

THE IMPACT OF FAMILY FUNCTION ON IDENTITY FORMATION DURING  
EMERGING ADULTHOOD

BY

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**ABSTRACT**

Family communication plays a pivotal role in many facets of an individual's life development. The aim of this study was to examine the effects of family communication and functioning as a predictor of identity formation during emerging adulthood. An online survey was used to assess components of Olson's Circumplex Model of Family Functioning as well as reported identity formation. Data was collected from 117 emerging adults. The final data revealed that more balanced cohesive and adaptive families were not significantly predictive of healthy identity formation, but certain extreme levels were predictive of low identification with commitments and high ruminative exploration. Discussion highlights the importance of understanding established family functions and their potential impact for personal development in conjunction with environmental and temporal factors.

## **The Impact of Family Function on Identity Formation during Emerging Adulthood**

Relationships within families are arguably the most impactful and persistent in the developmental lifespan. Within these interdependent relationships, communication plays a key role in regulation, change, and the definition of the family's present reality (Segrin & Flora, 2011). According to family systems theory, families have an interdependent structure in which there are patterns, boundaries, messages, and rules that shape the system (Kerr, 2000). Importantly, individuals are seen as inseparable from their network of relationships and are influenced heavily by their family of origin across developmental stages. In this way, overall family functioning has a significant influence on individual development. Within individual development, identity formation is recognized as an important process which starts in childhood and continues throughout life (Erikson, 1950; Luyckx et al., 2005; Schwartz et al., 2011) with the majority of identity change occurring in adolescence and the transition to adulthood (Arnett, 2000; Erikson, 1968).

More than 50 studies have been conducted using Olson's Circumplex Model to examine the effect of family functioning on child and adolescent development. These studies have found that family functioning has significant influence on the development of empathy (Henrym Sager, & Plunkett, 1990) and career maturity (King, 1989), as well as overall adolescent adjustment to new life events, such as remarriage of a parent (Henry & Lovelace, 1995). There can be critical consequences for individual development in childhood and adolescence if the family unit is dysfunctional, such as behavioral issues (Smets & Hartup, 1988), depressive and anxiety disorders (Warner, Mufson, &

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Weissman, 1995), and use of negative coping strategies and maladaptation to stressors (Marotz-Baden & Colvin, 1989).

The time between adolescence and adulthood, known as emerging adulthood, is a phase of high identity development and personal change. It is during this time that family functionality could influence an individual's ability to deal with situational stress (Olson et al., 1989); however, there is currently limited research on impact of family functioning on important outcomes for emerging adults' identity formation.

Identity formation is crucial to psychosocial functioning and commitment to social roles, which allows individuals to feel comfortable and capable within society. However, identity formation can be done more or less effectively dependent on satisfactory exploration and identity commitments. If identity formation is less effective it can be a source of problematic psychosocial development in later years. However, if an individual transitions to emerging adulthood coming from a balanced, functional family foundation they will reasonably have the self-esteem and fortitude to embark on the exploration necessary for crucial identity formation. Accordingly, this study will examine the potential influence of family functioning patterns on emerging adult's identity formation. I begin by explicating emerging adulthood as an important, yet understudied, phase of development. Then, I discuss identity formation and its factors, both beneficial and detrimental. Finally, I discuss family functioning and the impact of adaptability and cohesion on identity formation's defining factors; exploration in breadth, commitment making, exploration in depth, identification with commitment, and ruminative exploration.

### **Emerging Adulthood**

Arnett (2000) was one of the first to highlight this developmental phase of emerging adulthood, defined loosely as the years following secondary school (e.g., ages 18-25), as distinct from adolescence or adulthood due to the dynamic quality of this age period. Arnett (2000) posited that emerging adulthood has key features, including feeling in-between adolescence and adulthood, instability, self-focus, new possibility, and, importantly, identity explorations. Other researchers (McAdams et al., 2006; Schwartz, Cote, & Arnett, 2005) have also characterized this time period with identity development, self-exploration, and social experimentation, as developmentally distinct aspects of emerging adulthood.

Due to social and economic shifts in the past decades, people are waiting longer to marry and settle into a more long-term occupational position until the late twenties and early thirties. It is no longer the norm to transition directly from teens to an adult, and therefore there is more time to experience frequent change and exploration in order to establish a personal identity separate from the family (Arnett, 1998; Rindfuss, 1991). This is particularly the case for students who leave the family home, go to college, and move closer to becoming independent adults. This additional time encourages identity exploration and commitments instead of rushing or oppressing them.

At this stage, individuals find themselves in a new social setting with unique challenges, removed from the normalized environment of home and grappling with their own sense of identity. By the end of the period, usually in the mid to late twenties, most people have made defining life choices that will have enduring ramifications (Arnett, 2000), which makes it a critical developmental stage within the lifespan. When reflecting



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on important life events and developmental moments, most adults name events occurring within the period of emerging adulthood (Martin & Smyer, 1990). Therefore, features of emerging adulthood need to be examined as crucial to developmental that has important impacts for later life stages.

### **Identity Formation**

Emerging adulthood is characterized by several developmental features, but arguably the most important is the process of identity formation. Identity formation in emerging adulthood involves exploring various life possibilities and gradually, through knowledge gained by these explorations, move toward making lasting decisions. It is in this process of emerging adulthood that we can gain important information as to how individuals traverse the developmental phase and the consequences associated with failing to traverse it well.

Since this time period is notable for being the first time away from the family home, emerging adulthood is viewed as the developmental phase that offers the most opportunity for exploration of identity across several life areas (Arnett, 2000; Waterman & Archer, 1990). While most research on identity exploration has focused on adolescence, due to Erikson's (1950) distinction of identity versus role confusion as the central crisis of that time, it is rare for identity achievement to be reached by the end of high school (Montemayor, Brown, & Adams, 1985; Waterman, 1982) and that identity development markedly continues through the late teens and into the twenties (Valde, 1996) with more possibility for differentiation and exploration outside of the family home.

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Identity formation isn't always an easy or natural process and can be a challenge for emerging adults (Erikson, 1968). In this stage they have to rebalance their lives and distinguish their path to adulthood. Since most of them are no longer living at home they cannot fully depend on their old social network of friends and family, leaving them to deal with a multitude of life changes with limited pre-established support, which can lead to substantial changes in identity (Montgomery & Cote, 2003).

The most important aspects of individual identity formation are *exploration* and *commitment*. Exploration refers to actively questioning identity alternatives whereas commitment signifies adhering to and implementing a set of convictions, goals, and values. Marica (1980) defined four statuses: achievement (commitments enacted after exploring alternatives), foreclosure (commitments enacted without exploration), moratorium (exploring alternatives without current commitments), and diffusion (no current commitments or systematic exploration).

