inf_job</i>	How much has your parents' opinion influenced your job?	numeric (0-100)
<i>inf_partn</i>	How much has your parents' opinion influenced your relationship partner?	numeric (0-100)
<i>inf_pol</i>	How much has your parents' opinion influenced your politic orientation?	numeric (0-100)
<i>inf_relig</i>	How much has your parents' opinion influenced your religious beliefs?	numeric (0-100)
<i>Decision Making</i>		
<i>indectrouble</i>	I usually have trouble taking decisions	1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= slightly disagree 4= neither agree nor disagree 5= slightly agree 6= agree 7= strongly agree
<i>indeccapproval</i>	I usually feel I need approval or support to make decisions	1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= slightly disagree 4= neither agree nor disagree 5= slightly agree 6= agree 7= strongly agree
<i>indeccfailure</i>	I usually fear failure	1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= slightly disagree 4= neither agree nor disagree 5= slightly agree 6= agree 7= strongly agree
<i>indeccareer</i>	I dont know what careers interest me	1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= slightly disagree 4= neither agree nor disagree 5= slightly agree 6= agree 7= strongly agree
<i>indeccvocational</i>	I'm not sure yet about my vocational preferences	1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= slightly disagree 4= neither agree nor disagree 5= slightly agree 6= agree 7= strongly agree

<i>indecskills</i>	I don't have enough information about my skills	1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= slightly disagree 4= neither agree nor disagree 5= slightly agree 6= agree 7= strongly agree
<i>indecalternatives</i>	I am attracted to different professional/ educational alternatives, and it is difficult for me to choose	1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= slightly disagree 4= neither agree nor disagree 5= slightly agree 6= agree 7= strongly agree
<i>indecoption</i>	My preferences cannot be combined in a single academic-professional career option	1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= slightly disagree 4= neither agree nor disagree 5= slightly agree 6= agree 7= strongly agree
<i>indecabilities</i>	My abilities do not match the requirements of the academic/professional alternative in which I am interested	1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= slightly disagree 4= neither agree nor disagree 5= slightly agree 6= agree 7= strongly agree
<i>Work related variables</i>		
<i>idoccupsecurity</i>	My occupation gives me security in life	1= totally disagree 2= disagree 3= neither agree nor disagree 4= agree 5= totally agree
<i>idoccupconfidence</i>	My occupation gives me self-confidence	1= totally disagree 2= disagree 3= neither agree nor disagree 4= agree 5= totally agree
<i>idoccupsure</i>	My occupation makes me feel sure of myself	1= totally disagree 2= disagree 3= neither agree nor disagree 4= agree 5= totally agree
<i>idoccupfuture</i>	My occupation gives me security for the future	1= totally disagree 2= disagree 3= neither agree nor disagree

		4= agree 5= totally agree
<i>idoccupoptimism</i>	My occupation allows me to face the future with optimism	1= totally disagree 2= disagree 3= neither agree nor disagree 4= agree 5= totally agree
<i>idoccupfindout</i>	I try to find out a lot about my occupation	1= totally disagree 2= disagree 3= neither agree nor disagree 4= agree 5= totally agree
<i>idoccupreflect</i>	I often reflect on my occupation	1= totally disagree 2= disagree 3= neither agree nor disagree 4= agree 5= totally agree
<i>idoccupeffort</i>	I make a lot of effort to keep finding out new things about my occupation	1= totally disagree 2= disagree 3= neither agree nor disagree 4= agree 5= totally agree
<i>idoccupopinions</i>	I often try to find out what other people think about my occupation	1= totally disagree 2= disagree 3= neither agree nor disagree 4= agree 5= totally agree
<i>idoccuptalk</i>	I often talk with other people about my occupation	1= totally disagree 2= disagree 3= neither agree nor disagree 4= agree 5= totally agree
<i>idoccupdifferent</i>	I often think it would be better to try to find a different occupation	1= totally disagree 2= disagree 3= neither agree nor disagree 4= agree 5= totally agree
<i>idoccupinteresting</i>	I often think that a different occupation would make my life more interesting	1= totally disagree 2= disagree 3= neither agree nor disagree 4= agree 5= totally agree
<i>idoccuplooking</i>	In fact, I am looking for a different occupation	1= totally disagree 2= disagree 3= neither agree nor disagree 4= agree 5= totally agree

