INTIMACY AND COMMUNICATION IN EMERGING ADULTHOOD

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of Master of Arts in Psychology

by

Francesca Maria Guglielmi

December 2017
The thesis of Francesca Guglielmi is approved:

Sara Berzenski, Ph.D.                          Date

Scott W. Plunkett, Ph.D.                          Date

Gary S. Katz, Ph.D., Chair                          Date

California State University, Northridge
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to:

My parents, whose support has been invaluable in allowing me to pursue my dreams.
ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to thank my committee members who supported my efforts in writing this thesis.

To my chair, Dr. Gary Katz,

To Dr. Sara Berzenski,

To Dr. Scott Plunkett,

Thank you for your continued feedback and encouragement throughout the writing process. Your dedication to students and their success is inspiring and only helped to further my interest and dedication to the study of psychology.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Signature Page</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgment</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypotheses</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumptions</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER II – REVIEW OF LITERATURE</strong></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmental Theories and Emerging Adulthood</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender and Communication</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of Communication</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intimacy and Communication</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER III – METHODOLOGY</strong></td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedure</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample Description</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measures</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER IV – RESULTS</strong></td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER V – DISCUSSION</strong></td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 - Erikson’s Eight Ages of Man .................................................. 10

Figure 1 - MEPSI Max Stages ................................................................. 35

Table 2 - Summary of Correlational Analyses of the Importance of Communication Skills with MEPSI Stages ................................................................. 37
ABSTRACT

INTIMACY AND COMMUNICATION IN EMERGING ADULTHOOD

by

Francesca Guglielmi

Master of Arts in

Psychology

The purpose of this study was to examine how emerging adults perceive and think about intimacy and communication in their dating and romantic relationships. The theory of emerging adulthood posits that two of Erikson’s psychosocial stages of development—identity vs. role confusion and intimacy vs. isolation—overlap during emerging adulthood, when individuals delay adult responsibilities to explore and establish their identities and opportunities for intimacy. It was hypothesized that emerging adults facing the intimacy crisis would be more focused on intimacy on measures assessing the importance of intimacy to relationships when compared with individuals in the identity crisis. The way emerging adults view communication in relationships was also explored, specifically looking at how the importance of communication relates to an emerging adults views on intimacy. Gender and gender role were also examined to determine if men and women in the emerging adulthood stage have differing views of intimacy and communication. The results of the study suggested that the focus of individuals’ dating goals is significantly different when compared with whether they are more focused on establishing identity or intimacy in their lives. No significant relationships were found between emerging adults’ current psychosocial crises and the importance of intimacy.
characteristics to their relationships or value they place on communication skills in relationships. Although no differences were found based on gender, the results indicated that gender role is correlated with the importance placed on characteristics of intimacy in relationships. An individual’s gender role also influenced the value placed on communication skills in a relationship, and a significant difference was found between those classified as androgynous and those with a masculine or undifferentiated gender role. Further research is needed to examine these findings within a larger, more generalizable sample.
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

As society and culture have evolved, so have the intimacy needs of men and women, which has altered the way they engage in and communicate about intimacy in their relationships. Communication about intimacy needs becomes increasingly important as men and women engage in relationships, both casual and committed. In today’s dating culture, where “hookups” and “friends with benefits” share the social fabric with committed relationships, how do those engaged in this dating environment communicate about their intimacy wants and needs?

In order to answer such a question, it is important to first understand the individuals so prominently involved in this dating culture: emerging adults. As society has shifted over time, so too have the individuals within it. Arnett (2000) suggests that emerging adulthood is a new developmental stage where individuals are somewhere between adolescence and adulthood. According to Arnett’s theory of emerging adulthood, individuals in the 18- to 25-year age range face a time of uncertainty and exploration. These emerging adults are no longer forced to move directly from adolescence into roles of adult responsibility. As more individuals seek undergraduate and post-graduate education, adult roles (e.g., marriage, family, financial responsibility) have been postponed to the late twenties and early thirties (Arnett, 2000). Emerging adults spend the years following adolescence exploring and experimenting as they attempt to fulfill the developmental tasks ascribed to this new stage, which echo Erikson’s psychosocial crises of adolescence and young adulthood (Arnett, 2000). Emerging adults continue to strengthen their own identities while beginning to seek out
intimacy in their relationships, preparing them for the adult responsibilities that await them (Arnett, 2000). Intimacy in this case does not refer solely to sexual relations, but to a person’s ability to connect and relate to another person both physically and emotionally on a deep, meaningful level (Arnett, 2000; Erikson, 1950). From a developmental perspective, relationships during emerging adulthood could represent a link between the relationships common in adolescence and the committed life-long relationships emerging adults are moving towards (Knight, 2014; Shulman & Connolly, 2013).

In order to fulfill these identity and intimacy related developmental tasks, emerging adults rely on communication to better understand themselves and to establish and engage in intimate relationships (Veksler & Meyer, 2014). Although communication plays an important role in the exploration of intimacy, and relational communication is a factor in the romantic and sexual relationships of emerging adults, it seems that men and women may view and practice communication differently within their relationships (Kunkel & Burleson, 1999; Vasyura, 2008). Tannen (1990) suggests that men and women have different understandings of the world—men focus more on status, while women focus on connections—and communicate with each other according to those understandings. Although Tannen claims that men and women have a different understanding of the world, it is likely that these communication differences between men and women exist as a result of the way the two sexes are socialized as children and the societal expectations they encounter, and not just as a result of biology (Halim, Ruble, & Amodio, 2011; Maccoby, 2000).

According to prior research, emerging adults consider relational communication to be important to the establishment and maintenance of interpersonal relationships,
particularly in the case of friends with benefits (FWB) type relationships (Bisson & Levine, 2009; Hughes, Morrison, & Asada, 2005). A FWB relationship is typically seen as a non-romantic relationship between friends that involves sexual behaviors (Bisson & Levine, 2009). Emerging adults have acknowledged rules of communication, such as honesty and openness, as important to the maintenance of FWB relationships (Weaver, MacKeigan, & MacDonald, 2011), and it is possible that these same ideas apply to more committed romantic relationships as well. Based on the existing literature, communication and intimacy in relationships are intertwined; however, many recent studies focus on emerging adults and communication via social media and other forms of electronic communication, which are not the focus of this particular study.

**Statement of the Problem and Purpose**

The objectives of this study are to assess the extent to which the Eriksonian stages of identity and intimacy reflect the actual goals and challenges faced by today’s emerging adults. According to Arnett’s theory of emerging adulthood, the primary tasks of this life stage are to solidify one’s identity and seek out intimate relationships, preparing individuals to accept the responsibilities of adulthood (Arnett, 2004). Communication plays a pivotal role as emerging adults attempt to solidify their identities, as they rely on it to interact with the world and people around them (Veksler & Meyer, 2014). Similarly, individuals rely on interpersonal communication to establish and maintain intimate relationships, which are influenced by the way people communicate in and about them (Derlega, 1984). Therefore, it follows that emerging adults also rely on communication as they solidify their identities and build intimate relationships.

It is largely understood by emerging adults that communication is essential to
successful relationships, yet the current dating climate of many emerging adults makes it unclear how these individuals perceive communication in the context of their relationships (Bisson & Levine, 2009; Mongeau & Knight, 2015). As emerging adults undertake these tasks, the extent to which they are establishing their identities or seeking out intimate relationships may vary depending on their age, gender, and current desires. This leads to the questions that guided this research project: 1) If Arnett’s emerging adulthood is a combination of Erikson’s psychosocial stages of adolescence and young adulthood, will a sample of emerging adults be predominantly facing the identity vs. role confusion and intimacy vs. isolation crises described by Erikson? 2) Since both the identity and intimacy stages of Erikson’s psychosocial development play a large role in an emerging adult’s life according to Arnett (2000), will the extent of the resolution of the psychosocial crises impact the emerging adult’s views on intimacy? 3) If emerging adults view communication as important to successful relationships, yet tend to avoid it in more casual relationships because it is seen as work, what importance do they attribute to communication in relationships? 4) Will dating and relationship goals be dependent on an emerging adult’s predominant psychosocial crisis and dictate what they seek out in relationships—intimacy or identity?

**Hypotheses**

Based on the review of literature in Chapter 2, the following research hypotheses were developed.

