

Females' Perspectives on Emergence to Adulthood:
The Role of Information Communication Technologies

by

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ABSTRACT

Young women ages 18-29 are the highest users of Information Communication Technology (ICT) in the United States. As a group, they curate and create more online content than any other adult user group (Duggan, 2014). Throughout the research literature, scholars claim that the high rate of technology use among young people is related to their developmental stage (boyd, 2014; Kuper & Mustaki, 2014; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008; Turkle, 2010). The primary developmental tasks of young adults include forming an adult identity, and sustaining intimate relationships. Developmental psychologists and sociologist hypothesize that ICT's influence developmental trajectories and outcomes (Jensen & Arnett, 2012). Given the breadth of discussion in the literature about development, and ICT use, there is relatively little research focusing on how young women interpret and internalize these experiences. The primary purpose of this study was to understand the interaction between young adults frequent online use and developmental tasks — identity formation and intimate relationships.

Interviews were conducted with young women (18-29) who qualified as high users ($N=22$). Participants' were interviewed twice; the initial interview used a structured schedule, providing uniformity across participants. The second interview was an informal conversation personalized to the participant's' interests, experiences, and opinions about the topic. Participants were recruited from across the country, and the diversity in the sample mirrors the heterogeneous nature of the emerging adult population. Two forms of qualitative analysis were used, open thematic coding and narrative analysis.

Findings demonstrated the shift of the networked culture creates a highly individualized life trajectory for young people. Identity and intimacy are still the salient developmental tasks for young adults, but continue evolve throughout the life course. . Narrative analyses were used to show strengths of the critical realism theory, especially the reflexive modes, by using case examples. Lastly, the role of ICT are discussed using four primary themes— augmented relationships, disruptive networks, defining moments, and driven agency. Ultimately, this research study helps provide evidence that online spaces are relational and the interactions a part of sociality. For social workers ability to understand development experiences and other facets of social life, further research is needed.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Taylor is a 22-year-old woman who lives in San Francisco. Today she woke up, and like any other day, the first thing she did was check her text messages to see if Anthony had contacted her. They met two weeks ago on Tinder, a smartphone dating application, and since then they have communicated regularly. Their communication started off promising; a few days ago Anthony started following her on Instagram and added her as a Facebook friend. However, several days have passed since she last heard from him, and Taylor is unsure if she did something wrong. Perhaps she appeared too opinionated; she often posted blogs and comments about the upcoming Presidential election. Or maybe he did not like one of the pictures on her Instagram page. Taylor is unsure whether she should contact Anthony again or wait to hear from him. Eventually, Taylor decides her best option is to focus on her studies and avoid using Tinder for the time being.

Many young women frequently incorporate the use of ICT (Information Communication Technologies) into their daily lives. Recently, studies have shown women ages 18-29 to be the most active users in the United States, and, in many ways, young women surpass all other user groups in ICT usage rates (Smith & Duggan, 2013). Young adult women are more likely than any other age group to curate and create new online content, especially photos and videos (Duggan, 2014). Young adult women are also more likely to share online photos and videos than their male counterparts (Duggan, 2014). Young women are among the highest users of social media; 84% of 18-29 year olds report having a Facebook account (Duggan & Smith, 2014). As high users of ICT,

these women continually find new ways to express themselves and socially interact using ICT.

Transition to Adulthood

Certain scholars from the field of developmental psychology suggest that increased globalization through technology is changing the social environment and creating new pathways to adulthood (Jensen & Arnett, 2012). The developmental procession into adulthood within the United States, and other Western cultures, entails an intense focus on personal autonomy rather than predetermined social roles (Arnett, 2000; Archer, 2000; Archer, 2007; Archer, 2012; Schwartz, Côté & Arnett, 2005).

Developmental psychologist Jeffery J. Arnett promoted the theory of emerging adulthood as a distinct time when young people aged 18-29 (hereafter “emerging adults”) focus on two developmental tasks: identity and intimacy (Arnett, 2000). He theorized that emerging adults develop their understanding of identity and intimacy by exploring three domains: worldview, love, and work (Arnett, 2000).

Moreover, Margret Archer and other critical realism theorists, would argue that all social experiences involve a process of development (Archer, 2012; Donati, 2011). As a sociologist who also studies young people and their transition to adulthood, Archer (2007, 2012) emphasizes how *reflexivity*, the ability to consider one’s self in relation to one’s social context, produces a set of *concerns* that develops into *projects* and ultimately leads to daily *practices* (Archer, 2007). Archer’s principle of *agency*, suggests that the understanding of one’s ultimate concerns is subjective and based on her or his experiences (Archer, 2007). Thus, “who we are is what we care about.... over time, the self becomes that which the I [personal identity] generates in the reflexive search for

what [s]he cares for most – his [her] ultimate concern” (Donati, 2011, p.52). Human emotion is the catalyst for recognizing concerns. In contemporary society, our concerns are expected to evolve throughout the adult years (Archer, 2007). Still, during the period immediately after secondary school, emerging adults in the United States are expected to comprehensively invest personal time, energy, and resources for the purposes of solidifying their personal identity in relation to potential adult social roles (Arnett, 2000; Castells, 1997).

The advent of ICT in the last decade has presented expanding opportunities for independent social interactions for young people during their formative years. These opportunities are relatively unstructured and unbounded by predetermined social roles generating an ideal space for experimentation with self and for reflective observation of one’s interactions. It is still unknown how such activities influence a woman’s personal encounters in her late teens and early 20s, particularly as most women that age are uncertain-about their embodied self, and how she will be in this world (Archer, 2012; Senft, 2008). Despite emerging adult women being the highest ICT user group in many areas, no studies have focused on young women as a distinctive developmental case (Smith & Duggan, 2013). Indeed, the pace of the changing social environment alone would seem to demand a reexamination of developmental theories to better understand the lived experiences of young women growing up during the information age (Archer, 2012; Floridi, 2009). How young women process these opportunities throughout their emerging adulthood years is the focus of this study.

Identity

Personal identity is formed through our most private thoughts and is shaped by the continual inner dialogue that observes and processes our experiences (Archer, 2000). Social identity is manifested through social roles, and how our personal identity develops in certain social contexts. Our *personal identities* are a combination of individual attributes— such as intelligence, warmth, and humor. These qualities can be used to personify different social identities. To differentiate, *social identity* is the role taken on, such as teacher, friend, and is a result of combining *personal identity* with the social role. The process of *reflexivity* is what shapes our interactions between understanding our personal identity and developing our social identities. The internal dialogue between personal identity and social identity reflects both the social environment and who we believe we are in our environment. Social identities, in contrast to personal identities, are born through experimentation with social roles and outward expressions of the self (Archer, 2000; 2007). All individuals personify social identities by using their personal identity. During the emerging adult years, individuals are expected to focus intensely on reflexive practices in order to make a place for themselves in society.

Identity is a person's perception of his or her individuality, awareness of one's position in society, and a set of moral commitments or ultimate concerns (Archer, 2000; Archer, 2007; Castells, 1997; Stryker & Burke, 2000). Archer uses *morphogenesis* - a biological construct translated into sociology by Walter F. Buckley (1967) to explain how social forms are generated, maintained, or changed. In sociological terms for example, if a young person chooses to maintain a certain socio-cultural status quo, he or she could be said to be choosing to engage in a morphostatic act, upholding an existing social structure

(Archer, 2012; Donati, 2011). However, many young people seem engaged in a more complicated act of *double morphogenesis* where a person's "internal conversation" mediates between the felt force of social structures and a person's determination to choose such that ultimately, when a person acts, their action influences both social forms and identity formation (Donati, 2011, p.109). In other words, reflexivity and social structure directly affect one another, i.e., society influences an individual's options, and the individual acts to change society.

The use of *agency* as a term to denote the human capacity for intentional behavior is unusual in social work literature. Social work uses the term more generally to denote a social structure organized of some number of individual actors and recognized formally as a corporate entity. However, in this work, agency is used as a sociological term that denotes the ability of humans to act in a social field of social structures and social structural expectations. Agency is essential for understanding contemporary society. An agent is defined loosely by Archer (2007) as a person "who can exercise some governance in their own lives, as opposed to 'passive agents' to whom things simply happen" (Archer, 2007, p.6). To understand the use of agency, context must be provided based on subjectivity (social actor) and objectivity (social circumstances). Clearly, there are issues of substantive sociological debate about the relative influences of agency and social structure and any individual's ability to engage in a reflexive process (Burns, 1976). However, in this work, the assertion is that regardless of the relative influences of structure and agency, a critical part of the emerging adulthood developmental phase is growing the capacity to use the "internal conversation" as a point of personal engagement in a cycle of intentional reflexivity. As Archer points out: "Reflexivity depends upon a

subject who has sufficient personal identity to know what he or she cares about and to design the projects that they hope will realize their concerns within society” (Archer, 2007, p. 34). Theories of critical realism stress that personal identity work is directly related to the agency one exercises in order to change social structures.

Social structures and cultures are always evolving; prior to the overall technological advances in ICT, major adult roles for women were already being transformed (Castells, 1997; Jensen & Arnett, 2012). Since the Women’s Revolution, the social institution of marriage and the structure of the patriarchal family have changed drastically. Castells (1997) draws on an array of statistics to show the decline in traditional family structure in Western culture at the end of the 20th century by examining the rising age at first marriage, an increase in children born outside of marriages, a rise in divorce rates, and a decrease in overall percentage of those in marriages (Castells, 1997).

Emerging adult women have an array of choices. The theory of a networked society proposes that ICT use is not the sole cause of social change, but a major contributor to how people perceive the world around them and cultivate social interests. Simply defined, one can think of the networked society as a reorganization of social interests expressed through individualism (Castells, 1997, Twenge, 2013). Because individual identity can take precedent over belonging to a local community or culture, traditional pathways or life courses may be convoluted. LaMendola (2010) explains the significance of the network society, arguing that there was something radically different between associations made in older forms of human networks and those appearing through what he observed as “the personal use of locally situated and widely distributed electronic devices” (LaMendola, 2010, p. 110). The radical differences he observed led

him to the conclusion that those networks would soon become the fundamental organizing points of society, not the individual, family, organizations, or the state. Essentially, if our social interactions are changing and reshaping as they include device supported networks of multifarious interests as well as local communities, our perception of our place in the world is likely to change as well.

Developmental psychologists argue that identity is subjective and not defined by social roles (Arnett, 2000; Schwartz et al., 2005). They believe identity exploration consists of developing self-esteem, perceiving one's purpose in life, having an internal locus of control, and ego strength (Schwartz et al., 2005). This agentic approach emphasizes personal exploration of identity as the key to discovering a greater sense of life purpose (Schwartz et al., 2005). Sociologists agree that identity is subjective and based on personal perception; they also emphasize reflexivity as the means to best understand one's concerns, how to relate to society, and position his or herself in the social structure (Archer, 2007; 2012). Ultimately, the exploration of concerns is imperative for solidifying a personal identity, which in turn is used to select and sift through possible social identities (Archer, 2012). The developmental process determines an individual's social positioning by placing him or her in support or opposition to the traditional social structure.

Similar to Archer's concept of double morphogenesis, Castells talks of a *resistance identity*, one generated when an individual acts *morphogenetically* in opposition to existing social structures (Castells, 1997). By incorporating resistance into their daily practices, individual women act out a resistance identity; they become active agents in opposition to the social structure. Thus, both double morphogenesis and

resistance identity involve acting as an agent of change within society, whereas an emerging adult woman practicing morphostasis seeks to maintain the status quo.

Traditional developmental theories stressed the importance of conventional social roles for women to achieve adulthood, and these theories also stressed that a woman would experience intimacy before developing an identity (Erikson, 1964). Current research on developmental trajectories demonstrate that women tend to experience identity before intimacy, however, research has not examined how these developmental processes may have changed for young women (Beyers & Seiffge-Krenke, 2010).

Intimacy

Intimacy, broadly defined, is the ability to feel an emotional closeness and express intimate thoughts and feelings with another person (Mackinnon, Nosko, Pratt, & Norris, 2011). Although the cultivating of intimate or romantic relationships are often considered to begin during adolescence, emerging adults typically experience greater depth in their relationships than adolescents. Further, emerging adults report an escalation of romantic behaviors, an increased ability to influence partners, an increase in sexual experiences, and the exchange of instrumental support between partners (Giordano, Manning, Longmore, & Flanigan, 2009). During the emerging adult period, young women are likely to experiment with many forms of relationships, such as “hook-ups,” same sex, long distance, and cohabitation (Giordano et al., 2009; Halpern-Meehin, Manning, Giordano & Longmore, 2013a). These relationship practices also illustrate how emerging adults experiment with adult social roles and expand their understanding of what intimacy is (Dailey, Rossetto, Pfiester & Surra, 2009; Dailey, Jin, Pfiester, & Beck, 2011;

Halpern-Meekin, Manning, Giordano & Longmore, 2013b). Dating relationships are one indicator an individual is exploring intimacy.

The majority of research examining intimacy for young people has focused on dating relationships (Lanz & Tagliabue, 2007, Mackinnon et al., 2011). The intense focus on dating during the emerging adult years suggests that women, and men, consider personal identity a central component of intimacy (Manning, Giordano, Longmore, & Hocevar, 2009). Emerging adult daters usually seek out partners who confirm their identity, for example, the two may share an interest in work or school (Manning et al., 2009). Having financial security is another attractive quality for a partner to have, but does not come without complications (Archer, 2012). The goal of securing a long-term intimate relationship, while balancing the early phase of a career is complex, potentially leaving identity and intimacy in competition (Archer, 2012). Alternatively, some emerging adults may avoid the complication of career and partnership by opting out of dating altogether; non-daters have reported an intense focus on career and economic stability, as well as on spending more time with friends (Lanz & Tagliabue, 2007). Emerging adults may develop intimacy with others outside of traditional romantic relationships while they focus on their own careers and individual independence (Lanz & Tagliabue, 2007, Mackinnon et al., 2011). In a study of emerging adults' close personal relationships, both narratives about true friendships and true love (romantic partnership) were predictive of maturing and moving toward responsibility associated with middle adulthood (Mackinnon et al., 2011). Research should further explore how intimacy is perceived and experienced by those emerging adults who are not devoting time to dating relationships.

According to Archer (2012) young women are experimenting with intimacy and identity simultaneously; all while social structures and culture have gradually changed expectations for adult women (Archer, 2012; Castells, 1997). The individual woman's perception of the changing society leads to concerns about herself, and how she will relate or experience closeness with those around her. For example, one may be experimenting with the role of girlfriend, while also experimenting with the role of motherhood. The presentation of these multiple, concurrent, social identities are needed to confirm, or agree with, the concerns she is working to manifest through personal identity (Archer, 2012). In this example, her perception of what it means to be a girlfriend must compliment or align with her perception of what it means to be a mother. Additionally, this experimentation coincides with a time when new forms of interactions, or presentation of personal and social identity, are available through ICT.

Theoretical Framework

A theoretical assumption that can be overlooked in social work is that the *social* is a phenomenon. While the implicit limit in this study is to look only at the generation of the social as a human capacity, we recognize that we are excluding a large literature of studies of the social that now extend across all levels of observable life on our planet – from microbes to complicated levels of aggregated carbon, such as robots represent. What must be stated here is that this study views the human version of the social as a form, a morphology, that is generated, maintained, altered, and manipulated by humans. In other words, human sociality is morphogenetic. The mechanism through which human sociality is materialized in morphogenesis is relational interaction. Though Schegloff (2015) would limit the scope of his assertion that interaction is the fundamental site of

sociality solely to embodied humans, this study extends the relational capacities of human interaction to include the effects of interactive representations in non-human devices as well.