<i>optimeconom</i>	How optimistic do you feel of getting a job: with good economic conditions	0= i have it 1= optimistic 2= pesimistic
<i>optimeedu</i>	How optimistic do you feel of getting a job: related to your education	0= i have it 1= optimistic 2= pesimistic
<i>optimpromo</i>	How optimistic do you feel of getting a job: with promotion possibilities	0= i have it 1= optimistic 2= pesimistic
<i>optimspain</i>	How optimistic do you feel of getting a job: in Spain	0= i have it 1= optimistic 2= pesimistic
<i>optimstable</i>	How optimistic do you feel of getting a job: stable	0= i have it 1= optimistic 2= pesimistic
<i>workpref1</i>	Most important thing when you look for a job	1= money 2= social impact 3= flexibility 4= family compatibility 5= hobbies compatibility 6= enjoying/liking what I do 7= make own choices
<i>workpref2</i>	Most important thing when you look for a job	1= money 2= social impact 3= flexibility 4= family compatibility 5= hobbies compatibility 6= enjoying/liking what I do 7= make own choices
<i>workpref3</i>	Most important thing when you look for a job	1= money 2= social impact 3= flexibility 4= family compatibility 5= hobbies compatibility 6= enjoying/liking what I do 7= make own choices
<i>workpref4</i>	Most important thing when you look for a job	1= money 2= social impact 3= flexibility 4= family compatibility 5= hobbies compatibility 6= enjoying/liking what I do 7= make own choices
<i>workpref5</i>	Most important thing when you look for a job	1= money 2= social impact 3= flexibility 4= family compatibility 5= hobbies compatibility

		6= enjoying/liking what I do 7= make own choices
<i>workpref6</i>	Most important thing when you look for a job	1= money 2= social impact 3= flexibility 4= family compatibility 5= hobbies compatibility 6= enjoying/liking what I do 7= make own choices
<i>workpref7</i>	Most important thing when you look for a job	1= money 2= social impact 3= flexibility 4= family compatibility 5= hobbies compatibility 6= enjoying/liking what I do 7= make own choices
<i>worksocimpact</i>	In a job, importance of social impact	Numeric (1-7)
<i>workautonomy</i>	In a job, importance of making my own choices	Numeric (1-7)
<i>workenjoy</i>	In a job, importance of enjoying/liking what I do	Numeric (1-7)
<i>workfamily</i>	In a job, importance of family compatibility	Numeric (1-7)
<i>workflexibility</i>	In a job, importance of flexibility	Numeric (1-7)
<i>workhobbies</i>	In a job, importance of hobbies compatibility	Numeric (1-7)
<i>workmoney</i>	In a job, importance of money	Numeric (1-7)
<i>worksatis</i>	I am satisfied with my job/studies	1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= slightly disagree 4= neither agree nor disagree 5= slightly agree 6= agree 7= strongly agree
<i>Identity Capital</i>		
<i>esteemfun</i>	Im a lot to be fun with	1= unlike me 2= like me
<i>esteempopular</i>	Im popular with persons my own age	1= unlike me 2= like me
<i>esteemfollow</i>	People usually follow my ideas	1= unlike me 2= like me
<i>esteemlookinv</i>	Im not as nice looking as most people	1= like me 2= unlike me
<i>esteemlikedinv</i>	Most people are better liked than I am	1= like me 2= unlike me
<i>selfesteem</i>	Self-esteem total score	Numeric (5-10)