Identity is a developmental construct that fluctuates even within emerging adulthood. Prominent identity scholars such as Waterman (1982) initiated the hypothesis that the transition from adolescence to full adulthood (including emerging adulthood) would be marked by a progressive strengthening of one's sense of identity, with a peaking of exploration during the early twenties. It is viewed as the developmental phase that offers the most opportunity for exploration of identity across several life areas (Arnett, 2000; Waterman & Archer, 1990). During this time, individuals increasingly need to rely on their own self standards to guide personal choices and to create their own ideals and aspirations (Harter, 1999) instead of relying solely on family precedent.

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By establishing a strong sense of identity through exploration, individuals can create a clear sense of continuity and sameness, which in turn helps with overall psychosocial functioning. On the other hand, identity confusion is associated with a disorganized or haphazard sense of self (Luyckx, Klimstra, Duriez, Petegem, & Beyers, 2013). These individuals seem to lack the drive to invest in identity-crucial exploration and commit to life-defining choices (Erikson, 1968). Therefore, emerging adults need to experience exploration in their development in order to establish reliable and stable identity commitments.

Luyckx et al. (2008) empirically distinguished five identity processes that will be used in this study to evaluate identity formation in emerging adults. Four of these five are grouped under two consecutive cycles of identity formation (Luyckx, Goossens, & Soenens, 2006). The first cycle captures the processes through which individuals explore different identity alternatives and presumably arrive at making strong identity commitments. This cycle is broken down into two processes, exploration in breadth (pro-active exploration) and commitment making (adherence to a set of convictions and values). Exploration in breadth is expected to be high among younger young adults (ages 18-22) as they are without the regular restrictions of living in the family home. Likewise, commitment making should ideally be strong within emerging adults as they establish their individual values based on new experiences.

The second cycle includes the process through which individuals re-evaluate their identity choices and assesses the degrees to which they feel certain about and identify with these choices. It is conceptualized in terms of two processes; exploration in depth (evaluation and exploration of current commitments) and identification with commitment

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(the degree to which these identity commitments become integral to the sense of self).

Exploration in depth is expected to be more prevalent in later emerging adulthood as individuals have created preliminary identities and are reflecting on their implications in depth. Ideally, emerging adults will reach this stage as a means of solidifying identity formation gains. Similarly, identification with commitment will be a process reached in later emerging adulthood as an indicator of impending adulthood. Each of these processes are considered to be beneficial during emerging adulthood and indicators of proactive identity formation.

A fifth identity process, referred to as ruminative exploration, is a particular form of exploration conceptualized as a process that hinders identity development. Individuals with high levels on ruminative exploration experience difficulty in settling on satisfying answers to identity questions. Research on adolescents and emerging adults has demonstrated that ruminative exploration was associated with lowered well-being (Luyckx et al., 2008). It is expected that emerging adults who participate in ruminative exploration will not navigate identity formation successfully and experience negative outcomes. Studies show that those who fail to establish a sense of identity by being stuck in ruminative exploration have been found to be much more likely to suffer from depressive symptoms than others (Luyckx, Schwartz, Goossens, Beyers, & Missotten, 2011). This research seeks to examine if the pressure of identity formation can be more successfully met for individuals who come from functional family systems.

### **Family Functioning**

Family functioning can be conceptualized as a dynamic continuum, with individual families falling between fully dysfunctional and fully functional and

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fluctuating on the continuum based on life events. Individuals who come from mainly functional families will experience positive individual impacts, including higher self-esteem and positive coping strategies that will allow them to successfully navigate identity formation processes covered in the last section.

In this study, I will be using the the Olson Circumplex Model of Family Functioning (Olson, 2000). The model is built on the principles of family systems theory, and also relies on family development theory which places emphasis on the dynamic nature of change in families across the life span (Olson, McCubbin, Barnes, Larsen, Muxen, & Wilson, 1989). The model views family interactions along two spectrums, *adaptability* and *cohesion*, as the defining central elements. It suggests that balanced levels of both adaptability and cohesion are the most conducive to healthy family functioning. Conversely, unbalanced levels of adaptability and cohesion (very low or very high levels) are associated with problematic family functioning (Olson, 2011).

Olson and colleagues (1989) describe several model hypotheses that deal with the ability of families to change over time. For example: “To deal with situational stress and developmental changes across the family life cycle, balanced families will change their cohesion and adaptability, whereas extreme families will resist change over time.” The authors state that change is easier for balanced families because they “have larger behavioral repertoires and are more able to change compared to extreme families.” Specifically, “positive communication skills will enable balanced couples/families to change their levels of cohesion and adaptability more easily than those at the extremes.” This ability to change is crucial to significant developmental milestone

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shifts, such as individuals becoming emerging adults and moving out of the day-to-day family system and needing to establish their own identities.

This is further supported by the fact that several empirical studies have shown the benefits of balanced adaptability and cohesion in families; including better overall communication (Barnes & Olson, 1986), better handling of stress and change (Olson, 1989), as well as increased individual well-being (Henry & Lovelace, 1995). Since the social context of the family serves as an important resource for dealing with psychological disorders as well as physical illness (Horwitz & Kazak, 1990; Lewis & Khaw, 1982; Hanson, De Guire, Schinkel, & Burghen, 1992) this model has been used to examine family influence on various age groups, including adolescence, but there has been little study on the impact for emerging adults seeking identity formation.

A key aspect of the Circumplex Model is the facilitating component of communication. Family communication is defined as the act of making information, ideas, thoughts and feelings known within members of a family unit (Olson & Barnes, 2010). By changing communication strategies and finding that functional balance, families are better able to address the complexities of development. Therefore, families who use communication to reach optimal functioning will establish habits within members for dealing with developmental challenges, conceivably even when outside of the direct family context.

The family circumplex model and its self-report instruments, FACES II, III, and IV, have been used in hundreds of research studies which have consistently found positive, linear relationships between its dimensions and various family health outcomes, as well as individual outcomes (Kouneski, 2000). Overall, FACES is one of the most

widely used family assessment devices in the world. It has been applied extensively in the United States and translated into many other languages including Swedish (Engstroem, 1991; Rastam & Gillberg, 1991), Norwegian (Dundas, 1994), Japanese (Kurokawa, 1990), Chinese (Phillips, West, Shen, & Zheng, 1998), Polish (Porzak, 1993; Radochonski, 1992), German (Kirchler, 1988; 1989), Italian (Scabini & Galimberti, 1995), Spanish (Dandes, 1986), and Hebrew (Ben-David, 1995; Teichman & Basha, 1996).

The model conceptualizes adaptability and cohesion as central variables that are facilitated by communication within the family. It has been used clinically and within family therapy practices to help dysfunctional families find the appropriate balance on both continuums. In this study the measures of adaptability and cohesion will be examined as indicators of functional identity formation in emerging adulthood.

**Adaptability.** The concept of adaptability measures the ability of relationships to adjust to change within the family system, the quality and expression of leadership and organization, role relationships, and relational rules and negotiations. Adaptability focuses on the ability of a couple and family system to balance stability versus change. Very high levels of adaptability (chaotic) and very low levels of adaptability (rigid) have been found to be problematic for some families. On the other hand, relationships having moderate scores (structured and flexible) are able to balance some change and some stability in a more functional manner.