1. Emerging adults currently in the identity vs. role confusion crisis will have dating goals that are centered on identity, while emerging adults in the intimacy vs. isolation crisis will have dating goals focused on intimacy.
2. Emerging adults in the intimacy vs. isolation crisis will view intimacy as more important to relationships than will emerging adults in the identity vs. role confusion crisis, reflecting the increased importance placed on intimacy and commitment during the psychosocial stage of intimacy.

3a. Emerging adults in the intimacy vs. isolation crisis will value communication more highly than will those in the identity crisis.

3b. Emerging adults who view intimacy as more important, regardless of psychosocial crisis, should also place increased value on communication.

4. Female emerging adults will view intimacy as more important in their relationships than will male emerging adults.

5a. Emerging adults with a more feminine gender role will view intimacy as more important in their relationships than will those with a more masculine gender role.

5b. Those with a feminine gender role will also value communication skills more highly in their relationships than those with a masculine gender role.

Assumptions

This research study was created based upon certain assumptions. It was assumed that participants would be able to read, understand, and follow the directions presented in the survey. This assumption was made because the survey is written in English and the participants are currently attending a university where the primary language is English. It was also assumed that, since the survey is anonymous, participants would respond to all survey questions honestly. Next, it was also assumed that participants would respond in ways different from each other since they will have had different life experiences and be completing the survey independently of one another. It was assumed that all of the
measures utilized were appropriate for the emerging adult population in the study because they had been used, or created for use, with emerging adults in previous research. And finally, it was assumed that no errors occurred during data entry or analyses.
Developmental Theories and Emerging Adulthood

Development across the life span has evolved as the world has changed, becoming more industrialized, globally connected, and technologically advanced (Arnett, 2004). As these shifts have taken place, developmental theories have been adapted to the evolving life span, as with Arnett’s theory of emerging adulthood. Most life span theories have followed a distinct pattern: infancy, childhood, adolescence, and adulthood, with the latter often further subdivided into categories of young, middle, and late adulthood (Baltes, Lindenberger, & Staudinger, 1998). Developmental psychology, however, has had a varied history of preferred focus both in the United States and abroad (Baltes et al., 1998). While much developmental research has focused on childhood, studying the entire life span provides a unique theoretical framework from which to build (Baltes et al., 1998).

Numerous psychologists have studied the life span through its different aspects, each hoping to unlock the secrets of how human beings develop over time. Freud, Piaget, and Maslow studied the psychosexual, cognitive, and needs perspectives of development, respectively. In addition to these well-known individuals, many others have created theories about the developmental stages, and the theories have all contributed to a fuller understanding of the complexities of human development across the life span. One such theorist is Erik Erikson, whose theory of psychosocial development posits that each stage of the life span is marked by a distinct crisis that needs to be resolved before the
individual continues in his or her developmental trajectory (Erikson, 1950). This study will focus on Erikson and his psychosocial stages.

**Erikson’s Theory**

Erik Erikson’s psychosocial theory of development focused on crises during developmental stages, which he viewed as central to an individual’s ability to advance from one stage to the next (Erikson, 1950). Erikson’s stages followed a sequence, with the resolution of each crisis propelling the individual into the next stage of life. Even though Erikson did not assign exact ages to his stages, he did intend for them to correspond with specific segments of the life span, which, when connected, represent the whole life cycle (Levinson, 1986). In other words, the psychosocial stages of development focused more on the personal crises individuals face than the biological changes or aging they may be undergoing. Erikson described eight developmental crises across the life span, which he termed the Eight Ages of Man (Erikson, 1950).

The first stage of Erikson’s theory is basic trust vs. basic mistrust, where infants learn to trust that their mothers or care providers will satisfy their needs for nourishment and care, and always return when out of sight; the child can also develop mistrust about being cared for by others (see Table 1). The next early childhood stage, autonomy vs. shame and doubt, centers on the child’s ability and desire to control their life and be self-sufficient in a variety of activities. Shame and doubt can occur when the child does not trust their own abilities and feels incapable of self-sufficiency. Building on this autonomy, the child becomes more adventurous and eager to undertake more adult-like activities, demonstrating the next stage: initiative vs. guilt. Guilt results when the child does not desire to take on more adult-like responsibilities or adhere to the internalized
rules and demands set by the parents. As the child moves into late childhood, the focus shifts to the next stage of industry vs. inferiority, where children eagerly learn competence and productivity while mastering skills. Children can also feel inferior if they feel unable to accomplish things as well as they wished. Adolescence is marked by the crisis of identity vs. role confusion, where individuals develop and substantiate their identities, or remain indecisive about the roles they should undertake. Following the establishment of an identity, young adults seek out companionship and intimate relationships, yet fear of rejection can result in isolation for the individual navigating the crisis of intimacy vs. isolation. Middle adulthood is marked by generativity vs. stagnation, which can be described as a need to contribute and provide for the next generation, but failing to do so can result in stagnation for the adult. The final stage of Erikson’s theory is ego integrity vs. despair, and applies to those in late adulthood. This stage is a time where older adults may accept their lives for what they were and are, and understand the life cycle, or they fall into despair, however, as they fear death and look back on their lives with longing and regret. Although Erikson’s theory covers the entire life span, this thesis will focus on only two stages of human development: identity vs. role confusion and intimacy vs. isolation, as the intertwining of these two stages forms part of the foundation for a theory of emerging adulthood. These two Eriksonian crises generally map onto adolescence and young adulthood, which overlap in emerging adulthood.
## Erikson’s Eight Ages of Man

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Psychosocial Crisis (Approximate Age)</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trust vs. Mistrust (infancy)</td>
<td>Infants learn to trust that necessary care will be provided or will mistrust care from others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt (early childhood)</td>
<td>Children have the desire to exert control over their lives and achieve self-sufficiency or they will doubt their abilities to do so</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiative vs. Guilt (middle childhood)</td>
<td>Children desire to take on adult-like responsibilities or follow and internalize rules set by parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry vs. Inferiority (late childhood)</td>
<td>Competency, productivity, skill mastery become important to children, who feel inferior when dissatisfied with their abilities to perform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity vs. Role Confusion* (adolescence)</td>
<td>Adolescents develop and substantiate their identities or remain uncertainty about their identity and the roles they should undertake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intimacy vs. Isolation* (young adulthood)</td>
<td>Young adults look for companionship and intimate relationships, but a fear of rejection can lead them to isolate themselves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generativity vs. Stagnation (middle adulthood)</td>
<td>Adults play a role in providing for the next generation through their work and activities or they stagnate and do not contribute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ego Integrity vs. Despair (late adulthood)</td>
<td>Older adults accept their lives and the approaching end or despair over a life not lived and fear death</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Crises that overlap during Arnett’s stage of emerging adulthood

## Developmental Stages in Emerging Adulthood

**Adolescence.** According to these psychosocial stages of development, adolescence centers on the crisis of identity versus role confusion, in which adolescents search for and solidify their identities in society (Erikson, 1950). Adolescence is viewed as the last stage of childhood, which is completed as the individual supersedes any
childhood identifications with a socially age-appropriate identity (Erikson, 1968). Unlike the previous developmental stages that are designated largely by the changes an individual is undergoing (e.g., physical growth, puberty), late-adolescent development is largely dependent on what an individual does—not what is happening to the individual. In other words, the first five of Erikson’s stages focus on physical development, and how the body is evolving. Once the hormonal changes of puberty subside, however, the focus shifts to what an individual does to resolve the crisis at hand and continue to the next stage (Erikson, 1968; Scheck, 2005). It is this idea that allows the adolescent to alter and determine their identity in order to resolve the crisis Erikson defined at this stage. This crisis, however, is not always resolved in a designated amount of time, and Erikson (1950, 1968) allowed for a prolonged adolescence, wherein individuals are allowed by society to find their niche through a freedom to explore different roles. It is during this period, which Erikson (1950, 1968) referred to as the psychosocial moratorium, that the individual resolves their identity crisis into an identity that fits both the individual and the society. According to Erikson (1968), this psychosocial moratorium describes a period of time where an individual delays future commitments because they feel unready to partake in these commitments just yet. Individuals in psychosocial moratorium are considered to be in crisis, yet are actively trying to reconcile their choices by reevaluating and reformatting their beliefs (Erikson, 1950, 1968; Marcia, 1966). In other words, the psychosocial moratorium of prolonged adolescence refers to “a delay of adult commitments” while society permits the youth to play and explore various commitments before ultimately choosing the ones that fit best (Erikson, 1968, p. 157). The ability to make these adult commitments involves a compromise between society’s demands,
parents’ wishes, and the individual’s own abilities (Marcia, 1966). Essentially, Erikson (1950, 1968) suggests that not all adolescents are able to rectify their respective crises during a prescribed period; some individuals require additional time and exploration in order to develop their identities and progress towards the more adult commitments. According to Erikson (1950), once adolescents have formed a strong identity, they are ready to take on the challenges that will come with the next developmental period.