<i>purposebored</i>	I am usually a person: bored-enthusiastic	1= completely boring 4= neutral 7= exuberant and enthusiastic
<i>purposeexcitinginv</i>	Life seems: exciting-routinary	1= completely routine 4= neutral 7= always exciting
<i>purposedifferentinv</i>	Each day: different-same	1= exactly the same 4= neutral 7= constantly new and different
<i>purposeempty</i>	My life is: empty-exciting	1= empty, filled with despair 4= neutral 7= running with exciting new things
<i>purposeresponsible</i>	I am a person: irresponsible-responsible	1= very irresponsible person 4= neutral 7= very responsible person
<i>purpose</i>	Purpose in life total score	Numeric
<i>locussuccess</i>	Becoming a success is a matter of hard work	1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= somewhat disagree 4= somewhat agree 5= agree 6= strongly agree
<i>locusplans</i>	When I make plans, I am certain I can make them work	1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= somewhat disagree 4= somewhat agree 5= agree 6= strongly agree
<i>locusstudy</i>	There is a direct connection between how hard I study and my grades	1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= somewhat disagree 4= somewhat agree 5= agree 6= strongly agree
<i>locusluck</i>	It is impossible to believe that chance or luck plays an important role in my life	1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= somewhat disagree 4= somewhat agree 5= agree 6= strongly agree
<i>locusown</i>	What happens to me is my own doing	1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= somewhat disagree 4= somewhat agree 5= agree 6= strongly agree
<i>locuscontrol</i>	Internal locus of control total score	Numeric

<i>egostchallenge</i>	I enjoy difficult and challenging situations	1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= neither agree nor disagree 4= agree 5= strongly agree
<i>egostwillpower</i>	I have a lot of will power	1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= neither agree nor disagree 4= agree 5= strongly agree
<i>egostconcentration</i>	I am able to concentrate better than most people	1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= neither agree nor disagree 4= agree 5= strongly agree
<i>egostdiscomfort</i>	I can bear physical discomfort better than most	1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= neither agree nor disagree 4= agree 5= strongly agree
<i>egostdistraction</i>	I am not easily distracted	1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= neither agree nor disagree 4= agree 5= strongly agree
<i>egostrength</i>	Ego strengths total score	Numeric (5-25)
<i>idcapital</i>	Identity capital total score (selfesteem + purpose + locuscontrol + egostrength)	Numeric
<i>Identity Resolution</i>		
<i>idadultconsider</i>	Do you consider yourself to be an adult?	0= not at all true 1= a little true 2= somewhat true 3= true for the most part 4= entirely true
<i>idadultrespected</i>	Do you feel respected by others as an adult?	0= not at all true 1= a little true 2= somewhat true 3= true for the most part 4= entirely true
<i>idadultmatured</i>	Do you feel that you have matured fully?	0= not at all true 1= a little true 2= somewhat true 3= true for the most part 4= entirely true
<i>idadult</i>	Adult identity total	Numeric

<i>idsocialniche</i>	Have found a niche in your life?	0= not at all true 1= a little true 2= somewhat true 3= true for the most part 4= entirely true
<i>idsocialsettled</i>	Have settled on a lifestyle that you are satisfied with?	0= not at all true 1= a little true 2= somewhat true 3= true for the most part 4= entirely true
<i>idsocialcommunity</i>	Have found a community to live with for the rest of your life?	0= not at all true 1= a little true 2= somewhat true 3= true for the most part 4= entirely true
<i>idsocial</i>	Social identity total	Numeric
<i>idresolution</i>	Identity resolution total	Numeric
<i>idstyleunderstand</i>	When I have a problem, I do a lot of thinking to understand it	1= totally disagree 2= disagree 3= neither agree nor disagree 4= agree 5= totally agree
<i>idstylechallenges</i>	My problems can be interesting challenges	1= totally disagree 2= disagree 3= neither agree nor disagree 4= agree 5= totally agree
<i>idstyledeal</i>	I like to think through my problems and deal with them on my own	1= totally disagree 2= disagree 3= neither agree nor disagree 4= agree 5= totally agree
<i>idstylevalues</i>	I act the way I do because of the values I was brought up with	1= totally disagree 2= disagree 3= neither agree nor disagree 4= agree 5= totally agree
<i>idstylestick</i>	Once I know how to solve a problem, I like to stick with it	1= totally disagree 2= disagree 3= neither agree nor disagree 4= agree 5= totally agree
<i>idstyleadvice</i>	It is best to get advice from friends or family when I have a problem	1= totally disagree 2= disagree 3= neither agree nor disagree 4= agree 5= totally agree