Emerging adults coming from a family with low adaptability (rigid) would have less experience with individual freedom and role change, potentially resulting in difficulty exploring individually with more early established commitments. It is possible

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that overly controlling parents are associated with early development of ruminative exploration (Luyckx et. al, 2007). Therefore, the first hypotheses are as follows:

H1: Emerging adults with more rigid family functioning predicts lower exploration in breadth and depth.

H2: Emerging adults with more rigid family functioning predicts higher commitment making and identification with commitment.

Conversely, families with extremely high adaptability are considered to be chaotic; with a lack of leadership, dramatic role shifts, and too much change to allow for reliable consistency. Research by Luyckx et.al (2007) noted that individuals scoring high on ruminative exploration were likely experiencing indecision based on developmental, not trait-based, factors, such as family modeling. Emerging adults from these families are expected to experience ruminative exploration patterns and an inability to make satisfactory commitments based on their previous history of chaotic relationships and roles within the family.

H3: Emerging adults with more chaotic family functioning predicts higher ruminative exploration.

H4: Emerging adults with more chaotic family functioning predicts lower commitment making and identification with commitment.

Functional family structures within adaptability are flexible and structured. Both of these balanced levels have shared leadership, democratic discipline, and change when necessary. Emerging adults from these family structures will be able to balance commitment and exploration flexibly and avoid ruminative exploration practices.



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H5: Emerging adults with more balanced family functioning predicts higher exploration in depth and breadth, with low ruminative exploration.

H6: Emerging adults with more balanced family functioning predicts higher commitment making and identification with commitment.

**Cohesion.** Similarly, cohesion focuses on the ability of the family system to balance separateness and togetherness. Very high levels of togetherness (enmeshed) and low levels of togetherness (disengaged) have been demonstrated to be problematic for family functioning. On the other hand, relationships having moderate scores (separated and connected) are able to balance being alone together in a more functional manner.

Emerging adults from an enmeshed family structure will have experiences very high closeness, dependency, and loyalty which will make the transition to independent identity formation difficult and could result in low levels of exploration with little satisfactory commitment outside of the family.

H7: Emerging adults with more enmeshed family functioning predicts lower exploration in breadth and depth and higher ruminative exploration.

H8: Emerging adults with more enmeshed family functioning predicts lower commitment making and identification with commitment.

Conversely, families with disengaged cohesion experience little closeness and loyalty with high independence. In this case, emerging adults who are exposed to high independence early in life may make commitments to identity formation early with little to no exploration once outside of the family structure.

H9: Emerging adults with more disengaged family functioning predicts lower exploration in depth and breadth.

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H10: Emerging adults with more disengaged family functioning predicts higher commitment making and identification with commitment.

However, families with balanced functioning are either separated or connected, with moderate closeness and loyalty with interdependence. Emerging adults from these families will have a reliable family system for support while also having the freedom to explore in breadth and depth.

H11: Emerging adults with more balanced family functioning predicts higher exploration in depth and breadth.

H12: Emerging adults with more balanced family functioning predicts higher commitment making and identification with commitment.

## **Methods**

### **Participants**

Prerequisite of participation in the study was the classified age range of emerging adulthood (18-25). Participants were recruited from the undergraduate population at Wake Forest University and Facebook. Social media outreach allowed a larger sample with more diversity of the appropriate age range. A total of 117 responses were collected, after removing those outside the age range and incomplete data, with an average age of 21 ( $M = 21.21$ ,  $SD = 2.08$ ); 98 female participants (83.8%) and 19 male participants (16.2%). There were 99 Caucasian participants (84.6%), 7 Hispanic participants (6.0%), 5 Black/African American participants (4.3%), 2 Asian participants (1.7%), and 4 who selected Mix race (3.4%). Of the participants, 8 have completed high school (6.8%), 73 have completed some college work (62.4%), 16 earned a college degree (13.7%), 16 have completed some advanced degree work (13.7%), and 4 earned

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advanced degrees (3.4%). Annual family household income of participants broke down as follows: <\$25,000 (10.3%), \$25,000-\$49,999 (7.7%), \$50,000-\$74,999 (10.3%), \$75,000-\$99,999 (12.8%), \$100,000- \$124,999 (13.7%), \$125,000-\$149,999 (12.8%), >\$150,000 (31.6%).

### **Procedure**

A Qualtrics survey was distributed electronically via social media and email. In the recruitment material participants were told the general length and purpose of the study as well as the prerequisites for participation. After selecting the link embedded in the recruitment material, respondents were directed to an informed consent form. Once they agreed to participate, respondents were directed to the first page of the survey.

### **Measures**

*Demographic Information.* Participants were asked to complete a series of demographic questions in which they disclosed their: age, gender, ethnicity, current living situation, time spent living away from the family home, distance from family home, number of siblings, sibling order position, parental marital status, level of employment, and family income.

*Family Cohesion.* These questions were used to measure the emotional bonding that family members have toward one another. Items from Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scales IV are divided into three sub-scales. Balanced cohesion (i.e. Family members are involved in each other's lives);  $M = 4.18$ ,  $SD = 0.63$ ,  $\alpha = .85$ , disengaged cohesion (i.e. We get along better with people outside our family than inside);  $M = 2.28$ ,  $SD = .73$ ,  $\alpha = .82$ , and enmeshed cohesion (i.e. We spend too much time together);  $M = 2.09$ ,  $SD = .58$ ,  $\alpha = .68$ . Each sub-scale has a total of seven statements and

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all items are answered on a 5-point Likert-type rating scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

*Family Adaptability.* These questions were used to measure the amount of change in family leadership, role relationships and relationship rules. Items from Olson et al.'s FACES IV are divided into three sub-scales. Balanced adaptability (i.e. Our family tried new ways of dealing with problems);  $M = 3.49$ ,  $SD = .72$ ,  $\alpha = .76$ , rigid adaptability (i.e. There are strict consequences for breaking rules in our family);  $M = 2.72$ ,  $SD = .71$ ,  $\alpha = .76$ , and chaotic adaptability (i.e. We never seem to get organized in our family);  $M = 2.08$ ,  $SD = .66$ ,  $\alpha = .80$ . Each sub-scale has a total of seven statements and all items are answered on a 5-point Likert-type rating scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

*Family Communication.* FACES IV also includes a Family Communication scale that contains 10 items measuring communication in families (i.e. family members enjoy talking to each other). They are each answered on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strong disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The scale was found to be highly reliable ( $M = 3.81$ ,  $SD = .78$ ,  $\alpha = .92$ ).

