

Abstract

This study focused on the single mothering experience and investigated the relationships among parental motivation, maternal identity, and growth in two distinct groups: single mothers by choice and women who became single mothers not by choice. A sample of 162 single mothers (53% by choice; mean age = 41) completed questionnaires about their motivation to become mothers and their maternal identity. The research methodology is based on a retrospective view of parenting motivation. Path analysis revealed that intrinsic motivation to become a parent was associated with a higher level of commitment to maternal identity, that external motivation was associated with ruminative exploration, and that amotivation to become a parent was found to be related to ruminative exploration. The adaptive aspects of identity development (i.e., commitment, identification with commitment, and exploration in depth) were associated with personal growth. The model yielded similar results for both women who were single mothers by choice and those who were single mothers not by choice; however, their starting points were different. As hypothesized, it was found that women who were single mothers by choice had a greater intrinsic motivation to become a parent than women who were single mothers not by choice, whose external motivation was higher. Contrary to our hypothesis, women who were single mothers by choice exhibited a lower growth experience than women who were single mothers not by choice, suggesting that growth might be associated with a wider range of factors than those included in the scope of the current study. These results offer a novel overview of the maternal identity of women who are single mothers by choice versus not by choice and the role that parental motivational and identity processes can play in understanding personal sense of growth.