2017

The Relationship Between Emerging Adulthood and Communication Patterns

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Walden University
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Abstract

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Clinical Psychology

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August 2017

Abstract

Adults who have not developed effective communication skills are at an increased risk of having unsuccessful relationships. Children of divorce are less likely to have communication behaviors modeled to them, resulting in undeveloped communication and therefore a higher likelihood to get divorced themselves. The purpose of this quantitative quasi-experimental study was to determine if there was an association between the successful transition to emerging adulthood and the development of communication behaviors among adults. The research question focused on whether successful transition through emerging adulthood positively discriminates communication patterns among adults, specifically using Gottman's framework of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse when controlling for gender and level of education. The sample consisted of 30 participants ages 25 to 30 years old, recruited from university participant pools. Arnett's definition of successful transition into adulthood (accepting responsibility for one's actions, independent beliefs, financial independence) was operationalized to collect data for the predictor variable. The Four Horsemen Questionnaire was used to garner data for the continuous dependent variable (maladaptive communication patterns). An analysis of variance indicated a significant relationship between maladaptive communication patterns and the transition into adulthood. Findings contribute to social change by helping emerging adults understand the impact of a successful transition into adulthood on communication behaviors. Using the developmental period of emerging adulthood to improve communication patterns may assist in mitigating divorce risk variables and relationship breakdowns.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Tzivia, who has been an endless source of support and encouragement during the challenges of graduate school and life. I am forever thankful for having you in my life. This work is also dedicated to my parents, who have always loved me unconditionally and whose virtuous examples have taught me to work hard for the things I aspire to achieve.

Acknowledgments

This project would not have been achievable if not for the understanding, kindness, patience, and support of many individuals. Throughout my journey, I have felt extremely appreciative and am grateful for this opportunity to express my appreciations.

To Tzivia, my wife, partner, and teammate: I am honored to stand by your side and am forever grateful for your willingness to stay by mine. There have been so many times along our journey together that I have been mesmerized by your patience, understanding, support, and unwavering desire to positively influence the people you come into contact with. These characteristics were so apparent as I worked to complete this project, and I am so thankful for all the encouragement, support, and love you gave me along the way. I am excited for what the next chapters of our lives will bring, and I am equally as motivated to working with you to meet whatever challenges we may encounter. You have shown me more about what it means to love and be loved than I ever believed possible. I love you.

To my parents: I thank you for your continued support and encouragements. You have always had confidence in me irrespective of the situation, even when you might not have understood the specific challenge of the moment. This has been so meaningful to me, and I struggle to thank you as frequently as I ought to. As I continue to grow older, I realize more and more how much your efforts, sacrifices, attention, and love for me helped to form the individual I am today, and I am forever thankful. I love you.

To my mother-law: This endeavor cost us our last few months together, and it is one of the few strong regrets I have to live with. I appreciate that you encouraged me to

stay home and keep working instead of spending more time with you, and I know that is what you would have wanted, but I made the wrong choice. I am so sorry. I just wish you knew that your support throughout the journey meant more to me than I could ever portray. In addition to your love for Tzivia, your faith in me and the pride with which you spoke about me always impacted me in such positive ways. I always knew you had my best interests in mind, and I have so many memories of you doing what you thought was best for me. I wish I had the chance to share this with you. You were such a special person and I hope the world is impacted by all your acts of kindness.

To my chair, Dr. Virginia Salzer: I thank you for your willingness to take on this project notwithstanding your overflowing schedule. I came to you asking for a favor, and I am so appreciative for your support and guidance along the way. In addition to your academic guidance on this project, your contributions have significantly contributed to my personal and professional development. I have enjoyed our conversations along the way, and I thank you for everything.

To my committee member, Dr. Robert Meyer: I thank you for your willingness to serve on my committee, as I came to you at a time when I felt especially helpless. Your kind e-mails meant more than you know, and I genuinely thank you.

Finally, to all the family and friends I have neglected over the previous couple of years: I am finished and looking forward to making up for lost time!

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

In the United States, there is one divorce approximately every thirty-six seconds (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015). Children of divorce face relentless challenges as a result of parental separation (Caldwell, Woolley, & Caldwell, 2007; Knapp, Sandberg, Novak, & Larson, 2015). Adults of parental divorce score lower on psychological, interpersonal, and socioeconomic health predictors than adults reared in continuously intact two-parent families (Amato, 1994). Amato (1996) claimed children raised by conflicted or divorced parents are susceptible to learning unhealthy interpersonal communication skills. Communication skills are essential to relationship satisfaction (Domingue & Mollen, 2009; Mackey, Diemer, & O'Brien, 2004). Researchers have shown the various predictors of relationship satisfaction (in opposite as well as same-sex relationships) consist of intimacy, support, quality of communication, humor, common interests, loyalty, reliability, efficient conflict resolution abilities, and a sense of shared power (Domingue & Mollen, 2009; Mackey et al., 2004). Communication is a catalyst for the advancement of intimacy and trust in relationships (Pietromonaco, Greenwood, & Barrett, 2004). This is due to partners feeling understood and accepted within the context of positive communication. Gottman (1999), a preeminent couple researcher, classified four specific negative communication patterns most corrosive to couples: criticism, defensiveness, contempt, and stonewalling.

The focus of relationship research for the last four decades has been specifically geared towards positive and maladaptive communication patterns (Levenson & Gottman, 1983; Schwartz Gottman, & Gottman, 2015). Gottman (1995, 2015) claimed that strong interpersonal communication is the specific skill necessary to avert hostile marital conflict and divorce, with divorce being the ultimate collapse of romantic relationships. Researchers have shown how children of divorce face persistent challenges as a result of parental separation (Caldwell et al., 2007; Knapp et al., 2015). Reducing maladaptive communication patterns amongst couples will help diminish marital unhappiness as well as divorce. Children of divorce have significantly higher rates of divorce themselves than for people with no family history of divorce (Sanders, Halford, & Behrens, 1999). Lessening the risk of divorce will enable the development of healthy children who in turn are productive, educated, and law abiding citizens (Johnson, 2013).

Family Systems Thinking

The Bowen family systems theory is a conceptualization for the predisposition of offspring to repeat negative parental behavior (Brown, 1999). Multigenerational family theory, one of the eight concepts of the Bowen family systems, claims people obtain a basis for interpersonal relationships from their families-of-origin (FOO; Framo, 1981; Topham, Larson, & Holman, 2005). Offspring of divorce are placed at increased risk of divorce because of the negative communication patterns acquired through family systems as negative communication patterns are acquired throughout the developmental process (Amato, 1996).

Negative Communication Patterns

There are several researched predictors of divorce (Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998). Gottman (1999) explained how four negative communication patterns--criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling--lead to divorce. Levenson, Carstensen, and Gottman (1994) claimed poor interpersonal communication and prolonged conflict are severe indicators of marital separation. Offspring of divorce typically learn unhealthy communication skills from their parents (Amato, 1996). As a result of learned negative communication patterns, children are at increased risk of divorce; consequently, offspring of divorce are 14% more likely to get divorced themselves (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015).

Emerging Adulthood Theory (EAT)

People who marry under the age of 25 are 24% more likely to get divorced (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015). Emerging adults, ages 18–25, are in a unique developmental period. According to Arnett (2000), the social stage of development has been extended until approximately age twenty-five amongst industrialized countries. Arnett (2004) discovered young adults were postponing serious life decisions until the latter half of their 20s or early 30s. Beginning in the 1980s, young adults were delaying marriage or committing to lifelong professions until they were older than 25, creating a gap in their development (Tedx Talks, 2015). The break in development might be responsible for increased negative communication patterns, resulting in increased divorce among this population. Arnett (2004) stated emerging adulthood is a phase of identity development that previously would have occurred during adolescence.

Erikson (1968) explained how individuals, particularly in their late teens, experience a sense of confusion in regards to love, work, and their beliefs. Erikson explained the extended adolescent psychosocial moratorium "during which the young adult through free role experimentation may find a niche in some section of his society" (p. 156). Arnett (2000) expounded how in postindustrialized societies, Erikson's stage of identity development has been extended to the late 20s. One of Erikson's identity development domains is love, which inculcates romantic relationships and the eventual goal of marriage (Arnett, 2000).

According to EAT, young adults are delaying their commitment in all identity domains, including love, and using the extended period to explore and experiment (Willoughby & Dworkin, 2009). A child's communication skills are developed by independence from their parents (Amato, 1996) and by exposure to others (Roisman, Masten, Coatsworth, & Tellegen, 2004). Therefore, this extended stage of identity development and exploration becomes especially transformational for children of divorce as they can unlearn maladaptive communication patterns through the independence from their parents as well as learning effective communication through opportunities to improve their communication skills through romantic relationship experiences (Roisman et al., 2004).

Maladaptive communication patterns corrode relationships (Gottman, 1999, 2015). Effective communication is a skill learned through family upbringing, social experiences, and previous romantic relationships (Knapp et al., 2015). There was a gap in literature explaining the relationship between the progression of emerging adulthood and

an increase in communication patterns among adults. Understanding a possible association between emerging adulthood and communication patterns among adults could help prevent marital separation. Furthermore, a reduction in divorce rates will enable the development of healthy individuals who in turn are productive, educated, and law abiding citizens (Johnson, 2013).

Background

Effects of Divorce on Offspring

To fully appreciate why parental divorce increases the likelihood of offspring divorce, its effects must be understood. Outcomes of divorce on children have been consistently researched (Albertini & Garriga, 2011; Cheadle, Amato, & King, 2010; Kalmijn, 2013). Although researchers have investigated adverse outcomes from both paternal and maternal relationships, poor father-adult son relationships demonstrated significant negative outcomes (Kalmijn, 2013). Researchers have also shown that father love is as heavily implicated as mother love in offspring's psychological well-being, health, and behavior problems (Rohner & Veneziano, 2001). Having a mother as the sole custodial parent has several negative implications that last throughout adult life (Knapp et al., 2015; McLanahan & Bumpass, 1988). A chief repercussion is the financial toll on the custodial parent causing increased work hours and less money to invest in the children (Johnson, 2013; Knapp et al., 2015).

After three decades of research, researchers have recognized that there are negative associations between parental divorce and children's well-being, life chances, and intergenerational relations (Albertini & Garriga, 2011; Amato 2001; Sigle-Rushton &

McLanahan, 2004). Children of divorce are at an increased risk for a variety of issues later on in life including, but not limited to, divorce itself. Research has been consistent in showing a connection between parental divorce and offspring divorce (Amato, 1996; Topham et al., 2005), and researchers have reinforced the concept of intergenerational transmission of marital satisfaction and marital quality (Topham et al., 2005).

Bowenian Systems Theory

According to Bowen (1976), family behavior is viewed as an emotional entity. The nature of a family is for its members to be intensely connected on an emotional level (Bowen, 1976). Even though people typically feel distant and disconnected from their families, this is more of a feeling than reality (Bowen Center for the Study of the Family, 2014). Family members so significantly affect each other's thoughts, feelings, and actions that it seems as if people are living under the same emotional roof (Bowen Center for the Study of the Family, 2014). People petition for each other's attention, approval, and support and react to each other's needs, expectations, and distress. The connectedness and reactivity make the functioning of family members interdependent, this phenomenon is known as enmeshment (Brown, 1999). A change in one person's functioning is predictably followed by reciprocal changes in the operation of others (Brown, 1999). Enmeshment differs among families, but it is always present to a point (Brown, 1999).

Social Learning Theory

There are varying theories as to why children of divorce acquire parallel negative communication patterns and other coping skills. Bandura (1977) claimed social learning creates the blueprint from which people build their personal experiences (Bandura &

Walters, 1963; Topham et al., 2005). FOO is possibly one of the most influential social

learning environments used for this template of behaviors (Knapp et al., 2015).

Damaging experiences in an individual's FOO may escape into interactional forms with a

spouse (Roberto-Forman, 2008). Amato (1996) claimed that this is a source for offspring

of divorces' lack of communication and other healthy coping techniques. Children are

susceptible to emulating their parents' style of interaction resulting in similar problems in

their marriages (Amato & Booth, 1997; Booth & Edwards, 1989).

Negative Communication Patterns

Marital dissatisfaction is the stimulus for divorce more so than ever before in the

United States (Johnson, 2013; Raley, 2003). According to Gottman et al. (1998),

prolonged poor communication is predictive of marital unhappiness and divorce (Knapp

et al., 2015). Research has shown that effective communication is highly correlated with

marital satisfaction (Knapp et al., 2015; Rehman & Holtzworth-Munroe, 2007). FOO

experiences are one of the hypothesized reasons for strained communication in couple

relationships (Holman et al., 2001). According to Holman et al. (2001), FOO experiences

can severely affect communication and many other social skills. Negative FOO can

influence the perception of conflict, and this, in turn, has an effect on negative

communication sequences and increased contempt (Knapp et al., 2005; Story, Karney,

Lawrence, & Bradbury, 2004). Contempt is a fundamental predicting factor of divorce

(Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998). Gottman et al.'s (1998) theory of the sound

martial house demonstrates how poor communication and contempt contribute to divorce.

Emerging Adulthood

EAT, developed by Arnett in 2000, claims that people take longer to grow up. According to Arnett, four salient revolutions in the 1960s and 1970s spurred the creation of emerging adulthood (Tedx Talks, 2015). Firstly, there was a shift from a manufacturing economy to an information and services economy, and this commanded the need for higher education. More people needed to pursue an education for longer than ever before. Arnett claimed the invention of contraceptives, specifically the birth control pill in 1964, fractured the link between sexuality and reproduction (Tedx Talks, 2015). Consequently, the connection between sexuality and marriage was dissolved as well. The Women's Movement changed how young women think about and plan their lives, and this prompted women to reflect about different goals during their twenties. The Women's Movement generated a desire for women to want to pursue education and other aspirations previously thought of as impractical. The final aspect responsible for the rise of the emerging adulthood period was the Youth Movement (Tedx Talks, 2015). Arnett claims the Youth Movement established a level of respect for youth. With this in mind, the global developmental transitions previously occurring at age 20 now transpire at 25 to 30 (Arnett, 2000).

In their study, Roisman et al. (2004) clarified how emerging adulthood is responsible for the development of romantic relationship competencies including communication patterns. Roisman et al. claimed that success in chief tasks of development is established based on previous achievements in other life domains. Romantic relationship competencies, including communication patterns, are built upon previous relationship experiences. Prior to the change from a manufacturing economy to

an information and services economy (the impetus for the development of EAT), people were forced to join the workforce and begin a family around age 18 (Arnett, 2000). However, the aforementioned shift in economy, the invention of contraceptives, the Women's Movement, and the Youth Movement introduced the ability for young adults to explore other relationships (Arnett, 2000). As Arnett (2000) stated, "Having left the dependency of childhood and adolescence, and having not yet entered the enduring responsibilities that are normative in adulthood, emerging adults often explore a variety of possible life directions in love, work, and worldviews" (p.469). Moreover, Snyder (2006) explained how a critical developmental task of emerging adulthood is learning how to formulate, maintain, and graciously terminate romantic relationships. The transition into adulthood comprises of distinct periods of experiences in a network of relationships (Guarnieri, Smorti, & Tani, 2015). As a result, EAT highlighted new opportunities for people to further develop their communication skills (Shiner, Masten, & Tellegen, 2002). Young adults were no longer restricted to their acquired maladaptive communication patterns developed as children, and instead they have the ability to explore other relationships and learn firsthand about the effects of their communication skills (Tedx Talks, 2015). Through experiencing and experimenting during this stage of development, they have opportunities to experience different relationships and utilize their communication skills.