*Identity Formation.* Luyckx et al.'s (2008) Dimensions of Identity Development Scale (DIDs) which includes a total of 25 items. Each dimension has a total of five statements and all items are answered on a 5-point Likert-type rating scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The dimensions include exploration in breadth (i.e. Think about what to do with my life);  $M = 4.44$ ,  $SD = .59$ ,  $\alpha = .89$ , exploration in depth (i.e., Talk regularly with other people about the plans for the future I have made);  $M = 4.00$ ,  $SD = .67$ ,  $\alpha = .75$ , commitment making (i.e., Know what I want to achieve in

my life);  $M = 3.61$ ,  $SD = .91$ ,  $\alpha = .89$ , identification with commitment (i.e., Future plans give me self-confidence);  $M = 3.93$ ,  $SD = .91$ ,  $\alpha = .90$ , and ruminative exploration (i.e., Hard to stop thinking about the direction I want to follow in life);  $M = 3.23$ ,  $SD = .91$ ,  $\alpha = .81$ . See Appendix 1.

## Results

### Preliminary Analyses

To test for any potential gender differences I conducted a series of independent sample *t*-tests comparing mean scores of male and female participants on levels of family adaptability, family cohesion, identity formation, family communication, and family satisfaction. In all cases there were found to be no significant differences based on participant gender and therefore it was not be considered a confounding variable.

Next, I examined the impact of other possible control variables, including education level, age order within siblings, age of participants, and employment status. Results from a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) demonstrated that education level impacts family satisfaction,  $F(4, 108) = 2.56$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .09$ . Based on bonferroni post-hoc tests, participants who have completed some college ( $M = 3.80$ ,  $SD = .81$ ) had significantly higher family satisfaction than those who have completed college ( $M = 3.08$ ,  $SD = .93$ ),  $p < .05$ . Additionally, educational level impacted commitment making,  $F(4, 109) = 4.29$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .14$ . Results of a bonferroni post-hoc tests showed participants who completed high school ( $M = 2.72$ ,  $SD = .90$ ) experienced significantly less commitment making than those who had completed some advanced degree ( $M = 4.16$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ ),  $p < .01$ . Similarly, education level was found to impact exploration in depth,  $F(4, 112) = 4.54$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .14$ . After a bonferroni post-hoc test, participants

who completed high school ( $M = 3.30$ ,  $SD = .72$ ) had significantly less exploration in depth than those who have completed some advanced degree work ( $M = 4.42$ ,  $SD = .51$ ),  $p < .01$ .

Results of a one-way ANOVA test revealed that age order within siblings impacted rigid adaptability,  $F(3, 114) = 2.99$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .08$ . Based on bonferroni post-hoc testing, participants who were the oldest sibling ( $M = 2.92$ ,  $SD = .72$ ) perceived significantly greater rigid adaptability than those who were youngest siblings ( $M = 2.45$ ,  $SD = .69$ ).

Results of a one-way ANOVA test revealed that age of participants impacted enmeshed cohesion,  $F(7, 114) = 2.17$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .13$ . Based on bonferroni post-hoc testing, participants who were 21 years old ( $M = 2.44$ ,  $SD = .79$ ) perceived significantly greater enmeshed cohesion in their families than those who were 23 ( $M = 1.61$ ,  $SD = .39$ ).

Results of a one-way ANOVA test revealed that participant employment status impacted enmeshed cohesion,  $F(2, 113) = 4.68$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .08$ . However, a bonferroni post-hoc test revealed no significant differences between groups.

Additionally, a series of bivariate correlations were conducted between the dimensions of FACES IV (see Table I). There was observed significant correlations among the two balanced dimensions of FACES IV, cohesion and adaptability, which supports the overall Circumplex Model of family communication. Additionally, balanced cohesion was negatively correlated with disconnected cohesion and enmeshed cohesion, which further supports the model. Similarly, balanced adaptability was negatively correlated with chaotic adaptability, but positively correlated with rigid adaptability. In

line with the theory of FACES IV, balanced cohesion and adaptability were positively correlated with family communication and family satisfaction.

Interestingly, opposite ends of the scale for cohesion (disconnected and enmeshed) resulted in a significant positive correlation, which wouldn't be expected within the Circumplex Model. In contrast, adaptability does follow the model, with rigid and chaotic scales revealing a negative correlation though not significant.

As expected, family communication was significantly correlated with balanced levels of family functioning, and was found to be predictive of balanced cohesion ( $R^2 = .61$ ,  $F(1, 112) = 178.24$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and balanced adaptability ( $R^2 = .57$ ,  $F(1, 111) = 147.21$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Both had positive relationships,  $b = .78$  and  $b = .76$  respectively.

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**Table I.** Correlations Between FACES IV Dimensions

Variable	V1	V2	V3	V4	V5	V6	V7	V8
V1: B. Cohesion	—							
V2: B. Adaptability	.77**	—						
V3: D. Cohesion	-.69**	-.52**	—					
V4: E. Cohesion	-.03	-.08	.29**	—				
V5: R. Adaptability	.13	.24*	.02	.38**	—			
V6: C. Adaptability	-.55**	-.50**	.64**	.36**	-.06	—		
V7: Family Comm.	.78**	.76**	-.66**	-.01	.09	-.55**	—	
V8: Family Satisfaction	.77**	.73**	-.67**	-.07	.11	-.48**		—
	.85**							

Note: \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .001$

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Bivariate correlations were conducted between the dimensions of identity formation in DIDS (see Table II). As was expected, the proactive dimensions of identity formation (commitment making, identification with commitment, exploration in breadth and depth) were all positively correlated with each other. Commitment making and identification with commitments had significant negative correlations with ruminative exploration, which is in line with previous research. Exploration in depth was negatively correlated with ruminative exploration, but not significantly. Exploration in breadth was positively correlated with ruminative exploration, which is to be expected as ruminative exploration would drive exploration in many different areas.

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**Table II.** Correlations Between Identity Formation Dimensions

Variable	V1	V2	V3	V4	V5
V1: Commitment Making	—				
V2: Identification with Commitments	.66**	—			
V3: Exploration in Breadth	.22**	.48**	—		
V4: Exploration in Depth	.53**	.61**	.44**	—	
V5: Ruminative Exploration	-.43**	-.31**	.17	-.16	—

Note: \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .001$

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Additionally, bivariate correlations were conducted between the dimensions of FACES IV and DIDS as preliminary sources of hypothesis support. Unfortunately, neither balanced cohesion nor balanced adaptability were significantly correlated with the dimensions of DIDS. The same was true of disconnected cohesion and rigid adaptability. However, enmeshed cohesion did have a significant positive correlation with ruminative exploration ( $r = .22, p < .05$ ), which lends preliminary support for H7. Similarly, chaotic



adaptability had a significant negative correlation with identification with commitments ( $r = -.23, p < .05$ ), which gives preliminary support to H4. Interestingly, neither family communication nor family satisfaction were significantly correlated to dimensions of DIDS.

### **Hypothesis 1**

A linear regression analysis was used to assess whether a more rigid family adaptability would predicted lower exploration in breadth and depth in emerging adulthood. Results showed that rigid adaptability did not significantly predict exploration in depth;  $R^2 = .00, F(1, 114) = .00, p = .98$ . Similar results were found for exploration in breadth;  $R^2 = .02, F(1, 113) = 1.99, p = .16$ .