According to theories of critical realism (Archer, 2007, 2012; Donati, 2011), the ways in which people relate to one another, and hence develop, have an inherent capacity to change. Since roughly the 1980s, a more globally connected world has changed human society by bringing forward a new era of relationality (Archer, 2012; Donati, 2011; Castells, 1997). To define relationality, one can think of *connections*, *social ties*, and *conversations* as being the evidence of society, rather than society being a place containing these phenomena. These changes are happening rapidly, and philosopher Ray Kurzweil (2005) identifies this moment as the beginning of singularity—a time when technology exponentially increases and humans become more and more intertwined with these technologies in the production of everyday life (Floridi, 2009; Kurzweil, 2005). This rapid increase in social complexity is predicted to produce a great impact on economic interactions and health care, but less is understood about how it impacts social morphologies of human development and the ways humans relate. Those who are high ICT users, such as emerging adult women, can offer valuable insight about emergent forms of relationality in their daily lives. The objective of this exploratory study is to understand how high use of ICT by emerging adult women interacts with the developmental tasks of emerging adulthood.

This study is intended to draw out the complexities between social changes, and the perceptions of young women coming of age in the midst of these changes. Borrowing from *actor network theory*, part of the question is whether the user perceives ICT's as an

intermediary, a tool transporting information without changing the meaning, or if ICT's are *mediators*, tool's that transform, modify, or distort meaning (Latour, 2005). With the onset of a society intertwined with technology, are emerging adult women using ICT as subjects actively employing objects for their benefit? Alternatively, do they believe the ICT's become mediators that have changed the social environment to a degree that they are being acted on, unknowingly surrendering some portion of their agency? These perceptions will be explored in this research as they may represent major influences on the levels of agency felt by individual participants.

Research Questions

The theories of critical realism help to address technology's impact without oversimplification and provide a way to understand how technology offers a new means of relating to the world, with the interpretation of the interaction defined subjectively by the user. To this end, research is needed that focuses on the use of ICT's and the individual user's intentions, interpretations, and how subjective meanings are made of these experiences. For example, through social media use and reflexivity, emerging adults potentially challenge traditional social structures (Archer, 2012; Donati, 2011). Using theories of critical realism, the developmental process will be studied as an interaction instead of a one-way process (Donati, 2011). Rather than confirm the perspective of emerging adult theorists— especially the view that young people are adapting to a changing world (Jensen & Arnett, 2012) — this study will examine if young people leverage their transition to adulthood to engage with the social structure (Archer, 2012).

To summarize, young women are coming of age in a period when social structures are changing, and ICT use provides new means for social interactions. This ongoing exchange between human and non-human agents is an emerging form of *interactional agency* (LaMendola & Krysik, 2013). Because of the networked society, women have different possibilities for interactional agency in their adult lives. Interactional agency effectively exposes emerging adults to a global community of human and non-human agents. Some theorists believe exposure to a global community potentially impacts the developmental process (Jensen & Arnett, 2012). However, changes in contemporary Western cultures could mean entirely new trajectories for adult life, and sociologists propose that our lifetime will include many instances of change and growth as we take on meaningful projects (Archer, 2007). Discussing with young women their everyday experience of *interactional agency* can provide information about the individuals' perceptions, in addition to describing the shaping of online culture. To understand the subjective nature of the experiences of emerging adult women, a qualitative study is proposed, including the following general research questions:

1. What are the concerns of emerging adult women and how do they fit with the traditional developmental tasks of identity and intimacy?
2. Do emerging adult women describe their developmental experiences, as ways of engaging in morphogenesis, or maintaining social structures through morphostasis?
3. How does ICT use influence emerging adult women and their reflexivity during the developmental process?

Implications

The primary objective of this study is to contribute knowledge of how emerging adult women view primary concerns, using a theoretical lens to understand broader implications of what ICT means for human development. Currently, the research

speculates that ICT influences the developmental trajectory (Jensen & Arnett, 2012), but few studies have asked the question why and how this comes to be, especially from the perspective of the user. The majority of research on this topic draws from emerging adult literature, and poses research questions drawing from the theory without employing possible critiques (Jensen & Arnett, 2012). The collective body of research, specifically in psychology and media studies, holds many findings that indicate online life is an active part of identity exploration, dating relationships, and friendship during the ages of 18-25. However, the descriptive studies are largely focused on specific segments of transitioning to adulthood, as opposed to understanding the role of ICT throughout the entire process. This study requires suspending the assumptions that inform current hypotheses and theories of technology and development. To better understand the phenomena of ICT use and transitioning to adulthood, research is needed that provides a narrative and description from the view of the user.

Social work as a profession has always worked to understand the complexity of human interactions within larger social systems. Human behavior in the social environment is important because both behavior and environment influence one another. The intersection of online social environments and human developmental trajectories is an overlooked area of importance in the social work literature. As practitioners, social workers may be operating on outdated and incomplete theoretical frameworks. Social work research relies heavily on psychology literature and does not account for how human development may be impacted by changing social structures. The use of ICT in our day-to-day lives is one example of why it is important to assess how the social environment is changing. Specific to this study, online spaces may be changing the ways

in which young people describe and experience identity and intimacy, which in turn could impact goals and expectations for long-term adult relationships. Reaching beyond the questions of this study, social work research will benefit by addressing how technology is creating new social environments at every stage of development.

Further, if we have meaningful information about online processes we can improve social work practice. Knowing more about online culture can be useful for practitioners as they support individuals to navigate online spaces. The more in depth our information is about individuals' perceptions of online experiences, the more social workers can conceive of new ways to empathize and understand clients at an individual level. Social work ethics emphasizes the importance of human relationships, and this research can reveal new ways individuals are relating to one another (Reamer, 1998). If indeed, individuals perceive their identity and intimacy to be shaped by online environments, then research is needed which examines these processes. Social workers can use this information to help clients decode online cultures while building strong and resilient relationships.

Additionally, online culture can influence social and cultural structures currently in place. The ongoing development of these environments could be leveraged to offer emerging adult females greater visibility and power in society. The potential for empowerment, both at an individual and community level, is dependent on the subjective interpretations of individuals. If the perception of research participants includes a proclamation of empowerment in online spaces, social workers can use this information to help others employ technology in meaningful ways. Conversely, if individuals report ICT as interfering and jeopardizing their ability to build a social support network,

interventions that maintain the dignity and worth of young women online need to be considered. This research addresses a fundamental part of daily life for young women, especially those who are high ICT users. Knowing the richness and effects of these experiences is important both for serving our individual clients, and understanding the process of a changing society.

This study expands the theoretical understanding of human development. Findings about young women's experiences can be used to inform theory, research, practice, and potentially advocacy. Ideally, findings will generate further inquiry about development and technology for other populations and stages throughout the lifespan. Chapter Two will expand on the social theories used to develop the research questions. Specifically, comparisons will be drawn between emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000) and critical realism (Archer, 2012). The research literature about ICT use and development will be synthesized, specific gaps will be discussed, and further justification for the current study will be provided.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter outlines the theories used to generate the research questions. Specifically, traditional theories of development are discussed and critiqued in consideration of contemporary society. Secondly, the theory of emerging adulthood is addressed, especially assumptions surrounding the use of ICT and developmental trajectories for women. Lastly, theories of critical realism are used to discuss the transition to adulthood from the perspective of relational sociology. Each theory was used to inform the research questions and provide an important perspective when considering the phenomena of transitioning to adulthood in an increasingly connected society.

Development Theories

In the 1960's traditional developmental psychologists theorized that young men and young women would achieve adulthood in different ways (Erikson, 1964). Erik Erikson is credited with laying foundations for developmental theory by introducing stages that represent important progression throughout the life course (Arnett, 2000). Erikson theorized that most women could only experience identity achievement after achieving intimacy, i.e., finding a life partner, entering a marriage, and having a child (Erikson, 1964). Whereas he proposed that men transitioned to adulthood by first understanding their identity and choosing a vocation (Erikson, 1964). During his lifework as a scholar, Erikson knew his theory was criticized as being based on inherently sexist assumptions (Erickson, 1964). When Erikson addressed this criticism, he still emphasized traditional social roles for women as a primary means for reaching adulthood (Erikson, 1964). This example shows how dominant cultural structures (i.e., socially acceptable perceptions of womanhood) are a powerful influence, and likely sway individual's

perceptions of which adult roles they will take on. As history shows, what changed the possibilities for women on a large scale began with individuals in the Women's Movement using their agency to challenge the dominant culture, and critically engage social structures on many levels (Castells, 1997).

Some developmental psychologists have suggested the development process for men and women is more similar than not: first, identity, and then, intimacy, a sequential pattern (Beyers & Seiffge-Krenke, 2010). Other developmental psychology scholars propose that young women have a more complex pathway to adulthood than men, but they only briefly address how social structures can complicate the pathway (Jensen & Arnett, 2012). The work of Jensen and Arnett (2012) assumes that changing social structures create obstacles for young women. This simplifies the potential interaction happening between a changing society and individuals experimenting with new pathways to adulthood. Despite certain shortfalls of Erikson's original theories of development, it has persisted through research and teaching (Arnett, 2000; Beyers & Seiffge-Krenke, 2010, Jensen & Arnett, 2012; Mackinnon et al., 2011). Indeed, emerging adulthood as a theory represents an adaptation of the Erikson framework to fit contemporary society (Arnett, 2000).

As described above, the Women's Movement began to broaden the definition of identity for women (Arnett, 2000; Castells, 1997). Traditional theories of development have failed to account for potential changes regarding intimacy, especially the complication of two individuals simultaneously working toward individual identity goals while trying to establish intimacy. Erikson states with conviction the importance of marriage and family as the fabric of society, "For the strength of the generations (and by

this I mean a basic disposition underlying all varieties of human value systems) depends on the process by which the youths of the two sexes find their respective identities, fuse them in love and marriage, revitalize their respective traditions, and together create and "bring up" the next generation" (Erikson, 1964, p. 586). Erikson believed that to move onto *generativity*, one must resolve the conflict of intimacy versus isolation primarily through marriage (Mackinnon et al., 2011). Contemporary studies that draw on Erikson have more broadly defined *generativity* as generative concern "general concern for the well-being of the next generation" (Mackinnon et al., 2011, p.589). How an individual defines and chooses concerns is fundamental to his or her personal identity, and may be realized within the bounds of a relationship, or not.

Emerging Adulthood

Emerging adulthood, as a theory of human development, emphasizes the heterogeneity and fluidity that occurs for young people transitioning to adulthood. Arnett argued that during the emerging adult phase, the exploration of social roles intensifies, and individuals try a many different adult roles. Arnett (2000, 2012) claimed that globalization changes developmental trajectories, especially since a more connected world offers exposure to multiple cultural contexts. He described the merging of global and local cultures as a *combined hybrid identity* (Jensen & Arnett, 2012). When taking on this new form of identity, women may reject traditional notions of womanhood defined by their local cultures and experiment with more global definitions during the emerging adult phase (Arnett, 2002). Later, Arnett and Jensen (2012) discussed how technology, specifically ICT's, are connected to increased globalization. The emerging adult theorists alluded to the importance of a global culture, without exploring how the social

environment interacts with individuals' personal development and long-term expectations for adult life. Research question one, "What are the concerns of emerging adult women and how do they fit with the traditional developmental tasks of identity and intimacy," is an inquiry about the general fit of this framework. Do young women of today feel they need to accomplish the developmental tasks of identity and intimacy before reaching adulthood? If the traditional theories still fit contemporary times, data should emerge that show the importance of securing a sense of identity and intimacy— especially the attempt to resolve intimacy versus isolation.

Agency

According to emerging adulthood theory, subjective markers now define a broader concept of adulthood. The transition to adulthood is based on an individual's expectation of what it means (personally) to feel like an adult. Identity development is claimed to depend upon one's sense of agency, or agentic functioning (Schwartz, Côté, & Arnett, 2005). Agentic functioning is shaped by self-esteem, perceived purpose in life, internal locus of control, and ego strength, each of which contributes to discovering a greater sense of life purpose (Schwartz et al., 2005). Identity achievement then becomes more personalized in nature as individuals redefine adulthood by experimenting with possibilities that hold great personal meaning (Arnett, 2000).

Jensen and Arnett (2012) suggest the developmental process for emerging adult women is complex and not fully understood, however, they did not connect the changing world with the developmental process of individuals. The popularity of Arnett's work remains, although he offers no direct discussion of how using one's agency to choose an individualized pathway impacts personal identity, or intimacy for that matter (Arnett,

2000). Emerging adulthood as a theory seems to assume that women have made a seamless transition to contemporary society, and individuals exercise their agency based on an internal set of individual skills, specifically self-esteem and ego strength (Schwartz et al., 2005). Arnett (2000) and the emerging adulthood theory emphasize that young adults purposefully delay traditional adult social roles and assume all young people are capable of exercising agency if they possess the right skills.

Critical Realism

The theories of emerging adulthood and critical realism overlap in many areas. Both consider the contemporary social environment as changed because of technology and both present arguments for individualism as a defining characteristic of adulthood (Arnett, 2000; Archer, 2012; Jensen & Arnett, 2012). Sociologist Archer (2012) argues that identity and intimacy, are entwined and develop concurrently, not sequentially, leading to difficult choices for both men and women. Another noteworthy distinction and advantage coming from the sociological perspective is the emphasis on the relationship between individualism and the changing social environment (Archer, 2000, 2012). Critical realism theories suggest the agency used by individuals changes the environment. Therefore, identity and intimacy are developmental tasks that intensify during maturation, but they are not mastered once someone leaves the specified age group. As described by Archer, “self-socialization in trans-modernity is a life-long undertaking” (Archer, 2012, p. 247). The ongoing changes within the social structure may demand constant adaptation of the individual throughout the course of adulthood.

According to Archer, the achievement of adulthood would not be the mastery of identity and intimacy because these choices are often at odds with one another. “What

they [young people] have to resolve reflexively is *whether, how and in what combination* these two kinds of final ends [careers and love] can go forward together and accommodate other concerns” (Archer, 2012, p.109). Archer (2012) claims maturity is mastering the ability to define concerns, develop projects, and engage in satisfying practices or adult social roles (Archer, 2012). Although having a career path is not synonymous with identity achievement, this is a significant example provided by Archer multiple times to show how individuals develop projects (2012). Thus, the concerns an individual develops often influences his or her chosen career. Relating this conflict to traditional theories, specifically Erikson (1964), a woman is expected to view opportunities for marriage and family as her priority. Further, Arnett (2000) emphasizes the period of emerging adulthood as exciting and promising, so long as people exercise their agency; the theory offers no substantial explanation about conflicts that may exist between worldview, work, and love. Archer (2007, 2012) is more critical; she believes the social interactions and opportunities presented during the emerging adult years become a great influence on the trajectories of young people depending on how the information is internalized (Archer, 2012).

Modalities of Reflexivity

A relational reflexivity approach emphasizes the personal meaning that is made by young people as they shape lives for themselves through the necessity of selecting information and discerning the best choices. Archer (2012) stresses that socialization starts in the home as families of origin impact the receipt of relational goods— such as “love, reliance, caring, and trust” (Archer, 2012, p. 99). The types of social interactions one has during the childhood years may influence these relational goods; one may have

experienced love in their family of origin and show a high degree of trust as they pursue romantic relationships during the emerging adult years. If trust is abused during a social interaction, future use of the relational good, trust, may change. Whether or not an individual has been instilled with these relational goods will impact the style of reflexivity that he or she may practice.