**Young adulthood.** Once the crisis of identity vs. role confusion has been resolved, the individual then faces the crisis of intimacy vs. isolation, which is typically ascribed to the period of young adulthood (Erikson, 1950). The intimacy vs. isolation crisis focuses on the young adult’s search for companionship through both friendship and love. In terms of love and romantic relations, intimacy here does not refer to sex, but to a person’s ability to connect and relate to another individual on a deep, meaningful level (Erikson, 1950). At this stage, young adults are eager to combine their identities with that of another, and strive to succeed in their abilities to commit to another person and to follow through on such commitments (Erikson, 1950). If, however, they did not establish a firm identity in a resolution of the previous crisis, their capacity for intimacy is diminished (Erikson, 1950). A fear of rejection and of commitment can cause an individual to retreat into isolation (Erikson, 1950). The purpose of this stage is for the individual to seek out those with whom to form and nurture intimate bonds, eventually leading to the creation of the intimate relationship with a life partner (Erikson, 1950). It is these intimate relationships that then set the foundation for the remainder of the life course (Erikson, 1968; Scheck, 2005).
Despite its persistence across time and its comprehensive view of development, Erikson’s psychosocial theory has some drawbacks. Instead of relying on empirical evidence, he based his theory largely upon subjective data and logic (Rosenthal, Gurney, & Moore, 1981). Others note that Erikson’s theory lacked definitive boundaries for the identity constructs being developed (Waterman, 1982). In the same review, however, the basic constructs of Erikson’s theory, particularly about the transition from adolescence to adulthood, have found support in empirical studies (Waterman, 1982). Scheck (2005) claims that Erikson’s theory continues to reflect development across the life span, as long as it is viewed in the context of current societal changes and expectations. In one longitudinal study looking at adult psychosocial development, Whitbourne, Sneed, and Sayer (2009) found that Erikson’s stages applied to the development of individuals from college years through midlife; however, Whitbourne and colleagues concluded, that Erikson’s stages are not predetermined in time and may occur at varying times based on the development and experiences of individuals. Lastly, Erikson’s developmental time line may not fit exactly within the ages typically prescribed to the psychosocial stages (Waterman, 1982). Erikson believed that identity was largely formed during adolescence, while subsequent research has claimed that identity formation is also predominant in the years immediately following adolescence (Waterman, 1982). More recently, Valde (1996) posited that individuals continue to develop their identities past the end of adolescence and often into the twenties. Nonetheless, current developmental theorists, such as Arnett, continue to use Erikson’s theory as a foundation for their own theories, suggesting that his Eight Ages of Man continue to be relevant in the study of
development across the life span when augmented with modern views reflective of the current society.

**Arnett’s Theory of Emerging Adulthood**

Although Erikson’s stages of development do represent the progression of the life cycle, they do not fully convey the nuances of the different stages and the transitions from one to the next as they occur today. According to Arnett (2000) the shifts that have occurred over the past several decades have altered the time between adolescence and adulthood. Based on these changes he proposed a theory for an entirely new developmental stage he termed “emerging adulthood.” Emerging adulthood echoes the idea that individuals in their teens and twenties are somewhere between adolescents and adults, slowly emerging into adulthood during this stage (Arnett, 2007). Similar to the psychosocial moratorium noted by Erikson and Marcia, Arnett (2000) posits that adolescents in industrialized societies today spend the years following adolescence exploring and experimenting as they attempt to fulfill the developmental tasks ascribed to this new stage. The 18 to 25 or 29 year olds of these societies are no longer forced to move from adolescence into roles of adult responsibility as college and post-baccalaureate enrollments have increased. Concurrently, adult roles—marriage, family, financial responsibility—have been postponed to the late twenties (Arnett, 2000, 2004). According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census (1997), the median age of marriage has shifted over time, with women and men in the 1970s marrying at 21 and 23 respectively, while in 1996 marriage tended to occur for women at 25 and men at 27 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1997). These trends of delaying marriage have continued to today, with the median age at first marriage for women being 27, and the median age for men 29 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000, 2004).
Bureau of the Census, 2015). It is these delayed commitments, along with increased demographic variability, that make emerging adulthood such a unique period in the life span, and a time when nothing is the same or constant. Unlike the other developmental stages that are marked by specific tasks that almost everyone experiences (e.g., teething, puberty, career, death), the only normative thing about emerging adulthood is that there is nothing demographically normative about emerging adults (Arnett, 2000). Individuals in this stage often no longer live at home, but have yet to create a home of their own, and remain in flux as some move in with friends and others live in dormitories at universities. Because they are not constrained by the restrictions many faced while still living with parents, and have yet to be tied down by their adult commitments, the demographics of these emerging adults is both not normative and volatile.

Arnett’s theory of emerging adulthood overlaps with Erikson’s fifth and sixth psychosocial stages, claiming that identity is not fully achieved during adolescence, but continues into the twenties as individuals simultaneously solidify their identities and begin to seek out intimacy. Although emerging adulthood is based largely on the Eriksonian psychosocial theory, Arnett borrows from other similar theorists in his formulation of this newest developmental stage. According to Levinson (1986), early adulthood represents a time when individuals are most at the mercy of their own internal passions and ambitions, along with the external demands placed on them by family and society. Though Levinson’s description holds that early adulthood could continue into a person’s 40s, this idea of tension between personal and public desires dovetails with the identity exploration and achievement described by Arnett during emerging adulthood.

Keniston (1971) also theorized about individuals in their late teens and twenties,
emphasizing youth as a time when individuals experiment with different roles. Although Keniston seems to have described a period similar to Arnett’s definition of emerging adulthood, his use of the term “youth” leaves his theory vague and unable to be easily correlated with the 18-29 year old age range established by Arnett. Even before the societal shifts Arnett notes regarding the present, it is evident that the period between adolescence and adulthood has long been a period of exploration. The identity crisis of adolescence (Erikson, 1950) is largely the focus of this exploration in emerging adulthood, where individuals aim to define who they are through explorations of love, work, and worldviews (Arnett, 2000). Although identity research has looked mainly at adolescents and high school students, it is rare to find a high school senior that has reached identity achievement (Waterman, 1982). The individual’s identity is still being shaped and the explorations of emerging adulthood contribute to its formation (Arnett, 2000).

As individuals seek to firmly establish their identities during emerging adulthood, explorations in three categories are central to their search for themselves: love, work, and worldviews (Arnett, 2000). It is in these three categories where emerging adults tend to pursue various alternatives in the hopes of eventually making long-term commitments. In line with Erikson’s intimacy vs. isolation stage of young adulthood, Arnett’s emerging adults are also looking for intimacy as they move toward finding long-term commitment and life partners. This means that dating and relationships are now focused finding partners with whom to establish intimate relationships as emerging adults attempt to determine the type of person they want by their side as they move through life (Arnett, 2000). The search for work also becomes more serious, as it shifts from just a way to
make some money to finding a career. Earning money for leisure activities tends to be the focus of work during adolescence, while work in emerging adulthood seeks to direct the individual towards a satisfying career (Arnett, 2000). It is also during this period where many college graduates make the decision to leave school or to remain and pursue higher education. Graduate school allows emerging adults to further explore career options and gain specialized training necessary to pursue career paths. Although it appears that these explorations in love and work are largely preparation for the future and adulthood, that is not always the case. Frequently, explorations in love and work occur because they can; once individuals are tied down by adult responsibilities, they can lose the ability to gain a wide array of life experiences, and therefore take advantage of the exploratory opportunities available to them during emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000). Just as emerging adults explore their opportunities for love and work, they also explore and alter their views of the world.