Therefore, hypothesis 1 was not supported in this study. A linear regression was also used to assess if rigid adaptability would predict ruminative exploration, though it was not included in my original hypothesis. Results indication that there was no significant predictive relationship;  $R^2 = .00, F(1, 112) = .34, p = .56$ .

### **Hypothesis 2**

A linear regression analysis was used to assess whether a more rigid family adaptability predicted higher commitment making and identification with commitment. Results indicated that rigid adaptability did not significantly predict commitment making:  $R^2 = .01, F(1, 111) = .50, p = .48$ . The same was true for identification with commitment:  $R^2 = .01, F(1, 112) = 1.48, p = .23$ . Therefore, hypothesis 2 was not supported.

### **Hypothesis 3**

A linear regression analysis was used to assess whether a more chaotic family adaptability predicted higher ruminative exploration. Results demonstrated that chaotic

adaptability did not significantly predict ruminative exploration:  $R^2 = .03$ ,  $F(1, 113) = 3.71$ ,  $p = .056$ . However, the significance is close, and further study could reveal a predictive relationship. Overall, hypothesis 3 was not supported.

#### **Hypothesis 4**

A linear regression analysis was used to assess whether a more chaotic family adaptability predicted lower commitment making and identification with commitment. Results indicated that chaotic adaptability did not significantly predict commitment making:  $R^2 = .03$ ,  $F(1, 112) = 2.79$ ,  $p = .09$ . However, results showed that chaotic adaptability accounts for 5% of the variance in reports of identification with commitments:  $R^2 = .05$ ,  $F(1, 113) = 6.41$ ,  $p = .01$ . More specifically, as chaotic adaptability increases identification with commitments decreases,  $b = -.23$ ,  $p = .013$ . This significance held true even when controlling for age, level of education, age order, and family household income,  $b = -.24$ ,  $p = .01$ . Therefore, hypothesis 4 was partially supported.

#### **Hypothesis 5**

A linear regression analysis was used to assess whether a more balanced family adaptability predicted higher exploration in depth and breadth, and lower ruminative exploration. Results indicated that balanced adaptability did not significantly predict exploration in breadth:  $R^2 = .00$ ,  $F(1, 112) = .14$ ,  $p = .71$ , nor exploration in depth:  $R^2 = .00$ ,  $F(1, 113) = .00$ ,  $p = .95$ . Likewise, balanced adaptability did not predict ruminative exploration;  $R^2 = .00$ ,  $F(1, 111) = .06$ ,  $p = .81$ . Therefore, hypothesis 5 was not supported.

### **Hypothesis 6**

A linear regression analysis was used to assess whether a more balanced family adaptability predicted higher commitment making and identification with commitment. Results indicated that balanced adaptability did not significantly predict commitment making:  $R^2 = .00$ ,  $F(1, 110) = .03$ ,  $p = .87$ , nor identification with commitment:  $R^2 = .00$ ,  $F(1, 111) = .00$ ,  $p = .99$ . Therefore, hypothesis 6 was not supported.

### **Hypothesis 7**

A linear regression analysis was used to assess whether a more enmeshed family cohesion predicted lower exploration in breadth and depth, and higher ruminative exploration. Results indicated that enmeshed cohesion did not significantly predict exploration in breadth:  $R^2 = .00$ ,  $F(1, 112) = .02$ ,  $p = .90$ . However, results for ruminative exploration were significant, with enmeshed cohesion accounting for 5% of the variance in reports of ruminative exploration:  $R^2 = .05$ ,  $F(1, 111) = 5.53$ ,  $p = .02$ . This is to say that as enmeshed cohesion increases ruminative exploration also increases,  $b = .22$ ,  $p = .02$ . This significance held even when controlling for participant age, level of education, family income, age order, and employment status. Meaning that hypothesis 7 was partially supported.

### **Hypothesis 8**

A linear regression analysis was used to assess whether a more enmeshed family cohesion predicted lower commitment making and identification with commitment. Results indicated that enmeshed cohesion did not significantly predict commitment making:  $R^2 = .00$ ,  $F(1, 110) = .31$ ,  $p = .58$ . Similar results were found for identification with commitment:  $R^2 = .00$ ,  $F(1, 111) = .70$ ,  $p = .40$ . Hypothesis 8 was not supported.

### **Hypothesis 9**

A linear regression analysis was used to assess whether a more disengaged family cohesion predicted lower exploration in depth and breadth, and ruminative exploration. Results indicated that disengaged cohesion did not significantly predict exploration in depth:  $R^2 = .01$ ,  $F(1, 115) = .73$ ,  $p = .39$ . Similar results were found for exploration in breadth:  $R^2 = .00$ ,  $F(1, 114) = .00$ ,  $p = .96$ . Likewise, results for ruminative exploration were not significant:  $R^2 = .00$ ,  $F(1, 113) = .16$ ,  $p = .69$ . Therefore, hypothesis 9 was not supported.

### **Hypothesis 10**

A linear regression analysis was used to assess whether a more disengaged family cohesion predicted higher commitment making and identification with commitment. Results indicated that disengaged cohesion did not significantly predict commitment making:  $R^2 = .01$ ,  $F(1, 112) = .51$ ,  $p = .48$ . Similar results were found for identification with commitment:  $R^2 = .00$ ,  $F(1, 113) = .02$ ,  $p = .89$ . Hypothesis 10 was not supported.

### **Hypothesis 11**

A linear regression analysis was used to assess whether a more balanced family cohesion predicted higher exploration in depth and breadth, and lower ruminative exploration. Results indicated that balanced cohesion did not significantly predict exploration in depth:  $R^2 = .00$ ,  $F(1, 115) = .48$ ,  $p = .49$ . Similar results were found for exploration in breadth:  $R^2 = .00$ ,  $F(1, 114) = .23$ ,  $p = .64$ . Likewise, results for ruminative exploration were not significant:  $R^2 = .01$ ,  $F(1, 113) = .86$ ,  $p = .36$ . Therefore, hypothesis 11 was not supported.

### **Hypothesis 12**

A linear regression analysis was used to assess whether a more balanced family cohesion predicted higher commitment making and identification with commitment. Results indicated that balanced cohesion did not significantly predict commitment making:  $R^2 = .00$ ,  $F(1, 112) = .06$ ,  $p = .81$ . Similar results were found for identification with commitment:  $R^2 = .00$ ,  $F(1, 113) = .00$ ,  $p = .99$ . Hypothesis 12 was not supported by the findings.

### **Alternative Findings**

Based on significant bivariate correlation findings, linear regressions were used to test predictive relationships between several demographic variables and dimensions of identity formation.

*Age.* A linear regression analysis was used to assess whether age predicted higher commitment making. Results indicated that there was a significantly predictive relationship, with age accounting for 6% of the variance in reports of commitment making:  $R^2 = .06$ ,  $F(1, 113) = 6.99$ ,  $p < .01$ . Meaning that as age increases commitment making increases,  $b = .24$ ,  $p < .01$ . Similar results were found with age accounting for 6% of the variance in reports of ruminative exploration:  $R^2 = .06$ ,  $F(1, 114) = 7.37$ ,  $p < .01$ . More specifically, as age increases ruminative exploration decreases,  $b = -.25$ ,  $p < .01$ .