Fundamentally, critical realism acknowledges that the changes going on in the world do impact development and the ways people relate (Archer, 2000; 2012). Youth of today experience *contextual incongruity* where people are no longer surrounded solely by a local culture (Archer, 2012). The sources of information about society come from a global community, including new media and technology (Archer, 2012). Our personal identity is not reliant on society, rather, it emerges through a process of observing society, testing, reflecting, and deciding where one fits (Archer, 2007; 2012). Reflexivity, or connecting with one's inner dialogue, and realizing one's ultimate concerns, marks the formation of personal identity (Archer, 2000; 2012). To empirically test theories about reflexivity, Archer interviewed both male and female college students, ($N=36$) who were 18-22 years old, and asked them about their experiences at university. Strengths of the study included the use of qualitative and quantitative data, and the use of multiple interviews to understand the process of development (Archer, 2012). From this study, Archer developed a typology of reflexivity based on four different styles: communicative, autonomous, meta-reflexive, and fractured.

Communicative. The young people who rely on *communicative* reflexives are consumed with pleasing other people, especially their family members and those connected to the communities they come from. Their stories include being uncertain

about decisions, such as attending college and selecting a career path (Archer, 2012). The primary distinction for those who rely on communicative reflexives is the need for other people to confirm their choices before taking action (Archer, 2012). Overtime, several of the participants originally categorized as communicative progressed into a different reflexive style (Archer, 2012). Notably, there is fluidity in reflexive modes.

Autonomous. When an individual has a self-contained inner dialogue that leads to direct action, this is categorized as *autonomous* reflexivity (Archer, 2012). The individuals in this group were highly motivated and clear about future career plans. Further, they built friendships and relationships with those who had similar interests. Those with autonomous styles reported similar childhood experiences, for varying reasons they were all expected to be independent earlier on in their adolescence and childhood (Archer, 2012). Overall this group had created clear visions of their futures, and they had already set out to shape the lives they desired.

Meta Reflexive. Because morphogenesis, or changing structures, are happening more rapidly, certain individuals are frequently engaged with the global community and understanding how their individual choices impact those outside of themselves. Thinking of the consequences one's actions will have on the outside world is an internal dialogue known as a *meta-reflexive* dialogue. According to Archer, the individuals engaged in this meta approach all had parents who provided stability during the formative years and fostered the growth of relational goods (Archer, 2012). Contradictory to this stability, these young people show both concern for maintaining relations, but indifference to the social order—they show a special ability in critiquing structures such as the nation state and market economy. These young people take risks, and the risks are calculated actions

derived from their ultimate concerns and moral commitments — or personal identity (Archer, 2012).

Fractured. Lastly, *fractured reflexives* were those individuals who had not adjusted well to the changes going on in society. Rather, the distress of having more risk or opportunity than was comfortable led to freezing and avoiding action. Fractured reflexives focused their attention on immediate needs; decision-making was difficult, and defining a path even more so. The result of fractured reflexives is a lifetime focused on survival or immediate concerns. Further, this group commonly experienced negative relationships with family resulting in the opposite of relational goods, rather than trusting they were skeptical; previous relationships of care were one-sided, and they were less interested in maintaining family relationships (Archer, 2012).

All four styles of reflexivity show how internal dialogue's form. Archer (2012) demonstrates how agency within the social structure is not always simple: what becomes an opportunity for some is stress for others. Further, the internal dialogue and perception of risks and opportunities are shaped by social experiences, especially those that happen during the formative years of childhood (Archer, 2012). Research-question two, "Do emerging adult women describe their developmental experiences, as ways of engaging in morphogenesis, or maintaining social structures through morphostasis?" is informed by critical realism—specifically, this question seeks to understand how reflexivity, in combination with agency are used to engage in morphostasis and morphogenesis. During individual interviews young women will be asked to discuss their own feelings of agency. Also, interview questions will probe to find out if internal dialogue matches well with the outlined typology provided by Archer (2012). This study aims to understand further the

perceptions emerging adult women have about agency, and their own ability to change society. This study plans to examine critical realism as an alternate framework to traditional development theories.

Technology of the Self

Both Archer (2012) and Arnett (2004) hypothesize that ICT use provides meaningful interaction, however, how these experiences are internalized and become a part of our internal dialogue is yet to be understood. During the transition to adulthood, individuals rely on information within the social environment to understand what the world is like and where they may fit in. The incorporation of ICT use presents a unique opportunity for people to access more information about the world, and one's self. Each individual has the ability to practice many social identities that change with their surroundings; one person can house multiple social roles within the same "I" or self (Archer, 2000; Castells, 1997; Floridi, 2011). Personal identities are constructed by individual perceptions, biological reactions, social context, cultural cues, and the social processes undertaken during reflexivity that uses this information to create personal identity (Floridi, 2011). Of particular interest to Arnett is the ways in which individuals use information provided via ICT and internalize the experience.

Floridi (2011) presents an argument that ICTs are integral during social processes because they provide interaction and information. The construction of a virtual reality allows for individuals' to enhance reflexivity, by disengaging while their consciousness observes the interactions. "Obviously, any [information] technology, the primary goal of which is to manage records, is going to have an immense influence on how individuals develop and shape their own personal identities. It is not just a matter of mere quantity;

the quality, availability and accessibility of personal records may deeply affect who we think we are and may become” (Floridi, 2011, p. 564). The information provided by using ICT’s offers easily accessible and relatively accurate, informal and personal social records. The way online interactions are interpreted could change the meanings made in our consciousness, and influence our overall reflexive processes during development.

Emerging adult women interact with several social structures, cultural structures, and ongoing changes within networked society. Research question three, “How does ICT use influence emerging adult women and their personal reflexive style during the developmental process?” is posed to understand the impact ICT’s have during the developmental processes of emerging adulthood. New types of social interactions may influence the social experiences one has during development, and this in turn could impact their reflexive processes. The use of ICT’s, as described by emerging adult women, will help clarify how the transition to adulthood is changing and the potential role of technology in this process.

ICT Use & Development Research

Previous research on emerging adults’ use of ICT’s demonstrates how ICT use and human development intersect, especially around developmental tasks of identity exploration and intimacy (Subrahmanyam, Reich, Waechter & Espinoza, 2008; Subrahmanyam, & Greenfeild, 2008; Turkle, 2011; Walther et al., 2011). A number of studies cross several disciplines from sociology to family studies and human development that stress the importance of technology to social relationships. Specifically, a growing body of literature addresses ICT use of emerging adults and the impact on dating relationships (Coyne, Stockdale, Busby, Iverson, & Grant; 2011; Draucker &

Marstolf, 2010; Fox, Warber, & Makstaller, 2013; Mansson & Myers, 2011; Muise, Christofedes, Demaris, 2009; Odaci & Kalkan, 2010; Stevens & Morris, 2007; Tokunga, 2011). There is limited literature examining the role of technology as an actor in emerging adults development, a small number of studies have researched more directly the impact of ICT on development (Kuper & Mustanski, 2014; Manago, Graham, Greenfield, & Salimkhan, 2008; Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009). Literature theorizing the impact of ICT on adolescent development may offer insight, but given the theoretical complication specific to the emerging adult years, these studies have been excluded. To date, no studies have looked at women's use of ICT during emerging adulthood concerning developmental trajectories. The research studies that have been selected for review deal with development processes during the emerging adult period. Specifically, these studies deal with how ICT use and peer interaction are explored to further understand identity, and how ICT use and dating relationship experiences impact the development of intimacy.

Identity

Broadcasting a piece of our individual identity to others was much more difficult when outlets were restricted to traditional media, such as newspaper, television and radio (Baym, 2010). Now, rather than an elite group of people offered a platform, the opportunity to be visible and share a piece of oneself can be a part of the daily routines for emerging adult women (Duggan, 2014). Online media is distinctly different from traditional media because it allows interactions, and to understand the experience research must examine both the broadcast (sending) level and the consuming (receiving)

level. Thus far, research shows that common social media practices interweave with personal relationships as well (Marwick, 2015; Baym, 2010; boyd, 2014).

Social media, in and of itself, is a cultural phenomenon providing experiences outside traditional socializing formats. Individuals create a page or online presence in their likeness and then present their online selves, at all times of day, to other users who choose when and how to observe one another's content (Donnath & Boyd, 2004; Marwick, 2015). Marwick (2011) has described day-to-day activities on social media as *lifestreaming*. First, an individual watches his or her own behavior and everyday activities and then chooses the highlights or significant pieces to share with others. Indeed, lifestreaming has an emotional component to the process. Users carefully select and present, what information they subjectively believe are interesting to their network, to entice other users to watch their page (Marwick, 2011). The portrayal of media as social implies that users want their lives to be seen (Senft, 2008; Marwick, 2011). Some users may even go further, driven primarily by celebrity culture. Certain individuals might feel attention from many is more valuable than interaction with a few. Specifically, "microcelebrity" is a practice used within social media sites whereby individuals "strategically formulate a profile, reach out to followers, and reveal personal information to increase attention, and thus their online status" (Marwick, 2015). The intention behind particular posts, messages, or interactions has important implications for this study. Online interactions probably span a spectrum; some pieces of information shared are intended to garner more attention than others, and others are relatively benign and meant for a smaller group within the network (Baym, 2010; Turkle, 2011; Marwick, 2015).

Online social interactions offer individuals a unique opportunity to present personal information and consume information about the world around them, and for emerging adults this includes an emphasis on peers and potential partners (Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfield, 2006; Spercher, 2011). Although emerging adults receive personal attention from their social media use, the motivation for posting and the perceived benefit of posting is highly subjective. As an example, posting a selfie, was described by a group of psychology researchers as a manifestation of neuroticism (Eftekhar, Fullwood, & Morris, 2014). In the Eftekhar et al study, students were given an opportunity to complete a battery of personality tests, and then have their personal profiles analyzed. According to the findings of the study, having more pictures online was predictive of certain personality characteristics, specifically neuroticism and extraversion (Efteckhar et al., 2014). The researchers concluded that self-produced images are inappropriate social interaction, used by people who pathologically seek extra attention and affirmation.

However, some scholars defend an online activity, like posting a “selfie” (self-produced image) as a positive way to be seen by society (Tiidenberg, 2014). The way a researcher investigates an online interaction may influence the findings. Tiidenberg (2014) using qualitative methods, shows the passion and enthusiasm among a group of NSFW (Not Safe For Work) bloggers who post sexually explicit and nude images of themselves. The individuals in this community found posting nude self-images promoted body positivity and offered a way to subvert a judgmental gaze promoted by consumerism and perfectionism (Tiidenberg, 2014). “Self shooting is not a vapid form of narcissism but can be a very real and powerful way of reclaiming what sexy is and how it’s done” (Tiidenberg, 2014, p. 15). According to Tiidenberg’s (2014) findings, curating

and creating these images, within specific online communities, promotes connectedness to the self and the community. Some survey research has also confirmed, that for women, sharing photo's online is an activity correlated with reduced rates of stress (Hampton, Rainie, Lu, Shin, & Purcell, 2014).

Posting a selfie is a highly criticized practice popular among young adult women (Duggan, 2014; Marwick, 2015). These examples offer some insight and explanations into why people pursue online visibility (Marwick, 2015; Tiidenberg, 2014). To know and understand how interactions impact day-to-day life research needs in depth information. This particular selfie example was offered to show the difference between research findings when participants are asked directly about motivations and intentions. Specifically, there is still much to be learned about how people (research participants) interpret interactions, and then decide what and who to share with, and eventually how the individual internalizes these highly subjective interactions within their internal dialogue.

Social Media and Identity Construction

Online sociality (i.e., connecting and socializing via social networks) is likely to become a lifelong activity. During emerging adulthood, this activity intensifies as people seek feedback and practice impression management with their new adult roles (Lampe et al., 2006; Eckthar et al., 2014). Online platforms can be designed to recreate socializing from the offline world, but platform functions can create new social interaction; one poignant example is context collapse. This happens when one's personal network—comprised of individuals from different social circles such as work, school, and family—interact with the user in the same online space. This *context collapse* creates a networked

audience pulled together with people from different social spaces and communities, resulting in online presentations where performances are shaped for imagined audiences (Marwick, 2011). The practice of pruning and shaping information that is authentic and personal, but safe for a broad social group, could help to solidify a sense of identity. Alternatively, pleasing many people in a space of context collapse could create unnecessary challenges.

Previous research about college students found that most individuals view social media as an extension of offline social interactions (Pempek et al., 2009; Smith & Duggan, 2013; Yang, Brown, & Braum 2013). At a time when there is an intense focus on *personal identity*, through experimentation with adult roles, or *social identities*, individuals are likely to want a high exchange of personal information. For example, findings in one study asked college student Facebook users to rank whether they thought their account accurately represented who they were. On a Likert scale from one to five—a five representing highly agree their profile represents them accurately—the mean student score was higher than a four (Lampe et al., 2006). Another study examining the reasons for using Facebook found 84% of participants use Facebook to communicate with friends (Pempek et al., 2009). The second most popular reason for using Facebook was for entertainment. This particular study had notable methodological strengths. Students from an introduction to psychology class ($N=92$) did a weeklong diary activity; each day participants would fill out a checklist of possible activities as well as record their time spent on Facebook. Although certain limitations were still present, especially the use of a convenience sample, the diary activity provides information more reliable than recall data often collected using surveys. Further, findings from the diary activity

were used to develop a survey that was used to confirm themes identified by researchers (Pempek et al., 2009).

When reporting in their diaries about Facebook use, only 4.35% of psychology students claimed they wanted to present oneself to other users through their personal profiles. In the follow-up survey, participants were directly asked about identity—and 26.37% reported expressing identity/opinions using the site (Pempek et al., 2009). More popular reasons to use Facebook included keeping up with friends, avoiding boredom, taking a break from work and staying informed about social activities. The study conducted by Pempek (2009) and colleagues found that college students did not explicitly acknowledge their use of Facebook as a part of achieving developmental tasks, especially identity exploration. Further, only (6.9%) of the students reported using the site to try and find love. The findings in this study do not suggest Facebook is fundamental to development; rather it is a convenient way to stay connected and only peripheral to tasks of identity and intimacy. Again, the way these experiences are internalized is of particular importance for research question three, which aims to understand how online social experiences interact with individual reflexive styles.

Another study looking exclusively at the site Facebook used a content analysis of college students' pages ($N=63$), and when researchers analyzed Facebook pages, they reported the personalized sites were another form of social performance (Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008). The identity construction is ongoing “The Facebook selves appeared to be highly socially desirable identities individuals aspire to have offline but have not yet been able to embody for one reason or another” (Zhao et al., p. 1830). Within personal descriptions in the “about me” field responses included the use of clever

statements or a single interesting fact. According to the researchers, the users would not want to overwhelm others on the site with the need for confirmation or attention about themselves (Zhao et al., 2008). Continuing the participant's theme of subtlety, participants were more likely to post media preferences — like movies, music, or television shows before using traditional identity markers like politics or religions (Zhao et al., 2008). Females posted significantly more photos than males and reported managing their photos (e.g. untagging) more frequently (Pempek et al., 2009). Emerging adults may not openly acknowledge, or recognize, that Facebook use can be a part of identity construction. However, the activities they do report indicate that at least part of the satisfaction that comes from using social media is the social interaction or feedback. Identity is influenced by interactions, the environment determines these interactions to a degree, and people will adapt to their context. In a lab study of undergraduates Walther et al. (2011) found that when individuals were put into control groups and asked to practice extroverted/introverted behaviors in online public sites, the process triggered a feedback loop where positive attention and identity performance resulted in reported identity shifts. These findings imply that feedback matters to individuals. The participants in the experiment conducted by Walther (2011) and his colleagues demonstrated that an online social experience is incorporated by an individual, and treated as legitimate feedback, to the extent that individuals showed meaningful shifts in future self-presentation to reinforce their online social identity. Further, this shift occurred whether the feedback came from a blog-partner or the computer program, indicating that non-human agents can also influence our understanding of our social selves (Cirucci, 2014; LaMendola, 2010; Walther et al., 2011)

The previous two studies about Facebook presented findings that demonstrate how social media is used for identity work. Manago and her colleagues (2008) used qualitative work to understand young people's use of MySpace, showing that a different platform is still used for exploration of identity and relational experience (Manago et al., 2008). Using focus groups with 18-23 year old undergraduate students, researchers found emerging adults discuss MySpace experiences as an opportunity to present social identity, and receive affirmation from the audience within the network. Participants discussed how profile images were often idealized versions of the self (Manago et al., 2008; Turkle, 2011). The students also expressed concerns about how using the site could turn into an exercise of garnering extra or unnecessary attention (Manago et al., 2008). Participants in the group agreed that social media is a re-creation of yourself using social performance. They were also critical about the way people would alter themselves to conceal imperfections—some considered the altered images a goal or aspiration. Young people explicitly discussed how social media profiles would never fully represent who someone is (Manago et al., 2008).