Children of divorce have considerably higher rates of divorce than people with no family history of divorce (Sanders et al., 1999). Children of divorce cultivate negative communication patterns, creating relentless challenges (Caldwell et al., 2007; Knapp et

al., 2015). Without education, this sequence may reiterate to the next generations (Hall, 1981). The conclusions of this study show a relationship between maladaptive communication patterns and emerging adulthood. This information may help offspring of divorce reduce their risk of martial separation.

Problem Statement

Communication behaviors are integral to the success of romantic relationships. Adults who have not acquired successful communication skills are at increased risk for failed relationships Divorce is the definitive relationship failure, this failure can be compounded for children of divorce. Amato (1996) claimed children raised in divorced homes may not learn healthy interpersonal communication skills. Sanders, Halford, and Behrens (1999) explained how children of divorce are at increased risk of getting divorced themselves. Researchers have consistently shown the numerous benefits of being reared in a continuously intact home (Amato, 2014; Kalmijn, 2013). Children of divorce develop negative communication patterns (Amato, 1996). As a result, they face constant challenges including an increased risk of relationship breakdowns (Caldwell et al., 2007; Knapp et al., 2015). Unencumbered, this sequence has the potential to repeat its negative outcome from generation to generation (Hall, 1981). There has been exhaustive research conducted on the effects of divorce on offspring (Kalmijn, 2013) as well as extensive research on predictors of divorce and marital separation (Gottman et al., 1998; Gottman & Silver, 2015). However, there remained a gap in the literature regarding how the successful transition through emerging adulthood, a critical psychosocial

developmental stage, plays a role in the development of communication behaviors among adults.

Purpose of the Study

The goal of this quantitative quasi-experimental study was to assess a possible connection between emerging adulthood and communication patterns among adults. Researchers have shown the toxic effects of poor communication patterns (Gottman, 1999, 2015; Levenson & Gottman, 1983; Schwartz Gottman & Gottman, 2015). Researchers have also underscored the numerous developmental tasks of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000, 2004), specifically the development and experimentation with romantic relationships (Roisman et al., 2004). However, researchers have not yet shown how the new psychosocial developmental stage of emerging adulthood has impacted communication skills. I designed this study to fill the gap in literature regarding the impact that emerging adulthood has on communication patterns. The predictor (independent) variable was the successful transition into adulthood, while the dependent variable was the degree to which individuals engage in negative communication patterns.

Research Question and Hypotheses

I developed the following research question and hypotheses to guide this study: Does a successful transition through the emerging adulthood stage of development positively discriminate communication patterns among adults, specifically Gottman's Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, when controlling for gender and level of education?

H_o: The communication patterns of young adults who have not

successfully transitioned through the emerging adulthood stage of

development will not differ from those who have successfully transitioned

through the emerging adulthood stage of development.

H_a: The communication patterns of young adults who have not

successfully transitioned through the emerging adulthood stage of

development will be more negative than the communication patterns of

those who have successfully transitioned through the emerging adulthood

stage of development.

Theoretical Framework

Bowenian Systems Theory

In this study, I relied on Bowen family systems theory as a part of the theoretical

framework. Bowen (1999) claimed family members solicit each other's attention,

approval, and support and react to each other's needs, expectations, and distress. Bowen

theorized eight concepts to make up family systems theory, and the fifth concept was the

multigenerational transmission process. This process describes how small differences in

levels of differentiation among parents and their offspring lead to marked differences in

differentiation among the members of a multigenerational family (Crossno, 2011). The

information creating these differences is transmitted across generations through

relationships; the transmission occurs on several interconnected levels ranging from the

conscious teaching and learning of information to the automatic and unconscious

programming of emotional reactions and behaviors (Brown, 1999). Relationally and

genetically transmitted information interacts to shape an individual's self (Hall, 1981). This is potentially the reason for poor communication among offspring of divorce (Amato, 1996). Relying on this theory, there is a high propensity of children replicating the damaging patterns of their parents' emotional behavior (Hall, 1981). Without a conscious determination to amend these impaired patterns, the maladaptive behaviors are unconsciously repeated (Hall, 1981).

Negative Communication Patterns

Gottman (1998) consistently showed that high scores on criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling have a significant correlation with marital separation. These four negative communication patterns are referred to as the four horsemen of the apocalypse (Gottman, 1998). Researchers have shown effective communication is highly correlated with marital satisfaction (Gottman, 1998; Knapp et al., 2015; Rehman & Holtzworth-Munroe, 2007). Furthermore, researchers have shown a connection between parental divorce and offspring divorce (Amato, 1996; Topham et al., 2005). Children who fail to experience a positive model of parental marital interaction may not learn healthy interpersonal skills such as effective communication, conflict resolution, and compromising (Amato, 1996). Gottman (1994) claimed these are the very skills that may possibly prevent couples from engaging in hostile marital conflict.

EAT

In the EAT theory, Arnett (2000) proposed an extension of Erikson's stages of psychosocial development. Emerging adulthood theorists claim in industrialized countries like the United States and Europe, psychosocial stages of development have

been extended until approximately age twenty-five (Arnett, 2000). Arnett (2000) claimed that beginning in the 1970s, the economy transformed from a manufacturing economy to an information and services economy. As a result, high paying professions required a higher education degree. This is the basis for the change in development and the rise of the emerging adulthood epoch, and Arnett (2004) discovered young adults are postponing serious life decisions until the latter half of their 20s or early 30s. Beginning in the 1980s, young adults were delaying marriage or committing to lifelong professions until they were older than 25 and creating a gap in their development. Emerging adulthood is a time evidenced by postponed adult obligations and great change in educational, familial, and other social settings rather than a strong emphasis on adulthood formation (Arnett, 2000, 2011). During this transitional period, individuals postpone entry into adult roles, engage in more reflective thought, and examine personal identities and values in an attempt to establish a sense of self (Arnett, 2000, 2011; Chan, Tsai, & Fuligni, 2015).

Emerging adulthood is a period of searching and this makes it different from adolescence and adulthood (Arnett, 2004). Additionally, Arnett (2004) stated that emerging adulthood is a phase of identity development that previously would have occurred during adolescence. In distinguishing emerging adulthood from adolescence and adulthood, Arnett depicted emerging adulthood as a time of possibility, instability, individualism, identity exploration, and a feeling that an individual is no longer a child, but not yet an adult. Although emerging adulthood can be filled with uncertainty, it is a time of increased growth that eventually permits the development of a more established

identity (Arnett, 2004). Conceptually, this stage would have a direct effect on an individual's coping and communication skills.

Nature of the Study

I selected a quasi-experimental research design for this study to help achieve an understanding of the relationship between emerging adulthood and communication patterns among adults. Quasi-experimental analysis is an efficient design to understand the connection between two variables (Gallo, 2015). The general purpose of quasi-experimental analysis is to determine a connection between two naturally occurring variables (Grimm & Yarnold, 1995). The predictor variable in this study was the successful transition into adulthood, and the dependent variable was negative communication patterns. In this study, I sampled 30 participants (see Poulsen & French, 2008) in the age range of 25–30. I then conducted the study using a validated tool to measure the participant's negative communication patterns.

Definitions

Children of divorce: Offspring of parental divorce. This can occur at any age during the child's development. Although the effects are life-long, the divorce took place while the child still lived at home (Amato, 1994).

Divorce: Couple separation with one parent as the chief custodial parent (Amato, 1994).

Emerging adults: A period of development occurring approximately at age 18–25 (Arnett, 2000). However, it specifically refers to millennials and later generations (Arnett, 2000).

Family systems theory: A theory that a family is a unit so enmeshed that events affecting one person essentially affect everyone associated within the family (Brown, 1999).

Four horsemen of the apocalypse: According to Gottman (1998), the four negative communication patterns of contempt, defensiveness, stonewalling, and criticism that result in the poor communication responsible for divorce.

Gender: A controlled variable in this study, operationally defined as male, female, or other.

Level of education: A controlled variable in this study, operationally defined as less than high school, high school, some college but no degree, associate's degree, bachelor's degree, or graduate degree.

Multigenerational transmission process: One of the eight concepts that make up family systems theory. This concept describes how small differences in levels of differentiation among parents and their offspring lead to marked differences in differentiation among the members of a multigenerational family (Crossno, 2011).

Social learning theory: Bandura's (1977) theory claiming social learning creates outlines with which people build personal experiences. Children learn behaviors and schemas from observations and modeling, and this learning overflows into their future romantic relationships and marriages (Topham et al., 2005).

Successful transition into adulthood: Arnett (2000, 2004) added a supplementary stage to Erikson's stages of psychosocial development, called emerging adulthood. As a result, adulthood is no longer about reaching a chronological age, but rather about

reaching a developmental age of accepting responsibility, making independent decisions, and being financially independent (Arnett, 1994, 1998, 2000, 2001). According to Arnett, achieving these three salient developmental tasks is what makes a person successfully transition into adulthood. Accepting responsibility means responsibility for one's own actions (Arnett, 1998). Arnett claimed that independent decision making means making decisions of character, which combine a sense of making independent decisions with a self-consciously strong willed intention to carry them out. Lastly, Arnett also claimed that financial independence means being financially independent from an individual's parents (Moore, 1987), citing that the reason for this change in status definition is due to the changes in economy and emerging adult viewpoints.

Assumptions

When conducting an ANOVA, my goal in this study was to determine if there are group differences between an independent variable of transitioning to adulthood in their degree of negative communication. Firstly, I assumed respondents who choose to participate knew English, were between the ages of 25-30, and had at least a high school diploma or its equivalent based on their responses to the initial demographic questions. I assumed the participants in this study answered in an honest and truthful manner to best reflect their assessments of the questionnaires.

Scope and Delimitations

Creswell (2003) stated that delimitations have to do with "narrowing the scope of a study" (p. 148). I investigated male and female adults that were between the ages of 25–30 years old. The participants were accessed through university research participant pool

systems to solicit their help in completing a few questionnaires assessing their maladaptive communication patterns.

Limitations

I identified several limitations in this study. The primary limitation was the recruitment strategy for participation. Using accessible universities to petition volunteers from their current students and alumni could have contributed to less than honest responding and more socially desirable responses. Nevertheless, participants were encouraged to reply honestly and guaranteed their alma mater would not receive notice of their participation and survey responses. Another limitation was the use of self-report objective instruments to collect data. Such instruments do not allow for the gathering of in-depth information. Nevertheless, I made an effort to use valid and reliable published instruments.

Significance

The results of this study filled the gap in the literature regarding the effects of emerging adulthood on communication behaviors. This information may help adults understand the possible influence between this new stage in development and some of its effects on communication patterns. Moreover, the results may extend to help offspring of divorce understand some of the mitigating variables for marital separation. Elucidating the aforementioned connection will impact and promote positive social change by aiding awareness regarding the effects that this developmental stage has on some of the risk factors for relationship failure pertaining primarily to people interested in romantic relationships and secondarily to the offspring of divorce. Clarifying some of the variables

that increase the prevalence of divorce may help mitigate the chances of couple separation and augment the likelihood of remaining in an intact home.

Summary

In this chapter, I provided information about the study problem, purpose, background, nature, research questions, theoretical framework, and significance. Poor communication can lead to the dissolution of romantic relationships, specifically marriage. Divorce can lead to poorer mental health, less engagement in prosocial behaviors, more risk-taking behaviors, and divorce of the offspring as well (Amato, 1994, 1996; Sanders et al., 1999). The particular problem that I addressed in this study was a lack of understanding about the relationship between emerging adulthood and communication patterns among adults. This study was needed to help provide adults, including children of divorce, with greater potential for relationship success. The purpose of this study was to determine the influence emerging adulthood has on the development of communication patterns. To achieve this purpose, I conducted this study using a quantitative research method with a quasi-experimental design. The predictor variable was the successful transition into adulthood, and the dependent variable was negative communication patterns as Gottman et al. (1998) claimed these patterns were most significantly correlated with divorce. In the next chapter, I will examine the literature related to the variables and relationships of interest in this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Problem and Purpose Statement

Arnett (2000, 2004) claimed people are getting married later on in life now more so than ever before. Emerging adulthood has become the new developmental stage encapsulating 18–25 year olds (Barry, Madsen, Nelson, Carroll, & Badger, 2009). As a result, Arnett (1994, 1998, 2000, 2001) claimed becoming an adult is no longer about reaching a chronological age, but rather accomplishing a set of salient developmental tasks (accepting responsibility, making independent decisions, and being financially independent). An individual can complete these tasks and develop into an adult prior to reaching a chronological age of 25; however, other tasks of emerging adulthood may not be achieved if someone progressed from adolescence to adulthood without successfully transitioning through emerging adulthood.

One skill that may not be fully developed is communication patterns. Communication patterns are essential to the success of romantic relationships (Gottman, 2015). Adults who have not acquired effective communication skills are at increased risk for failed relationships, and this is compounded in children of divorce (Amato, 1996). There has been comprehensive research on divorce predictors and marital separation (Gottman et al., 1998; Gottman & Silver, 2015). Furthermore, researchers have exposed the detrimental effects of maladaptive communication patterns on marriages (Gottman, 1999, 2015; Levenson & Gottman, 1983; Schwartz Gottman, & Gottman, 2015) and have even underscored the numerous developmental tasks of emerging adulthood (Arnett,

2000, 2004; Roisman et al., 2004). However, researchers have yet to show how the new psychosocial developmental stage of emerging adulthood has influenced communication skills. Therefore, in this study I addressed the gap in the literature regarding how the successful transition through emerging adulthood plays a role in the positive development of communication patterns among adults. The goal of this quantitative quasi-experimental study was to assess a possible connection between the emerging adulthood stage in development and communication patterns among adults. I compared the negativity of communication patterns of young adults who have either successfully transitioned from emerging adulthood or who have not successfully transitioned from emerging adulthood.

Current Literature

Gratifying relationships are quintessential to life satisfaction (Twenge & King, 2005), and effective communication is at the epicenter of healthy relationships. When a romantic relationship, primarily marriage, breaks down, the children are often fraught with countless negative aftereffects (Caldwell et al., 2007; D'Onofrio et al., 2007; Knapp et al., 2015). Moreover, researchers have shown how children of divorce develop maladaptive communication patterns from their parents (Amato, 1996; Topham et al., 2005). Additionally, extensive research exists on divorce predictors and marital separation (Gottman et al., 1998; Gottman & Silver, 2015). Researchers have also highlighted the numerous benefits of being raised in a continuously intact home (Amato, 2014; Kalmijn, 2013). The emerging adulthood concept has been heavily researched over the past 15 years (Arnett, 2000, 2004, 2015; Côté, 2006; Mitchell, 2015; Reifman, Arnett,

& Colwell, 2016; Syed & Mitchell, 2013). However, there was a gap in literature with reference to applied issues regarding romantic relationships in emerging adulthood (see Fincham, Stanley, & Rhoades, 2011). Subsequently, there was a need to further research how emerging adulthood plays a role in the development of communication patterns in adults, primarily in children of marital separation.