Typically, individuals graduating high school have a worldview that has been with them since childhood and is largely molded by parents and other adult figures. Upon entering college, this worldview is often challenged as new ideas and perspectives are experienced and learned. This allows the individual to begin questioning a preexisting worldview, often altering it in light of the newly learned information (Arnett, 2000). Emerging adulthood encompasses a vast array of people and experiences, with little to no homogeneity. Despite this, it is important to note that Arnett’s theory is largely based on a heteronormative population. However, there are certain features that make this part of the lifespan distinct from those preceding and following it. According to Arnett, it is a time for exploring identity, instability, focus on the self, feeling in the middle, and
possibility; it is the time to explore and experience life in new and different ways (Arnett, 2004).

It is apparent that Erikson’s psychosocial theory provides a solid foundation for more modern developmental theorists, such as Arnett. Erikson’s defining crises of adolescence and young adulthood offer insight into what challenges face individuals in these life stages, and what they are attempting to achieve. Unlike Erikson’s earlier stages, where individuals take a more passive role in tackling the crises, adolescence requires active participation and exploration to achieve an identity. Similarly, the intimacy crisis of young adulthood necessitates an active search for love and close personal relationships. The psychosocial moratorium, described by both Erikson and Marcia, depends on this more active developmental role, where individuals explore and decide what factors will influence their identity, and later intimate relationships. This active involvement is in line with Arnett’s theory of emerging adulthood, where individuals actively explore a wide variety of possibilities in love, work, and worldviews as they seek to define themselves and prepare to take on full adult responsibilities. According to both Erikson and Arnett, intimacy plays an important role in post-adolescence, and emerging adulthood affords individuals the opportunity to experiment and explore this area of their lives. Intimacy is not just a romantic relationship, but the ability to connect and relate to another person on a deep and meaningful level; it is more than sex or friendship, it is a real connection with another person. As part of the exploration of intimacy, emerging adults are seeking an in-depth connection with another person, someone with whom life’s intimate details can be shared, and where communication is key in furthering this intimacy.
Gender and Communication

According to Tannen (1990), men and women speak different languages with regard to ideas of intimacy and independence. Tannen asserts that men and women communicate with each other from two different understandings of the world, or as Tannen puts it, participate in a form of cross-cultural communication, much as two individuals from disparate cultures might communicate (1990). In an attempt to investigate these claims made in regards to gender and communication, Edwards and Hamilton (2004) went beyond just biological sex to look at gender roles, which may or may not coincide with an individual’s actual gender, and how they are involved in a more complex model of gender communication. Participants completed an interpersonal communication survey and responded to four scenarios. The results of the survey suggested that Edwards and Hamilton’s more complex model of gender communication—using gender roles as mediators—better represents the multidimensionality of communication by accounting for gender role and individual differences; Tannen’s model, where differences resulted from a person’s sex, did not garner support from these results (Edwards & Hamilton, 2004).

In attempt to determine if male and female communication really are two different cultures, or just the result of skill specializations, Kunkel and Burleson (1999) examined the male and female preferences of emotional support and comfort at a university in the Midwestern United States. According to the authors, the existence of different cultures for men and women would suggest differing motivations for their behaviors; however, different skill specializations within the same culture would suggest that men and women do have similar expectations within their relationships (Kunkel and Burleson, 1999). In
this case, comfort preferences can be seen as one example of gender-specific communication and understanding. The authors investigated whether men and women represent two separate cultures who prefer different types of comforting, or if societal expectations have simply resulted in the development of better comforting skills in one gender over the other. The results of Kunkel and Burleson’s study indicated that men and women provide comfort in different ways. Women provide person-centered comfort: comforting messages that focus on the individual and their feelings. Men provide situation-centered comfort: comforting messages reflect a distressing situation, but do not focus on individuals and their feelings. Despite these differences, both men and women tended to prefer the ways women offered comfort. The authors concluded that since both male and female participants preferred the person-centered feminine comfort provided by women, it is unlikely that men and women represent two different cultures. Instead, the socialization and skills internalized and learned by men and women from childhood is what accounted for differences between the genders. It is easy to find the different cultures approach to differences in men and women appealing as a way of explaining misunderstandings between the genders. However, the research seems to support the idea that men and women do not represent different cultures, but rather the developmental end products of socialization differences.

Development of Communication

Communication differences may be due to socialization more than different cultures, but it is evident that a variety of factors influence how any communication differences initially develop. Vasyura (2008) attempted to perceive gender differences in communication activity by looking at individuals in two different age groups, in different
phases of the study: 18 to 40 years and 19 to 24 years. The 18 to 40 year age range drew on participants of an entry-level firefighter course, and the 19 to 24 year olds came from a university (Vasyura, 2008). Vasyura then analyzed her findings about differences between males and females, and adults and adolescents, and found gender differences in both the adult (18-40 years) and adolescent (19-24 years) samples. Although described as adolescents in the study, the 19-24 year olds are more in line with emerging adulthood than adolescence. The study concluded, after looking at sex, age, gender role, personality, and numerous other factors, that an amalgam of biological and social factors contributed to the gender differences found in communication and that some of these social factors have influenced individuals since childhood. Maccoby (2000) claimed that socialization impacts the way sex-specific habits develop, as boys and girls are reinforced (or deal with consequences for doing the opposite) for their masculine or feminine behavior, respectively. Furthermore, gender is one of the earliest social constructs children become aware of, learning about gender, its constructs, and its stability as they develop through childhood (Halim, Ruble, & Amodio, 2011). If males and females are socialized differently as children, it is reasonable to assume that there will be noticeable differences between the two groups as they grow and mature, whether those differences result in different cultures or different skills.

Eckstein, Love, Aycock, and Van Wiesner (2008) took a different approach to interpersonal communication differences than some other studies. The authors looked at the way role perceptions influence how couples communicated with and understood each other. Role perception referred to the way in which men and women identified themselves as more masculine or feminine within society, as well as how they viewed
those of the opposite gender. These roles are often generalizations or stereotypes based on normative gender differences (Eckstein et al., 2008). Other findings suggested that men and women in American society still perceived each other according to certain traits, despite any societal changes that have taken place (Auster & Ohm, 2000). In this study, the authors reevaluated the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) to assess whether the original gendered characteristics still applied in society nearly thirty years after the measure’s creation. Their findings suggested that 18 of the 20 original feminine traits were still viewed as feminine, while only 8 of the 20 masculine traits were still identified as masculine (Auster & Ohm, 2000). Although not all characteristics originally used on the BSRI remained accurate descriptions of masculine and feminine, the findings that some did remain the same suggest that traditional gender roles persisted despite changes that have occurred in society over time. As emerging adults work towards establishing their identities, they rely on communication to navigate their world and the interpersonal relationships (e.g., friend, romantic, and work) they encounter (Veksler & Meyer, 2014). That is to say that this emerging adult period can be a pivotal time in the individual’s development of interpersonal communication skills, as they learn to communicate effectively (or not) with the world around them.

**Intimacy and Communication**

According to both Erikson and Arnett, intimacy is a key factor in the development of young adults and emerging adults, respectively. Given the importance of intimacy in establishing committed adult relationships, it is evident that communication about intimacy is also necessary in this endeavor. In a cross sectional study, Montgomery (2005) looked at 12-24 years old to assess how the capacity for interpersonal intimacy
evolved as individuals developed from adolescence through emerging adulthood. She looked at the extent to which romantic relationships, behavior, affect, cognition, identity, age and gender influenced the development of intimacy. According to her findings, gender predicted an individual’s capacity for intimacy more than any of the other demographic variables looked at. Dating experience and motivations were found to predict intimacy better than a person’s age, indicating that aging alone did not account for changes in intimacy behaviors. Montgomery found that although differences existed at all age ranges between men and women, significant differences only existed for identity during early adolescence and intimacy during emerging adulthood. In a study looking at starting romantic intimacy, Eryilmaz and Atak (2011) found that, according to the results of the Markers of Starting Romantic Intimacy scale, men initiated romantic intimacy more freely than did women. This demonstrates that gender could influence the way emerging adults communicate and develop intimacy within romantic relationships.