<i>idstyleavoid</i>	I try to avoid problems that make me think	1= totally disagree 2= disagree 3= neither agree nor disagree 4= agree 5= totally agree
<i>idstyleignore</i>	When I ignore a potential problem, things usually work out	1= totally disagree 2= disagree 3= neither agree nor disagree 4= agree 5= totally agree
<i>idstylestress</i>	When I know a problem will cause me stress, I try to avoid it	1= totally disagree 2= disagree 3= neither agree nor disagree 4= agree 5= totally agree
<i>Reflexivity</i>		
<i>perspectivecriticizing</i>	Before criticizing somebody, I try to imagine how I would feel if I were in their place	1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= neither agree nor disagree 4= agree 5= strongly agree
<i>perspectivelisteninginv</i>	If I'm sure I'm right, I don't waste much time listening to other people	1= strongly agree 2= agree 3= neither agree nor disagree 4= disagree 5= strongly disagree
<i>perspectiveimagining</i>	I sometimes try to understand my friends by imagining how things look from their perspective	1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= neither agree nor disagree 4= agree 5= strongly agree
<i>perspectivesides</i>	I believe that there are two sides to every question and try to look at them both	1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= neither agree nor disagree 4= agree 5= strongly agree
<i>perspectiveviewinv</i>	I sometimes find it difficult to see things from other's point of view	1= strongly agree 2= agree 3= neither agree nor disagree 4= disagree 5= strongly disagree
<i>perspectivesdisagree</i>	I try to look at everybody's side of a disagreement	1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= neither agree nor disagree 4= agree 5= strongly agree

<i>perspectiveshoes</i>	When I'm upset at someone, I usually try to put myself in his shoes for a while	1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= neither agree nor disagree 4= agree 5= strongly agree
<i>Generativity</i>		
<i>generativknowledge</i>	I try to pass along the knowledge I have gained	0= nothing 1= a little 2= somewhat 3= a lot
<i>generativothersinv</i>	I do not feel others need me	0= a lot 1= somewhat 2= a little 3= nothing
<i>generativteacher</i>	I think I would like the work of a teacher	0= nothing 1= a little 2= somewhat 3= a lot
<i>generativcare</i>	I feel many people care about me	0= nothing 1= a little 2= somewhat 3= a lot
<i>generativvolunteerinv</i>	I do not volunteer for charity	0= a lot 1= somewhat 2= a little 3= nothing
<i>generativimpact</i>	I have made things that have had an impact	0= nothing 1= a little 2= somewhat 3= a lot
<i>generativcreative</i>	I try to be creative	0= nothing 1= a little 2= somewhat 3= a lot
<i>generativremember</i>	I think I will be remembered after I die	0= nothing 1= a little 2= somewhat 3= a lot
<i>generativhomelessinv</i>	Society cannot be responsible for providing for the homeless	0= a lot 1= somewhat 2= a little 3= nothing
<i>generativcontributions</i>	Others would say I have made unique contributions	0= nothing 1= a little 2= somewhat 3= a lot