Preview of Major Sections.

There are four major concepts to understanding this issue. Firstly, family systems (Bowen systems) thinking provided me with a foundational framework towards conceptualizing why children of divorce are more susceptible to lifelong challenges, including divorce. Bowen systems thinking was one of the first broad and encompassing theories of family functioning (Brown, 1999) and has been acclaimed as one of the most carefully developed family systems theories (Innes, 1996; Larson, Benson, Wilson, & Medora, 1998; Nichols & Schwartz, 1991). Family systems theory provides a transgenerational viewpoint for children's specific behaviors (Topham et al., 2005). Enmeshment, a fundamental Bowenian concept, underscores the emotional connectedness each member of a nuclear family has on its members (Brown, 1999).

Secondly, Bandura's (1977) social learning theory provided me with a foundational framework to understand why children exhibit learned behaviors from societal influences. Social learning theory is a powerful framework to consider why children of divorce are specifically more susceptible to acquiring maladaptive communication patterns. The four phenomenon of modeling the observation and integration of behaviors are attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation (Bandura,

1977). I will discuss these aspects in greater detail later in this chapter. When all four phenomena are present, an observer can encode and ultimately inculcate the behavior as part of their repertoire (Bandura, 1977).

Thirdly, Gottman and Levenson (1983) conducted the first qualitative laboratory studies on couples. They established live-in apartments in which two-way mirrors and cameras were set up for 12 hours a day. Gottman et al. (1983) have conducted research on couples and marriages for over three decades. They have developed numerous theories on what makes successful marriages as well as what makes destructive marriages. One of their more popularized theories, the four horsemen of the apocalypse, highlights four negative communication behaviors that Gottman et al. claim are most corrosive. Although this theory is part of a broader concept known as the core tirade of balance, Gottman is highly recognized for the development of the four horsemen of the apocalypse theory (Johnson, 2013).

Finally, EAT is a supplementary stage of Erikson's (1959) psychosocial development proposed by Arnett (2000). Arnett claimed this additional stage in development was necessary for postindustrialized societies as a result of four revolutions (economy transformation, invention of contraceptives, the Women's Movement, and the Youth Movement). Although some researchers have argued about the need for an additional stage of development (Côté & Bynner, 2008; Hendry & Kloep, 2007; Schwartz, Zamboanga, Luyckx, Meca, & Ritchie, 2013), most agree adolescence is no longer where people make essential life choices (Buhl & Lanz, 2007; Nelson & Barry, 2005). In postindustrialized societies, children take longer to mature into adulthood, and

this elongated span of development has delayed many global developmental tasks, placing them in the emerging adulthood period (Arnett, 2000).

According to Snyder (2006), one of the most critical developmental tasks of emerging adulthood is learning how to create, maintain, and gracefully terminate romantic and sexual relationships. A significant aspect of these abilities is the capability of a person to efficiently and positively communicate with their partner (Snyder, 2006). As a result, the development of positive versus negative communication patterns is essential during this period of maturity.

Literature Search Strategy

Library Databases

I employed an integrative literature review to discover current research relating to negative communication patterns among emerging adults as well as adults. I searched the electronic databases of psychology library journals and search engines, such as Google Scholar, EBSCOhost, JSTOR, ProQuest, and ProQuest Dissertation & Theses at Walden University, to locate studies on this topic. The keywords used to search for overall articles included *offspring of divorce, predictor of divorce, negative communication pattern, family-of-origin, social learning theory, Bowen family systems theory, emerging adulthood, adult development*, and *identity*.

Scope of Literature

I used cross-referencing for the discovery of additional references. These searches generated hundreds of articles. Articles were then limited to the ones that have been published within the last 16 years (2000 to 2016), with the exception of some pertinent

sources relevant to the topic of family systems, negative communication, and emerging

adulthood that were published earlier than 2000. The majority of sources I obtained were

taken from peer-reviewed literature and published books. In the remainder of this chapter,

I will present information about the theoretical foundation of the study and then I will

provide a chapter summary.

Theoretical Foundation

I based the theoretical foundation of this study of analysis on the Bowen family

systems theory, social learning theory, negative communication skills as predictors of

divorce theory, and EAT. Understanding these four theories and their operationalization

provides a framework for understanding why and how children of divorce are more

susceptible to divorce during emerging adulthood. I will provide an overview of each of

these theoretical foundations.

Bowen Family Systems

Bowen family systems were one of the original comprehensive theories of family

functioning (Brown, 1999). Beginning in the 1940s, Bowen began involving mothers in

the treatment of schizophrenic clients (Brown, 1999). As director of Georgetown Family

Center, Bowen started focusing family systems research on less severe patients, and this

focus progressed to research across many generations (Brown, 1999). After collecting a

great deal of qualitative data on family systems, Bowen focused on all forms of human

emotional systems (Brown, 1999). Bowenian therapy emerged after a discussion of the

theories, which Bowen tried on his own family at a conference in 1967 (Brown, 1999).

The focus of Bowenian theory is on patterns that develop in families to disperse anxiety

(Brown, 1999). Bowen claimed anxiety stemmed from too much or too little closeness in relationships (Brown, 1999). Eight key concepts make up Bowenian theory; however, the eighth concept, societal emotional process, predominantly has to do with the evolution of society and has little bearing on the practice of the theory (Brown, 1999). In this section, I will provide an overview of the first seven concepts as they concern operationalizing the systems thinking.

Differentiation of self. Differentiation is a concept referring to how much a single unit in the family dynamic affects the rest of the family system (Brown, 1999). The degree of bonds with others, the level of anxiety in self and the relationship network, and the degree of emotional cut-off with others influence differentiation (Bowen, 1976). Increased tensions augment these processes, which can lead to problems. When family members get apprehensive, anxiety intensifies by spreading amongst them, and when anxiety levels rise, the emotional connectedness of family members becomes more stressful (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Eventually, one or more members feel overwhelmed, isolated, or out of control (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Differentiation is the ability of an individual to function independently while staying emotionally associated to the significant relationship system (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Enmeshment, or fusion, is the converse aspect of differentiation (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Family members affect each other's thoughts, feelings, and actions to the point that it is as if they live under the same emotional roof (Bowen, 1976). When enmeshed, people petition each other's attention, approval, and support and react to each other's needs, expectations, and distress; the connectedness and reactivity make the functioning of family members interdependent

(Bowen, 1976). While people typically feel disconnected from their families, it is more of a feeling than reality (Bowen, 1976), so much so that a change in one person's functioning is predictably followed by reciprocal changes in the functioning of others. Families always differ in the amount of enmeshment; nevertheless, it is always present to a point (Bowen, 1976).

Triangles. The concept of triangles implies a theoretical frame of reference for the observation of functioning patterns in families and emotional systems (Hall, 1981). Triangles are the building blocks of larger emotional systems, and according to Bowen (1976), triangles are the smallest stable relationship systems. Bowen (1976) claimed triangles are basic molecules of a family or emotional system and that a two-person system is unstable because it cannot tolerate as much tension before involving a third person. Conversely, a triangle is capable of handling more tension without involving another person since the tension can shift between the three relationships (Brown, 1999). Bowen claimed when the tension is too high for one triangle to handle, it spreads to a series of enmeshed triangles (Brown, 1999). The degree of reactivity varies based on the amount of enmeshment among members of a triangle and related triangles; subsequently, a variation in one triangle is followed by foreseeable transformations in other triangles within the same family.

Nuclear family emotional system. The nuclear family consists of one's immediate family. The nuclear family has two generation groups comprising of parents and children (Hall, 1981). It encompasses three basic relationship patterns which typically trigger conflict within a family. The attitudes and beliefs of nuclear family

members affect the reactions. Means of modification that resolve these tensions include marital conflict, spousal dysfunction, impairment of one or more children, and emotional distance (Hall, 1981). Most families apply all four means of modification to address the overloaded tension (Hall, 1981).

Marital conflict. As family stress surges, spouses become more anxious. As a result, each spouse externalizes anxiety towards the relationship. Each focuses on what is wrong with the other spouse. Each tries to control the other, and ultimately resists the other's struggles for control (Bowen, 1976).

Dysfunction of a spouse. When one partner demands the other think or behave in particular ways as the other yields to said demands. Subsequently, both partners endure and modify actions and feelings to maintain a sense of congruence (Bowen, 1976). Nonetheless, one spouse ultimately does more. Anxiety significantly increases as tolerance levels rise. Increased anxiety eventually becomes intolerable, fueling the development of psychiatric, medical, or social dysfunctions (Bowen, 1976).

Impairment of one or more children. Increases in anxiety result in a spouse focusing on one or more of their children. Eventually, the parent exhibits excessive agonizing and a negative view of the child. The greater the attention of the parent, the more the child focuses on the parent. The child learns to be more reactive than other siblings towards thoughts, requirements, and expectancies of the parents. The increased level of separation makes the child vulnerable to act out or internalize family tensions. The augmented tension impedes the child's school performance, social skill development, and physical health (Bowen, 1976; Brown, 1999; Hall, 1981).

Emotional distance. This is a pattern associated with other people. In an attempt to reduce intensities of relationships, people distance themselves from each other. However, this occurs with an increased risk of becoming too emotionally sequestered. Effectively, the more anxiety one relationship absorbs, the less the person's other relationships have to accommodate.

Family Projection Process

The projection process is a means to transfer emotional issues onto a child. It is a method of addressing excessive undifferentiation in a nuclear family system (Hall, 1981). Children obtain a plethora of positive and negative outcomes from parents. When there is excess anxiety which is then projected onto children, the child inevitably inherits relationship insensitivities. This includes increased need for attention or approval, difficulty tolerating expectations, tendencies of blaming oneself or others feeling responsible for the happiness of others, and impulsions to relieve momentary anxiety versus bearing the anxiety and acting thoughtfully (Hall, 1981).

Emotional Cutoff

Emotional cutoff is an extreme circumstance of estrangement among family members. Emotionally cutting off or limiting contact with certain family members is a means to reduce anxiety levels. Cutoff can be achieved by simply not physically going back home or being there on a physical level but not emotionally by avoiding sensitive issues. Although this may seem like a remedy, it is simply allowing anxiety to stay dormant and fester. When a family of origin is cutoff, the person may look to a spouse, children, or new friends to satisfy emotional needs. Attempting to satisfy the emotional

cutoff with other relationships pressurizes the new relationships, and those triangles receive too much anxiety.

Multigenerational Transmission Process

Small differences in levels of differentiation between parents and children lead over many generations to marked differences later on in life. Multigenerational transmission process depicts patterns of behavior between members of different generations in the same family. Nuclear families have the most salient versions of this transmission process. This transmission transpires on numerous levels ranging from conscious teaching and learning of information to automatic and unconscious programming of emotional reactions or behaviors. Relationally and genetically transferred information interrelate and form the self (Bowen, 1976; Brown, 1999; Hall, 1981).

Sibling Positions

Bowen, using Toman's (1976) sibling profiles, claimed sibling position among FOO has a major effect on differentiation of self and vulnerability to family projection and multigenerational transmission (Bowen, 1976; Brown, 1999; Hall, 1981). The notion is people with similar sibling positions will have shared characteristics (i.e., oldest children drift towards leadership positions while youngest siblings tend to be followers). Toman's research showed how a spouse's sibling position affects the risk of divorce (i.e., an older brother of a brother marries an older sister of a sister). The positions are not paired, with neither spouse having grown up with a sibling of another gender. They are disposed to fight over who is in control (Bowen, 1976).

Family of Origin Experiences

Bowenian systems thinking operationalizes how FOO experiences affect emerging adults in ways that contribute to successes or problems in romantic relationships. Multigenerational theorists claim past family issues are influential, but people can accept them and ultimately have healthy adult romantic relationships (Framo, 1992; Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Martinson, Holman, Larson, & Jackson, 2010). Bowen (1976) claims a person's level of differentiation empowers or confines the ability for a developed sense of self. Emerging adults from emotionally reactive families (i.e., divorced) are likely to have developed negative distress responses (Gardner, Busby, & Brimhall, 2007). Researchers have proposed that FOO with unsupportive and conflicting behavior may result in poor stress reactions and dysregulation for children (Gardner et al., 2007). Researchers have suggested FOO experiences are related to the way people perceive marriage and marriage-related issues (Larson, Benson, Wilson, & Medora, 1998). For example, young adults who grew up in emotionally enmeshed homes and were pulled into their parents' disputes had more negative attitudes and feelings toward marriage (Larson et al., 1998).

Attitudes About Marriage

Marriage safeguards the preservation and existence of future generations (Johnson, 2013). However, many people understand marriage as an outlet to obtain emotional fulfillment, friendship, and financial reassurance (Glenn, 1999). Healthy marriages set the stage for healthy families. This supports the development of healthy children who in turn develop into productive, educated, law abiding citizens (Johnson,

2013; Wilson, 2002). Wilson (2002) explained how local, state, and federal governments have begun safeguarding marriage due to its impact on positive influence. Healthy families have lower rates of divorce, suicide, addiction, education completion rates, teen pregnancy, unemployment, imprisonment, and mental illness (Wilson, 2002). Researchers have explained how marriage is an important life goal during the transition into young adulthood (Arnett, 2000; Willoughby, 2010). Emerging adults' attitude towards marriage is critical to developing relational expectations (Hall, 2006). The significance of marriage provides a determining factor in past relationship satisfaction among emerging adults (Simons, Simons, Lei, & Landor, 2012). Relationships characterized by a habitual dispute, frustration, and dissatisfaction are prone to promote negative opinions about marriage (Simons et al., 2012).

Positive communication. Communication is essential towards the function of marriage. Researchers proposed that specific aspects of communication (i.e, problem solving, affect regulation, conflict management) relate to success and failure in romantic relationships. Furthermore, researchers have explained how these aspects are influenced by FOO (Conger, Cui, Bryant, Elder 2000; Sanders, Halford, & Behrens, 1999). Markman, Rhoades, Stanley, Ragan, and Whitton (2010) showed that negative communication was a substantial divorce predictor. Martinson et al. (2010) showed how positive communication mediated negative consequences of FOO issues on relationship happiness among couples. Additionally, effective communication could protect against negative attitudes toward marriage, emotional dependency, and depression and anxiety (Halford & Moore, 2002; Martinson et al., 2010).

Previous romantic relationships. Researchers found perceptions about marriage are associated with romantic relationship behaviors (Crissey 2005; Willoughby 2009). Emerging adults often experiment with romantic relationships as a means to further develop their identity (Arnett, 2000). Researchers have explained how relationship issues are dealt with differently based on the person's age (Collins & van Dulmen, 2006b). Snyder (2006) claims to learn how to begin, preserve, and terminate romantic relationships are critical developmental duties of young adulthood.