In another study looking at intimacy across age ranges (adolescents to emerging adults), three dating goals were examined to assess at what points intimacy, identity, and status could be the goals of dating and/or relationships (Zimmer-Gembeck, Hughes, Kelly, & Connolly, 2012). The study compared the three dating goals between teens and emerging adults, males and females, same sex and other sex attracted individuals, and those with or without a steady romantic partner. After revising the Social Dating Goals Scale (SDGS-R) to assess intimacy, identity, and status, the authors found that younger participants tended to have goals more focused on identity, while older participants had more intimacy-centered goals (Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2012). This pattern is in line with both Erikson’s and Arnett’s theories, where intimacy tended to follow the development of
identity. Further exploration into the relationship between an individual’s dating goals and most relevant psychosocial crisis will provide insight into how the developmental process overlaps and influences the dating goals of emerging adults. Although the older participants (the emerging adults) tended to have more intimacy goals, they continued to have goals related to identity as well, supporting Arnett’s idea that identity formation is not completed in adolescence, but continues into and throughout emerging adulthood alongside explorations of intimacy. However, the search for identity can influence how invested an individual is in seeking out and establishing intimate relationships. Individuals who know themselves and what they want would be more interested in exploring intimacy than the person who is not yet sure of an identity (Zimmer-Gembeck & Petherick, 2006).

Communication plays an important role in the exploration of intimacy, and relational communication is a factor in the romantic and sexual relationships of emerging adults. According to research, emerging adults considered relational communication to be important to the establishment and maintenance of interpersonal relationships, particularly in the case of friends with benefits (FWB) type relationships (Bisson & Levine, 2009; Hughes, Morrison, & Asada, 2005). Emerging adults have acknowledged rules of communication, such as honesty and openness, as important to the maintenance of FWB relationships (Weaver, MacKeigan, & MacDonald, 2011). Being honest and open about the relationship is viewed as key to its success. Additionally, when compared to other types of non-romantic sexual relationships (e.g., one night stands and other causal sexual encounters), FWBs contained more relational communication and intimacy (Wentland & Reissing, 2011). Despite having identified communication as salient to the
success of these relationships, many emerging adults also admitted that it does not commonly occur (Bisson & Levine, 2009; Hughes, Morrison, & Asada, 2005). Even with the expectations of honesty and openness in the relationship, it seems that a disconnect still exists between what emerging adults think should occur and what they actually communicate in these relationships (Hughes et al., 2005). If emerging adults considered communication important to FWB relationships, why has it been so uncommon in practice? According to a semi-structured interview study by Knight (2014), talking about a relationship was considered work, and participants believed that FWB relationships should not necessitate the same amount of effort for relationship maintenance as an actual relationship. Participants in the study agreed that a FWB relationship provided some of the same benefits as a committed relationship, but without all the hassle and effort such a relationship would require (Knight, 2014). Essentially, to emerging adults, talking about the relationship in order to establish or maintain it required effort, yet the expectations of the FWB relationship implied that this work is not necessary to maintain such a relationship, and so they tended to avoid it. This lack of relational talk in a FWB relationship could be viewed as a taboo topic, or an area of conversation to avoid because of its possible negative repercussions (Baxter & Wilmot, 1985). Discussing the state of a relationship could be considered one of these taboo topics (Baxter & Wilmot, 1985), and underscores why individuals involved in a FWB relationship could be prone to avoiding such topics. Furthermore, although it may appear like closer, more intimate relationships would result in less taboo topics, Baxter and Wilmot found that these topics remained taboo regardless of whether individuals were in a romantic or non-romantic relationship.
Although the above research focuses mostly on casual sexual relationships (e.g., friends with benefits) it is possible that these same ideas apply to more committed romantic relationships as well. According to Mongeau and Knight (2015), relational communication may be particularly important in FWB relationships in order to clarify their ambiguity between friendship and romance, but this same relationship talk is essential to the success of any relationship, regardless of type. From a developmental perspective, relationships during emerging adulthood could represent a bridge between the relationships common in adolescence and the committed life-long relationships emerging adults are moving towards (Knight, 2014; Shulman & Connolly, 2013). Based on the existing literature, communication and intimacy in relationships are intertwined, yet little to no research seems to address this topic in emerging adult committed relationships. Communication is central to the emerging adult’s identity and intimacy in these transformative years, and the current research demonstrates that more research is needed to better understand the complexities of communication at this stage and more specifically, the use of communication in regards to intimacy and committed relationships (Veksler & Meyer, 2014). This study aims to contribute to the growing body of research on emerging adults by exploring intimacy and communication within romantic relationships.
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

Procedures

The study was conducted as an online survey. The survey site Qualtrics was used to create and host the survey. The California State University, Northridge psychology department’s human participant pool website, the Sona System (subject pool software), was used to recruit participants. Student participation in psychology research studies is required for credit in the undergraduate psychology courses. The students who do opt to participate in the research have numerous studies to choose from. However, an alternative assignment is available should a student choose not to participate in research.

Participants followed a link through Sona to the survey on Qualtrics. To complete the survey, participants had to read and agree to a consent form. They were then presented with the six measures used for this study: the Modified Erikson Psychosocial Inventory (MEPSI), the Social Dating Goals Scale-Revised (SDGS-R), the Sternberg Triangular Love Scale (TLS), the Communication Functions Questionnaire (CFQ), and the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) were presented to all participants. Following completion of the survey, a debriefing was displayed to participants to further explain the nature of the study in which they had just participated.

Sample

The sample consisted of 60 participants, with 21 men and 38 women, with one person not providing gender. They ranged in age from 18 to 26 years, with a mean age of 19.5. The majority of participants were age 18 (28.3%) and 19 (35%) years. Since all participants were within the age range for emerging adulthood, no participants were excluded based on reported age. Participants’ gender role classifications, as determined
by the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI), were as follows: 8 were classified as masculine, 6 were classified as feminine, 21 were classified as androgynous, and 23 were classified as undifferentiated. When asked about relationship status, 21 participants indicated being in a committed relationship, 11 in a dating relationship, 6 in a casual relationship (e.g., friends with benefits), 21 not currently in a relationship, and 1 did not respond.

**Measurement**

**Developmental Stage**

The 80-item Modified Erikson Psychosocial Inventory (MEPSI) was used to determine participants’ stage of development according to Erikson’s psychosocial theory (Darling-Fisher & Kline Leidy, 1988). The MEPSI has been found to be a reliable and valid scale used in numerous studies. The reported internal consistency for the scale overall was .97, with reliability coefficients for the eight scales as follows: trust .82, autonomy .84, initiative .78, industry .85, identity .85, intimacy .78, generativity .75, and ego integrity .80 (Darling-Fisher & Kline Leidy, 1988). The Modified Erikson Psychosocial Inventory consists of eight subscales each with 10 questions, corresponding to Erikson’s eight psychosocial stages. The MEPSI uses a Likert format with the following response options: 1 = hardly ever true, 2 = occasionally true, 3 = about half the time, 4 = usually true, and 5 = almost always true. Sample items include “I know what kind of person I am,” “I’m basically a loner” (reverse coded), and “I find it easy to make close friends.” There are five positive and five negative items within each subscale, with negative items being reverse coded, that are averaged to compute a mean score representing each psychosocial stage. An aggregate mean can then be computed from the subscale means. According to Darling-Fisher and Klein Leidy, a high score suggests a
predominance of positive attribute, while a low score suggests more negative attributes. A higher score reflects successful resolution of the psychosocial crisis. Calculated reliability coefficients for the eight scales in the current sample were as follows: trust .75, autonomy .74, initiative .70, industry .84, identity .78, intimacy .59, generativity .62, and ego integrity .60. The reliability for the full scale was .95; these values were similar although generally lower in magnitude than those obtained in the standardization sample.

**Intimacy**

In terms of this study, intimacy refers to a deep connection that goes beyond just physical intimacy to encompass emotional and relational connectedness between individuals. Intimacy was assessed through two different scales. The Social Dating Goals Scale-Revised (SDGS-R) determines whether a participant’s goals and ideas about dating are more focused on establishing their identity or on building intimacy (Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2012). Published Cronbach’s α values were .74 for the identity scale, and .78 for the intimacy scale (Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2012). The SDGS-R is an 18-item scale with three subscales, though only the intimacy and identity subscales were used in this study. It is presented in a Likert scale format with the following response choices: 1 = disagree strongly, 2 = disagree somewhat, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree somewhat, and 5 = agree strongly. Sample items include “In my dating relationships I want to do things on my own” and “In my dating relationships I want to spend a lot of time with my partner”. Item ratings are averaged to produce a score for each subscale—intimacy and identity. The highest scored scale reflects the dating category most in line with an individual’s own dating goals. For example, a high intimacy score with a low identity score would suggest an individual seeks out intimacy when dating, but places less emphasis on
establishing an individual identity. The reliability coefficients for the current sample were .85 for the identity scale and .88 for the intimacy scale.