Social media was also used to compare one's self to other users to "create a sense of self in relation to peers" (Manago et al., 2008 p. 452) Lastly, participants discussed the presentation of self and the use of gender identity. Both men and women talked about women working harder to impress other people, but acknowledged that men are also eager to impress even if their posts were subtle (Manago et al., 2008). Women were confronted with familiar double bind situations that existed before social media and are specific to gender. As an example, young women reported that other users would encourage them to display pictures that were sexualized, but would simultaneously insist

the young women avoid looking too promiscuous (Manago et al., 2008). The additional pressure and expectation placed on women are of particular interest to this study; especially how young women navigate online interactions when receiving conflicting information from a broad network of people. Findings from the Manago et al. (2008) study indicate that Myspace, as well as Facebook, is an opportunity to present information about yourself and receive feedback from your peers. This study intends to understand social media use more holistically by not limiting the discussion of experiences to one platform, participants will be encouraged to explore the motivation and intentions when using more than one social media site.

Internalizing Online Interactions

All of these studies provide examples of how people present themselves using social media. The focus of these studies was about online presentation, rather than how the feedback from the sites becomes internalized (Manago et al., 2008; Pempek et al., 2009; Zhao et al., 2008). To date, there has only been one study that asked emerging adults about how they internalize experiences online during development and the focus was on same sex attracted youth (Kuper & Mustanski, 2014). Using in-depth semi-structured interviews with 32 same sex attracted youth (SSAY), ages 16-24; participants were asked how Internet use impacted development narratives. The researchers analyzed data looking for patterns with similarities and differences (Kuper & Mustanski, 2014). Individuals in the LGBT community have a history of using online communities to find and support people like them during adolescent years (Kuper & Mustanski, 2014). Using narrative analysis, researchers found young people describe the Internet as integrated into developmental narratives.

To further explain these experiences, Kuper and Mustanski (2014) profiled four different youth to demonstrate the similarities and contradictions in their experiences. The first type of Internet experience was *extensive use*; here a young man reported LGBT online communities as a consistent and helpful source for learning about his own feelings and resolving identity confusion. In contrast, another user had *incidental use*— the young man mentioned using the Internet and found it to be helpful. However, the profile of the incidental user showed that his overall experience was less direct. The Internet was more supplemental for this user than fundamental. His online social activities were not directly related to his sexuality, and social interactions were focused on other interests such as music. The third type mentioned was *pivotal impact*; this young woman relied on the Internet for clarification about her emotions and general understanding of LGBT identity. When experiencing a difficult break up, she also turned to the same online community for support. Lastly, a young woman who had close relationships with her offline network, especially her family, described her Internet experience as more of a *missed opportunity*. Early on she was discouraged by her experiences with different types of online interactions. Specifically, the sexual nature of many contacts made her feel less interested in going online. Even though her first experiences were not what she was looking for, she turned to the Internet again during college to try and find an offline group or place to socialize with other women who were bisexual and lesbian. She was unable to find an offline group to network with as she had hoped.

Ultimately, the researchers summed up their findings by pointing out three primary functions of online interaction for SSAY “These primarily included locating information and support, making meaning of attractions and emerging identity, and

forging interpersonal connections (both online and offline)” (Kuper & Mustanski, 2014, p. 524). The role ICT played for individuals in the Kuper and Mustanski (2014) study depended on the types of needs they had, and also the ways interactions materialized. Those emerging adults who are provided relational goods during their formative years may not have as great a need for the Internet in order to connect and belong (Archer, 2012; Kuper & Mustanski, 2014). As seen by the pivotal impact user, some individuals may need more social support during the emergence of their identity because the family/community where they came from did not offer it or do not understand the identity. Archer (2012) uses a similar example, although the young woman is not LGBT identified, she copes with a poor home environment by learning as much as she can through the Internet. In her own recounting of her experiences building an identity, connecting with people outside her local community using ICT was crucial and offered a sense of hope (Archer, 2012). This study will expand on what is known about the internalizing of these experiences, and to what degree ICT use is connected to relational goods and reflexivity style.

Intimacy

A recent study found the age of first marriages in the United States has reached historic low, and the average age for a woman to enter marriage is now 27 (Manning, Brown & Payne, 2014). Cohabitation has steadily increased over the last 20 years (Manning et al., 2014). Erikson’s (1964) original assumptions about the importance of traditional marriage and family as a pathway to adulthood may no longer generally apply to women. Although marriage is currently changing, many individuals are interested in dating and actively pursuing relationships during emerging adulthood (Manning,

Longmore & Giordano, 2007). Dating relationships are largely experimental and heterogeneous, much like the emerging adult years themselves (Manning, Longmore, & Giordano, 2007; Morgan & Korovob, 2012). The state of contemporary dating relationships offers insight as to how these social interactions became focused on individual interests before commitment to the relationship progression. Previously researchers have shown that a great deal of social interaction with peers is time spent examining the intersection of identity and intimacy during dating, or whether the relationship is a good fit (Morgan & Korovob, 2012). A primary objective of this study is to understand how intimacy is experienced and understood by emerging adult women, and whether or not dating experiences influence their ultimate concerns for adulthood.

The contemporary state of emerging adult romantic relationships varies. During this age many options are available, experiences range from informal hookups to marriage during the emerging adult period (Willoughby & Carroll, 2010). The level of commitment and the relationship goals may vary between individuals. For those seeking a committed relationship, individuals eventually negotiate the social role of boyfriend and girlfriend (Willoughby & Carroll, 2010). Giordano claims the social status that comes with having a partner is considered supportive and a source of validation for some (Giordano et al., 2009). Today, questions of what constitutes a boyfriend or girlfriend are subjective and left to individuals to discern; however, the definitions are impacted by online interactions (Papp, Danielewicz, & Cayemberg, 2012). Despite the changing nature of dating relationships, no research was identified that focused exclusively on the impact of emerging adults' close friendships and feelings of intimacy via ICT use.

Numerous research studies have come out focused on how emerging adults' dating experiences are impacted by ICT; this is a review of those studies.

Relationship Inception

The availability of dating partners is changing (Hardey, 2004; Smith & Duggan, 2013). Previous research shows online dating sites are most often used by adults 25 years and older (Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs, 2006; Smith & Duggan, 2013). However, the use of dating apps may change all of this quickly. Tindr, for example, is already being hailed as the first “hook-up” app that young women will use (Greenfield, 2013). Some people are concerned that the potentially unlimited number of dating partners will cause societal problems. Supposedly, the sex addict or cheating partner can now access a sexual partner with more ease and efficiency (Weiss & Samenow, 2010). This concern became widespread moral panic this past year when a popular cheating website, Ashley Madison, was hacked exposing several prominent figures (primarily men) who went to the site looking to have an affair (Pelúcio, 2015).

Further, one research experiment using adolescent and emerging adult youth found that when provided with more online dating profiles, the youth would tend to look more; and the more they looked, the more their choices became diluted or unclear (Yang & Chiou, 2010). Although this controlled experiment may not represent actual dating scenarios, the findings indicate a potentially negative impact on partner selection when large networks are available. Here, a consideration should be made about what the effects are for emerging adults and relationship commitments when they know and understand the readily-available casual sexual networks and extended marriage pool (Yang & Chiou,

2010; Hogan, Li, & Dutton, 2011). How does the wider pool of potential partners influence perceptions of intimacy and the need to find a partner?

Meeting people and getting to know one another via online interactions, especially in the context of dating, could bring positives. Stevens and Morris (2007) hypothesized that online communications would be a way for those who experience social anxiety to maintain many types of social relationships, especially dating. In a study of undergraduates, certain technologies—specifically, webcams—were nine times more likely to be used by individuals who reported dating anxiety. This study did not report if the participants who were more likely to report dating anxiety were interacting with a partner they had also met online (Stevens & Morris, 2007). Previously discussed, undergraduates found that gathering more social information before initiating a relationship could reduce the pressure an individual felt (Stienfield, Ellison, & Lampe, 2008; Yang et al., 2013). During the inception of a relationship, informal activities may consist of virtual hangouts, which often include getting to know a person’s online identity through their social media accounts (Smith & Duggan, 2013).

Currently, online communications are an expected part of the inception of new romantic relationships; courting and flirting are a mix of face-to-face and online interactions (Hardey, 2004; Smith & Duggan, 2013; Yang et al., 2013). Dating research reports that a part of contemporary courtship involves “hang outs” (i.e., informal activities in mixed gender settings) as opposed to formal dates (Giordano et al., 2009). Additionally, 34% of emerging adults report researching potential partners online prior to meeting them (Smith & Duggan, 2013). The practice of vetting a potential date goes beyond seeking information in the beginning. Emerging adults openly discussed checking

out an individuals' online persona in order to get to know a person, especially a partner (Yang et al., 2013). Surveyed about dating behaviors, 47% of 18-24 year olds reported flirting online with a potential partner (Smith & Duggan, 2013). These examples show ICT use and social media, play a potential role in romantic relationship pursuits. Smith and Duggan (2013) did not clarify if these interactions took place via private messaging, or more directly through public posts and comments. Social media offers unique opportunities for getting to know an individual and flirting with potential partners.

Relationship Dynamics

Social media and ICT may impact how and when two people designate their relationship as an exclusive couple. Another study of emerging adult couples, together for at least one month, indicated their Facebook relationship status was an important part of the relationship development process (Papp et al., 2012). Other research studies have confirmed that choosing to post publicly a relationship status on Facebook can be a significant step between a couple (Fox, Osborn, & Warber, 2014; Fox, Warber, & Makstaleer, 2013b; Marshall, 2012; Zhao, Shwanda, Cosley, 2012). Beyond changing one's relationship status on the popular social media site Facebook, using an image of an individual and his or her partner as the profile picture predicted greater relationship satisfaction (Papp et al., 2012). Although the results showed that the majority of couples were similar in their social media use and presentation, limitations impacted the findings. The study used a cross-sectional survey of college students, which limits the general applicability of the findings (Papp et al., 2012). Furthermore, because the study only included those who reported being in a couple, a large number of daters who were not committed and those in the process of relationship churning (i.e. the practice of on-again-

off-again relationships) could have been excluded from the study (Papp et al., 2012). Social media can provide a means for expressing social identities (e.g., boyfriend or girlfriend) while simultaneously experimenting with dating relationships.

Intimacy may also develop through private conversations experienced via mediated communications. A study of married and engaged couples shows how positive use of ICT's help to enhance feelings of closeness within intimate relationships; individuals reported using online communications to speak frequently throughout the day as well as to express positive feelings and affection toward their partner (Coyne et al., 2011). The role of mediated messages potentially impacts feelings of intimacy and influences when and how people share intimate parts of themselves (Walther, 1996; Yang et al., 2013). Some emerging adult relationship types (e.g., on-again-off-again) show higher levels of intimate self-disclosure than emerging adults in stable relationships (Giordano et al., 2013). Despite the findings from the Coyne et al. (2011) study that intimate and loving messages were helpful for couples already in stable relationships, the level of intimacy shared through ICT's may not be the same for relationships in earlier phases of dating. Qualitative research can further explain how the experience of private text message conversations helped or hindered relationship boundaries.

In a study of African-American and Puerto Rican emerging adults, participants discussed the use of cell phones and text messaging as common during relationship inception and throughout dating experiences as a means for setting the pace of the relationship (Bergdall, Kraft, Andes, Carter, Hatifield-Timajchy, & Hock-Long, 2012).

During in-depth interviews, participants described avoiding constant contact and timing private messages with a casual partner as a strategy to maintain distance and set

emotional boundaries (Bergdall et al., 2012). Although not explicitly stated, the choice to not answer incoming calls or send a timely response text was a means for sending a message of apathy (Bergdall et al., 2012). In contrast to the previous example, these participants carefully timed messages so as not to encourage feelings of intimacy. There are parallel examples of young men controlling text message conversations to avoid seeming too intimate offered by Turkle (2010). The ways ICT's are used to communicate boundaries, develop trust, and provide care are certainly complex. Individual young people are likely to report different understandings of intimacy based on personal experiences during adolescence, or early emerging adult years, influencing how each individual processes the meaning of dating interactions.

Public Dating Experiences

In another study that closely examined this issue, Zhao (2012) and colleagues had 20 college students record a diary for two weeks and discuss Facebook activities related to their partners (Zhao et al., 2012). Facebook relationship status was generally seen as a positive affirmation for the couples (Fox et al., 2014; Zhao et al., 2012). On the other hand, other participants thought the use of a relationship status put them in competition with other couples and “numbed” the identity of the couple. The acceptance and public acknowledgement from the audience was not merely about receiving attention, but rather a “third party validation around self-identity” (Zhao et al., 2012, p. 774). Participants reported ways to promote their relationship without changing the status; some couples shared pictures taken with their partner as an informal way of announcing their relationship. Emerging adults opinions differed about whether changing relationship status would be a benefit, if the perceptions individuals have about the choice may

influence the relationship, and if the changed status will affect their partner's perception of the relationship (Fox et al., 2014; Giordano et al., 2009; Papp et al., 2012; Zhao et al., 2012). A public relationship status may enhance the intimacy between two people, or it may be used to shape an ideal image for other users. Either way, the experience is likely to influence how individuals interpret the importance of sharing personal information with their network.

One individual anecdotally noted the symbolic weight of profile pictures. Following an argument, her partner removed the picture that featured both of them and opted for an individual photograph. Soon after both stopped posting photos of one another, and the female participant saw this as a major indication their relationship was not going well. As entwined and complex as couples interactions have become, according to the authors, explicit communication is not a part of understanding the boundaries within the relationship (Zhao et al., 2012). If anything, the findings indicated that participants, especially females, reported watching their partner's behaviors closely and mimicking those behaviors to maintain harmony in the relationship (Zhao et al., 2012). To broaden the point, communicating predetermined rules or boundaries for social media use would have been seen as overbearing by a partner. Rather, individuals would often use social media interactions as implicit forms of communication regarding feelings.

Certain factors may trump the stage of the relationship. In a study of serious relationships, especially marriage, high use of social media by one partner often led to conflict centered on that partner's social media use and the potential negative outcomes from such use (Clayton, Nagurney, & Smith, 2013). Although there was not a direct relationship between social media use and negative outcomes; when the researchers

separated the group by relationship length, they found that for relationships under 36 months, the more time a partner spent using social media, the more likely they were to experience negative outcomes (Clayton et al., 2013). The closeness between an individual and those in their online networks, may jeopardize the relationship and threaten the trust between partners. The findings from these studies imply that social media can impact a relationship. How these experiences influence an individual's general understanding of intimacy is of particular interest for research question one and three of this study that consider developmental tasks and reflexive style.