Social Learning Theory

Albert Bandura claimed social learning creates the blueprint from which people build their personal experiences (Bandura, 1977; Bandura & Walters, 1963; Topham et al., 2005). Modeling is a term used by social learning theorists to explain how humans learn specific acts and integrate them into behaviors. These observed behaviors can be influenced by many societal models (i.e., parents, social media, friends, teachers). Observational learning, behavior learned from the environment, is a key aspect of social learning (Bandura, 1977). Children encode observed behaviors and imitate model's behaviors. Modeling phenomena are dictated by four interdepended processes of social learning.

Attention. The extent to which the subject is exposed to the behavior. Certain members of any social group will command more attention than others (Bandura, 1977). This is the stimulus for the subject to notice the modeled behaviors. Attractive characteristics make a model more susceptible to getting attention (Bandura, 1977). Attention is a catalyst for the amount of influence the behavior will have and the amount

of imitation it will cause.

Retention. To have a lasting influence on the person, the model's behavior must be remembered. Furthermore, there must be long-term retention for the person to recall the model's behavior when the model is not present. This serves as a guide and method to reach a level of permanence. Bandura (1977) explains how there are verbal and imaginal representational systems. Modeling stimuli generate lasting retrievable images of modeled successions of behavior. This occurs through a process of sensory conditioning during exposure (Bandura, 1977). Certain observed things are highly correlated with visual representations after a verbal cue which conjures imaginal representations of nonexistent physical stimuli (e.g., golfing, Paris and White House). Verbal representations consist of the majority of observational learning (e.g., directions). Most regulatory cognitive behavioral processes are verbal (Bandura, 1977). People who code modeled activities into words, labels or imagery learn and retain the behavior better than those who merely observe.

Reproduction. The ability to implement the displayed modeled behavior. The learner must compose a set of responses concurring with the modeled patterns (Bandura, 1977). Some responses may not be physically possible for the learner (e.g., elderly person who struggles to walk attempting to compete in a hurdling competition). The possibility of completing the responses is a determining factor when attempting to model the observed behaviors.

Motivation. The determination to accomplish the modeled behavior. The learner considers the positive and negative outcomes. The learner responds to the behavior it

models with reinforcement or punishment. If the consequences of the model's behavior are rewarding, the observer is likely to continue performing the behavior. Conversely, the observer may not model the behavior if there is a perceived negative or lack of positive outcome.

Family of origin is possibly one of the most influential social learning environments used to operationalize this pattern of behaviors (Knapp et al., 2015). FOO experiences are one of the hypothesized explanations for negative communication in couple relationships (Holman et al., 2001). Damaging FOO experiences may overflow into interactional episodes with a spouse (Roberto-Forman, 2008). Amato (1996) claims this is the foundation for children of divorce's lack of communication and other unhealthy coping techniques. Children encode modeled parental styles of communication. Therefore, they are predisposed to having similar challenges in their marriages (Amato & Booth, 1997; Booth & Edwards, 1989). Children who fail to experience positive models of parental marital interaction may not learn healthy interpersonal skills such as effective communication, conflict resolution, and compromising (Amato, 1996).

According to Holman et al. (2001), FOO experiences severely affect communication and many other social competencies. Negative FOO's affect conflict sensitivity. This, in turn, has an effect on negative communication sequences and increased contempt (Knapp et al., 2005; Story et al., 2004). Contempt is an integral predicting factor of divorce (Gottman et al., 1998). Social learning theorists would claim

these behaviors and skills are formulated during childhood and continue toward adulthood.

Negative Communication Patterns

Gottman has established himself over the past 30 years as a preeminent researcher of couples and marital therapy. In 1976, Gottman partnered with Levenson and founded The Family Research Laboratory, nicknamed "love lab" (Levenson & Gottman, 1983). Gottman and Levenson were the first researchers to study couples longitudinally as well as in a laboratory setting. Couples were attached to instruments capable of measuring heart rate, sweat gland production, blood velocity and body movement (Schwartz Gottman & Gottman, 2015). Couples were asked to discuss a conflict issue for 15 minutes. As some couples got upset, physiological measurements climbed. Although they appeared calm, heart rates would rise anywhere from one hundred to one hundred and fifty beats per minute, hands would sweat and bodies would tremble. Gottman and Levinson noted how the physical symptoms resembled that of a person being attacked. Gottman and Levinson would make the couples watch the recorded conflict sessions and rate the emotional responses. The couples would then return home and were asked to return 3 years later and repeat the process (Schwartz Gottman & Gottman, 2015). The researchers found they were able to predict the following behavior with ninety percent accuracy. Gottman, Levenson, and later Jacobson, studied gay and lesbian couples as well as violent couples for some years with similar results.

Gottman married Schwartz in 1987 who also joined to advance research. They constructed an apartment laboratory at the University of Washington (Gottman, 1999;

Schwartz Gottman & Gottman, 2015). The goal was to be able to observe couples for more than 15-minute intervals like the old laboratory setting. Newlywed couples would spend a full day in the apartment as they would on a Sunday afternoon at home (Gottman, 1999). They were contacted and observed annually over the following 6 years. Gottman and Schwartz Gottman (2015) claim the atmosphere of the apartment was relaxing sans three cameras bolted to the walls, a one-way window, staff observing the couple from behind the window and staff who took blood and urine samples from each participant. Schwartz Gottman reports how most couples ate, read, watched television, talked and slept. The cameras were turned on at 9:00 AM and off at 9:00 PM. This provided a 12-hour window with which researchers could observe interactions. Data were accumulated on "respiration, electrocardiogram, blood velocity to the ear and finger of the non-dominant hand, skin conductance, and gross motor movements using a device attached to the base of chairs" (Gottman, 1999, p. 26). Using the videotapes, behaviors were coded using an "objective coding system with trained observers who describe facial expressions, voice tone, gestures, body positions and movements, the distance between them, and so on" (Gottman, 1999, p.27).

Gottman et al. (1999) completed seven longitudinal studies totaling over 677 couples over the 30 years (Lute, 2015). The researched couples included ranges from young people to elderly (Gottman, 1994; Levenson & Gottman, 1983, 1985). Couples with a preschool child (Gottman, Katz, & Hooven, 1996), newlyweds (Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998), middle-aged couples as well as couples in their sixties (Levenson, Carsatensen, & Gottman, 1994). Gottman and colleagues also included four

groups of couples labeled highly abusive, moderately abusive, distressed nonviolent and happily married nonviolent (Jacobson, Gottman, Gortner, Berns, & Shortt, 1998). Gottman and colleagues authored several scholarly journals, and eventually a theory of the main aspects to successful marriages.

Gottman coined the term stable steady state, relying on von Bertalanffy's (1968) concept that mechanisms within a system work to help said system retain a homeostatic equilibrium (Gottman, Swanson, & Swanson, 2002). Operationally, this means each person's behavior is influenced by the other. Gottman claims "every relationship is a system that develops its balance of steady stable states, with respect to the ratio of positivity and negativity in behavior, perception, and physiology" (Gottman, 1999, p.33). Gottman's locus is grounded in the idea that marriage has a steady state of balance within each of the three domains (behavior, perception, physiology), the system of the relationship gravitates to this state to retain homeostasis, and every marriage is repairable. Gottman and colleagues explain two types of steady states in human relationships (Cook, et al., 1995).

Uninfluenced steady state. The impartial steady state comprises of what each member brings to the relationship prior to partner influences (Cook et al., 1995). This uninfluenced steady state is built on the person's FOO, history, temperament, and other variables. The uninfluenced steady state does not include influences occurring after the couple have initiated the relationship.

Influenced steady state. The influenced steady state describes how one individual is affected by the partner during an interaction (Cook et al., 1995). Gottman

claimed each brings an uninfluenced steady state in each of the three areas of the core

triad to the relationship. Each interaction between the couple involves ways in which the

husband influences the wife and vice versa.

Currently, marital dissatisfaction is a chief stimulus for divorce (Johnson, 2013;

Raley, 2003). According to Gottman et al. (1998), persistent negative communication is

predictive of marital unhappiness and divorce (Knapp al., 2015). Conversely, researchers

have explained how positive communication is significantly correlated with marital

satisfaction (Knapp et al., 2015; Rehman & Holtzworth-Munroe, 2007). Bowen (1976),

Bandura (1977) and Gottman (1999) place FOO at the epicenter of strained

communication in couple relationships. FOO experiences severely affect communication

and many other social skills (Holman, et al., 2001). Negative FOO can influence the

perception of conflict. This, in turn, negatively affects communication sequences and

increases contempt (Knapp et al., 2005; Story et al., 2004).

Core Triad of Balance

Gottman believed there are three fundamental concepts of balance required to

maintain equilibrium in a marriage. Gottman developed the core triad of balance as a

means of explaining the three factors. Gottman stated, "every relationship is a system that

develops its own balance or stable steady states, with respect to the ratio of positivity and

negativity in behavior, perception, and physiology" (Gottman, 1999, p. 33). Gottman

operationalized positive and negative affect as behavior, perception and physiology.

Gottman explained how the balance of positivity and negativity between the three

elements determines marital stability (Gottman, 1993).

Interactive behavior. Gottman developed the Specific Affect Coding System to record facial features involved in emotion, voices, gestures and content of couple conversations. Using this coding system in longitudinal studies, Gottman computed the ratio of positive to negative exchanges during interactions that involved conflict resolution and called it "Dow-Jones ratios" (Gottman, 1999). Several observers would code the same interactions making the data inter-rater reliable. Gottman et al. (1998) concentrated on the Dow-Jones ratios of positive to negative interactions when assessing couples. They postulated a higher degree of negativity over positivity would predict future relationship satisfaction. The researchers found couples who had high ratios of negativity to positivity in conflict resolution interactions were considerably more likely to be displeased with their relationships (Gottman et al., 1998). This was true when the study was conducted as well as at 4-year follow-up observations. Couples with high Dow-Jones ratios were more likely to be divorced at follow-up 4 years later than couples who had ratios with higher positivity to negativity. Couples who exhibited more negative effect than positive were drastically less happy. The level of adverse effect by itself is not a predictor of lower relationship happiness. However, the ratio of positive to negative interactions forecasted more encouraging results. Like Gottman claimed, "Marital therapy should not declare war on negative affect, for it serves many positive functions in marriage. It calls out what does not work and renews courtship via a dance of closeness and distance" (Gottman, 1999, p.40).

Carrere and Gottman (1999) observed couples in the love lab in fifteen-minute conflict conversations. They evaluated the communications regarding the ratio of

negativity to positivity and split the 15 minutes into three 5-minute sets. Positivity was coded as any display of validation, joy, humor, or interest. Negativity was coded as any display of contempt, belligerence, anger, fear, defensiveness, sadness, or stonewalling. In each of the three sets, they found couples who later divorced demonstrated higher negative and lower positive affect compared to couples who remained together. The researchers, over a 6 period, found husbands displayed increased negativity across time but not a decrease in positivity in relationships. However, with couples who ended in divorce, husbands displayed higher negativity and less positivity as the conversations continued. This supported Gottman's statement that the ratio of positivity-to-negativity was integral to predicting the stability of relationships and not the amount of positivity nor negativity. Eventually, Carrere and Gottman (1999) found that only the first 3 minutes of the conversation were necessary to foretell relationship stability.

Four horsemen of the apocalypse. After concluding the Dow-Jones ratio predicts divorce, Gottman realized he was looking at all the negative interactions as the same. After further examination, Gottman discovered, "Not all negatives are equally corrosive. Four behaviors, which I call The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, are most corrosive: criticism, defensiveness, contempt, and stonewalling" (Gottman, 1999, p.41). This realization was the foundation of the sound martial house theory which encapsulates the four horsemen of the apocalypse.

Criticism. Gottman describes criticism as "any statement that implies that there is something globally wrong with one's partner" (Gottman, 1999, p. 41). These statements frequently commence with "you always" or "you never," and transform a complaint into

a criticism. It is important to note, Gottman encourages making complaints without blame and focusing on specific, rather than global concerns. Furthermore, Gottman (1999) claims a list of stockpiled grievances functions as criticism since it takes on an overall allegation toward the partner.

Defensiveness. Gottman describes defensiveness as, "any attempt to defend oneself from a perceived attack" (Gottman, 1999, p.44). This can be in response to a complaint. The nature of defensiveness is to shirk all responsibility and place blame exclusively on the other partner. Gottman attempts to reduce defensiveness by having each partner acknowledge his/her responsibility in the establishment of a particular problem.

Contempt. Gottman described contempt as, "any statement or nonverbal behavior that puts oneself on a higher plane than one's partner (Gottman, 1999, p.44). Gottman explains how contempt typically comes in the form of mockery (e.g., all you do when you come home from work is slump onto the couch like a child and play senseless computer games). This can be especially damaging in public settings. The goal of this communication pattern is to make the victim feel despised and worthless (Lisitsa, 2013). In fact, contempt is so corrosive that couples who are contemptuous of each other are more likely to suffer from infectious illness than others. Gottman (1999) found, similar to Ekman, Schwartz, and Friesen (1978), that contemptuous facial expressions (eye rolling, upward glances and dimple muscles pulling the lip corners to the sides and forming cheek dimples) were culturally universally damaging. Gottman claims contempt is the single greatest predictor of divorce (Lisitsa, 2013).

Stonewalling. Gottman (1999) described stonewalling as withdrawing from interactions. In this context, it refers to a partner leaving the room and consequently, the conversation. A healthy method to communicate and listen is by providing the speaker indications one is listening (e.g., eye contact, head movement, empathy as well as mirroring facial expressions). Gottman (1999) explains how stonewallers briefly look, keep a stiff neck and barely respond. Gottman recommends couples dealing with conflict take small pauses (e.g., 15 minutes) to avert stonewalling.

Gottman (1999) stressed how healthy marriages do not merely avoid the four horsemen, but rather, occur less repeatedly. Furthermore, he claims they are often accompanied by effective attempts at healing. Also, positive interactions in the Dow-Jones ratio are more important than instances of the four horsemen. It is important to note the four horsemen typically follow a pattern. Criticism leads to defensiveness, which leads to contempt, which leads to stonewalling. This ends the interaction.

Gottman claimed contempt is the most corrosive of the four negative communication patterns. In fact, Gottman teaches therapists to treat contempt as emotional abuse and not to permit it in the relationship. Gottman explains how criticism, defensiveness and stonewalling are part of stable relationships. Accordingly, the focus on intervention for these is centered on creating successful repair efforts. Gottman explains successful restoration efforts yield interest, affection, humor and lowered expressed tension.

In his book The Marriage Clinic (1999), Gottman provided the Four Horsemen Questionnaire. This 33-item true or false questionnaire evaluates the manifestation of

each of the four horseman. Higher scores on the subscales represent greater presences of negative communication patterns. The Four Horsemen Questionnaire has displayed satisfactory reliability and validity in several studies (Cornelius & Alessi, 2007; Gottman, 2012; Walker, 2005).