*Highest Education Level Achieved.* A linear regression analysis was used to assess whether education predicted higher commitment making. Results indicated that there was a significant predictive relationship, with education accounting for 11% of the variance in reports of commitment making:  $R^2 = .11$ ,  $F(1, 113) = 6.99$ ,  $p < .001$ , as

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education increases commitment making increases,  $b = .34, p < .001$ . The significance holds true even when controlling for family income, age, and time spent living away from home,  $b = .316, p < .05$ . Similar results were found with education accounting for 4% of the variance in reports of identity with commitments:  $R^2 = .04, F(1, 114) = 4.97, p < .05$ . More specifically, as education increases identification with commitments increases,  $b = .21, p < .05$ .

A linear regression analysis was used to assess whether education predicted higher exploration in depth. Results indicated that there was a significantly predictive relationship, with education accounting for 11% of the variance in reports of exploration in depth:  $R^2 = .11, F(1, 116) = 13.53, p < .001$ . More specifically, as education increases exploration in depth increases,  $b = .32, p < .001$ . Similar results were found with education accounting for 4% of the variance in reports of ruminative exploration:  $R^2 = .04, F(1, 114) = 4.18, p < .05$ . Meaning that as education increases ruminative exploration decreases,  $b = -.19, p < .05$ .

*Family Income.* A linear regression analysis was used to assess whether family income predicted commitment making. Results indicated that there was a significant predictive relationship, with family income accounting for 7% of the variance in reports of commitment making:  $R^2 = .07, F(1, 112) = 7.97, p < .05$ . More specifically, as family income increases commitment making decreases,  $b = -.26, p < .05$ . Similar results were found with family education accounting for 5% of the variance in reports of exploration in depth:  $R^2 = .05, F(1, 114) = 5.64, p < .05$ , as family income increases exploration in depth decreases,  $b = -.22, p < .05$ .

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A linear regression analysis was used to assess whether family income predicted ruminative exploration. Results indicated that there was a significantly predictive relationship, with family income accounting for 4% of the variance in reports of ruminative exploration:  $R^2 = .04$ ,  $F(1, 113) = 4.64$ ,  $p < .05$ . More specifically, as family income increases ruminative exploration increases,  $b = .19$ ,  $p < .05$ .

A linear regression analysis was used to assess whether family income predicted family satisfaction. Results indicated that there was a significant predictive relationship, with family income accounting for 8% of the variance in reports of family satisfaction:  $R^2 = .08$ ,  $F(1, 111) = 10.05$ ,  $p < .005$ . Therefore, as family income increases family satisfaction increases,  $b = .29$ ,  $p < .005$ .

Rich families also seem to be better functioning families. A linear regression analysis was used to assess functionality of families. Significant results were found with family income accounting for 4% of the variance in reports of balanced cohesion:  $R^2 = .04$ ,  $F(1, 114) = 5.29$ ,  $p < .05$ . More specifically, as family income increases balanced cohesion increases,  $b = .21$ ,  $p < .05$ . Similar results were found with family income accounting for 8% of the variance in reports of balanced adaptability:  $R^2 = .08$ ,  $F(1, 112) = 9.57$ ,  $p < .05$ . Meaning that as family income increases balanced adaptability increases,  $b = .28$ ,  $p < .05$ .

*Time Spent Away from Family Home.* A linear regression analysis was used to assess whether time spent away from home predicted commitment making. Significant results were found with time spent away accounting for 5% of the variance in reports of balanced cohesion:  $R^2 = .05$ ,  $F(1, 113) = 5.35$ ,  $p < .05$ . Therefore, as time spent away

from home increases commitment making increases,  $b = .21, p < .05$ . However, this did not hold true when controlling for family income, participant age, and level of education.

## **Discussion**

The goal of this study was to further examine the effect that family communication and functioning have on identity formation processes in the developmental period of emerging adulthood. In this study participants 18-25 years old were asked to report on their family cohesion and adaptability dimensions as well as their own experience with identity formation dimensions. Both of the scales' dimensions were internally consistent with previous research and mean ranges were expected within the age parameters. Additionally, family communication was found to be highly predictive of both balanced cohesion and adaptability, congruent with the overall model and previous research.

Based on the Olson Circumplex Model of Family Functioning, it was predicted that both balanced cohesion and adaptability would positively impact beneficial identity formation dimensions (commitment making, identification with commitment, exploration in depth and breadth) and negatively impact ruminative exploration; however, this was not supported within the study. While there were correlations between the variables to support the predicted directionality, they were not significant findings at the level of linear regression. This is unexpected considering family systems theory (Kerr, 2000) and the prevalence that family systems have for their individual members. Within this study it is concluded that balanced family function, while an important aspect of increased individual well-being (Henry & Lovelace, 1995), overall communication (Barnes & Olson, 1986), and better handling of stress and change (Olson, 1989), does not have a



significant impact on dimensions of identity formation as measured in Luyckx et al.'s (2008) Dimensions of Identity Development Scale.

Despite this, there were found to be significant predictive relationships between dysfunctional family dimensions and identity formation. Results demonstrated that more chaotic family functioning (high levels of adaptability) was significantly predictive of lower identification with commitments (H4). In chaotic families there are often shifting roles and responsibilities, to the extent that leadership and organization are lacking and rules are ever changing (Olson et al., 1989). Coming from this type of environment, it is easy to see how emerging adults could be negatively impacted when it comes to internalizing commitments that are important to sense of self. Identification with commitments is considered to be a latter process of identity formation as it is a re-assessment of identity choices, and while emerging adults from chaotic families may have been able to successfully transition through the commitment making phase they struggle to identify with those commitments. In other words, they have the ability to make commitments but resist imparting a sense of self or self-worth within those commitments, perhaps because their family functioning growing up was chaotic and unreliable which would generate distrust of long-term commitments. Identification with commitments is an important process within identity formation and an indicator of proactive adulthood, lower levels of this dimension indicates struggling identity formation which could lead to depressive symptoms (Luyckx, Schwartz, Goossens, Beyers, & Missotten, 2011) and a disorganized sense of self (Luyckx, Klimstra, Duriez, Petegem, & Beyers, 2013). These results support previous research that chaotic family

functioning is unhealthy for the handling of stress and change (Olson, 1989), demonstrating that it could cause stunted identity development in later stages.

Similarly, H7 was partially supported when enmeshed family functioning (high levels of cohesion) significantly impacted levels of ruminative exploration. Enmeshed families are very interdependent and insulated, which is the exact opposite of what emerging adulthood should be as an exploratory and independent developmental phase. For many, emerging adulthood is the time they start living outside the family home on college campuses, which can be a stressful and traumatic experience for those who are so dependent on their family for social support (Myers & Bryant, 2008). It makes sense that enmeshed family functioning would increase ruminative exploration, as it is the type of exploration that hinders identity development and makes it difficult for someone to settle on satisfying identity commitments. The purpose of exploration within identity formation is to discover what commitments are the best, individualized fit but ruminative exploration does not result in these discoveries because it breeds further confusion and discontent instead of insight and clarity. Removed from the tight-knit family environment, participants from an enmeshed family may not have the self-reliance, independent fortitude, or individualized sense of self to partake in exploration without falling into ruminative and unhelpful patterns.