Public Affection

As can be seen from the discussion thus far, Facebook is a complicated space for relationships, and individuals recognize there can be both positive and negative implications for personal relationships (Chiou & Edge, 2012; Elphinston & Noller, 2011; Papp et al., 2012). When asked about showing affection over social media sites, a study of undergraduates at a southern university found that females report higher rates of public displays of affection than males when using Facebook (Mansson & Meyers, 2011). In a content analysis of Myspace accounts, findings showed that females were more likely to present information about their partner in their self descriptions and were statistically more likely to mention their partner in different posts and throughout their page (Magnuson & Dundes, 2008).

Using social media as a couple invites people within the social network to observe and watch the relationship and decide for themselves the quality based on a couple's interactions (Fox, Osborn, & Warber, 2014; Sprecher, 2011). A participant in a focus group described how posting regularly on a partner's wall may look suspicious to

outsiders, or make the relationship seem weak and in need of outside validation (Fox et al., 2014). One's friend network also can use online social media to show either approval or disapproval of their friend's partner in a relationship (Sprecher, 2011). In a study of undergraduate students, participants reported using social media sites to both approve and disapprove of their peers' dating, and women were significantly more likely to engage in positive praise of friends' relationships (Sprecher, 2011). The social approval, and high rates of social network interactions regarding relationship status of women could potentially impact feelings and desires about being with a partner (Giordano et al., 2009; Manago et al., 2008). The feedback coming from the network may be considered significant and influence the concerns an individual has about his or her relationship or identity.

Further, males and females had different attitudes about showing affection online. Females were more likely to find online social interactions as appropriate (Mansson & Meyers, 2011). Studies about social media use have found that with friends, females are also more comfortable than males with being openly affectionate online (Manago et al., 2008). In a study of ICT's and dating relationships among adolescents, females were more likely to report viewing and monitoring a partner's information as acceptable in comparison to male participants (Lucero et al., 2014). Taking into consideration what these different research findings say about emerging adults' online behaviors, and attitudes, and emotions about online social interactions, there is still information needed about how individuals translate the subjective experiences. Research should also be conducted to understand how dating relationship experiences become a part of developmental narratives, rather than focus solely on relationship outcomes.

Jealousy and Social Media

Several recent studies about experiences of jealousy and dating relationships found Facebook activities to be positively correlated with feelings of jealousy (Elphinston & Noller, 2011; Muise et al., 2009; Marshall, Benjanyan, Di Castro, & Lee, 2013). Muise et al. (2009) claimed that an individual's personality and the status of his or her relationship were strong predictors of Facebook jealousy, a phenomenon described as similar to romantic jealousy. Gender was also a strong predictor of reports of jealousy (Muise et al., 2009). Females in the study were more likely than men to experience jealousy of their partners when using Facebook (Muise et al., 2009). A more recent study testing for jealousy over Facebook found that relationship quality was a stronger predictor than attachment style (Marshall et al., 2013). Elphinston et al. (2011) claim that feelings of jealousy and relationship dissatisfaction through Facebook participation are similar to romantic jealousy because Facebook intrusion creates a constant stream of disruption. The looking partner is provided with an abundance of information, which can affect the perception of the relationship. Facebook intrusion encouraged surveillance behaviors, cognitive jealousy, and negatively impacted the ability to build relationships (Elphinston et al., 2011). Some have expressed exasperation at how a variety of information, or posts, available through Facebook can lead to arguments and questioning a partner's original intent (Fox et al., 2014).

These findings do indicate a need for further understanding. The average age of participants in the Elphinston et al. (2011) study was 19, and feelings of jealousy may possibly decrease with age. Furthermore, including a variety of online platforms other than Facebook might provide insight as to how the platform culture impacts feelings of

jealousy (Madden, Cortesi, Gasser, Lenhart, & Duggan, 2012). Also, because of study limitations, these cross-sectional studies do not indicate Facebook is the cause of the jealousy. Research that provides a description of the social interactions that facilitated the jealous reaction can give context to emerging adults' interpretations of these experiences. Feelings of jealousy likely exist in both online and offline spaces. Those who are coming to the relationship with relational goods—such as trust, previous experiences with love, and caring— may not feel as tempted to use ICT as a way to establish trust. Also, those who have a negative interaction spurred by the use of ICT may have their ability to trust hindered, and their reflexive style may be impacted (Archer, 2012).

Multiple research studies on dating relationships and ICT use examines the role of technology when a partner decides to monitor or conduct surveillance of their partner (Draucker & Marstolf, 2010; Marwick, 2012; Tokunga, 2011; Tong & Walther, 2011). Surveillance may occur at many different stages in the relationships. Whether the monitoring or surveillance is socially acceptable changes based on the intensity, intentions, and timing of the surveilling party. Marwick (2011) claims there is a clear distinction between traditional surveillance and the everyday practice of *social surveillance*. Specifically, traditional surveillance uses a large social institution in order to exert power or control over the other while; on the other hand, social surveillance is a compilation of typical, daily interactions outside of power dynamics used by those groups. The daily activities of social surveillance include: “ongoing eavesdropping, investigation, gossip and inquiry that constitutes information gathering by people about their peers, made salient by the social digitization normalized by social media” (Marwick, 2011, p. 382).

Other research has reported on the use of social media sites for monitoring or watching those in our personal network, especially romantic partners (Tokunaga, 2011; Yang et al., 2013). In the development of an interpersonal surveillance scale, Tokunaga observed that monitoring the personal networks of romantic partners through social media is an expected strategy for information gathering activities. Tokunaga (2011) and colleagues created a tool measuring items such as “I try to read comments my partner posts on social media” and “I explore my partner’s page to see if there is anything new or exciting” and tested the scale with a sample made up largely of female college students (Tokunaga, 2011, p. 710). Ultimately, the findings suggested that interpersonal surveillance is a normal and an expected part of relationships. Hypotheses that interpersonal electronic surveillance behaviors are born of circumstance, such as a partner’s infidelity, were null (Tokunaga, 2011). Previous research has shown that adolescent girls are more likely to describe interpersonal surveillance behaviors as normal in dating relationships (Lucero et al., 2014). However, in a recent study using an emerging adult sample, after controlling for time spent on social media sites, the findings show that men look at a partner’s Facebook page more often than women (Marshall et al., 2013). Thus, interpersonal surveillance may potentially be a form of relationship control, or an attempt to gain power, or it may be nothing more than a partner watching and learning about another individual. Although the constructs are defined as separate, there is great overlap between social browsing and interpersonal surveillance (Ellison et al., 2006; Tokunaga, 2011). Additional research is needed to understand fully this phenomenon. Intentions and motivations for watching another on social media can offer insight into these behaviors.

Relationship Dissolution and Social Media

One of the most puzzling times for distinguishing boundaries is when a couple breaks off a romantic relationship. Letting go of a partner can be a challenging task, and some researchers suspect this is increasingly difficult with the availability of detached interaction and personal information available via social media (Fox et al., 2014; Marshall, 2012). In a study of Facebook users ($N=464$), 84% of whom were women ($M=21$ years old), Facebook surveillance accounted for a lower level of adjustment after the relationship (Marshall, 2012). Those who were no longer Facebook friends but still visited their ex-partner's page and monitored their partner's friend list were more likely to report a desire to get back together with their partner or feel negative emotions toward their ex. In contrast, former couples who remained Facebook friends but did not monitor their ex-partner's behavior experienced a more rapid post break-up recovery, were significantly less likely to experience sexual attraction to their former partner and harbor negative feelings or report longing for a former partner (Marshall, 2012). Similarly, in a study of 206 undergraduate students at a large southern university, LeFevbre and colleagues found that participants who reported no impact or limited impact caused by Facebook during their break-up had higher adjustment scores than participants who reported Facebook impacting the breakup process (LeFevbre, Blackburn, & Brody, 2014).

To synthesize, those who remained Facebook friends would have less desire to get back together with their former partner, but would also have weaker narratives surrounding the event as changing their outlook (Marshall, 2012). Those who were not friends with their ex-partner, but did take steps to monitor the page reported more

difficulty in recovering. A major limitation of this study was the use of a convenience sample and cross-sectional data; the findings presented offered no way of knowing if monitoring or surveillance was happening because someone still had feelings or if they had feelings because they continued interacting with former partners through Facebook. Qualitative data about Facebook and relationship dissolution explains that some individuals think the availability of information through social media makes overcoming romantic feelings for a former partner more challenging, in comparison to times when this information was not available (Fox et al., 2014). The amount of information available about a partner or an expartner is unlikely to be the cause of feelings toward that person, but it may influence the sustained feelings of closeness. Relative to research question three, this study seeks to understand how individuals discern what information matters, why, how they change information flow during different stages of a relationship, and how this impacts their personal identity.

When the practice of surveillance goes too far, the resulting interaction might be abuse or harassment (Draucker & Marstolf, 2010; Finn, 2004; Lindsay & Krysik, 2012; Southworth, Finn, et al., 2007; Tokunga, 2011). Instances of abuse or harassment hinge on one user misreading a boundary and making the other feel uncomfortable or unsafe. There is a growing body of literature that addresses the experiences of online harassment and cyberstalking (Bennett et al., 2011; Finn, 2004; Fox & Makstaller, 2013, Fox et al., 2014; Lindsay & Krysik, 2012; Melandar, 2010; Marwick & Miller, 2014; Muise, Christofedes, Demaris, 2009; Mansson & Myers, 2011; Schenk & Fremouw, 2012). This work should be noted as potentially significant to this study given the high risk emerging adult women face for crimes related to intimate partner violence. When and how the

online activities between parties change, the intensity of the behavior, the motivation, and perception of both parties is an important gap in the current state literature.

Summary

“...human relations are covertly attributed to the *virtual social*, which is, instead simply non-human. If the production of fictitious, illusory, simulated worlds implies the loss of the distinction between virtual and real, the human social is simultaneously distorted, and enormous problems of communication and identity are created. Nevertheless, it must also be admitted that it is these very phenomena that generate the quest for new distinctions.”

Pierpaolo Donati, 2011, p.39

Adulthood in the trans-modern era is shifting, and young people coming into their adult lives must make sense of who they are, and how to successfully integrate into an ever-evolving society (Archer, 2007, 2012). How the *virtual social* becomes internalized within the individual is the primary interest of this research. Based on certain findings in the studies presented, ICT facilitates frequent interaction related to developmental experiences. Pertinent findings suggest the creation of an online presence provides a stream of peer feedback, interacting with identity construction. Online socializing offers new ways to meet people, and connect romantically, interacting with intimacy.

The descriptive studies bring understanding about some of these online experiences and indicate that online sociality may influence identity and intimacy. Current literature about technology and emerging adults has heavily relied on surveys and has not provided an in-depth description of how individuals' subjective interpretations are a part of these online experiences. Those qualitative studies that were available focused on either a singular platform (e.g., Facebook) or in the case of one study, same-sex attracted youth (Kuper & Mustanski, 2014). Yet, given the common thread of high-

user activity among young women, they as people may share a social need that is fulfilled through online interaction.

Online experience is not uniform, and what is still not clear is why young adult women as a group are motivated to use ICT so frequently. Social workers have an obligation to understand how human interactions shift, reshape, and change given the availability of ICT (LaMendola, 2010). Examining young women as representative users might generate additional insight into the nature of online interaction, and changing relationship experiences. Knowing why people gravitate toward online community, identity experimentation, and relationship communication through ICT can help delineate how to best support and honor human relationships in contemporary life.

How contemporary society influences the development process, and especially the ways these interactions become a part of one's reflexive practice, can further explain the transition to adulthood young women now experience. The emerging adult phase is filled with individualized and subjective interpretations of how one first understands themselves through identity, close and personal relationships, and interactions within a networked society. The availability of ICT changes the volume of social interaction, and potentially the nature of socializing. Determining how this abundance of social interaction is sorted through and given meaning is vital for knowing how young people establish their ultimate concerns. The online social world has the capacity to offer limitless social interaction, detached from a physical community. How people undertake these possibilities during the formation of their adult identity likely depends on individual's social needs.

Lastly, the availability of contact with other humans at any given time could change how young people are experimenting with intimacy and feelings of closeness. Currently, research about dating relationships emphasized relationship outcomes over developmental processes, and little is known about how dating experiences impact identity development. However, the way a person weighs their emotions and the experience of being with another person is an important foundation for adult life. Their intimate connections may not result in romantic relationships, but the desire to feel closeness to other people remains critical. To summarize, young women are drawn to ICT, and as a group can provide valuable understanding of online sociality. These new social interactions may influence who they become as people, and who they forge intimate relationships with for their future. Yet, all of these possibilities are dependent on personal interpretations and insight during their developmental experiences.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

To conduct this exploratory study, a phenomenological qualitative approach was used to create an account of the everyday lives of emerging adult women and their developmental experiences in relation to ICT use. Additionally, the study was situated within a constructivist paradigm, which allows for multiple constructions of the lived experiences of participants shaped by important historical and social contexts (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Participants shared their stories, and those stories were analyzed for patterns and themes. Phenomenology was used to capture rich description of the experiences of emerging adult females during the developmental process and to determine how ICT use influences their daily lived experiences during this phase (Giorgi, 1997).

The theoretical framework used for this research was critical realism using a human development approach. Developmental theory, especially that of emerging adulthood, is a specific way of understanding the process of transition and has been used to develop and inform the research questions. Further, social work research has a history of connecting an individual's developmental trajectory in context with social environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Theories of critical realism point to how the changing society, brought on through ICT, demonstrates the need for using qualitative methods to understand more about lived experiences as the interactions of individuals and social environments shape one another (Donatti, 2011). Information philosopher Floridi describes ICT as tools used subjectively, "The more virtual the structure becomes, the more it is disengaged from the external environment in favor of an autonomously constructed world of meanings and interpretations, the less physical and more virtual the

bonding force can be. The self emerges as a break with nature, not as a super connection with it” (Floridi, 2011, p.560). The use of critical realism as a theory was crucial for understanding the construction of social and cultural structures in this world of meanings and interpretations. Qualitative work can offer depth and essential context for knowing how the daily practices and lived experiences that intermingle with the subjective virtual world are influencing an individual’s perceptions of society. Although the findings of this phenomenological study are subjective and not intended to represent any one reality (Giorgi, 1997) the findings can inform theoretical understandings of the phenomenon and guide future research generating new hypotheses. Finally, given the subjective nature of phenomenology, the remainder of the dissertation will be written using the first person for reasons of transparency.

Throughout her career, Dr. Markham has explored new ways for research to investigate outcomes from Internet use, stressing the importance of qualitative work. When designing this study, the following passage from Annette Markham stood out as applicable for the research approach. She discussed how using the Internet can be unpredictable but remains a promising prospect for social science research:

“Taking a remix approach ...where we engage in everyday practices of sense making. The concept of remix highlights activities that are not often discussed as a part of method and may not be noticed, such as using serendipity, playing with different perspectives, generating partial renderings, moving through out multiple variations, borrowing from disparate and perhaps disjunctive concepts and so forth....Adaptation and creative innovation is sorely needed to study the complexity of digital life.”

(Markham, 2013, p.65).

This study followed the remix approach, embracing the Internet as a means to accomplish the study objectives. The study design included using the online environment to locate and recruit participants, and throughout the duration of the study continued

contact between the participants and the researcher were explored. The following sections outline the study procedures, demonstrating how Internet was an asset during the research process.