Perception. Perception is the second concept required to maintain a balanced equilibrium in marriage (Gottman, 1999). Moreover, Gottman (1999) posited how perception is an important variable in differentiating happy and unhappy marriages. Gottman describes perception as methods partners recognize, interpret and attribute positive and negative actions of the other. In happy marriages, spouses identify positive actions from the other spouse as unswerving and characteristic of both partner and relationship. The spouse perceives negative behaviors as momentary, situational and fixable. In unhappy marriages, positive behaviors are perceived to be transient and situational, while negative behaviors are seen shortcomings of the other spouse. Gottman coined the term Distance and Isolation Cascade, referring to the progression in which the perceptions of negative behaviors are converted to permanent negative views of the relationship (Gottman, 1999). The cascade is described as flooding, perceiving relationship issues as austere, loneliness and eventually leading parallel lives. Flooding is when negative interactions lead to negative emotions. This eventually is overwhelming to the point that one partner cannot believe how the other spouse is acting or reacting that harmfully. Following overwhelming feelings, a partner views the relationship issues as harsh and considered the responsibility for repairing situations of their spouse. This leads to increased efforts at avoiding confrontation and escalation in couple emotional

disengagement. Loneliness is followed, and the other relationship opportunities begin to look more appealing.

Physiology. Gottman (1993) explains there are physiological reactivity variables that predict divorce. Gottman went on to explain that prolonged levels of husband physiological arousal are predictive of divorce. The love lab helped researchers discover physical (heart rate, blood pressure, glucose levels, adrenaline, respiratory rate) arousal states that rose or dropped around baseline rates. This was indicative as a predictor of divorce. Gottman explained the time for people to work on challenging emotions (resentment, grief, distress, hatred) is when the person is experiencing the feeling (Gottman, 1999). Gottman claimed the sympathetic nervous system is an alarm used to alert the body to emergency situations. Gottman called this diffuse physiological arousal, claiming, "many systems are simultaneously activated to mobilize the body so that we can cope effectively with emergencies and situations perceived to be dangerous" (Gottman, 1999, p.75). The sympathetic nervous system is a physical response activated by the body in a "fight-or-flight" situation. Gottman (1999) claims this is also activated when in a relationship conflict.

The Sound Marital House

Gottman (1999) developed a theory of successful relationships called the sound martial house. He focused on the positive aspects of what built a prosperous relationship. This was rather unconventional from previous researchers, who looked at what made relationships fail. Gottman stressed how the ratio of positive versus negative affect in the relationship was central to predicting relationship success. He explained three types of

successful relationships as volatile, validating and conflict-avoiding (Gottman, 1993).

Gottman explained how these relationships are similar in that they have at least a 5:1

ratio of positive to negative interactions. As long as high levels of negative affect are

accompanied by five times as much positive effect, the relationship would be okay. He

stressed how negative effect was not the issue but rather mismatched interaction styles

are predictive of relationship success (Gottman, 1999). The sound marital house theory

consists of seven core levels. However, the first three levels are the essential components

of the marital friendship.

Gottman (1999) claimed it is hard for people to create positive affect in a

distressed relationship, yet the marital friendship can be restored relatively easily.

Consequently, the first three floors of the sound marital house focus on establishing

positive effect in nonconflict settings (everyday exchanges). Gottman identified three

components of the marital friendship, which he refers to as cognitive room, fondness and

admiration and turning toward versus turning away.

Love maps. The love map, or cognitive room, refers to the understanding that

partners have about each other's history, lives, hopes and dreams. The love map is a road

map of a partner's psychological being. A fundamental process is when couples ask

open-ended questions and augment their understanding of their partner.

Fondness and admiration. The second level of the house is fondness and

admiration. The fondness and admiration component attempts to develop a sense of

liking and admiring for a partner. Gottman (1999) claims this is the antidote for

contempt. A fundamental aspect is altering habits of looking for other's mistakes to

looking for what is done right. This helps build gratitude, affection, love and respect.

Turn towards. Gottman (1999) claims simply turning towards a partner and not turning away helps couples accept partners' bids for attention. The essential method is generating an awareness of how a partner requests a connection and expresses emotional requests. It is up to the other partner to choose to turn toward these bids. Turning towards a bid will increase positive regard, pushing the Dow Jones ratio towards the favorable margin.

The positive perspective. The fourth level of the sound marital house involves creating a positive sentiment override (Gottman, 1999). This is talking about the couple's capability to achieve positive affect during conflict exchanges. If the first three steps (positive affect) is present, it is probable to infiltrate to the conflict exchanges as well. Gottman claimed, "sufficient positive affect in nonconflict interactions makes positive sentiment override possible" (Gottman, 1999, p.107).

Manage conflict. Gottman believes since people maintain distinctive personalities while fusing them together in a relationship, the conflict will certainly transpire in the relationship. At some point, there will be unresolved issues. However, Gottman (1999) explains, more important than resolution, is the effective regulation of conflict. Gottman (1999) explained couples capable of decreasing negative affect as well as expressing positive affect during the conflict were 83.3% more likely to be in a stable and happy marriage eight years later.

Make life dreams come true. Positive affect systems (fun, play, adventure) must be built deliberately. This level is also about helping a spouse realize important life

dreams. This aspect is the foundation for solving conflict deadlock. The couple can explore and understand tenets within a position in the deadlocked conflict.

Create shared meaning. Gottman (1999) claimed a family creates its own culture using unique blends of routines, symbols, metaphors and stories. People in happy relationships attempt to share in each other's goals, dreams and aspirations. They attempt to work together and make them come true. This demands the characteristics of a marital friendship. Couples either produce or do not produce a feeling of shared meaning in their life together.

After more than three decades of research, the numerous negative associations between parental divorce and children's wellbeing, life chances and intergenerational relations have been recognized (Albertini & Garriga, 2011; Amato 2001; Sigle-Rushton & McLanahan, 2004). Gottman (1998) has consistently shown how high scores on criticism, contempt, defensiveness and stonewalling, have significant correlations with marital separation. Levenson, Carstensen, and Gottman (1994) claim poor interpersonal communication and prolonged conflict is a severe indicator of marital separation. These negative communication patterns are acquired during the developmental period of a child.

Emerging Adulthood

At one time, developmental psychologists regarded adolescence as the groundwork towards adulthood (Bandura, 1995; Erikson, 1959, 1964, 1968; Piaget, Inhelder, & Piaget, 2013). Erikson's (1959) psychosocial developmental theory consisted of eight consecutive development stages. In stage 5, adolescents or identity versus role confusion, individuals arrive at a period of development between childhood and

adulthood (Erikson, 1959). Sokol (2009) claims this stage begins with puberty and continues until around age eighteen, immediately followed by the commencement of maturity. In the sixth stage, young adulthood or intimacy versus isolation, individuals are assumed to have achieved maturity and are ready to undertake the challenge of constructing and maintaining relationships (Erikson, 1968).

In 2000, Arnett offered a developmental psychological theory entitled emerging adulthood theory. Arnett proposed adding an additional phase after adolescence yet before adulthood. Arnett explained this was necessary to explain a person's development. Although Arnett (2000) agreed that before the 1970s, leaving adolescence meant getting married and obtaining employment in the workforce. This progression of events is consistent with Erickson's developmental stages from five to six. However, after the 1970s, the transition to adulthood in post-industrialized cultures has begun to take longer. The shift from adolescence to employment and marriage started occurring later on in life. Arnett noticed young adults were not settling down into adult roles until later, leaving many of life's critical decisions to the latter half of their twenties and early thirties. This showed discrepancies in Erikson's stages of development. Arnett claimed individuals were extending their entry into adulthood, taking longer to grow up. This extension urged the need for a supplementary stage when describing psychosocial development (Arnett, 2000). Arnett identified this new stage as the emerging adulthood stage.

The term emerging adulthood was selected as it highlighted a relationship with adulthood while still recognizing the individual is still not an adult (Arnett, 2004). Arnett (2004) described emerging adulthood as being separate from adolescence and adulthood

demographically, individually, and regarding identity exploration. Arnett described this phase as an era of instability, conscious of opportunities, individualistic, filled with identity exploration, and an overall feeling of in-between (Arnett, 2004). Researchers contended this delay into adulthood extends exploration and identity development as well (Koepke & Denissen, 2012; Schwartz, Coˆte, & Arnett, 2005; Syed & Seiffge-Krenke, 2013).

Arnett cited four revolutions, occurring in the 1960s and 1970s, in postindustrialized societies that were responsible for the need of a supplementary stage of psychosocial development (Tedx Talks, 2015). Firstly, the shift from a manufacturing economy to an information and services economy played a role in progressing the education system. It was no longer sufficient to simply have a high school diploma. There was now a need for higher education to gain employment. The sophistication of equipment, and ultimately the need to obtain significantly more information to operate the equipment, created a phenomenon in which 25-year-olds were still in school and financially dependent on parental support. This living situation, financial dependence and increased education was an unprecedented change (Arnett, 2000). Secondly, Arnett claims the invention of contraceptives, specifically the birth control pill in 1964, broke the link between sexuality and reproduction (Tedx Talks, 2015). As a result, the connection between sexuality and marriage was severed. This too was an unprecedented change. At one time, sexuality and cohabitation were irreversibly interconnected with pregnancy. Consequently, people could not cohabitate without the chance of childbirth. This meant abstinence until socially and financially capable of raising a child. However,

contraceptive treatment changed this forever. People now had the opportunity to cohabitate, engage in sexual relations and experiment without the risk of pregnancy. Arnett (2000) claims this created a postponement in psychosocial development like never before exhibited in history. Thirdly, Arnett claims the Women's Movement had changed how young women thought about and planned their lives. This prompted a new way of thinking about goals during a female's 20s. Education, and ultimately careers, had become real possibilities. Women no longer had to think in binary terms of being a spouse and homemaker. Women could now expand their duties or responsibility to whatever they desired. This too was an unprecedented change like no other in society. Arnett (2004) claimed the last revolution responsible for the need to add a stage of development was the Youth Movement. Arnett explained how the Youth Movement created a level of respect for youth. Consequently, the revered and sought after position of adulthood was no longer as desired. Children no longer wanted to grow up as fast and enter adulthood. This too was an unprecedented change previously never experienced. Arnett (2000) cites these four revolutions as primary reasons for the rise of the need to insert emerging adulthood as a supplementary stage of development.

Although most modern developmental psychologists recognize adolescence is no longer the period where individuals make important life decisions they do not agree there is a need for an additional stage in an individual's development (Buhl & Lanz, 2007; Nelson & Barry, 2005). Several researchers argue emerging adults are not distinct enough an age group to warrant a new developmental stage as the semblance to adolescence is too related (Côté & Bynner, 2008; Hendry & Kloep, 2007). Schwartz et al. (2013) claim

Arnett's description of emerging adulthood as a period of identity exploration has not been empirically justified.

Identity development. During adolescence, individuals explore their identities as they transition from being a child to becoming an adult (Pearce & Denton, 2011; Smetana, Campione-Barr, & Metzger, 2006). Erikson (1968) classified adolescence as a distinct stage of development, in which the chief concern is determining self-identity about vocation, ideology, and family, leading to the emergence of a sense of real self. Erikson (1968) identified the process of identity development as the progression between identity confusion and identity synthesis. Identity confusion is classified as an unstable awareness of self, frustrating decision-making capabilities (Schwartz et al., 2013). Identity synthesis is when an individual incorporates a stable sense of self-promoting their capability to progress with lucidity (Dunkel, 2005). Correspondingly, if adolescents are not successful in finding their psychosocial identity, they may experience identity confusion, lack of understanding who they are, as well as where they fit in society (Erikson, 1968). Having an unstable identity leads to unhealthy life choices and encourages risky behaviors (Schwartz, 2005).

The motivation for identity exploration during the adolescent phase in an individual's life is the cerebral and social transformations teenagers' exhibit (Nichols, 2009). Piaget (1955) defined adolescence as the period one starts to think rationally and conceptually. Keating (2004) supplemented adolescents as they are more aware of their surroundings than children. These developments provide adolescent's the ability to see and understand the world as others do (Selman, 2003). From a social standpoint,

adolescence commences with the development of individuation (Koepke & Denissen, 2012). It is during this phase that children begin extricating themselves from their parents, schools, social groups, media, cultural institutions, and develop at creating competing expectations (Nichols, 2009). Erikson (1968) claimed an individual's sense of self is driven by struggles between how they see themselves and how they feel others see them (Nakkula & Toshalis, 2006). The perpetual negotiation between these two selves drives adolescents to attempt exploration and better recognize their view and the view others have of them, thereby developing a sense of identity (Nakkulffe, 2006).

Founded on Erikson's (1968) theories, Marcia (1996) operationalized identity development through two breadths: exploration and commitment. Exploration is the action of exploring potential identities. Commitment is choosing a specific identity. Marcia proposed four identity statuses: achievement, moratorium, foreclosed, and diffused. Achievement is the result of commitment after exploration, moratorium is exploration sans commitment, foreclosure is the product of commitment without exploration, and diffusion is when there is no exploration or commitment (Marcia, 1996).

Researchers examining personality characteristics based on Marcia's (1996) identity status model, found every one of the four identity statuses exposed particular internalizing indicators (Schwartz et al., 2005). Persons demonstrating identity attainment were found to be stable and mature (Beyers & Seiffge-Krenke, 2010; Krettenauer, 2005). Those with moratorium displayed openness and a level of inquisitiveness (Luyckx, Goossens, & Soenens, 2008) with anxiety and depression symptoms (Schwartz et al., 2009). Foreclosed persons appeared self-assured yet exhibited low levels of emotional

issues (Porfeli, Lee, Vondracek, & Weingold, 2011). Individuals in diffusion were found to have low self-esteem as well as no self-direction (Schwartz et al., 2005).

Erikson (1968) explained how individuals, particularly in their late teens, experience a sense of confusion in regards to love, work, and their beliefs. Arnett (2000) expounded how in post industrialized societies, Erikson's stages of identity development extend to the late 20s. It is important to note Arnett extended Eriksonian theory with the introduction of EAT in 2000. Arnett's basis for the need to extend adolescent developmental theory to the late 20s was predicated on the aforementioned shift in economy, Women's Movement, invention of contraceptives, and Youth Movement. Arnett (2004) stated,

> There has been a profound change in how young people view the meaning and value of becoming an adult and entering the adult roles of spouse and parent. Young people of the 1950s were eager to enter adulthood and settle down. Perhaps because they grew up during the upheavals of the Great Depression and World War II, achieving the stability of marriage, home, and children seemed like a great accomplishment to them...
>
> The young people of today, in contrast, see adulthood and its obligations in quite a different light. In their late teens and early 20s, marriage, home, and children are seen by most of them not as achievements to be pursued but as perils to be avoided. It is not that they do not want marriage, a home, and (1 or 2) children-eventually. Most of them do want to take on all of these adult obligations, and most of them will have done so by the time they reach age 30. It

is just that, in their late teens and early twenties, they ponder these obligations and think, "Yes, but not yet". (p. 6).