<i>generativadopt</i>	If I were unable to have children, I would adopt	0= nothing 1= a little 2= somewhat 3= a lot
<i>generativskills</i>	I have important skills I try to teach others	0= nothing 1= a little 2= somewhat 3= a lot
<i>generativsurviveinv</i>	I feel that I have done nothing that will survive after I die	0= a lot 1= somewhat 2= a little 3= nothing
<i>generativpositive</i>	My actions do not have a positive effect on others	0= nothing 1= a little 2= somewhat 3= a lot
<i>generativworthinv</i>	I feel as I have done nothing worth to contribute to others	0= a lot 1= somewhat 2= a little 3= nothing
<i>generativcommit</i>	I have made many commitments to different kinds of people	0= nothing 1= a little 2= somewhat 3= a lot
<i>generativproductive</i>	Others say I am a very productive person	0= nothing 1= a little 2= somewhat 3= a lot
<i>generativneighbour</i>	I have responsibility to improve my neighborhood	0= nothing 1= a little 2= somewhat 3= a lot
<i>generativadvice</i>	People come to me for advice	0= nothing 1= a little 2= somewhat 3= a lot
<i>generativexist</i>	I feel my contributions will exist after i die	0= nothing 1= a little 2= somewhat 3= a lot
<i>Mental Health and Well-being</i>		
<i>dasswindown</i>	S: I found it hard to wind down	0= never 1= sometimes 2= often 3= always
<i>dassmouth</i>	A: I was aware of dryness of my mouth	0= never 1= sometimes

		2= often 3= always
<i>dasspositive</i>	D: I couldn't seem to experience any positive feeling	0= never 1= sometimes 2= often 3= always
<i>dassbreath</i>	A: I experienced breathing difficulty	0= never 1= sometimes 2= often 3= always
<i>dassinitiative</i>	D: I found it difficult to work up the initiative to do things	0= never 1= sometimes 2= often 3= always
<i>dassreact</i>	S: I tended to over-react to situations	0= never 1= sometimes 2= often 3= always
<i>dasstremble</i>	A: I experienced trembling	0= never 1= sometimes 2= often 3= always
<i>dassnervous</i>	S: I felt that I was using a lot of nervous energy	0= never 1= sometimes 2= often 3= always
<i>dassworry</i>	A: I was worried about situations I might panic and make a fool of myself	0= never 1= sometimes 2= often 3= always
<i>dasspurpose</i>	D: I felt that I had nothing to look forward to	0= never 1= sometimes 2= often 3= always
<i>dassagitated</i>	S: I found myself getting agitated	0= never 1= sometimes 2= often 3= always
<i>dassrelax</i>	S: I found it difficult to relax	0= never 1= sometimes 2= often 3= always
<i>dassdown</i>	D: felt down-hearted and blue	0= never 1= sometimes 2= often 3= always

<i>dassintolerant</i>	S: I was intolerant of anything keeping me from getting on with what I was doing	0= never 1= sometimes 2= often 3= always
<i>dasspanic</i>	A: I felt I was close to panic	0= never 1= sometimes 2= often 3= always
<i>dassenthusiastic</i>	D: I was unable to become enthusiastic about anything	0= never 1= sometimes 2= often 3= always
<i>dassworth</i>	D: I felt I wasnt worth much as a person	0= never 1= sometimes 2= often 3= always
<i>dasstouch</i>	S: I felt that I was rather touchy	0= never 1= sometimes 2= often 3= always
<i>dassheart</i>	A: I was aware of the action of my heart in the absence of physical activity	0= never 1= sometimes 2= often 3= always
<i>dassscared</i>	A: I felt scared without any good reason	0= never 1= sometimes 2= often 3= always
<i>dassmeaning</i>	D: I felt that life was meaningless	0= never 1= sometimes 2= often 3= always
<i>anxiety</i>	Anxiety total	Numeric
<i>anxietylevel</i>	Anxiety level	1= normal 2= mild 3= moderate 4= severe 5= extremely severe
<i>depression</i>	Depression	Numeric
<i>depressionlevel</i>	Depression level	1= normal 2= mild 3= moderate 4= severe 5= extremely severe
<i>stress</i>	Stress total	Numeric