Ethics

Before the study began, permission for the study was obtained from the Arizona State University Institution Review Board (IRB), please see Appendix A. Participation in the study included recorded interviews using Skype, and interaction with a Facebook account designated for the research study. Before beginning any interviews, the participants' were informed of the research study protocols. Participants were informed during the recruitment process that information from video recordings and participation on the site would potentially be used for research purposes and shared publicly. Throughout the recruitment process, the researcher explained via email how to consent to either anonymous participation or shared public participation. Informed consent documents were provided online using Qualtrics, a survey software package accessible through the university. After being sent the link, participants could read the agreement, and formally consent to the study using an electronic signature. An informational sheet was provided to participants with contact information for Dr. Judy Krysik, the primary investigator, and the IRB (see Appendix B). All information posted through the Qualtrics link was also shared with participants through email attachments.

Internet research not only offers benefits but also increases certain risks. Specifically, the use of search engines, IP addresses, and traceable data left on the web during any exchange limits the amount of anonymity that can be offered to participants. Because of the personal nature of the study, I took reasonable precautions to prevent the

inadvertent disclosure of any confidential information within my control; however, participants who chose to share their stories online agreed and acknowledged that I could not guarantee data security would not be compromised during transmission (Markham, 2013). All participants had access to me through email, and social media sites set up specifically for the study. To honor and respect the personal nature of these stories, participants were encouraged to have ongoing contact and voice any concerns.

To ensure participants were clear about the different levels of participations offered in the study, all participants were required to sign a release form detailing their preferences about which type of data could be collected and/or shared. Participants were given two options; first was to participate anonymously with extra precautions to detach personal information from being linked to the study. The second option included agreement to some public use of information, video recordings, and social media postings. Individuals who opted for the second option were asked to provide additional consent acknowledging the use of their videos for presentations and publication. Specifically, ASU offers a Performing, Modeling, Narration contract, which explicitly agrees that information, is meant for some degree of public consumption (see Appendix C). After a participant had been enrolled I would send a Facebook friend request, all of the social media interaction through this site were considered part of the data collection process. Information shared by participants' online using social media were intended for a public dialogue; I served as an online facilitator, and actively worked to maintain the safety and integrity of participants. Those participating in the research study social media sites were advised the forums were semi-public, and sharing risks should be considered the same as in all social media use.

Record Storage

For data storage purposes, each participant was given a study identification number. All video files, correspondence, social media archives, and transcripts were saved to individual files using the study number. Documents, file names, and other identifying information were changed to a pseudonym, rather than the participant's actual name. A single file folder, with paper copies of transcripts and other client information, are stored in the researcher's home office. All files are currently saved on my personal laptop, and using an external hard-drive. Data coding and analysis files are also saved online via Dedoose software, as well as on the laptop and hard-drive.

Sample

For this study, 22 women participated representing a robust and varied group of individuals. All of the participants had some form of post-secondary or higher education and many were currently pursuing their bachelor or graduate degrees; one participant had a degree from a trade school. Participants represented a variety of demographic groups, for a detailed description of sample characteristics see Table 1 below.

Table 1. Sample Demographic Information (N = 22)

<i>Age</i>	18-22	6
	23-25	7
	26-29	9
<i>Gender</i>	Female	20
	Agender	1
	Androgynous	1
<i>Sexual Orientation</i>		14
	Heterosexual	
	Lesbian	1
	Bisexual	2
	Pansexual	2
	Unidentified	3
<i>Ethnicity</i>	Biracial	3
	Black/African American	5
	Latino/Hispanic	1
	Native American	1
	White	12

Eligibility

Recruitment criteria included: age (must be 18-29), self-identify as female or under a gender-queer umbrella of alternate gender categories, classify as a high user of ICT— e.g. goes online everyday and has more than one social media account. Because parts of the study required a retrospective narrative about identity formation during the emerging adult years, age criteria focused on females who were going through the emerging adult years as well as those exiting the emerging adulthood phase. Since ICT use has advanced rapidly over the past ten years a 28-year-old participant versus a 22-year-old may have different experiences even though both reported as high users (Smith & Duggan, 2013). Additionally, high user status was based on previous activities and behaviors described by the PEW Internet and American Life Project (Smith & Duggan,

2013). The criteria included the use of more than one social media account, daily Internet use, and ownership of a smartphone. To formally enroll, individuals were asked to identify their age, gender identity, and all individuals were expected to have an understanding of the study requirements. The study aims were to enroll between 15-25 participants for interviews. A total of 22 participants were interviewed (see Table 1). As a token of appreciation, each participant was given a \$15 gift card to Amazon for participating in the first interview. The 21 young women who participated in the second interview, and helped to provide digital content of their online lives were each given an additional \$10 gift card.

A snowball sampling approach, specifically *opportunistic sampling*, was used (Krysik & Finn, 2014). Participants were found online, offering access to emerging adult women from across the United States. Sullivan claims sampling done online should focus on highly competent users and youth; the benefits include representations of different regional cultures and a community mirroring online spaces (Sullivan, 2013). The use of opportunistic sampling was a successful strategy and allowed for the research process to unfold. One goal was to represent the heterogeneous nature of emerging adult females, as seen in Table 1 the group was diverse in many aspects. Participants were found with different cultural backgrounds, race/ethnicity, income, rural/urban upbringing, varied living situations, career status, socio-economic status, education, motherhood, and religion. However, the young women commonly identified as middle-class and all had pursued some form of independence through education or career efforts.

To recruit participants, advertisements were posted in online forums (e.g., Craigslist or student listservs). Additionally, emails were sent to those in my professional

and personal networks for referrals and dissemination to other emerging adult females. Finally, social media provided a way to informally advertise study details to a broad national audience. In addition to sharing study details on my personal social media pages, I directly messaged and invited certain young women online whom I knew fit certain criteria. The majority of participants were found based on referrals (e.g., information shared through mutual acquaintances' social media accounts).

Using the leads and recommendations of participants, and those within the original networks contacted for advertising, allowed recruiting to pursue several avenues to find diverse participants. Representing different experiences was intended to fill gaps left by other studies relying on college students for their sampling. Specifically, different participants' diversity has the potential to influence how, where, and why individuals' create associations within their networks (LaMendola, 2010). As feminist scholar bell hooks describes, there is an authority of experience that connects a person's physical body with their social conditioning, experience, and interaction with the broader society (hooks, 1994). To better understand the emerging adult phase, one aim of the study was to expand the story of online experience to include description and detail about the developmental procession by carefully appraising how diverse qualities influenced young women's experiences.

Using opportunistic sampling allowed for me to adjust and recruit specific demographic groups in order to meet the original goals of the study. As an example, I reached out to a friend who is a mother because I wanted to represent that experience and social role in the study. Prior to the study, I had a personal relationship with seven of the participants. The majority of the participants ($n = 10$) found out about the study through

Facebook sharing. Facebook offered an easy route for informal introductions, many people would tag (or link) my Facebook account, as well as the person they had in mind for the study, in the same post. The original posters knew me either personally or professionally; these informal connections may have positively influenced individuals' decisions to participate. In addition to Facebook, I also used Tumblr and Twitter to privately message users and recruit regular users ($n = 3$). I had never had a personal conversation with these users, but one of the participants had been following my own Tumblr blog and was familiar with my personal interests. Lastly, two of the participants found an advertisement through Craigslist and sought out the study on their own. To conclude participants had a range of trust and familiarity with me as the researcher going into the process. The influence I had on participants' processes will be discussed in greater depth throughout the results.

Online recruitment and interviews were an innovative and realistic approach, given the population (Sullivan, 2013). Using online spaces to conduct the interviews eliminated certain constraints that could have prevented individuals from participating in traditional face-to-face interviews. Those without transportation, resources, or time to participate under normal circumstances may have decided to participate because of the convenience offered by meeting via online video chat programs (e.g., Skype). Participants were not asked explicitly if the online format was a benefit or obstacle, but several individuals mentioned the convenience of interviewing online as opposed to in-person. To my knowledge, no participants opted out of the study because of constraints with the study procedures, however, when participants brought up issues with the format, accommodations were made where possible. For example, multiple participants were sent

information on how to download Skype onto a mobile phone. Additionally, one participant requested the second interview be conducted using online chat rather than video call, for matters of privacy. No study can avoid limitations, but given the nature of the research questions and the participants being recruited, the use of online recruitment strategies provided many advantages, and individuals were receptive to the format.

Data Collection

The research study included several steps, starting with a pilot study. Once data collection began, the research participants were invited to participate in two distinct phases. A table visualizing the study timeline is found in Appendix D. During the first phase I conducted a 90-120 minute semi-structured interview including the collection of demographic information. The second phase allowed me to continue to have ongoing interaction with participants; this included the option for a second interview and participation in online forums. One participant opted out of the second interview and expressed concerns about further participation. When asked for her reasoning or a chance to improve her experience, the participant discontinued correspondence. The remaining participants ($n = 21$) all agreed to the second interview.

To prepare for the interview process, several practice interviews were conducted to help minimize biases. Pilot research can be used in qualitative studies to 1) prepare the researcher for potential problems, 2) improve the quality of experiences for participants during the data collection period, and 3) increase the consistency of research procedures (Kim, 2011). For this study, I used a series of practice interviews to act as a pilot for testing the research questions and interview schedule. A total of seven young women volunteered for the pilot interviews.

When using a practice interview, Kim (2011) found she had presented herself in a way that could inhibit building rapport; by focusing on the professional, objective status one may expect from a researcher, she overlooked important cultural practices and made the participants feel uncertain about the process. Also, to best prepare an interview for cultural differences, Kim (2011) recommends trying to understand the perceptions and views participants already hold about major concepts in the study, as well as remaining flexible and open to collaboration during the process. An additional benefit of recruiting online was the opportunity I had to view participants' social media accounts in between interviews, and in some cases before the first interview. Practice interviews were a chance to explore wording, phrasing, and ordering of specific questions to minimize the potential of leading the participant and to anticipate the influence of the researcher (Kim, 2011). During the pilot interviews, I worked to identify any language or concepts that seemed too far removed from the everyday lives of young women.

The practice interviews were recorded, and notes were used to recognize how the questions potentially influenced the interviewees. Data from the seven practice interviews were not used for the purpose of analyses or findings. After listening to the practice interviews and receiving feedback from these volunteers, the interview schedule was revised. The finalized version of the interview schedule was used with all participants. A copy of the interview schedule is included in Appendix E. Throughout the pilot study, participants reported how the interview style and questions helped or hindered the process. Several individuals reported feeling more comfortable and open to sharing when I would disclose parts of my own experiences. To allow for rapport building, and elicit

the most honest and personal narratives as recommended by the pilot interviewees, I tried to make the interviews conversational when possible.

Two of my colleagues agreed to provide support through peer debriefing. The last step in the pilot phase included my colleague conducting the interview, using myself as the participant, as a step in understanding potential problems. She and I spent time afterward discussing different ways I could avoid leading participants, and keep the focus on questions as they were written. We also discussed potential biases that may influence my rapport with a participant; my positionality is discussed in more depth below.

Phase One

Semi-standardized individual interviews were conducted with study participants. Additionally, probing and impromptu questions were used to elicit more in-depth narrative descriptions (Berg & Lune, 2004). Audio and video interviews were the primary source of data. During phase one, young women participated in a semi-structured interview recorded using Skype. Participants were asked to retrospectively describe their lived experiences from the ages of 18-29 years. This first step used an in-depth life events interview so participants could detail their most consequential experiences during their formative years as a child up through their years as emerging adults. The interview schedule began with demographic questions, to help the interviewee ease into the process. Using the previously outlined critical realism framework, questions focused on moral commitments, ultimate concerns, autonomy, and perception of place in society (Archer, 2012). Additionally, to understand more about participants' perspectives on the idea of delayed adulthood, questions were used from a survey designed by Arnett (2012).

The primary objective of the initial interview was to get participants to tell stories about their day-to-day experiences, including some description of ICT use during their emerging adult years. To avoid biases, and leading participants into creating socially desirable narratives about development, the participants were not told directly that the purpose of the study was to understand identity and intimacy. Instead, participants were informed the study was about understanding young adult women's daily experiences during the transition to adulthood, and when specific questions about technology were asked, careful prompts and further probes offered insight about their individual use patterns.

Phase Two

Participants were given the option to be interviewed a second time, the follow-up interview was treated less formally, and participants were encouraged to lead the conversation. The first interview was semi-structured and offered uniformity across all participants whereas the second interview was less formal and narrowly tailored toward the participant's individual narrative. During the follow-up, the participants were asked more explicitly about their perspectives on the role of ICT use. Open-ended questions with loose interview probes were sent to the participant for review ahead of time (see Appendix F). During the second interview, I practiced informal member checking by discussing the first interview, specifically notes written about the participant during the initial interview, to uncover potential researcher bias. This use of member checking allows for participants to respond and react to the interpretations of the researcher, a process that also builds trust with participants (Padgett, 2008).

The final opportunity for participation was interaction with research social media pages where young women could submit digital content and contact the researcher with any remaining ideas (see Appendix F). This strategy is an ethnographically informed use of triangulation, popularized by digital media scholars as a way to collect content representing the online life of participants (Markham, 2013). Participants were directed to the social media pages and asked to contribute digital media that they believed represented their experiences and that they felt comfortable sharing. Many participants were engaged on the Facebook social media page where public discussions included interacting with the researcher and other participants, an efficient way to engage in member checking with the researcher and other participants. Not all participants decided to share content, or comment using the social media page. Further, most participants did not choose data specifically from their pages as examples of their daily online activities. However, the ability to interact with participants and observe their online presence still proved useful. To be thorough, I archived certain posts, content, and comments during the period of online data collection. Finally, certain participants reached out, via email and direct messages, to connect with me and clarify parts of their stories. These exchanges were archived with individual files and considered part of the data collection.

Analysis

In order to rigorously analyze the data, two approaches were used— narrative analysis and open thematic coding. During the ongoing analysis process, a third party transcribed all interviews. The interview process created an abundance of data to be sorted and organized. The average participants produced 61 pages of transcript data,

totaling 1,351 pages. Data was broken down into 6 major themes, and approximately 15 subthemes are discussed throughout the findings.

First, I reviewed data using narrative analysis techniques and open thematic coding. A narrative analysis of each participant's interview(s) was used to draw out a story that described a *sequence* of events and *consequences* based on her/their experiences during emerging adulthood (Riessman & Quinney, 2005). The interviews were intended to draw stories about individuals' lives as they came to understand intimacy and identity. Narrative analysis is a useful approach because individuals construct stories around their experiences whether or not they are told through research. "In everyday use, however, narrative has become little more than metaphor—everyone has her 'story'—a rising trend linked to the use of the term in popular culture: telling one's 'story' on television, or at a self-help group meeting" (Riessman & Quinney, 2005, p.393). Because storytelling, or narratives about the self, seem to be a crucial part of post-modern identity, analyzing the data included honoring the perspective and narrative the individual had worked to create. To accomplish rigor and preserve the perspective of the story tellers, each narrative summary underwent a three-step process. First, I listened to the interviews while simultaneously taking notes and familiarizing myself with the data. The initial summary was written describing key facts, events, and ideas presented by the participant. Secondly, the summary was edited and formatted to make a narrative summary. Each narrative summary includes a story arch, including event sequences, and consequences and an analysis of participants relation to pertinent theories (e.g., reflexive style).