Arnett (2000, 2004) found adolescents are postponing major life decisions and are typically in a state of moratorium regarding their several roles including that of spouse and parent. Consequently, they now have time to develop skills necessary to advance the success of their romantic relationships. Jay (2012) explains how a critical salient developmental task of this age group is to solidify oneself with the most potential to fulfill desired goals and aspirations. Jay expounds on this by claiming one of the developmental tasks of the 20s is to acquire identity capital, claim one's adulthood, and picking one's family (Tedx Talks, 2013). Acquiring identity capitol includes improving one's communication patterns as maladaptive communication patterns corrode relationships (Gottman, 1999, 2015).

Relationship skills as developmental tasks. Snyder (2006) proposed the critical developmental tasks of emerging adulthood are learning how to formulate, maintain and graciously terminate romantic or sexual relationships. Moreover, the transition into adulthood comprises of distinct periods of experiences in a network of relationships (Guarnieri, Smorti, & Tani, 2015). Allen and Land (1999) explain how relationships become more dominant in the worlds of emerging adults and they develop an ability for mature intimacy with romantic relationships. Furthermore, romantic companions become higher in the relationship order (Collins & van Dulmen, 2006a) and emerging adults turn their focus to romantic relationships, frequently at the expense of spending time with social relationships (Collins & Laursen, 2000, 2004).

Emerging adults often engage in risky behaviors such as acts of aggression, unprotected sex, illicit drug use and heavy alcohol consumption (Arnett, 2000). Acts of aggression are rife among dating couples during emerging adulthood (Woodin, Caldeira, & O'Leary, 2013). Approximately one-third of dating couples report engaging in acts of physical aggression (e.g., slapping, shoving) during emerging adulthood (Chan, Straus, Brown-ridge, Tiwari, & Leung, 2008; Lewis & Fremouw, 2001). Additionally, psychological forms of aggression (e.g., yelling, insulting, threats, damaging property) were commonly reported during emerging adulthood (Scott & Straus, 2007). Physical (Coker, et al., 2002) and psychological partner aggression (Taft, et al., 2006) can cause a variety of physical and mental health disorders. Psychical aggression is not partial to males in emerging adulthood. Women initiate physical aggression as often as, or more, than men (Archer, 2000; Capaldi, Kim, & Shortt, 2007), and report performing more psychological aggression than men (Hines & Saudino, 2003). Furthermore, partner aggression is typically bidirectional during this stage of development (Fergusson, Boden, & Horwood, 2008; Woodin et al., 2013).

Summary

In this literature review, I looked at emerging adulthood and negative communication behaviors from several angles to include: (a) etiology of learned behaviors (Bowen family systems, social learning theory; Bandura, 1977; Bowen, 1976), (b) negative communication patterns (Gottman, 1999; Levenson & Gottman, 1983; Schwartz Gottman & Gottman, 2015) and finally (c) the emerging adulthood stage of psychosocial development (Arnett, 2000, 2004). Each section was incorporated to

concisely inform the reader on the topic of the relationship between emerging adulthood and communication patterns. The areas selected for this literature review were not intended to represent a full or comprehensive representation regarding emerging adulthood or communication patterns, but rather, provided a representative glimpse into the challenges adults, primarily offspring of divorce, may face when attempting to build romantic relationships during their developmental stages.

Emerging adults are in an unprecedented developmental stage rife with exploration, identity development, and introspection (Arnett, 2000, 2004). For many, this is the first time living out of their parent's home in their entire life. Behaviors, communication skills, and most aspects of development have been learned at home (Bowen, 1976; Brown, 1999; Hall, 1981). The negative relationship skills, primarily communication skills, of children of divorce are well documented (Amato, 1994, 1996, 2001; Amato & Anthony, 2014; Amato & Booth, 1997). Thus, this demographic is at an increased risk of romantic relationship failure.

To my knowledge, this study was the first to explore the relationship between emerging adulthood and the development of communication patterns. Research has increased over the last number of decades regarding understanding the phenomena of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000, 2004, 2015; Côté, 2006; Mitchell, 2015; Reifman, Arnett, & Colwell, 2016; Syed & Mitchell, 2013). Researchers have also highlighted the negative outcomes of children of divorce (Amato, 1994, 1996, 2001; Amato & Anthony, 2014; Amato & Booth, 1997). Researchers have been able to successfully predict divorce among couples with surprisingly high success rates (Gottman, 1999; Levenson &

Gottman, 1983; Schwartz Gottman, & Gottman, 2015). However, as of yet, researchers have not begun to focus on the relationship between emerging adulthood and the development of communication behaviors. Fincham et al. (2011) explain how the literature on emerging adulthood has primarily focused on basic research. They explain there is a lack of research on applied issues concerning romantic relationships in emerging adulthood.

In Chapter 3, I will reveal the research methodology of this study. I will also discuss the research design and approach, participants, and data collection and analyses. This explanation was intended to help explain the relationship between the successful transition to emerging adulthood and maladaptive communication patterns.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

Purpose of the Study

The goal of this quantitative quasi-experimental study was to assess a possible

connection between the emerging adulthood stage of development and communication

patterns. Researchers have shown that maladaptive communication patterns negatively

affect romantic relationships (Gottman et al., 1998; Gottman & Silver, 2015) and that

children of divorce are more likely to acquire maladaptive communication skills as they

integrate their parent's maladaptive communication patterns (Amato, 1996). Information

regarding a connection between the emerging adulthood stage of development and

communication patterns can help children of divorce mitigate risk factors for maladaptive

communication patterns and minimize their chances of relationship breakdowns.

There has been much research surrounding predictors of divorce among offspring

of divorce (Gottman et al., 1998; Gottman & Silver, 2015). Researchers have also

catalogued the negative relationship outcomes associated with children of divorce

(Amato, 1994, 1996; Caldwell et al., 2007; Kalmijn, 2013; Knapp et al., 2015). However,

researchers have neglected to show how the new psychosocial developmental stage of

emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000, 2004) may impact the development of communication

patterns, revealing a gap in literature. I aimed this study at filling this gap in literature

regarding the impact emerging adulthood has on maladaptive communication patterns.

Information on the impact emerging adulthood has on maladaptive communication

patterns could provide additional strategies to reduce negative communication patterns

for children of divorce. Reducing negative communication patterns could help prevent a

leading cause for relationship failure and divorce (Gottman et al., 1998; Gottman &

Silver, 2015).

Preview Major Sections

In this chapter, I will explain the quantitative quasi-experimental research design

that I used in this study. Furthermore, I will discuss the sample size, effect size and

demographics of the study population. The chapter will also include a discussion of the

operationalization of the variables, the ethical procedures, and the threats to validity.

Research Design and Rationale

In this study, I measured the predictor variable, the successful transition into

adulthood, by Arnett's (1994, 1998, 2000, 2001) determining factors for successful

achievement of adulthood: (a) accepts responsibility, (b) makes independent decisions,

and (c) is financially independent. This variable was assessed with a demographic

questionnaire that I supplied participants with prior to their completion of any other

questionnaires. The continuous dependent variable, negative communication patterns,

was measured using the Four Horsemen Questionnaire (see Gottman, 1999). The control

variables in this study were (a) gender and (b) level of education. I used an analysis of

variance to analyze the data. The research design was geared at understanding the

predictive relationship between the successful transition into adulthood and negative

communication patterns.

My decision to use a quantitative method over a qualitative one for this study was

swayed by the nature of the variables. Determining the level of communication patterns of the participants, which was the predictor variable in this study, was possible after the survey. The predictor variable of successful transition into adulthood was defined by three subjective criterions (accepts responsibility, makes independent decisions, and is financially dependent). Identity researchers have endorsed using quantitative methods because it allows the researcher to be objective by creating a level of distance to the subject matter (Watzlawik & Born, 2007). Additional advantages of quantitative methods are the low-cost of the design as well as the rapid data collection turnaround (Garwood, 2009).

Methodology

Population

The target population for this study were adults ages 25–30, and there were 30 participants (see Poulsen & French, 2008). I placed the participants into two groups: Those who had transitioned through emerging adulthood and reached adulthood after turning 25 and those who went from adolescence to adulthood before 25 years of age.

Sampling Procedures

I recruited potential participants through university participant pools. The first step was gaining approval from the universities to post the questionnaire and securing a website responsible for sending out the data requests. My e-mail requests contained a brief description of the study with a link to the survey. The link allowed respondents fitting the inclusion criteria for this study (a participant between 25–30 years old) to access the survey. I obtained informed consent from the participants prior to completion

of the survey. The study questionnaire consisted of four sections: (a) an informed consent form, (b) demographic survey (Appendix A), (c) a 33-item questionnaire (Appendix B), and (d) a debriefing form (Appendix E). The surveys were designed to take between 10 and 15 minutes to complete.

The predictor variable in this study was the successful transition into adulthood, and the dependent variable was negative communication patterns. I used G*Power 3.1 to determine the number of participants need to achieve a statistical effect size of .15, a two-tailed alpha of .05, and a statistical power of .80 given the four predictor variables of the study and determined that 20 participants would be needed. I then conducted the study using a validated tool to measure negative communication skills (the Four Horsemen Questionnaire). Two groups were generated: Participants who fit into the adult criteria prior to reaching age 25 (see Arnett, 1994, 2000, 2001), and those who do not successfully complete all three developmental tasks prior to reaching 25.

Procedures for Recruitment

Participants were recruited using online university participant pools. Those recruited were then provided with an Internet-based survey to complete. Using an Internet-based process of collecting data is effective and proficient due to the immense number of participants who can be contacted through the Internet (Hewson, Yule, Lurent, & Vogel, 2003). Furthermore, Internet-based surveys include automated response assurance as well as the ability to extricate the data in a structure equipped to transition to statistical analysis (Hewson et al., 2003). Another benefit of Internet-based surveys is the amount of interactivity and impartiality achievable whilst still upholding strong

anonymity. Face-to-face data collection procedures have more researcher bias than anonymous ones (Hewson et al., 2003). However, Hewson et al. (2003) explained Internet-based surveys contain fewer levels of control and increased difficulty procuring informed consent and guaranteeing confidentiality, and this makes implementing ethical procedures more challenging.

Informed Consent

The consent information was the initial information I provided on the electronic survey. I informed participants of the objective of the study and provided them with the ability to opt out of the survey at any time. The possible risks and benefits were clearly outlined. I also provided participants with my contact information, so they could contact me with any questions or concerns. Data were collected using a link to the online survey. At any time, participants could simply click on the exit button to terminate their involvement.

Instrument

The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse Questionnaire (Appendix B) is one of many questionnaires designed to assist clinicians in assessing the Sound Marital House of the couple in therapy (Gottman, 1999). This questionnaire was developed by Gottman (1999), in the book *The Marriage Clinic*. The 33-item true/false questionnaire assesses for the presence of each of the Four Horseman, with subscales corresponding to criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling (Gottman, 1999). High scores on each of the four subscales indicate a greater presence of the corresponding maladaptive communication pattern (Gottman, 1999). Items include "I often just want to leave the

scene of an argument," "My partner never really changes," "My partner doesn't face problems responsibly and maturely," and "Arguments seem to come out of nowhere." Given that the focus of the study was on college students and not necessarily on dating couples, the word "spouse" was replaced with "partner" in all applicable items. The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse Questionnaire has shown adequate reliability and validity in multiple studies (Cornelius & Alessi, 2007; Gottman, 2012; Walker, 2005).

Although many researchers have analyzed the subscales and identify which items should be scored, most did not publish the methods used to score each subscale. When completing a dissertation, Lute (2015) was in a similar predicament and established a 28-item scale to help identify which items should be scored on each subscale of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse Questionnaire. This scale yielded a Fleiss' kappa of .827, and removing any further items did not increase the kappa value (Lute, 2015). Lute calculated the Cronbach's alpha to determine the internal consistency reliability of the scores resulting from each subscale and the overall 28-item scale. This statistic assesses the intercorrelations between items on a subscale and is the most widely used measure of internal consistency (Garson, 2008). Included in Lute's scale is an 8-item criticism subscale ($\alpha = .701$), an 8-item defensiveness subscale ($\alpha = .800$), a 7-item contempt subscale ($\alpha = .780$), and a 5-item stonewalling subscale ($\alpha = .654$). Each of the four subscales are correlated with one another other as well as the total score, which is expected given Gottman's (1999) assertion that the Four Horsemen often occur in response to each other. The overall reliability for the 28-item questionnaire is $\alpha = .912$ (Lute, 2015). I used this 28-item measure and four subscales in all subsequent analyses.

Operationalization of Constructs

      I established two control variables, gender and level of education, to assess whether they may influence the continuous dependent variables. In the following subsections, I will explain each of these variables.

      Adulthood. Arnett (2000, 2004) added a supplementary stage to Erikson's stages of psychosocial development, called emerging adulthood, and as a result, adulthood was no longer about reaching a chronological age of 18, but rather a developmental age of accepting responsibility, making independent decisions and being financially independent. Arnett (1994, 1998, 2000, 2001) stated that when these three variables are combined, it means a person has reached adulthood. Arnett (1998) explained that accepting responsibility, specifically means for an individual's own actions and that independent decision making refers to decisions of character, as it combines a sense of making independent decisions with a self-consciously, strong-willed intention to carry them out. This is essential to the transition into adulthood (Arnett, 1998; Kett, 1977. Financial independence is defined as a person being independent from their parents (Arnett, 1998; Moore, 1987).

      In this study, I expressed categorical data reflecting adulthood as a nominal variable coded as 1 = successful transition and 2 = unsuccessful transition. The criteria to be included in the successful transition group were that the participant had begun accepting responsibility, made independent decisions, and was financially independent prior to reaching age 25. The criteria to be included in the unsuccessful transition group were that the participant had not completed all three of these milestones prior to reaching

age 25.

Criticism. In a relationship, criticism is an ad hominem assault (e.g., "I don't think you could be that forgetful, you are just egocentric") and an attack on the partner at their essence (Gottman, 1999). It is important to note that Gottman (1999) reported that men are more likely than women to respond to criticism by stonewalling. These gender differences are a reason why I controlled for gender in the analyses.

Contempt. The goal of contempt is to make the victim feel despised and worthless (Gottman, 1999) It is when one is treats others with disrespect, mocking them with sarcasm (try to be more pathetic), ridicule, name-calling, mimicking, and/or body language (i.e., eye-rolling). Gottman (1999) explains contempt is the most corrosive of the four maladaptive communication patterns.

Defensiveness. When a person feels accused unjustly that person becomes defensive (Gottman, 1999). Gottman (1999) claims defensiveness is a way of blaming a partner. Gottman (1999) explains how placing blame on a spouse is toxic to romantic relationship happiness.

Stonewalling. Stonewalling is when one person shuts down and closes off from the other (Gottman, 1999). There is a lack of responsiveness towards the partner and the interaction between the two. Instead of confronting the issue with the partner, the person makes evasive maneuvers (turning away or acting busy).

Age. Age was operationalized by what chronological age the participant had already obtained. This study expressed categorical data reflecting age as a nominal variable coded as *1 = 25, 2 = 26, 3 = 27, 4 = 28, 5 = 29, and 6 = 30 years old.*

Gender. Gender is defined as the state of being male or female (Gender, 2016). In the present study gender was a controlled variable. This study expressed categorical data reflecting gender as a nominal variable coded as 1 = male and 2 = female, 3 = other.