### **Other Variable Impact on Identity Formation**

There were also found to be significant correlational and predictive relationships between demographic information and the dimensions of identity formation. First, age plays an important role in the levels of commitment making and ruminative exploration for emerging adults. As would be expected from the identity formation literature, older

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age was predictive of commitment making as individuals have achieved more exploration in breadth and are therefore able to identify their interests and personal commitments easier and with more confidence. On college campuses in particular this would be found as students are encouraged to decide on a major by the end of their sophomore year at the latest. By that point students have usually found extracurricular interests and stable social groups as well, leading to greater commitment making. On the other hand, age was found to be inversely predictive of ruminative exploration. Older participants experienced less developmentally hazardous ruminative exploration than their younger counterparts. It was found, and expected, that ruminative exploration and exploration in breadth are positively correlated, and since early stages of identity development are heavy with exploration in breadth it is logical that ruminative exploration would also be high at younger ages. What is significant is that ruminative exploration was significantly related to age, while exploration in breadth was not. Results indicate then that exploration in breadth is not limited to younger ages, while more likely to occur then, and extend to older emerging adults as well. Whereas ruminative exploration is significantly linked to younger participants, perhaps due to limited experience with independence and lack of pressure to make important commitments. As emerging adults age they are confronted with increasing pressure to make increasingly more important and difficult decisions, that tied with more established self-reliance would decrease ruminative exploration.

Second, education level also played a significant role in identity formation, correlating strongly with commitment making, identity with commitment, exploration in depth, and ruminative exploration. Further, education level was found to be a predictive

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variable for these dimensions of identity formation. Participants who achieved higher levels of education were more likely to have increased commitment making and identification with commitments. Because the significance of education on these dimensions held true even when accounting for age it is clear that the education level itself, and not just the passage of time, has influence on identity formation. The environment is, for most, the first time they can exercise commitment making and identification with commitments independently. Those who pursue an undergraduate degree are encouraged to make identifying choices regarding field of study, internships, social groups and extracurricular activities. This is even greater for those pursuing or having completed an advanced degree as they are making commitments to continuing a specific area of study central to their personal goals and fulfillments.

Education level also significantly impacts identity exploration, both beneficial and detrimental. Exploration in depth is greater for those who have a higher level of education, mostly likely because college environments foster academic exploration on a deeper level, especially within advanced degrees. Students are asked to engage with class material in a significant way and to produce insightful work, which requires exploration in depth of topics of interest. This is further supported by the fact that as education level increases ruminative exploration decreases, as students move away from confusing and unsatisfying exploration patterns to more structured and focused exploration within their studies and social groups.

Third, family income holds significant impact on several dimensions of identity formation, including commitment making, exploration in depth, and ruminative exploration. Results of this study show that participants from wealthier families were

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more likely to have decreased commitment making and exploration in depth. For many emerging adults identity formation prepares them for the transition to adulthood and the necessity of living independently, which includes producing their own means of income and self-care. The pressure of moving out of, and away from, the family home may be less for those who come from wealthier families because their parents have the means to provide continued care past the years of emerging adulthood, and therefore a security of future. This security would allow for wealthier emerging adults to defer or postpone engaging in beneficial aspects of identity formation, such as commitment making and exploration in depth, thus resulting in lower levels of those dimensions. The financial safety net may reduce the need to commit to personal goals or academic paths which would in turn decrease exploration in depth as they would not have stagnant or focused commitments. It is therefore understandable that ruminative exploration would increase for emerging adults from wealthier families as they have fewer commitments and an expanding set of options that induces confusion and lack of direction (Schwartz et al., 2005). These results are relevant because they occur despite wealthier families being more balanced in cohesion and adaptability than lower income families. Further proof that balanced family functioning doesn't have as much impact on identity formation dimensions than this study predicted, and that other environment variables have a more impactful role to play. It also demonstrates that balanced and satisfied families do not necessarily promote successful identity formation in their emerging adults. It is important to note that a disproportionate number of participants came from wealthier families with a majority reporting a family income of over \$100,000 annually, which may influence the data.

### **Variable Impact on Family Functioning**

While family functioning had limited effects on identity formation, several demographics were found to have strong correlations with dimensions of both balanced and dysfunctional families. Interestingly, participant age was not significantly correlated family satisfaction, family communication, adaptability or cohesion as might be expected. On the other hand, education level was found to be negatively related to rigid family functioning (low adaptability), with less rigid families seem to produce higher education seeking emerging adults. Due to the low adaptability central to rigid family systems there can be a detrimental lack of coping mechanisms in the face of change mediated by the demands of social environments (Lee, 1988). Psychological flexibility has been considered a predicting factor to personal resilience (Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010) and with fewer familial experiences with situation adaptation emerging adults may not possess the internal fortitude or stress coping mechanisms to successfully pursue higher levels of education.

As mentioned earlier, wealthier families were found to be significantly linked to balanced levels of cohesion and adaptability, as well as family satisfaction. It can be reasonably assumed that more financially stable families allow for more security and flexibility throughout the family life cycle, whereas families with lower income do not have the same fiscal freedom and may, by necessity, resist change over time, which can lead to forms of dysfunction (Olson et al, 1989). Interestingly, family communication was not significantly correlated with family income, which has been tied to balanced cohesion and adaptability due to its ability to change levels of functionality according to situational need (Olson et al, 1989). So we can see that while wealthier families exhibit

higher levels of balanced functionality, the facilitating component of the model is not the cause, and it would benefit researchers to include a greater context of environment in family functioning research.

### **Future Studies**

The implications of this study confirm that forms of dysfunction in families can have a negative impact on the dimensions of identity formation in a time period of development that is dependent by that exploration and commitment making. This is further evidence that balanced cohesion and adaptability should be strived for through communication in order to increase individual self-reliance and support through a tumultuous developmental period typically occurring outside of the family system. Often the Circumplex Model of Family Function is utilized in family therapy to demonstrate effective and healthy communication styles and functioning habits. The significant results of this research will add to the number of results that can be associated with the model's components. Additional research could advance findings here with more diverse sample groups, perhaps looking specifically at first generation students, lower socioeconomic groups, non-higher education seeking groups, and family marital conditions. Each of these factors could have a significant impact on the process of identity formation because they relate to the conditions of emerging adulthood, or lack thereof.

While many of the hypotheses were not support, there are other family factors that should be considered for future research in identity formation and emerging adulthood. Areas include sibling support, parent-child relationships, and affective communication in families. Family communication has implications for each member of the family system, even once those members leave the immediate environment of the encompassing family

home. Another area of potential future investigation could be family function and communication on decision making during emerging adulthood, including but not limited to post-high school plans, alcohol and drug use, and number of close connections with peers (social support system).