Narrative analysis can be a practical and helpful way to create research that is related to practice; similar to working with clients, the emphasis lies in understanding the process of creating the narrative. Through a careful reading of the data, the researcher can understand the story presented but can also use a more critical eye to notice what parts of the story are left out and how the narrative influenced perceptions (Riessman & Quinney, 2005). After the interviews were completed I wrote a brief summary about each individual participant. This first round of analysis began immediately after the data collection ended. Revisions, editing, and refining of the narrative summaries became an ongoing practice during the second round of analysis, and provided organization and structure.

After the transcripts had been reviewed using the narrative methods, a second reading was conducted to look for patterns among the individual participants by using open thematic coding. Open coding was used to first interpret data with no (or minimal) expectations or interpretations of possible variables. A second step of axial coding was used for an intensive analysis to sort individual codes by relevant categories, such as relationship type or online behaviors, and then the codes were organized by themes and subthemes through the writing process. I started with approximately 112 codes; through the initial read of the data major themes were identified and selected for review.

A part of my writing process was collapsing codes when the content was similar enough to be combined for the purpose of discussion. As an example an excerpt from the codes for “dating relationship” and “physical intimacy” are written coinciding a discussion about a long distance relationship. In other instances, I collapsed and combined codes for the sake of organization. Rather than review “sexual assault,” “child

abuse,” and “intimate partner violence” I combined these codes under the umbrella of “abuse experiences.” Because of the nature of certain codes, often an excerpt would be given multiple codes. The process was less linear than I originally anticipated, yet through the effort of coding I became intimately familiar with the expressions and stories provided by my participants. Reviewing and interpreting these data required cycles of simultaneously writing and examining the codebook.¹

Steps for Rigor

Qualitative research, especially phenomenological studies, have used bracketing as a way of identifying and noticing potential biases the researcher may carry when conducting a research study (Tufford & Newman, 2010). Different disciplines have used a variety of definitions for bracketing; these include addressing the emotions of the researcher, biases, preconceptions, presuppositions, and assumptions (Tufford & Newman, 2010). To address this, I used reflexivity exercises throughout the study to address potential biases before collecting data, throughout data collection, and during the period of analyzing data. The most thorough method was to actively reflect on possible researcher interference using multiple approaches (Padgett, 2008; Tufford & Newman, 2010).

Memos were a helpful way to notice personal thoughts and reactions, and to keep track of potential issues that would arise during the period of data collection (Tufford & Newman, 2010). Throughout the data collection, I used notes and memos to organize my

¹ A note about writing presentation; two participants identified outside of the gender binary — Kai and Ryan. To show proper respect for their identities I agreed to address them using the singular “they,” maintaining gender-neutral language.

thoughts about the process. This included taking notes in a word document, and also regular voice text message exchanges with a debriefing partner immediately after interviews. From the start of analyzing the data, I used reflexive journaling to detail my experiences conducting the interviews and to discuss my emotions, reactions and personal biases noticed during the interviews. Reflexive journaling is used in qualitative research as a step for rigor and also to ensure the participants are treated fairly and as uniformly as possible throughout the process (Lietz & Zayas, 2010).

Peer debriefing is an opportunity to work with people who are familiar with the phenomenon, although not formally enrolled, to check findings and discuss researcher positionality. As previously mentioned, this involved ongoing interaction with two research colleagues familiar with qualitative research processes. On a regular basis, reactions were discussed with both colleagues, and notably potential problems with handling data were addressed. Debriefing was a helpful way to notice and observe my personal biases and think aloud about the ways I was responding to the stories that were told during the interviews.

Positionality and Researcher Influence

Bracketing was used to avoid convoluting research findings (Tufford & Newman, 2010). Throughout the research process, I worked to engage in reflexive practices intended to minimize biases. This process has included considering my own historical and cultural context, academic biases or theoretical influences from the academic literature, emotional reactions, and confronting how developing a sense of self in the role of researcher became a part of the research process itself (Tufford & Newman, 2010; Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2012).

Similar to Kim (2010), a challenge that did arise for me as a researcher, came from trying to know which situations warranted self-disclosure for building rapport, and knowing if there was an appropriate boundary that had to be drawn. Several of the participants discussed events, stories, and experiences that related to my own time as a young adult woman; specifically, discussion of conflict with religion and dating, relationship dynamics influenced by social media, preferences for certain social media platforms, shared interests in cultural groups, and similar relationship dynamics with caregivers. Acknowledging these shared experiences helped as I worked to build rapport, and honor the humanity that existed between two people when discussing personal stories. In feminist research, the use of researcher reflexivity includes challenging the traditional dynamics of objective researcher and participants as subjects (Hess-Biber & Piatelli, 2012). I discussed with a debriefing partner incidents of personal sharing to help check for ethical treatment and to ensure the best interest of the participants. Ultimately, this sharing led to increased engagement for most, and a sense of co-constructing knowledge (Hess-Biber & Piatelli).

Within qualitative research, the role of the researcher is never simply completed by determining an insider or outsider position. Based on my own intersecting identity, my position to the study ebbed and flowed with each research participant, and throughout the study process (Hess-Biber & Piatelli, 2012). For example, when I first began researching the topic during the early phases of my dissertation work, I was new to a committed long-term intimate relationship. The changing of my relationship status influenced my understanding and perceptions about intimacy. To account for this change I reflected on experiences and emotions that would have been different had I not met my partner.

Interactions with participants gave me a reason to think about how I viewed my personal experiences in life throughout my twenties.

To attempt reducing power differentials, and to continue building trust with participants, I acknowledged salient differences and asked the participants if they were comfortable sharing given our differences. Many participants discussed life experiences and identities that I do not have any personal proximity with, including identifying gender outside of traditional female/male, time spent on certain social media sites, certain political views, and personal experiences with sex work online. Those differences that did come up warranted extra discussion, and it became especially important for these conversations to include addressing power dynamics (e.g. white privilege, hetero privilege, etc.) and repeating back to participants a summary of their viewpoints to ensure their stories were understood. Most often, I relied on notes from the first interview, and would address potential differences during the second interview.

Lastly, I worked to understand biases and influences coming from the academic literature. Discussing assumptions about how adult life is expected to unfold was a useful exercise with the interviewees, as well with debriefing partners. In particular, I was careful not to assume people set out to achieve specific adult roles such as wife and mother. Further, I worked to get interviewees to describe in detail their own culture, background, and perceptions of adulthood instead of asking questions that would emphasize universal experiences of young adult life.

Summary

This phenomenological study aimed to understand the lived experiences of emerging adult females and set out to accomplish these objectives by offering several

ways for the researcher and participants to stay in contact throughout the process. By offering continued communication, several extra steps to increase rigor, and thoughtfully reflecting on the researcher's positionality, findings emerged through a systematic and comprehensive process. The findings represent the phenomenon and offer insight about the developmental trajectory of this population.

The remainder of the dissertation will be devoted to findings and conclusions. The next three chapters will present a comprehensive account of the research findings. Chapter four will examine theories of development, focusing on the meaning of developing identity and intimacy. Chapter five will highlight nine stories, drawn from the narrative analysis process, to exemplify how different reflexive styles and online interaction help shape individual development. Each case example was selected to demonstrate how online interactions had become a pronounced influence on an individual's identity, according to her story. Chapter six will provide a broad view of themes and patterns among participants. The findings will be discussed in comparison to previous research literature, looking for points of convergence and divergence. The final chapter, seven, is a discussion of lessons learned, theoretical implications, and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER FOUR: EXPERIENCES OF IDENTITY & INTIMACY

“What’s the world for you if you can’t make it up as you want it?”

Toni Morrison, Jazz

In the previous chapters, I have outlined research questions that build on one another in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of congruent issues surrounding young women’s development. Broadly speaking, I sought to understand what a developmental trajectory might look like in contemporary society, and how new technologies are a part of that process. This chapter begins with findings relevant to research question one, “What are the concerns of emerging adult women and how do they fit with the traditional developmental tasks of identity and intimacy?” Patterns and themes regarding broad sociological shifts are discussed, and an examination of how the developmental tasks have possibly altered is presented. This chapter discusses traditional developmental tasks to set the stage for the next chapter.

Findings discussed in chapter four will highlight portions of emerging adult theory and summarize how sociological changes provide support for certain trends specific to emerging adult theory and expand on relevant critiques of the theory as well. As mentioned in chapter three, select interview questions were drawn from a survey about the emerging adult years. Interview data will be compared and contrasted with the quantitative findings of Arnett and Schwab (2012). Stories shared concentrated on participant’s day-to-day lives, providing examples about how contemporary society influences personal experience.

One of the goals of this dissertation was to understand if traditional theories of development have lapsed because of contemporary living. Specifically, I set out to know

more about the ways women construct identity and intimacy and how they plan for their futures according to their personal perception of these tasks. Major themes were identified regarding developmental tasks. Identity is discussed addressing three subthemes — generational identity, living independently, and customized commitments. Discussion focuses on the expanding views of what it means to be a woman, and how to construct a healthy relationship in a private manner.

Identity

To understand the construction of identity I focused on personal and social identity. Specifically, I looked for personal identity by identifying a description of traits and qualities that make them unique. To recognize social identity, I examined how participants selected social roles to experiment with during their emerging adult years. Additionally, during the interviews I asked several questions about concerns, priorities, and moral commitments. Some of the concerns that participants emphasized are associated with day-to-day living pressure, and a fight for independence. Granted, these concerns and the pathway to independence looked different depending on individual's aspirations and backgrounds. The following themes persisted — young women consistently discussed the significance of belonging to a generational cohort, living independently, and developing customized moral commitments as a foundation.

Generational Identity

Throughout the interview process, young women discussed their feelings about defining, shaping, and molding their identity, partially incongruent with their generational cohort. The young women were keenly aware of the stigma and symbolism associated with the millennial generation. As they described their own coming of age

stories, part of their purpose came from a need to defend themselves against older generations. Young women discussed how the perceptions of their generation were misguided and misunderstood. As an example, participants discussed their observations and experiences concerning financial stability. Consistently, the women reflected on how the financial crisis had impacted their personal lives, and the frustration they felt when people would judge their capabilities based on these difficult years.

“Yeah and it’s – the, like the whole thing with the financial struggles that just the country is in and the state of the economy, all of a sudden, my generation like our generation is being told that we’re lazy and we’re not working hard and I’m like just because the only jobs available even to college graduates are McDonald’s and Burger King like we’re lazy? Like you messed this up like don’t blame it on us. It’s pretty bothersome.” (Daisa, 20)

“Nowadays, it’s like you get a college degree, it doesn’t guarantee anything. It feels like you’re throwing money into a bucket. Honestly. It feels like we just throw our debt and we’re forever chain-balled by paying bills off. We’re never gonna be comfortable like our parents are.” (Jennifer, 25)

Many of the young women were exhausted from financial troubles, and felt that emerging adults were stereotyped as self-involved and complacent, rather than acknowledged as the heirs to a financial crisis. Daisa passionately defended her generation throughout the second interview and expressed multiple instances when she felt misunderstood by older adults. She was adamant that the way media and older adults would generalize about young people simplifies complex social issues. Jennifer shows the difficulty of choosing how to prepare and adequately plan for a future. She was personally having a difficult time deciding which career path to take; yet, multiple participants described similar sentiments about higher education. College was no longer perceived to be the secure guarantee they perceived it once was.

As described above the financial crisis is felt on a close personal level, creating palpable stress. Participants discussed their generation as generally being a cautious group, not just financially but in all decision making. They believed they could observe and learn from other generations, and many made direct comparisons with their parents.

“For my life experiences, as a millennial, is that they [adults] paint us as privileged kids, and these are our parents painting us as privileged kids because these are basically people that forty to fifty that are talking about us, which are basically their-, they’re talking about their kids. But what I’d like to say back to them is that, like, our parents made us suffer so much, at least from my perspective, like, and I’m talking from, like, the divorced, you know, freedom because, like, all of our parents got divorced, they made us go through, like, so much crap. Like, they grew up in this bubble of, like, being able to get any type of work they wanted in the 90s, and then we grow up in the recession...and then they have the audacity to be, like, just take the chip off your shoulder and just start working, or just get married. Like, don’t worry about who you’re gonna marry, but they don’t understand that, first, we’re growing up in their recession. That’s difficult. And second, we saw all of their, like, problems and all of their crap decisions, and it’s just, like, I think we take things a lot slower than their generation. I think their generation was just quick and swift and going off of what they feel and just doing things, and our generation, we, like, ponder a little bit more, we think a little bit more deeply, and so we’re a little slower with our decisions.” (Briana, 28)

“You know, I see like a lot of this generation, they’re waiting to get married or, you know, they’re going around and dating different people and just like seeing what they like and don’t like as opposed to like my parents’ generation or my grandparents’ generation, you know, they like marry the first person they fell in love with when they were in high school.” (Holly, 19)

As seen above, Briana frames this caution as strength, millennial’s approach their adult lives with thoughtfulness out of wisdom. Biding time during the twenties is not viewed as a sign of procrastination or avoiding responsibility, but investing in rational decision-making. Holly agreed, pointing out the importance of deliberate planning for relationships. She acknowledged that changing social expectations have influenced the way that they are experiencing their transition. Yet, as pointed out by the participants, they are doing their best to make deliberate decisions and take calculated risks to avoid

unnecessary damage while also moving forward. Participants stressed having less trust and more restraint about long-term commitments, whether career or relationship choices.

Promoting Change

Below is a description of how participants create a socially informed identity, and develop unique personal concerns often connected with social progress. Even though millennials remain cautiously optimistic, fundamental to the generational identity was a belief in the ability to engage and change society for the better through their own personal choices. Participants recognized they are coming of age during a bleak financial period, but remain focused on finding solutions to social problems and emphasizing the strengths of their own group.

“Yeah, absolutely, absolutely! That’s the other thing, I hate when people complain like “Oh your generation’s apathetic” and I’m like “my generation has literally shut down highways because of what’s happening with Erick Garner and Mike Brown. Don’t talk to me about apathy.” Like what? I think that we’re a lot more aware of what’s going on whereas the older generation, the previous generation tries to turn a blind eye to it, they don’t wanna hear about it unless it’s something very politically charged such as abortion rights then the older generation’s all over it. I’m like we even have a uterus anymore why are you voting on this? That’s my opinion on that.” (Daisa, 20)

“And, I think the same thing happens to like in our... like political culture. It’s like, you know, this is how it was done for so long so we must continue with the status quo.

And, I think that, you know, the younger generation is kind of changing that and being more inclusive and less... caring less about the status quo and thinking more critically about how we can get things done in a different manner that’s gonna be more effective for everyone.” (Olivia, 26)

Olivia and Daisa were both proud of their generation’s accomplishments and plan to continue promoting change. For them, the millennial generation is motivated to refocus energy on helping those who are disenfranchised. Many participants expressed a similar pride in their cohort’s actions, and Carly summed up the spirit of the millennial group by saying *“I think we’re more tolerant, more open, more liberal, um. Yeah, I think that’s the*

main strengths.” The millennial generation views themselves as having created highly individualized and unique personal concerns and detached from social institutions.

Tina mentioned several times that the social category of adulthood exasperates a power dynamic that allowed people to prejudice themselves against individuals “*they like make adulthood as a social category and, it’s like ridiculous to think about the ways or like the cause of that.*” Tina is drawn to intergenerational feminism and she want to know more about how women define and perpetuate notions of girlhood and womanhood. Tina, and other participants reiterated similar concerns about their ideas being diminished and overlooked because of their age, or generational status. She wants all young women to be taken more seriously. These stories share a general theme; each individual young woman wanted millennial’s to get recognition for their shared attitude of hopefulness about their own abilities as a group. They perceived the millennial generation, and young people, as valuable and contributing members of society capable of creating positive change.