Level of education. Level of education was operationalized by what educational level the participant has currently obtained. The levels were broken up into the following levels: les than high school, high school, some college, associate's degree, bachelor's degree or graduate degree. This research expressed categorical data reflecting level of education as a nominal variable coded as 1= less than high school, 2 = high school, 3 = some college, 4 = associate's degree, 5 = bachelor's degree, and 6= graduate degree.

Data Analysis Plan

The research inquiry to determine if there was a relationship between communication patterns and adulthood was undertaken in the following research question, two hypotheses, and data analysis plan:

Research Question: Does a successful transition through the emerging adulthood stage of development positively discriminate communication patterns among adults, specifically Gottman's Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, when controlling for gender and level of education?

H_o: The communication patterns of young adults who have not successfully transitioned through the emerging adulthood stage of development will not differ from those who have successfully transitioned through the emerging adulthood stage of development.

H_a: The communication patterns of young adults who have not

successfully transitioned through the emerging adulthood stage of

development will be more negative than the communication patterns of

those who have successfully transitioned through the emerging adulthood

stage of development.

Threats to Validity

Threats to External Validity

External validity indicates the capacity to generalize research results beyond the

study sample to similar populations, to other eras as well as other circumstances (Thomas

& Rothman, 2013). The results of this study may be influenced by participants' social

pressures. For example, when answering delicate questions about communication

patterns, participants may respond with what they recognize as socially suitable. This

would introduce a social desirability or threat to external validity. This may be addressed

by techniques as deleting extreme outliers (Thomas & Rothman, 2013).

Threats to Internal Validity

The internal validity of a quantitative research study concerns the extent to which

an assumption can be made that research outcomes from the statistical analysis were the

result of the intervention and not from another variable (Thomas & Rothman, 2013).

Attrition, history, maturation, testing, regression to the mean and instrumentation are

forms of single-group study internal validity threats (Creswell, 2003; Thomas &

Rothman, 2013). Single-group designs are typically subject to threats of maturation and

attrition. However, the transience of this study will exclude maturation impacts and the

data collection will be from a large enough sample size to enable the identification of significant effects.

Ethical Procedures

This study was conducted in fulfillment with the standards for conducting research. Permission to conduct this study was obtained from the Walden University Institutional Review Board prior to implementation.

Protection of Participants From Harm

In research involving human participants, it is important to consider any harm the participants may be subjected to. In the current study, the participants' involvement solely consisted of completing an online study questionnaire, which should not have introduced a risk of more harm than is encountered in daily life. The participants were informed they were not required to answer any questions that made them uncomfortable and they could terminate their participation in the study at any time to reduce the likelihood of any harm coming to them.

Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from participants prior to completion of the survey. An informed consent form was presented to participants on the first page of the questionnaire. After reading the informed consent form, participants were instructed to click "Yes" to indicate they have read and agreed to the conditions in the informed consent statement.

Right to Privacy

Participants in this study have the right to privacy. Therefore, no information

about participants was released in any form. The only information made public by the researcher will be the summary statistics from the statistical analyses described above. No information on individual participants or their responses will be made public to ensure participants maintain their right to privacy.

Honesty and Integrity

This study was conducted in an honest manner. The Walden University Institutional Review Board was informed of any change to the study protocols or procedures. I discussed any potential ethical issues with the dissertation chair or the Institutional Review Board should arouse.

Summary

This section provided information about the research method and procedures used to answer this studies questionnaire consisting of four sections. A quantitative quasi-experimental research design was used to determine a possible relationship between emerging adulthood and communication behaviors. The specific sample consisted of 30 participants recruited via university participant pools.

Data for the predictor variable (successful transition into adulthood) was measured using Arnett's (1994, 2000, 2001) definition. Data for the dependent variable (negative communication patterns) was gathered using Gottman's Four Horsemen Questionnaire (Gottman, 1999). The control variables (gender and level of education) were evaluated by a short set of questions on the demographic survey. Analysis of variance was used to analyze the study data. In Chapter 4, I will discuss the recruitment

and data collection processes. I will also reveal the descriptive statistics and research

results of this study.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

Communication behaviors are integral to successful romantic relationships

because when communication patterns fail, relationships eventually fail. Adults who have

not acquired successful communication skills are at increased risk for divorce, and this is

compounded amongst children of divorce (Amato, 1996). Researchers have shown the

numerous benefits of being reared in a continuously intact home (Amato, 2014; Kalmijn,

2013). Researchers have also shown how children of divorce develop negative

communication patterns (Amato, 1996), and consequently, face perpetual challenges

including increased risk of divorce (Caldwell et al., 2007; Knapp et al., 2015).

Unencumbered, this sequence has the potential to repeat its negative outcome from

generation to generation (Hall, 1981). There has been exhaustive research on effects of

divorce on offspring (Kalmijn, 2013). Moreover, there has been extensive research on

predictors of divorce and marital separation (Gottman et al., 1998; Gottman & Silver,

2015). However, there was a gap in the literature regarding how the successful transition

through emerging adulthood, a critical psychosocial developmental stage, plays a role in

the development of communication behaviors among adults.

The goal of this quantitative quasi-experimental study was to assess a possible

connection between emerging adulthood and communication patterns among adults.

Researchers have shown the toxic effects of poor communication patterns (Gottman,

1999, 2015; Levenson & Gottman, 1983; Schwartz Gottman & Gottman, 2015).

Researchers have also underscored the numerous developmental tasks of emerging

adulthood (Arnett, 2000, 2004), specifically the development and experimentation with romantic relationships (Roisman et al., 2004). However, until this study, researchers had yet to show how the new psychosocial developmental stage of emerging adulthood has impacted communication skills. I designed this study to fill the gap in the literature regarding the impact emerging adulthood has on communication patterns. The predictor (independent) variable was the successful transition into adulthood, and the dependent variable was the degree to which individuals engage in negative communication patterns.

The research question that guided this study was: Does a successful transition through the emerging adulthood stage of development positively discriminate communication patterns among adults, specifically Gottman's Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, when controlling for gender and level of education? The null hypothesis I developed was that the communication patterns of young adults who have not successfully transitioned through the emerging adulthood stage of development would not differ from those who have successfully transitioned through the emerging adulthood stage of development. My hypothesis was that the communication patterns of young adults who have not successfully transitioned through the emerging adulthood stage of development would be more negative than the communication patterns of those who have successfully transitioned through the emerging adulthood stage of development. In this chapter, I will discuss and share the descriptive statistics as well as the results of the ANOVA.

Data Collection

I recruited adults ages 25–30 years old through university participant pools and

flyers posted in universities to participate in this study by completing a study questionnaire hosted by Survey Monkey. A demographic questionnaire was used to gather data for the predictor variable of successful transition into adulthood and Gottman's (1999) Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse Questionnaire was used to collect data for the criterion variables of maladaptive communication patterns. I also used a demographic questionnaire to garner information for the control variables of gender and level of education. A total of 33 adults (25–30 years old) responded to the study invitation and accessed the online survey. Of the 33 initial respondents, 3 answered the consent form but did not answer any of the questions, so those data sets were excluded from further analysis. A total of 30 participants completed the survey, which met the sample size requirement. The time frame for data collection was about 4 weeks.

I performed descriptive statistical tests including frequencies, percentages for all categorical variables and means, standard deviations, and ranges for all continuous variables. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients were also computed for all composite measures. I also completed inferential statistical tests that included an ANOVA to establish the relationships of the successful transition into adulthood (predictor variables) on maladaptive communication behaviors (criterion variable). In the remainder of this chapter, I will provide information about the findings of the study, followed by an evaluation, and summary.

I conducted descriptive analyses of demographic information for the 30 study participants (see Table 1). Of the 30 respondents, the majority were men (70%). Participants were between 25 to 30, and the majority were 27 years old (36.7%). Of the

30 respondents, the majority had a graduate degree (36.7%), were financially independent (76.7%), and considered themselves people who had independent beliefs (96.7%). All 30 respondents considered themselves people who accepted responsibility for their actions (100%). Almost all of the 30 respondents were reared in intact homes (96.7%) and most successfully transitioned into adulthood prior to reaching age 25 (56.7%).

Table 1

Demographics

	n	%
Gender	30	100.0
Male	21	70.0
Female	9	30.0
Age	30	100.0
25	9	30.0
26	5	16.7
27	11	36.7
28	3	10.0
29	0	0.0
30	2	6.7
Level of education	30	100.0
High School	1	3.3
Some College	6	20.0
Associate's Degree	2	6.7
Bachelor's Degree	10	33.3
Graduate Degree	11	36.7
Financial independence	30	100.0

(table continues)

Yes	23	76.7
No	7	23.3
Independent beliefs	30	100.0
Yes	29	96.7
No	1	3.3
Accepts responsibility	30	100.0
Yes	30	100.0
No	0	0.0
Parents Divorced	30	100.0
Yes	1	3.3
No	29	96.7
Transitioned into adulthood	30	100.0
Successful	17	56.7
Unsuccessful	13	43.3

I collected the sample population using university participant pools, which restricted the sample demographic. Moreover, the sample population primarily consisted of people in the greater New York City area. Another important aspect to consider is that 96.7% of the respondents were reared in intact homes, with one respondent reporting that his parents separated when he was 7 years old.

Results

The descriptive statistics for the study variables are listed in Table 2. By completing the three salient development tasks described by Arnett (2000), the mean of participants who successfully transitioned into adulthood before they reached 25 years of age was 55.411. The standard deviation was 6.432. The mean of participants who have not successfully transitioned into adulthood before they reached 25 years of age, by

failing to complete the three salient development tasks described by Arnett (2000), was

61.230, and the standard deviation was 3.982.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for the Study Variables

		M	*SD*
4 Horsemen	Successful	55.411	6.432
	Not Successful	61.230	3.982
	Total	57.9333	6.164
Criticism	Successful	13.529	1.907
	Not Successful	14.846	1.143
	Total	14.100	1.729
Defensiveness	Successful	12.470	2.065
	Not Successful	14.769	1.235
	Total	13.466	2.080
Contempt	Successful	12.764	1.251
	Not Successful	13.307	1.031
	Total	13.000	1.174
Stonewalling	Successful	7.882	1.691
	Not Successful	8.769	1.363
	Total	8.266	1.595

Note. N = 30. Cronbach's alpha was .80
4 Horsemen = total of all four maladaptive communication patterns

ANOVA Results

For a one-way ANOVA, I assumed that data were independent, had equal variances, and were normally distributed. For the first ANOVA, total maladaptive communication patterns (continuous) was the dependent variable and successful transition into adulthood (categorical) was the independent variable. There was a significant effect of negative communication patterns on successful transition into adulthood at the $p < .05$ level for the four maladaptive communication patterns [$F(1, 28) = 8.194, p = 0.008$] (see Table 3). This result supported the hypothesis that there is a relationship between maladaptive communication patterns and transitioning into adulthood. I then further subcategorized each of the subscales using Lute's (2015) adapted subscales of the 28-item Four Horsemen Questionnaire (see Appendix B). There was a significant effect of criticism on successful transition into adulthood at the $p < .05$ level for criticism [$F(1, 28) = 4.838, p = 0.036$]. There was a significant effect of defensiveness on successful transition into adulthood at the $p < .05$ level for defensiveness [$F(1, 28) = 12.593, p = 0.001$]. There was no significant effect of contempt on successful transition into adulthood at the $p < .05$ level for contempt [$F(1, 28) = 1.608, p = 0.215$]. There was no significant effect of stonewalling successful transition into adulthood at the $p < .05$ level for stonewalling [$F(1, 28) = 2.383, p = 0.134$].

Table 3

One-Way ANOVA Results for Comparison of Successful Transition and Maladaptive Communication Patterns

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	pvalue
4 Horsemen	Between Groups	249.441	1	249.441	8.194	.008
	Within Groups	852.425	28	30.444		
	Total	1101.867	29			
Criticism	Between Groups	12.772	1	12.772	4.838	.036
	Within Groups	73.928	28	2.640		
	Total	86.700	29			
Defensiveness	Between Groups	38.924	1	38.924	12.593	.001
	Within Groups	86.543	28	3.091		
	Total	125.467	29			
Contempt	Between Groups	2.172	1	2.172	1.608	.215
	Within Groups	37.828	28	1.351		
	Total	40.000	29			
Stonewalling	Between Groups	5.794	1	5.794	2.383	.134
	Within Groups	68.072	28	2.431		
	Total	73.867	29			

Summary

The results from the one-way ANOVA for the research question were significant, leading me to reject the null hypothesis. The independent variable of the successful transition into adulthood did have a relationship with maladaptive communication patterns. I operationally defined successful transition into adulthood as having completed Arnett's (2000) three salient developmental tasks of financial independence, accepting responsibly, and making independent decisions. My interpretation of the findings from this study is included in Chapter 5 along with study limitations, recommendations, and implications for this research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The general impetus for this study was the increasing divorce rates, specifically among younger people (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015); the significant levels of divorce, suicide, addiction, education completion rates, teen pregnancy, unemployment, imprisonment, and mental illness (Wilson, 2002); and rising psychological, interpersonal, and socioeconomic health predictors (Amato, 1994). Marriage safeguards the preservation and existence of future generations (Johnson, 2013). Healthy marriages set the stage for healthy families, and healthy marriages support the development of healthy children who in turn develop into productive, educated, and law abiding citizens (Johnson, 2013; Wilson, 2002).

The goal of this quantitative quasi-experimental study was to assess a possible connection between emerging adulthood and communication patterns among adults in an attempt to help clarify the impact of emerging adulthood on essential martial skills. Researchers have shown the toxic effects of poor communication patterns (Gottman, 1999, 2015; Levenson & Gottman, 1983; Schwartz Gottman & Gottman, 2015). Researchers have also highlighted numerous developmental tasks of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000, 2004), specifically the development and experimentation with romantic relationships (Roisman et al., 2004). However, there was a gap in the literature regarding to applied issues regarding romantic relationships in emerging adulthood (Fincham et al., 2011). Researchers had not shown how the new psychosocial developmental stage of emerging adulthood impacts communication skills. I designed this study to address that

gap in literature. In this study, I sampled 30 participants between the ages of 25–30. I

conducted a study using Gottman's validated 4 Horsemen of the apocalypse

questionnaire to measure the participant's negative communication patterns. The results

of the ANOVA suggested a statistical significance between communication patterns and

emerging adulthood. I conducted this study in an attempt to help educate people,

primarily children of divorce, on the relationship between emerging adulthood and

communication patterns.

Summarization of Findings

The completion of a one-way ANOVA showed there was a significant effect of

negative communication patterns on successful transition into adulthood for the four

maladaptive communication patterns. With this result, I rejected the null hypothesis. This

result supported the hypothesis that there is a relationship between maladaptive

communication patterns and transitioning into adulthood. I then subcategorized each of

the subscales and both criticism and defensiveness had a statistically significant

relationship with the transition to emerging adulthood. It was interesting to note that there

was no significant effect of contempt or stonewalling on successful transition into

adulthood.