The Sternberg Triangular Love Scale (TLS) assesses the intimacy, commitment, and passion of an individual’s current or most recent relationship (Sternberg, 1986). The intimacy side of the triangle deals with the emotional investment in the relationship (Sternberg, 1986). According to Sternberg (1997) the internal consistency for intimacy characteristic ratings is .91 and for intimacy importance ratings is .90. The TLS also appeared valid when compared with similar measures. For the purposes of this study, only the intimacy subscale was used, as assessing participants’ emotional investment in relationships will help determine how focused emerging adults are on intimacy in their current or most recent relationships. The intimacy scale consists of 15 items, where individuals are asked to consider questions such as “I have a warm relationship with…” and “I share deeply personal information about myself with…”, as they would apply to the partner in their current or most recent relationship. The scale is administered twice, first asking participants how characteristic of their relationship the item is, and then asking how important each item is to the relationship, but only the importance ratings were used for this study. The TLS is presented in a Likert format with the following response options: 1 = not at all, 5 = moderately, and 9 = extremely, with other values in between. Items are summed and divided by 15 to obtain an average intimacy scale score. A higher average rating indicates that intimacy is more important to the participant’s relationship. The reliability coefficient for the importance of intimacy characteristics to a relationship in the current sample was .99.
Communication

The Communication Functions Questionnaire (CFQ) is a 30-item scale assessing the value participants place on communication skills within a particular relationship (Burleson & Samter, 1990). It was originally designed to assess the value friends place on communication skills within their friendships, but has since been extended to assess the same thing in dating and romantic relationships (Burleson, Kunkel, & Birch, 1994; Graham, 2009). Burelson and Samter reported Cronbach alphas of $\alpha = .83$ for affective communication skills and $\alpha = .74$ for instrumental communication skills. Later studies confirmed the construct validity of the CFQ (Graham, 2009). The most recent version of the CFQ measures the perceived importance of ten skills related to affective and instrumental communication skills. The CFQ is a Likert-based scale with response options ranging from $1 = \text{somewhat important}$ to $5 = \text{extremely important}$. The CFQ consists of items such as “can make conversations easy and fun” and “is open in expressing her/his thoughts and feelings to me”. To assess the value participants place on communication overall in their relationships, a total score was calculated by adding up item ratings and then calculating the mean. Higher scores indicate increased value placed on communication in relationships. An internal consistency reliability coefficient of .96 was computed with the current sample.

Gender Role

The Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) was included to assess the masculine and feminine sex roles of the participants (Bem, 1974). The short form of the BSRI, which consists of only 30 questions and is half the length of the original (Bem, 1981), was administered because it has been shown to be purer, according to confirmatory factor
analyses, than the original form (Choi and Fuqua, 2003). The correlation between the original and the short form is .87 (women) and .88 (men) for femininity (F), .96 (women) and .94 (men) for masculinity (M), and .90 (women) and .91 (men) for femininity - masculinity difference scores. The coefficient alpha was also calculated: .84 (females) and .87 (males) on femininity, .86 (females) and .85 (males) on masculinity, and .89 (females) and .88 (males) for the femininity - masculinity difference scores. Reliability on femininity - masculinity difference scores was .88 for females and .85 for males. Test-takers are asked to rate how well each characteristic describes them on a 7-point Likert scale. Response options include: 1 = never or almost ever true, 2 = usually not true, 3 = sometimes but infrequently true, 4 = occasionally true, 5 = often true, 6 = usually true, and 7 = always or almost always true. Participants are asked to rate how true of them the characteristics, such as “affectionate” and “independent” are. The reliability coefficients for the current sample was .87 for masculine characteristics, .88 for the feminine characteristics, and .93 for the scale overall.

The BSRI is scored by first averaging the ratings of the feminine and masculine items to arrive at a Femininity and Masculinity score for each participant. The ratings of each scale are summed and produce raw scores that are then converted to standard T-scores so that a difference score can be calculated. High scores suggest the participant is strongly sex-typed, with positive scores indicative of femininity (a) and negative scores indicative of masculinity (b). After subtracting masculinity scores from femininity scores, a difference standard score was used to classify participants according to the median raw scores of the normative sample or the median raw scores of the current sample.
Given the fluidity between natal gender and gender roles, this is an important construct to assess. Since socialization can explain differences in communication and intimacy, looking at largely socially constructed gender roles can offer insight into the extent to which that socialization does in fact affect communication. In the present study, this researcher presented the BSRI last in order to avoid priming participants’ responses to the other measures with regard to gender characteristics. Studies have suggested that the views of women primed with gender roles impact measures of gender stereotypes and self-concept (Rudman & Phelan, 2010).

**Demographics**

Demographic variables such as age, gender, and relationship status were also measured. Although the study of nonbinary gender is prevalent in psychology, the majority of the research referenced in this study was from a predominantly heteronormative perspective, leading to the decision to assess gender only as male or female.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

After calculating each participant’s scores for the eight subscales representing the eight psychosocial crises, the subscale with the highest score was determined and used to categorize participants into one of the psychosocial stages. Contrary to assumptions that the majority of participants would be in either the identity vs. role confusion or intimacy vs. isolation stages, only 6 participants were in the intimacy stage and 2 were in the identity stage. Almost half of the participants \((n = 23)\) were determined to be in the industry vs. inferiority stage, with only 2 participants in the trust vs. mistrust stage, 7 in the autonomy vs. shame and self-doubt stage, 9 in the initiative vs. guilt stage, 6 in the generativity vs. stagnation stage, and 5 in the ego integrity vs. despair stage.

In conducting analyses on participant’s psychosocial crises, the eight subscales representative of these crises were highly correlated with each other. Instead of relying on categorical assignment of participants into psychosocial stages, correlational analyses were used, as previous researchers have done (Darling-Fisher & Kline Leidy, 1988; Kline Leidy & Darling-Fisher, 1995). This prior research tended to look more at the psychosocial stages than actual ages of individuals. Each participant, therefore, had eight psychosocial stage scores corresponding to the extent to which each of Erikson’s crises had been resolved up to this point.
According to hypothesis 1, emerging adults in the intimacy vs. isolation stage would have more intimacy-focused dating goals, while those in the identity vs. role confusion stage would have more identity-focused dating goals. Participants’ responses were used to determine the focus of their dating goals, and the highest subscale score determined the predominant focus of participants’ dating goals—identity or intimacy. After categorizing participants according to these dating goals, it was found that 39 (65.0%) participants had intimacy-focused dating goals, 13 (21.7%) had identity-focused goals, and 8 (13.3%) had dating goals focused equally on intimacy and identity.

An ANOVA was used to compare the category of participants’ dating goals with their mean identity vs. role confusion crisis and intimacy vs. isolation crisis scores. The results revealed a statistically significant difference between participants with identity-
focused ($M = 3.53, SD = .65$) and intimacy-focused ($M = 3.47, SD = .51$) dating goals when compared with their average intimacy vs. isolation psychosocial stage scores ($F(2, 57) = 3.97, p = .02$). A Bonferroni post hoc test revealed that the significant differences between groups were due to both the identity focused ($M = 3.53, SD = .65$) and intimacy focused ($M = 3.47, SD = .51$) groups being significantly different from the equal focus group ($M = 2.90, SD = .57$; identity $p = .04$; intimacy $p = .03$), but not significantly different from each other. No meaningful differences were found between groups comparing participants’ identity vs. role confusion scores with the focus of dating goals ($F(2, 57) = .82, p = .45$).