<i>stresslevel</i>	Stress level	1= normal 2= mild 3= moderate 4= severe 5= extremely severe
<i>satisideal</i>	In most ways my life is close to my ideal	1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= slightly disagree 4= neither agree nor disagree 5= slightly agree 6= agree 7= strongly agree
<i>satisconditions</i>	The conditions of my life are excellent	1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= slightly disagree 4= neither agree nor disagree 5= slightly agree 6= agree 7= strongly agree
<i>satisatisfied</i>	I am completely satisfied with my life	1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= slightly disagree 4= neither agree nor disagree 5= slightly agree 6= agree 7= strongly agree
<i>satisimportant</i>	So far I have gotten the important things I want in life	1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= slightly disagree 4= neither agree nor disagree 5= slightly agree 6= agree 7= strongly agree
<i>satischange</i>	If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing	1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= slightly disagree 4= neither agree nor disagree 5= slightly agree 6= agree 7= strongly agree
<i>lifesat</i>	Life satisfaction total	Numeric
<i>flophyhealth</i>	How would you rate your physical health?	Numeric (0-10)
<i>flomentalhealth</i>	How would you rate your overall mental health?	Numeric (0-10)
<i>flosatis</i>	How satisfied are you with life as a whole these days?	Numeric (0-10)
<i>flohappy</i>	How happy or unhappy do you usually feel?	Numeric (0-10)

<i>floworth</i>	To what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?	Numeric (0-10)
<i>flogood</i>	I always act to promote good in all circumstances, even in difficult and challenging situations	Numeric (0-10)
<i>flohappiness</i>	I am always able to give up some happiness now for greater happiness later	Numeric (0-10)
<i>flopurpose</i>	I understand my purpose in life	Numeric (0-10)
<i>flofriends</i>	I am content with my friendships and relationships	Numeric (0-10)
<i>florelsatis</i>	My relationships are as satisfying as I would want them to be	Numeric (0-10)
<i>floworry</i>	How often do you worry about being able to meet normal monthly living expenses?	Numeric (0-10)
<i>flosafety</i>	How often do you worry about safety, food, or housing?	Numeric (0-10)
<i>flourishing</i>	Flourishing total score	Numeric
<i>Lifestyle and Behaviors</i>		
<i>timephonehrs</i>	How many hours/week do you spend on your phone?	Numeric
<i>timephonemins</i>	How many mins/week do you spend on your phone?	Numeric
<i>timesleephrs</i>	How many hours/day do you sleep?	Numeric
<i>timesleepmins</i>	How many mins/day do you sleep?	Numeric
<i>timehobbieshrs</i>	How many hours/week you dedicate to hobbies?	Numeric
<i>timehobbiesmins</i>	How many mins/week you dedicate to hobbies?	Numeric
<i>timesporthrs</i>	How many hours/week do you play sports?	Numeric
<i>timesportmins</i>	How many mins/week you play sports?	Numeric
<i>phoneaffect</i>	How much do you use your phone to seek affect?	1= nothing 2= a little 3= somewhat 4= a lot
<i>phonebet</i>	How much do you use your phone for bets?	1= nothing 2= a little 3= somewhat 4= a lot
<i>phoneevad</i>	How much do you use your phone to stop thinking about something uncomfortable?	1= nothing 2= a little 3= somewhat 4= a lot

<i>phonefun</i>	How much do you use your phone for entertainment purposes?	1= nothing 2= a little 3= somewhat 4= a lot
<i>phoneinfo</i>	How much do you use your phone to look for information or news?	1= nothing 2= a little 3= somewhat 4= a lot
<i>phoneorg</i>	How much do you use your phone for bets?	1= nothing 2= a little 3= somewhat 4= a lot
<i>phoneporn</i>	How much do you use your phone to watch porn or similar content?	1= nothing 2= a little 3= somewhat 4= a lot
<i>phonesocial</i>	How much do you use your phone to socialize with others?	1= nothing 2= a little 3= somewhat 4= a lot
<i>drunk</i>	In the last month, how many times did you get drunk?	Numeric
<i>drugs</i>	In the last month, how many times have you used drugs?	Numeric
<i>physagress</i>	In the last month, how many times have you physically assaulted someone?	Numeric
<i>verbalagress</i>	In the last month, how many times have you verbally assaulted someone?	Numeric
<i>volunteer</i>	In the last month, how many times have you spent time with people in need?	Numeric
<i>altruism</i>	In the last month, how many times have you participated in charities, beneficial organizations, etc..?	Numeric
<i>unwantedpregyn</i>	Have you had an unwanted pregnancy?	0= No 1= Yes
<i>sexriskyn</i>	Have you had sexual relations with someone who is not your partner?	0= No 1= Yes
<i>sexage</i>	Age of the first sexual relation	Numeric
<i>sexnum</i>	How many sexual partners have you had	Numeric

Appendix 2. English translation of the semi-structured interview script

Adult identity

What does it mean to be an adult?