Interpretation of the Findings

The findings of this study suggested there is a relationship between

communication patterns and emerging adulthood. The extension of the psychosocial

developmental stage that Arnett (2000) prolonged includes romantic communication

pattern development. Completing the salient developmental tasks of emerging adulthood

later on in life is, in fact, a productive and beneficial phase of development. Results from this study highlighted the importance of successfully transitioning through emerging adulthood as an essential aspect of romantic relationship happiness. Significant and enjoyable relationships with others are essential to global life satisfaction (Twenge & King, 2005). Researchers have shown the various predictors of relationship satisfaction (in opposite as well as same-sex relationships) consist of intimacy, support, quality of communication, humor, common interests, loyalty, reliability, efficient conflict resolution abilities, and a sense of shared power (Domingue & Mollen, 2009; Mackey et al., 2004). Communication is the catalyst for intimacy growth and trust in relationships (Pietromonaco et al., 2004), and this is primarily due to partners feeling understood and accepted within the context of positive communication. Gottman (1999) highlighted the four horsemen as the negative communication patterns most corrosive to couples. Results from this study showed how the four horsemen are affected by emerging adulthood.

Children of divorce are in a particularly vulnerable position. Amato (1996) explained how children of divorce often times leave the children with poor communication behaviors. This is in part due to parental communication breakdown. Divorce due to poor communication is the third highest reason for divorce after infidelity and financial strain (Schwartz Gottman & Gottman, 2015). Children of divorce learn unhealthy communication skills from their parents (Amato, 1996), and as a result of learned negative communication patterns, children are at increased risk of divorce. Researchers have consistently shown how children of divorce face persistent challenges, including poor communication behaviors, as a result of parental separation (Caldwell et

al., 2007; Knapp et al., 2015). Because of these persistent challenges, children of divorce have significantly higher rates of divorce themselves than for people with no family history of divorce (Sanders et al., 1999). Children of divorce are 14% more likely to get divorced themselves (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015).

The results of this study show a relationship between maladaptive communication patterns and emerging adulthood. With this information, children of divorce have the opportunity to make an educated decision about engaging in romantic relationships prior to reducing learned maladaptive communication behaviors. Unlearning maladaptive communication patterns (primarily the 4 horsemen) will enable the success of romantic relationships while diminishing the risk of martial separation. Lessening the risk of divorce will enable the development of healthy children who in turn are productive, educated, and law abiding citizens (Johnson, 2013).

Limitations of the Study

I identified several limitations in this study. The primary limitation was the limited recruitment strategy for participation. I was limited to using accessible universities to petition volunteers from their current students and alumni. This could have contributed to responses that were perceived as more socially appropriate. Nonetheless, participants were encouraged to reply truthfully and guaranteed their alma mater would not receive notification of participation or survey responses. The participants were limited to the use of a self-report objective instrument to collect data. Such instruments do not allow for the gathering of in-depth information. Nevertheless, I made an effort to

use valid and reliable published instruments. Finally, the generalization of results is minimized due to the number of respondents that chose to participate in the study.

<div align="center">**Recommendations**</div>

Practical Recommendations

Based on the study findings and limitations, I can make practical recommendations for couples, people transitioning through emerging adulthood, and children of divorce. Based on the findings from this study, my first recommendation is for couples. Communication is critical to marital happiness. The four horsemen of the apocalypse highlight the four most corrosive communication patterns in romantic relationships. Contempt, the most toxic of the four behaviors, should never be exhibited. If a couple observes they might have contempt, they should seek psychotherapy immediately. Having either of the four or a combination of the four maladaptive communication patterns is tolerable if coupled with positive communication patterns such as expression of love, gratitude, and respect. Additionally, stonewalling, an attempt to de-escalate an argument essentially escalates the conflict. During a conflict, the body and mind interpret the argument as an attack and the body initiates the sympathetic nervous system and reacts similarly to a physical confrontation. It is essential to remain calm, collected, communicative, and above all, maintain levels of mutual respect.

My second recommendation is for people transitioning through emerging adulthood. I recommended that people use this newfound luxury of emerging adulthood, where there is ample opportunity to explore to attempt new employment opportunities and initiate, maintain, and successfully terminate relationships to their advantage.

Emerging adulthood is not a time to languish or stagnate during the 20s until life begins. It is a new and rare opportunity to take advantage of chances which may never rise again. Emerging adulthood is a time to develop communication, relationship, employment, and other skills essential to global life satisfaction. Based on the findings from this study, people transitioning through emerging adulthood should use this time to invest in their romantic, vocational, and social future.

My third recommendation is for children of divorce. The findings of this study suggested that children of divorce should marry or engage in cohabitation after they unlearn maladaptive communication patterns that may be present. Children of divorce are susceptible to develop more maladaptive communication behaviors if their parents had maladaptive communication patterns (Amato, 1996, 1999). It is essential to unlearn those habits before engaging in romantic relationships. Following these practical recommendations may result in halting the rise in divorce rates among young adults by strengthening their communication skills.

Recommendations for Future Research

I also developed several suggestions for future research. As all the participants were from university participant pools, I recommend additional research be conducted with participants representing other demographics. If research is conducted within random sampling of more expanded demographics, future researchers could consider the various denominations within other populations. Future researchers could also conduct studies with larger sample sizes to more accurately determine the relationship between emerging adulthood and maladaptive communication patterns. Finally, future researchers

could conduct mixed methods research in this topic area to further increase the understanding of the relationship between emerging adulthood and maladaptive communication patterns by allowing expansion of answers to questions asked.

Implications for Social Change

I conducted this study with a goal of determining if there was a statistically significant relationship between emerging adulthood and communication patterns. The findings from this study supported a basis for positive social change related to relationship happiness, divorce rate reduction, and global life satisfaction. Reducing maladaptive communication patterns amongst couples and emerging adults will help diminish marital unhappiness as well as divorce. Children of divorce have significantly higher rates of divorce themselves than for people with no family history of divorce (Sanders et al., 1999). Lessening the risk of divorce will enable the development of healthy children who in turn are productive, educated, and law abiding citizens (Johnson, 2013). Children of divorce face lifelong challenges as a result of parental separation (Caldwell et al., 2007; Knapp et al., 2015), and adults of parental divorce score lower on a plethora of psychological, interpersonal, and socioeconomic health predictors, than adults reared in continuously intact two-parent families (Amato, 1994).

Conclusion

The purpose of this quantitative quasi-experimental study was to determine if there was a relationship between emerging adulthood and communication pattern development. I recruited 30 adults between the ages of 25 to 30 years old through university participant pools. The results of their responses to surveys indicated that there

is a relationship with emerging adulthood and maladaptive communication patterns. The results also indicated there was a relationship between emerging adulthood and criticism and defensiveness. These results suggested that exploring during emerging adulthood would positively impact communication patterns. The study findings may be used to modify the behaviors of couples, parents, and children to develop their communication behaviors. Moreover, the study findings extend EAT by demonstrating the relationship between emerging adulthood and communication pattern development. The current findings also supported Arnett's (2004) notion that the stage of emerging adulthood should be distinct from adolescence and adulthood and reflect that young adults are delaying commitment to marriage.

Based on the results of this study, I made 3 practical recommendations. It is my hope that positive social change will stem from my recommendations. My practical recommendations based on these results included (a) fostering better communication among couples, (b) that emerging adults should use this phase of development to invest in their future relationships and ultimately marriage, and (c) children of divorce should work to unlearn maladaptive communication patterns they may have acquired prior to engaging in romantic relationships.

In future studies, participants should be recruited from a broader area and include other levels of education. Data should be collected using a measure tailored towards each of the toxic communication patterns and denominations to yield more accurate results. Finally, qualitative and experimental studies should be conducted to increase the

understanding of the relationship between emerging adulthood and communication

patterns.

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Appendix A: Demographics Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions:
1. Age: _____ years old
2. Please select your gender:
    a. Female
    b. Male
    c. Other
3. Level of Education:
    a. Some High School
    b. High School
    c. Some College
    d. Associate's Degree
    e. Bachelor's Degree
    f. Graduate Degree
6. Are you currently financially independent (from your parents)?
    a. Yes
            If yes, what age did you become financially independent? _____
    b. No
7. Do you consider yourself someone who accepts responsibility for his/her actions?
    a. Yes
            If yes, what age did you become responsible for your actions? _____
    b. No
8. Do you consider yourself someone who makes independent decisions?
    a. Yes
            If yes, what age did you start making independent decisions? _____
    b. No
9. Are your parents divorced/separated?
    a. Yes
            If yes, how old were you when they divorced/separated? _____
    b. No

Appendix B: The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse Questionnaire

Read each statement and answer according to your **CURRENT ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP**. If you are not currently involved in a romantic relationship, please answer according to your **MOST RECENT ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP**. Place a check mark in the appropriate TRUE or FALSE box.

When we discuss our relationship issues: **Response:**

I feel attacked or criticized when we talk	True	False
I usually feel like my personality is being assaulted	True	False
In our disputes, at times, I don't even feel like my partner likes me very much.	True	False
I have to defend myself because the charges against me are so unfair.	True	False
I often feel unappreciated by my partner.	True	False
My feelings and intentions are often misunderstood.	True	False
I don't feel appreciated for all the good I do in this relationship	True	False
I often just want to leave the scene of an argument.	True	False
I get disgusted by all the negativity between us.	True	False
I feel insulted by my partner at times.	True	False
I sometimes just clam up and become quiet.	True	False
I can get mean and insulting in our disputes.	True	False
I feel basically disrespected.	True	False
Many of our issues are not just my problem.	True	False
The way we talk makes me want to just withdraw from the whole relationship.	True	False
I think to myself, "who needs all this conflict?"	True	False
My partner never really changes.	True	False
Our problems have made me feel desperate at times.	True	False
My partner doesn't face issues responsibly and maturely.	True	False
I try to point out flaws in my partner's personality that need improvement.	True	False
I feel explosive and out of control about our issues at times.	True	False
My partner uses phrases like "you always" or "you never" when complaining.	True	False
I often get the blame for what are really our problems.	True	False
I don't have a lot of respect for my partner's position on our basic issues.	True	False
My partner can be quite selfish and self-centered.	True	False
I feel disgusted by some of my partner's attitudes.	True	False
My partner gets far too emotional.	True	False
I am just not guilty of many of the things I get accused of.	True	False
Small issues often escalate out of proportion.	True	False
Arguments seem to come out of nowhere.	True	False
My partner's feelings get hurt too easily.	True	False
I often will become silent to cool things down a bit.	True	False
My partner has a lot of trouble being rational and logical.	True	False

Appendix C: Subscales of the 28-Item Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse Questionnaire

Subscales of the 28-item Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse Questionnaire

Subscale	Item	α (N = 406)
Criticism		.701
	1. I feel attacked or criticized when we talk.	
	3. In our disputes, at times, I don't even feel like my partner likes me very much.	
	10. I feel insulted by my partner at times.	
	17. My partner never really changes.	
	22. My partner uses phrases like "you always" or "you never" when complaining.	
	25. My partner can be quite selfish and self-centered.	
	27. My partner gets far too emotional.	
	31. My partner's feelings get hurt too easily.	
Defensiveness		.800
	4. I have to defend myself because the charges against me are so unfair.	
	6. My feelings and intentions are often misunderstood.	
	7. I don't feel appreciated for all the good I do in this relationship	
	14. Many of our issues are not just my problem.	
	23. I often get the blame for what are really our problems.	
	28. I am just not guilty of many of the things I get accused of.	
	29. Small issues often escalate out of proportion.	
	30. Arguments seem to come out of nowhere.	
Contempt		.780
	9. I get disgusted by all the negativity between us.	
	12. I can get mean and insulting in our disputes.	
	13. I feel basically disrespected.	
	19. My partner doesn't face issues responsibly and maturely.	
	24. I don't have a lot of respect for my partner's position on our basic issues.	
	26. I feel disgusted by some of my partner's attitudes.	
	33. My partner has a lot of trouble being rational and logical.	
Stonewalling		.654
	8. I often just want to leave the scene of an argument.	
	11. I sometimes just clam up and become quiet.	
	15. The way we talk makes me want to just withdraw from the whole relationship.	
	16. I think to myself, "who needs all this conflict?"	
	32. I often will become silent to cool things down a bit	

Scale	Four Horsemen Total Score	Four Horsemen Criticism	Four Horsemen Defensiveness	Four Horsemen Contempt	Four Horsemen Stonewalling
4H Total Score	1	.900**	.906**	.871**	.759**
4H Criticism	.900**	1	.753**	.716**	.615**
4H Defensiveness	.906**	.753**	1	.717**	.517**
4HContempt	.871**	.716**	.717**		.549*
4H Stonewalling	.759**	.615**	.517**	.549**	

** *p* <.0

Appendix D: Permission for use of the Gottman Questionnaire

From: XXXXXXXX
Subject: Re: Request to Use Gottman Measure in Dissertation
Date: December 20, 2016 at 3:58:34 PM EST
To: XXXXXXXX
Hello Eli,
Thanks for reaching out to The Gottman Institute and for your interest in our work. You may certainly use The Four Horsemen Questionnaire in your research. Please give credit to Dr. John Gottman & The Gottman Institute. John lives for research, so when you have completed your dissertation please send me a copy, which I will forward to John.
Kind Regards,
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
The Gottman Institute
www.gottman.com

From: Eli Felt [mailto:XXXXXXXX] **Sent:** Tuesday, December 20, 2016 12:30 PM **To:** XXXXXXXX **Subject:** Request to Use Gottman Measure in Dissertation
Hello, my name is Eli Felt, and I am currently a doctoral candidate in clinical psychology at Walden University. I really like The Sound Marital House, and I would like to include the Four Horsemen Questionnaire in my dissertation research. I can provide as much information on my study as needed, but briefly stated it involves looking at the relationship between negative communication patterns among emerging adults as well as adults. The administration involves a few questionnaires to subjects, and the analysis involves a regression correlation.
Best Regards,
Eli Felt, M.S.
Doctoral Candidate
Clinical Psychology
Walden University

Appendix E: Debriefing Form

Thank you for your participation in this study.

At the beginning of this study, you were informed that the purpose of the study is to investigate the relationship between communication and emerging adulthood. More specifically, the study aimed to look at how the transition into adulthood affect particular negative patterns of communication known as the "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse".

Because the term "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse" may have a negative connotation, this was referred to more generally in the study as "communication." It is important to note that research suggests these communication patterns are present in varying levels in all relationships, and the presence of these communication patterns do not indicate anything in and of themselves.

By participating in this study, you contributed to research that can help inform people and may eventually assist people in working through their relationship problems. It is my hope that you feel proud to have participated in the study, and I thank you for your time and effort.

All of the information disclosed by participants during this study will be kept confidential. If you have any questions or would like further information about this study, including the results when the study has been completed, please contact the following individuals:

Student Researcher: Eli Felt, M.S.   Faculty Sponsor:
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX   XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXXXX   XXXXXXXXXX

Appendix F: IRB Approval Number

The IRB approval number for this dissertation study is 04-06-17-0367185. The approval expires on April 5th, 2018.