The second hypothesis expected that emerging adults in the intimacy vs. isolation crisis would see intimacy characteristics as more important to their relationships than those in the identity vs. isolation crisis. The results indicated that 11 participants (18.3%) felt that the intimacy items were extremely characteristic of their relationships, while 22 participants (36.7%) felt that the same intimacy characteristics are extremely important to have in their relationships. However, no significant correlations existed between either the identity or intimacy stages and the importance of those intimacy characteristics to a relationship. Having characteristics of intimacy in one’s relationship was also correlated with feeling that it is important to have those characteristics in a relationship ($r = .76, p < .01$).
Table 2
Summary of Correlational Analyses of the Importance of Communication Skills with MEPSI Stages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. CFQ</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Trust vs. Mistrust</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.29*</td>
<td>.67**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Initiative vs. Guilt</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.37**</td>
<td>.56**</td>
<td>.77**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Industry vs. Inferiority</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.38**</td>
<td>.46**</td>
<td>.58**</td>
<td>.67**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Identity vs. Role Confusion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.66**</td>
<td>.72**</td>
<td>.63**</td>
<td>.63**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Intimacy vs. Isolation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.42**</td>
<td>.51**</td>
<td>.46**</td>
<td>.37**</td>
<td>.54**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Generativity vs. Stagnation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.26*</td>
<td>.40**</td>
<td>.47**</td>
<td>.60**</td>
<td>.56**</td>
<td>.67**</td>
<td>.49**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Ego Integrity vs. Despair</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.40**</td>
<td>.63**</td>
<td>.63**</td>
<td>.60**</td>
<td>.62**</td>
<td>.63**</td>
<td>.49**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05, **p < .01

According to hypothesis 3, participants’ average ratings of the importance of communication skills in a relationship were correlated with all of the psychosocial stages except identity vs. role confusion, intimacy vs. isolation, and trust vs. mistrust (see Table 2). The psychosocial stages initiative vs. guilt (.37), industry vs. inferiority (.38), and ego integrity vs. despair (.40) all had significant correlations with the average importance placed on communication skills at the $p < .01$ level. Autonomy vs. shame and doubt (.29), and generativity vs. stagnation (.26) were significant at the $p < .05$ level. It was also hypothesized that emerging adults with more intimacy, regardless of psychosocial crisis, would also place more value on communication skills in relationships. The importance of communication skills was significantly correlated with participants’ scores, both for having intimacy characteristics in the relationship and the importance of those characteristics ($r = .487, p < .01$, $r = .613, p < .01$, respectively).

Although it was hypothesized that female emerging adults would have and value intimacy more in their relationships than would male emerging adults, the findings did not indicate and differences between the variables based on gender. Specifically, no relationships were found between the focus of participants’ genders and the focus of their
dating goals, the importance of intimacy characteristics in relationships, or the value placed on communication skills in relationships.

Lastly, it was hypothesized that emerging adults with a feminine gender role would view intimacy characteristics as more important to their relationships than those with a masculine gender role. Participants’ gender role classifications were correlated with the importance of intimacy characteristics in a relationship ($r = .32, p < .05$). The importance of these intimacy characteristics in relationships, however, was not significantly different from participants’ gender role classifications ($F(3, 54) = 2.27, p = .09$). It was also hypothesized that participants with a more feminine gender role would place increased value on communication skills in relationships than would those with a more masculine gender role. An ANOVA was used to compare participants’ average ratings of the importance of communication skills with their gender role classifications. The results indicated that a significant difference existed between groups’ average ratings of the importance of communication skills ($F(3, 54) = 4.970, p = .004$). A Bonferroni post hoc test revealed that individuals classified as androgynous ($M = 4.46, SD = .41$) significantly differed from those classified as undifferentiated ($M = 3.95, SD = .75$) and masculine ($M = 3.68, SD = .50$) in the way they rated the importance of communication skills in relationships (undifferentiated $p = .033$; masculine $p = .013$). No significant differences existed with those participants classified with a feminine gender role ($M = 4.40, SD = .45$).

Overall, these findings suggest that there are relationships between intimacy, communication, and gender role for emerging adults, although not necessarily in the way hypothesized. Although emerging adults are dealing with identity formation and the
establishment of intimate relationships, the psychosocial stage scores did not reflect these ideas as their predominant focus. It was found that individuals in the intimacy stage were more likely to acknowledge characteristics of intimacy in their relationships and view them as important than those in the identity stage. Communication, however, was not correlated with either the identity or intimacy stages. Lastly, it was found that gender role does influence the way an individual perceives qualities of intimacy and communication. These results show that are relationships between intimacy, communication, and gender role that need to be explored further to gain a better understanding of how these things are intertwined in emerging adulthood.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

This study aimed to contribute to the growing body of research on emerging adults by exploring intimacy and communication within dating and romantic relationships. It examined the extent to which the Eriksonian stages of identity and intimacy line up with Arnett’s description of emerging adulthood. According to Arnett’s theory of emerging adulthood, the primary tasks of this life stage are to solidify one’s identity and seek out intimate relationships, preparing individuals to accept the responsibilities of adulthood (Arnett, 2004). As emerging adults undertake these tasks, the extent to which they are establishing their identities or seeking out intimate relationships may vary depending on their age, gender, and current desires.

Based on the findings in the previous chapter, the majority of participants in the study were neither in the identity vs. role confusion nor the intimacy vs. isolation crisis, as was assumed based on Erikson’s psychosocial theory and Arnett’s theory of emerging adulthood. This suggests that emerging adulthood and development are more complicated than dealing with just a combination of an identity and intimacy crisis. The eight stages were also highly correlated with each other, and this multicollinearity is possibly due to psychosocial development being an ongoing process, where each stage has no definitive start or end. During the identity vs. role confusion crisis, while attempting to define and solidify an identity, individuals may question the resolutions of previous crises and life experiences to decide whether those ideals are worth merging with the newer more complete identity being formed at this stage (Erikson, 1950). Earlier stages may be revisited around puberty and reevaluated to determine their role in the individual’s life. To
some extent, adolescents need to relive the struggles of the earlier crises to arrive at resolutions that work for and with the identity they are building (Erikson, 1950). These reevaluation of the earlier crises is a way for the adolescent to merge his childhood identity with his current identity in a way that allows that individual to progress into the stages of adult development (Erikson, 1968). This revisiting of the earlier stages could be one reason that participants scored higher in earlier psychosocial crises, than in the crises expected to have the highest scores—identity vs. role confusion and intimacy vs. isolation.

Since Erikson (1950, 1968) does say that earlier crises can be revisited in later stages, particularly in the case of adolescence and identity formation, psychosocial development can be viewed as more of a lifelong process than just a definitive sequence of development. For Erikson, a strong and lasting identity can only be developed when previous stages have all been resolved. This is seen during adolescence when old values established in previous stages are questioned, to reassess what can work within the forming self-identity, and what to discard as an individual moves forward with identity formation and the later stages of development (Scheck, 2005). Furthermore, identity is not definitively set during this adolescent period, as it is viewed as a life-long process affected by the life and experiences of an individual (Erikson, 1968; Scheck, 2005). For Erikson, the development of the individual is also seen as a life-long process, where each stage overlaps with those before and after it, rationally joining the stages of psychosocial development (Erikson, 1968; Scheck, 2005). Even though the emerging adults in this study were not determined to be in the psychosocial crises that correspond with Arnett’s
theory of emerging adulthood, the relationships between psychosocial stage, intimacy, communication, gender, and gender role were still examined.

Participants’ identity- or intimacy-focused dating goals were generally varied for those individuals in the intimacy vs. isolation crisis, but not those in the identity vs. role confusion crisis. Post hoc tests indicated that much of this variation was due to participants who had equal identity and intimacy dating goals and not to participants whose dating goals were only intimacy or identity focused. This means that the hypothesis stating that those in the intimacy vs. isolation stage would have more intimacy-focused dating goals, while those in the identity vs. role confusion stage would have more identity-focused dating goals was not supported. The findings, however, suggest that emerging adults are not focused solely on establishing an identity or finding intimate connections, but are concurrently doing both. Previous research has found that younger participants tended to have goals more focused on identity, while older participants had more intimacy-centered goals (Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2012).

Participants’ dating goals further reflect this idea, as those with equal identity and intimacy focused goals were significantly different from those with predominantly only identity or intimacy focused dating goals. Emerging adults are not simply dealing with creating an identity or finding intimate connections, but are concurrently doing both. Since the majority of participants were the same age, it’s possible that these results reflect a combination of factors: emerging adults are actively working on resolving their identity and intimacy crises, but may also be influenced by other factors. Further inquiry into an individual’s dating goals and how they correspond with that individual’s current
psychosocial crisis is needed in order to determine what relationships, and possible differences, exist between dating goals and psychosocial crises.