Do you consider yourself an adult? Why?

Who is for you an ideal model of an adult person? What do you value most in him/her?

Do you consider that there are "youth" and "adult" values? Can you give several examples and explain why they are specific to each generation?

It is often said that there are five steps to adulthood:

Finishing school

Finding a stable job

Moving out of the house

Getting married

Having children

Do you agree that an adult should have taken all these steps? Why do you think that this is not necessary to be an adult? Of the remaining ones, do you think there is an ideal order in which to take them? What would that order be?

What does it mean to be a mature person?

Do you consider yourself a mature person? Why?

Do you think being an adult is the same as being a mature person?

Life priorities

Right now, what would you say are the 3 most important things in your life?

And in 10 years, what do you think will be the most important things to you?

[If you say "the same", ask again repeating the 3 they said. Wouldn't you change any of them].

What things motivate you? What drives you to do what you do?

What is the most important thing for you when looking for a job?

What things are you devoting the most time and effort to?

Do you think your personal/social relationships conflict with your work/study life?

Imagine the following fictitious situation:

You have enough money so that you don't need to work. Your partner tells you that he/she wants to take full care of the household. So you are free to choose. Would you work outside the home, stay at home?

How would you divide your time between these things (work, family and other projects)?

What other projects?

If at some point in the future there was a conflict between your work goals and your family life, what do you think you would put first? Why?

At any time there has been a conflict between your work goals and/or personal relationships, what would you put first, why, and would you make the same decision again today?

Decision Making

What do you consider to have been the most important decision you have had to make in your life? Why did you make that decision? Did someone influence or help you to make it?

Do you consider yourself an indecisive person, from 0 to 10?

What do you find most difficult when deciding?

I'm going to cite some things that are often associated with indecision. Tell me if you think it is something that affects you, how much it happens to you and why.

Fear of failure, that is, of not achieving what you want.

The fear of being wrong, i.e., choosing something that wasn't for you

The fact that there are so many options that you don't know which one you prefer.

Not wanting to close yourself off from options

The fear of being rejected or being considered weird.

The effort that would be involved in carrying out the decision taken

Not being clear about what suits me (or is best for me).

When you have trouble deciding something, what do you usually do?

Tell me about something you have done or decided that you are satisfied/proud of.

What is the thing that gives you the most satisfaction from that action or decision?

Do you regret any decision you have made? (Specify) Why?

Life as a couple, commitment and marriage

What is the most important thing to you in a relationship? Tell me up to three things.

How do you imagine your life as a couple in a few years (if you don't have a partner)?

How do you think your relationship will evolve in a few years (if you have a partner)?

Is your relationship today as you imagined it before you were together?

[If no: How has it changed?]

How committed are you to your current relationship?

What does it mean to you to commit to a relationship?

How/why did you make the decision to commit (if you have a partner)?

What does it take to take the step to commit to someone?

[There can be two types of factors:

external: having enough money, a good job, etc....

internal: being clear about things, having the same tastes, being mature or responsible....

If you only mention one type, ask about the other one.

What about things like economic stability?

What about the ability to be responsible or similar things]?

What does marriage mean to you? Explain.

[If you say "nothing", "I don't want to get married", or similar... go deeper too: So, what is marriage to you, so you reject it and don't want to get married]?

Do you want to have children, why?

What does it take to start a family?

[There can be two types of factors:

external: having enough money, a good job, etc....

internal: having things clear, same tastes, being mature or responsible....

If you only mention one type, ask about the other one.

What about things like economic stability?

What about the ability to be responsible or similar things]].

Others

What characteristics should your ideal partner have? What characteristics do you consider indispensable in your partner (current or future)?