### **Study Limitations**

Limitations in the study include lack of participant diversity. Most of the participants were rich, white undergraduate women from Wake Forest University. This dominant demographic limited potential gender differences in the identity formation as well as economic differences within emerging adulthood. Emerging adulthood is considered to be an upper middle class experience as it requires a lack of pressure to enter adulthood and financial freedom to pursue multiple avenues of exploration. The participants in this study reflected this, limiting the possibility of learning more about economic factors in relation to the variables. With a more diverse sample (gender, race, and economic status) there would be richer data and a greater understanding of identity formation in emerging adulthood.

This survey also studied the impact of family function on an individual, but family is often studied as a system where relationships with specific family members can have significant impact on individuals, not just the family environment overall. It would have benefitted the study to take into consideration familial relationships with parents and siblings when examining family as an independent variable. Some of the questions measuring family function would have different interpretations if the participant reflected on relationships with certain family members over others, potentially skewing their perception of the overall family based on positive or negative attributes of specific



relationships. Future research should consider these relationships in conjunction with family functioning's impact on individual development.

Unfortunately, while parental marital status was included in the survey a significant numbers of participants seemed to answer the question in accordance with their own marital status (over 45% responded "never married"). Important data concerning family systems was therefore incomplete and tests were unable to be considered in conjunction with identity formation and family functioning.

### **Conclusion**

These findings did support the overall Circumplex Model of family functioning as well as give important information concerning identity formation in an understudied developmental period. In particular, emerging adulthood is considered to be a time for self-growth and differentiation, separate from family and distinctive for new relationships. This research is helpful in demonstrating that family function still has some impact on emerging adults, despite not being the focus of the developmental time period. Enmeshed families and chaotic families each demonstrated negative influence over productive aspects of identity formation in emerging adulthood, and that was just considering the two scales independently. A family that is both highly enmeshed as well as chaotic in adaptability would exponentially increase difficulties for emerging adults in regards to their identification with commitment and risk of ruminative exploration. These potential consequences should be made aware to families in conjunction with other findings of Olson's model in order to encourage change within with family structure.

This study found that family communication was highly predictive of balanced, healthy family functioning within cohesion and adaptability. Communication is the key

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agent within the family function model as it allows family systems to move within the model along the spectrums of cohesion and adaptability as needed. Families should not be stagnant within these dimensions, encouraging the practice of healthy and effective communication as a necessary facilitating component of balanced family function and flexibility of function during family cycles. The results of this study contribute to previous research and modeling used for impactful family counseling practices and family communication teachings.

While family function does continue to impact various aspects of an individual's development, other factors came into play when looking at influencing factors of identity formation including family income, education level, and participant age. These results indicate that there are a number of environmental and temporal factors that are included in the process of identity formation in emerging adulthood. This study offered unique insights into the influences of individual development, reinforcing the importance of demographic variables while clarifying family functional relationships. I am encouraged that these results may lay the groundwork for future research on the interplay identity formation, family systems, and the navigation of emerging adulthood.

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Appendix 1

Items of the DIDS (1-5 scale; strongly disagree – strongly agree)

K. Luyckx et al. (2008). *Journal of Research in Personality*, 42, 58-82.

*Commitment making*

Decided on the direction I want to follow in life  
Know what I want to do with my future  
A clear view on my future  
Made a choice concerning some of my plans for the future  
Know what I want to achieve in my life

*Identification with commitment*

Plans for the future offer me a sense of security  
Future plans give me self-confidence  
Because of the path of life I have mapped out, I feel certain about myself  
Sense that the direction I want to take in life with really suit me  
Value my plans for the future very much

*Exploration in breadth*

Think about the direction I want to take in life  
Think a lot about how I see my future  
Try to figure out regularly which lifestyle would suit me  
Think about what to do with my life  
Try to find out which lifestyle would be good for me

*Exploration in depth*

Think about the future plans I have made  
Talk regularly with other people about my plans for the future I have made  
Work out for myself if the goals I put forward in life really suit me  
Try to find out regularly what other people think about the specific direction I want to take in my  
life  
Think a lot about the future plans I strive for

*Ruminative exploration*

Keep looking for the direction I want to take in my life  
Doubtful about what I really want to achieve in life  
Keep wondering which direction my life has to take  
Worry about what I want to do with my future  
Hard to stop thinking about the direction I want to follow in life



## CURRICULUM VITAE

### EDUCATION

**Wake Forest University** **Winston-Salem, NC**  
*Master of Arts in Communication* May 2017  
Thesis: “The Impact of Family Function on Identity Formation during Emerging Adulthood”  
Committee: Jen Priem (Advisor), Mollie Canzona, Samuel Gladding

**Denison University** **Granville, OH**  
*Bachelor of Arts in Communication* May 2013

### TEACHING EXPERIENCE

**Wake Forest University, NC**  
*Teaching Assistant,*  
Empirical Research Methods Fall 2015, Fall 2016, Spring 2017

**Institute of Reading Development**  
*Summer Reading Teacher* Summer 2016

**Wake Forest University, NC**  
*Teaching Assistant*  
Public Speaking Spring 2016

### CONFERENCE PAPERS

Krcmar, M., Lapierre, M. & Wallace, B. (2017). Revising a Measure to Assess Consumer-Related Family Communication Patterns. Paper presented at the annual conference of the International Communication Association, San Diego, CA.

### PRESENTATIONS

“Family Functioning and Social Support between Siblings during Emerging Adulthood.” Paper presented at Wake Forest University’s Graduate Research Fair Presentation, March, 2016, Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Examined the effect of family functionality and communication on perceived social support of siblings during the period of 18-25 years old.

### RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

*Masters Research* Spring 2016 – Spring 2017

- Thesis – “The Impact of Family Function on Identity Formation during Emerging Adulthood”
- Paper – “Family Functioning and Social Support between Siblings during Emerging Adulthood.” Results demonstrated that the interaction of cohesion and adaptability of family functioning are significantly positively predictive of sibling support

## FAMILY FUNCTION & INDENTITY FORMATION

### *Research Assistant*

Fall 2015 – Spring 2017

- Assistant to Dr. Krcmar of Wake Forest University and Dr. Lapierre of U. of Arizona, conducting source research, scale development, survey collection logistics, and editing

### *Independent Study Research*

Spring 2016 – Fall 2016

- Assisted Dr. Priem in the creation of a new interpersonal mindfulness scale by means of extensive research, collaboration of ideas, and formulation of subscale items
- The Interpersonal Mindfulness Scale is currently undergoing pilot testing and analysis, it will add a new dimension to the already existing body of literature on mindfulness and expand understanding of the complexities of interpersonal communication

## **COMMUNITY SERVICE & LEADERSHIP**

- Captain of GE Intern Relay for Life team 2012  
raising over \$1,500
- Initiated a volunteer opportunity for at Emmaus Kid's Café 2012
- President of Kappa Kappa Gamma, Gamma Omega Chapter 2011-2012