Correlational analyses of participants’ responses about the importance of intimacy characteristics in relationships revealed that views of intimacy are correlated with psychosocial stage. The results suggest that some correlations existed between participants’ intimacy vs. isolation scores and how important they viewed intimacy characteristics being to relationships. It was hypothesized that participants in the intimacy vs. isolation crisis would view intimacy characteristics as more important to a relationship than would those in the identity vs. role confusion crisis, however, this was not fully supported by the results. These findings suggest that the importance placed on characteristics of intimacy within a relationship is not correlated with an individual’s psychosocial desire for intimacy. It is possible that the emerging adults participating in this study are not as focused on intimacy as other emerging adults might be, as evidenced by the small number of participants that were placed in the intimacy vs. isolation stage.

The search for intimacy can be dependent on successful resolution of the previous crises, particularly that of identity formation. If an individual has not yet solidified an identity, or successfully resolved earlier crises, that individual’s focus will center on forming an identity or resolving earlier crises, and not on the search for intimacy (Zimmer-Gembeck & Petherick, 2006). Since the focus of the identity vs. role confusion stage is on defining one’s self in society, it makes sense that intimacy characteristics would not be relevant to the individuals more focused on their search for identity than intimacy. The small sample size, coupled with the small number of participants placed in the intimacy vs. isolation crisis makes it difficult to draw reasonable conclusions about the relationships between
an individual’s current psychosocial crisis and how that individual views intimacy in terms of relationships. Further research is necessary to better understand the correlations that were found between the intimacy vs. isolation crisis and the importance of intimacy characteristics to relationships, however, it is important to first understand whether emerging adults are actively seeking out intimacy or still focused on establishing an identity.

It was hypothesized that participants in the intimacy vs. isolation stage would attribute more value to communication skills in a relationship; however, no relationship was found between the value placed on communication and the psychosocial stages being examined. This suggests that it may not be as important to emerging adults as was hypothesized.

Although one objective of this research was to examine the possible relationships of intimacy and communication with gender, no differences were found to exist between male and female emerging adults. This suggests that any differences that do exist are not due to biology, but are byproducts of other factors, such as socialization. One reason for these findings could be that gender, more than other demographic variables, is predictive of an individual’s capacity for intimacy (Montgomery, 2005). Even though it may predict the capacity for intimacy, it does not account for the how much intimacy exists in an individual’s relationship or how much importance the individual places on that intimacy. Despite the lack of significant differences based on gender, the results suggest that gender roles do influence emerging adults’ perceptions of intimacy and communication. The importance of having characteristics of intimacy in a relationship was correlated with an individual’s gender role classification, but no significant differences were found. That is
to say there is a relationship between gender role and an emerging adult’s perceptions of intimacy, but not a relationship specific to one gender role category over the others.

The value placed on communication, however, was related to participants’ gender role categorizations. Those categorized as androgynous differed significantly from those categorized as masculine or undifferentiated, but not from those classified as feminine. It was hypothesized that those with a feminine gender role would value communication skills in their relationships more than would those with a masculine gender role, however that was not what the results illustrated. The findings indicated that those classified as androgynous value communication skills highly in relationships, while those classified as masculine or undifferentiated do not. Since the majority of participants fell into the undifferentiated or androgynous category, it is not possible to determine from these results whether a feminine or masculine gender role does in fact influence the value placed on communication skills in relationships. Even though there was not a significant difference between the value participants with masculine or feminine gender roles placed on communication, the significant difference between masculine and androgynous—high masculine and high feminine—suggests that a feminine gender role might have some relation to the way emerging adults view and value communication skills within their relationships. Since androgynous individuals have high levels of both feminine and masculine characteristics, it is possible that the feminine characteristics do influence the importance attributed to communication skills. Similarly, the significant difference between those classified as androgynous and those classified as undifferentiated (low masculine and low feminine) further suggests that the feminine gender role may influence the value placed on communication in relationships; however the relationship between
the feminine and masculine characteristics should also be examined to determine how they each impact the way a person views communication. Further research into gender role and its influence on communication would be needed to determine the nature of this relationship.

**Limitations**

This thesis will contribute to the growing body of literature on emerging adulthood and how emerging adults view intimacy and communication; however, certain limitations to the study exist. The sample was limited to students from one university, possibly minimizing the generalizability of the findings. All data were collected via self-reporting, which only looks at the views of emerging adult participants at the time the survey was completed. Since data were only collected at one time point, it is difficult to draw conclusions about causality between the variables. The sample size itself also posed some limitations to the analysis of the data, as the small number of participants made certain analyses impossible, and possibly affected the results that were obtained through the analyses conducted. However, the sample was sufficient for the analyses conducted.

Another limitation is the theory of emerging adulthood itself, which some argue is only a superfluous addition to development across the lifespan. Arnett’s proposed theory of emerging adulthood does not significantly contribute to the literature, but complicates it by adding a new name for ideas that can be expressed just as easily using previously existing terms (Côté, 2014). Furthermore, Côté (2014) adds that Arnett provides almost no empirical evidence in defense of emerging adulthood, and no other researchers have attempted to provide such empirical support either. Based on these claims, Côté feels that
emerging adulthood is an unsupported idea that contributes little, if anything to the literature, and might actually being doing more harm than good in the field and society.

Despite Côté’s opposition to Arnett’s theory, emerging adulthood does describe the tumultuous time in life that seems to come between the end of puberty and the onset of adult responsibilities. The unexpected results of participants’ predominant psychosocial crises may actually reflect Arnett’s theory better than if they all participants had fit neatly into Erikson’s identity and intimacy crises. Arnett describes emerging adulthood by saying that the only normative thing about emerging adulthood is that there is nothing demographically normative about emerging adults (Arnett, 2000). The fact that the results were not normative, and varied so much from what was expected suggests that the results actually do support the need for such a theory.

**Implications**

This research is important because it contributes to the growing body of literature focused on emerging adulthood. As such a new area of research, there are many areas within emerging adulthood that have not been explored, and this study attempts to provide some insight into how emerging adults view intimacy and communication in the context of establishing their identity and fulfilling their desires for intimate connections.

The results of this study can then be used to inform future research into the ways emerging adults view intimacy, as well as the way they communicate about intimacy within the context of intimate relationships. Further research can assist emerging adults struggling with intimacy or relationships issues by providing a deeper understanding of why these issues may occur and they can be best dealt with. Additionally, this research can offer some insight into the current popular culture dating and relationship trends of
emerging adults, and these trends impact the way emerging adults form and maintain dating and intimate relationships.

**Conclusion**

This thesis adds to the existing literature on intimacy, communication, and emerging adulthood, by examining the identity and intimacy goals of emerging adults and how these objectives impact an individual’s views on intimacy and communication in relationships. The findings suggest that further research in these areas is necessary to better understand emerging adults and their views on intimacy and communication. Future researchers can build on some of the findings of this study with a larger and more generalizable sample to determine if these findings are unique to this sample, or hold true within the larger emerging adult population. Further research into dating goals, particularly when identity and intimacy dating goals are equally balanced, could reveal more about why and how emerging adults choose to form different kinds of romantic relationships, from casual sex to long-term commitments.

The perceptions of and importance placed on intimacy should also be looked at further to obtain a better understanding of how emerging adults perceive and experience intimacy within their various relationships, and what other factors might influence these perceptions. Although no differences were found between male and female participants, gender roles did contribute to the ways individuals viewed intimacy and communication. The masculine and feminine characteristics that make up an individual’s gender role should also be examined further to better understand which characteristics contribute to the values placed on communication and how that in turn impacts the intimacy and relationships of emerging adults.
The results of this study illustrated the connections between emerging adults’
dating goals, communication, and gender role, but these topics need to be explored more
fully in depth within larger samples before any conclusions can be drawn. As research in
this area continues, looking at things such as relationship status and how that impacts
emerging adults’ views on intimacy and communication, as well as how these are all
affected by their gender role with lead to new and interesting research that will allow the
scientific community to further understand emerging adulthood.
REFERENCES