Living Independently

Young people in this study were finding ways to build an independent life. All of the participants had some experience with post-secondary education; with the minimum self-report being ‘sometime spent in college’ to the advanced professional degrees. One young woman, Vanessa, was the only participant to attend a trade school. Women recounted their personal challenges in finding work, earning money, learning to pay bills, and financially weaning themselves from their parents. Kendall was the only woman to report no financial uneasiness during her emerging adult years. For the rest of the participants, they perceived these years as a personal struggle to try and achieve stability. Young women adapted definitions of success and autonomy to include not only financial

stability, but also life-work balance, and the ability to observe and regulate emotions.

Also, participants continued to seek out personally fulfilling careers.

Success through Balance

When asked to reflect on what makes for a successful adult life, participants emphasized individualism. “*Independence. It’s the first word I think of...*,” Kami (28) and other participants stressed the importance of being self-reliant, stable, and needing little help from people. Establishing finances, and career would come up first, but other themes included more tangential ideas. Young women talked about creating a life balance, personally maturing, and gaining respect among peers. Individualism also means the freedom to pursue individual desires, “*So, I guess like maybe knowing what you like and what makes you happy and like going after it.*” (Kai, 23) Participants stressed success as more than financial security (although that is ideal); success also means being happy and attaining some semblance of life balance.

“Oh, my gosh. I think it’s changed so much for me, you know? And, kind of does change. I think, right now, it’s the balance of being happy and also trying to figure out exactly what I want to do and, you know, make sure I’m doing it. But, the balance between having to make money and make a living and trying to find a job and a career path that you really like because, you know, obviously you gotta pay your bills.” (Kendal, 24)

“Key to success? Happiness I think is crucial. Doing something that you love, I think that’s related to happiness, having a good support system, yeah. I think having good, sound, intimate relationships are important as well.” (Lea, 23)

“I think being happy and- and feeling that this is you know and – being happy in meeting your responsibilities I think is the key to being happy as an adult. Ahm ‘coz a lot of people aren’t happy and they’re just kinda doing stuff just because you know this is a good paying job but I feel miserable and I feel like adulthood is a little bit more fulfilling than that like it’s a sense of fulfillment so- I mean at least that’s how I feel that’s what I wanna be like when I finally reach adulthood you know for real for real” (Jordan, 24)

As described earlier millennial’s see their generation as a determined group capable of taking on the challenges. Reflecting on this need for work-life balance,

entering the labor force in a time of economic instability may have made young women less trusting in work and career stability in general. This again contrasts perceived negative stereotypes about the group. Millennials are interested in being financially independent but have likely learned how to have moments of happiness and content feelings without a sense of job security. Lastly, one young woman emphasized relationships as a sign of maturity, again showing young women strived to be financially independent and sought additional supports to create balance.

Finances & Ambition

Many of the decisions and day-to-day stress came from finding a way to identify the type of work that would bring financial security and offer the balance the young women desired. For Margret, she identified her ability to establish credit, pay bills, and make arrangements for larger purchases as a step toward maturity. This also brought her stress because she did not have a family that was capable of supporting or providing extra financial assistance. Because of this she chose to put community college on hold for a semester to save money.

“And, I never had to pay any bills. But, then now, I’m just like I’m paying for a car, we [her and her boyfriend] were paying for rent, I’m paying for my phone on my own now....And, like I’m working. I don’t know. All these things. You just have to like think about it. And, then also going to school on the side. So, everything’s just like crammed in. And, so...” (Margret, 20)

Both Kendra and Jordan, like many of the young women, had already found a career they were interested in pursuing and were finding ways to secure these jobs. Kendra selected a graduate program and was working to finish her professional degree to get to the next level professionally. Jordan found political organizing by accident but felt as though it was a real calling. For her, the passion and energy the job gave her provided

a sense of purpose, but the financial prospects were unstable. For many participants, including Jordan and Kendra, being on track to a larger goal often meant financial instability during the interim. They viewed the unstable period during their twenties as necessary to reach certain goals, especially if the sacrifice was required for the ideal jobs some were seeking.

“Well, when I think of being like an adult I equate like your “big girl job” is what I call it. So, basically, you’re in your profession. You’re actually doing something that you love and you’re actually making money.” (Kendra, 25)

“It’s other things as well. Like, you know, where am I gonna, you know... I know, from just talking to a lot of different organizers, that being an organizer is not like super sustainable you know?...Like, “Oh, yeah, I’m gonna have plenty of money. I’m gonna be able to afford everything I want and be very comfortable.” I mean, I’m sure you can be comfortable as an organizer but, it’s gonna be some scrappy living at first. And, so that makes me anxious because I like to be financially secure. And, even right now, you know, I’m looking for another job and, a lot of organizing positions are very [audio breaks]. And, so it’s like, okay, you know, I want some security in that sense. So, that kinda makes me anxious.” (Jordan, 24)

These data explored how time and energy are spent coming up with individualized plans for living independently and maintaining happiness. For certain women, the stress is lessened by financial support from family. For other young women little to no financial support means exasperated daily stress and extra time spent working to earn money, *“I do. I feel like at the moment all I think about is work. And, it’s terrible ‘cause I have nightmares about it all the time.” (Kai, 23)* All participants described a pursuit of independent living, and personal happiness. The experiences of finding security were influenced by access to material resources, especially participants who reported having financial support from parents had different opportunities. Those who were already working and paying all (or most) of their living expenses were not afforded the same flexibility or time to experiment with careers.

Customized Moral Commitments

I found several examples of participants presenting identity as highly individualized, and outside the bounds of traditional community. Certain individuals resisted labeling parts of their identity altogether, finding categories to be cumbersome and outdated. When Tina (23) was asked to identify her sexual orientation for the study she replied, “*I don’t.*” During our second interview, Kai was not available to speak using Skype because their family was home, and they knew gender identity may come up. Kai typed the following message about how their identity is too complex to describe, and they resist making themselves fit into other people’s expectations. Olivia’s brief statement resonated with similar intentions — labels just do not work for her.

“I guess I would describe my identity as everything I already described, but I think that's mostly because I've repeated it so much in college. I feel like it's become more of an automatic answer than a felt answer, yet when I think about it to a degree I feel it

I think I'm always so busy and caught up in what I'm doing that I don't really think about what I am until people start treating me differently

I think gender-based ones I feel most cuz it's so often, like everywhere I go, from who knows my legal name to me using the restroom, or interacting with people on a day to day basis (like how they greet me, treat me, etc). Then probably race ones, like people fetishizing me or assuming I'm out to steal, so probably age next. I feel like this isn't a concise "identity term," to identify as being like a twink/little boy/etc but I feel like people automatically assume I'm up to no good cuz of it. Those are some of the biggest things that come to mind. I feel like my quietness/ solitude also hugely defines me, like it's something people always notice about me, although if me and 20 other silent people walked in a room somehow people always only point out that I didn't say anything

So I guess selectively mute (?) Idk if that's an identity.

People always say I "see the world differently than other people." I guess. I'm pretty creative and usually have "the unpopular/unthought of opinion." At work we're allowed to set up our desks however we want. When everyone sees mine they make a comment about it and are like, "Whoa, whenever I see it, it trips me out." To me it makes sense to do it that way. I guess I feel like a lot of aspects about me are just "queer" in lots of ways to a lot of people (?)

I don't know what's most important about me--- I guess my memories and experiences cuz that was the first thing to come to mind, like them shaping who I am now and what I plan to do next” (Kai, 23)

“And, part of the struggle was like me not understanding myself enough. So, I went on to talk about like labels and boxes and then just saying like I no longer wanted to, you know, be put in a box and, so I wasn't going to..... I also just really don't like labels. So, I get... I'm like just like throw your study out of the window. But, yeah, I think... I don't know.” (Olivia, 26)

Intangible and fluid personal definitions of identity were important for multiple young people. These values informed their decision-making, and were described as a touchstone for shaping their lives. Labels and social roles were seen as secondary to what they could accomplish on their own. They associated growth and progress by turning their concerns into daily practices. Participants' described personal relationships as indicators of emotional growth, but not at the expense of allowing individuals' to self-define and approach their identity with flexibility. For that reason, they shared the broad overarching desire to improve the world, and specific goals resulted in individualized concerns that motivated how to accomplish this through their daily practices.

“I mean, I think of success as actually achieving what you want in life.” (Kendra, 26)

“Like, for me, success would be like achieving my goals personally – like my goals to advocate for change and to help people.” (Kara, 26)

“I want to be able to know that I've done something positive” (Jordan, 24)

Both Kendra and Kara demonstrate the way young people perceive life purpose as personal matters. The consensus among participants was that no group, community, or institution should be the decider of what a person takes on in their own personal life. Jordan shows how young people want to define and realize goals so that they can see their own personal impact on the world. They all believed it was normal and healthy to let their reflexive process guide them to the most meaningful pursuits.

“So, I guess, what I’ve always said is kinda like my like goal is to leave a legacy. And, you know, even if that’s one building or, you know, that’s there... I don’t know. Something that at least impacts one person, even if it’s only one person.” (Kendall, 24)

“One thing that I could influence, so like I work at the relationships protection violence prevention center so I think I would like to end rape culture. I know that’s a really lofty goal but I would like to see that like non-existent.” (Lea, 24)

Kendall and Lea show how varied these personal goals may be. They both had found ways to incorporate personal concerns into their professional work, relating their job to their moral commitments. Ultimately, they both exemplified how even specific goals are connected back to greater concerns. Repeatedly the participants discussed how their goals and personal motivation should not interfere with other people’s lives, or produce any harm for another person. *“Like will this hurt other people or something or will it offend someone? So basically I think about myself and the other guy. I try to employ that into my decision making.” (Ryan, 18)* These young women stressed the importance of love as the basis for coexisting with others.

“Yes. Me and my husband have kind of like a motto and mainly because we come from two very different cultures and often times those, our values are very different so we try to say like “Whatever choice you’re gonna make, do it like by coming from a place of love.” We have a very diverse family and like my husband’s brother is gay and he, well basically he lives in Missouri so recently they passed the law that gay people can get married in Missouri and people often wanna give us a lot of opinions about that and we always just kind of like is your opinion or your idea coming from a place of love or judgment? And so, whenever we, I don’t know, I’d say like our main family value is just be respectful and whatever you’re doing come from that place of love, don’t come from hate or judgment, you know?” (Casey, 29)

“...I mean it’s also one of my values, it’s just love. I mean, I love the word “love.” I used it big time more than once today. But, I mean I think love is just very... It strikes up a lot of emotion. And, not like... I mean, it could be a bad emotion for some people if they hadn’t had healthy love. But, I mean when I think of the word “love,” I think of caring, loving other people, using who I am to change the world. ‘Cause it’s something that I’m passionate about and I love to do. I don’t know. I’m very optimistic in my life and I’m very ambitious. So, yeah, I wanna change the world.” (Kendra, 26)

Casey provides a rich example of how important love and humility are in her day-to-day life, and how she employs this value as a daily practice. As she mentions, being in an interracial relationship has meant that her outlook needs to be broad and flexible in order to approach all of the people in her life with genuine care. Kendra believes that love is the strongest stimulus for change. These young women emphasized their desire to create positive change and to understand others through love and compassion.

Religion

Some women were still practicing formal religion as their way of cultivating kindness. Other participants talked about growing up in a religious home. The participants I interviewed had a range of spiritual practice, from self-descriptions of “very religious” to “no religion,” and even certain young women practicing religion maintained a liberal attitude on many issues. There was also evidence that young women practicing religion may adopt more conservative and traditional ideas.

“Yes, I do. Again, I try to stay positive on everything, on decisions. And, we just started going to a Christian church with Carlos [husband] and my family. And, so I feel like that’s kind of changed my views in a lot of things and just trying to make decisions based on that, on our belief.” (Vanessa, 26)

“But at the same time, like, I guess-, I like to think of it as there are people with closed doctrine and there’s people with open doctrine, or open ideas. Um, the people with closed, I feel are, like, maybe more conservative, maybe more traditional. Um, everything that is ever said or whispered is doctrine, and I like to look at it as I believe that the ordinances are true...So I think that’s kind of, like, how I, like, you know, do that, but I think, like, just my relationship with God. And I also-, I really like the doctrine that every single person that is good will be accepted by God, and that’s not in every single religion.” (Brianna, 28)

The liberal approach to religion connects back to broad concerns of the generational cohort, millennial’s desire a harmonious multicultural society. The way they took up their own religious beliefs was to give space for individuality, as Briana

describes it “open doctrine.” Casey recounted the catalyst for her own questions about religion and an experience that led her to challenge religious authority even though she still practices. Other participants left religion, or a congregation, because they did not believe their churches were inclusive enough.

“I remember a specific event here that I was in a Sunday school class and rural America, alright? And our Sunday school teacher, this is a Sunday school teacher so usually you’re supposed to be talking about religious things but she rights up on the board like U.S and she like asked us like what is the best country in the world? And then she points to this board and she was asking lots of questions basically like trying to like reiterate that she thinks the U.S is the best country in the world and I’m like “Okay. I don’t know why you’re doing this.” And so I stopped participating ‘cause she would kept going on and on like asking like which country has the best food? Which country has the best people? Which country has the best military like that, weird things and I was just why are you doing this? So I think I was like maybe 10 or so and she like was like “Casey, you don’t think that we’re the best” and I was like I just don’t see what this test, I’m not, I don’t know why we’re doing this because she was trying to get us all like to chant at the same time and I remember that was kind of scary and I was like “I don’t wanna do this” you know?... You know, and yeah so I can remember that as one event where I started to like think outside, like really, is the U.S the only option? Or not just like, oh, it’s, I guess the way she made it seem was that like other countries aren’t as good and I didn’t appreciate that, I don’t know why.” (Casey, 29)

“I mean I think I’m probably evolving and growing but I think that all my morals really solidified when I actually stepped away from the church as like church group or entity ‘cause I mean, even though that I think they played a pretty big part in me developing, they taught me what to do but really what not to do and I think that really happened for me when I was about 12 or 13 ‘cause that’s when I kind of had the agency of myself to be like you know, I don’t really wanna participate in this and I mean, that was a really, really terrible time for my parents because you know, they kind of at first thought like “Oh my gosh, she’s an atheist. Help!” you know? Like “Help us. We weren’t supposed to raise someone like this.” But you know I’m not an atheist. I mean I don’t necessarily have any of the answers but you know, I’m not saying anyone’s wrong and I just think that I kind of really began to start having a more open mind after me and my dad kind of went through that period of like butting heads a lot and I think super solidified when I came to like ‘cause I haven’t really changed much mentally in the past couple of years ‘cause I’ve been pretty consistent with just being like a little less judgmental and a little more open. So that probably happened for me when I was about 18 or 19, so yeah, that was probably the age.” (Alex, 23)

“I’m very open with spirituality. I mean, my views of like religions, spirituality, some of those can be sort of like blurred lines. But, I’ve changed. Like, I’m not as much... Like, I still identify as Christian. I’m starting to walk away from that title now though ‘cause I’m

more into sort of like meditation and looking at other religious beliefs... well, spiritual beliefs. I get those confused. Well, other spirituality like Buddhism. “ (Kendra, 26)

For all of these participants choosing for themselves was an important component of their identity. Whether that meant choosing to leave religion, or find a new church, they used a reflexive practice to match their values to the right practice. *“I felt like, when I researched it for religions and I look at Universalism by Unitarian, I look at it, like, that feels more like me. That feels more like what I truly believe in, like, I always have trouble believing that, like, no one will be in Heaven except Christians”* (Carly, 25). The descriptions of these choices often included distancing themselves from certain religious practices or ideas that were too exclusionary.

To summarize this section I want to stress that young people in this study recognized the shift toward individualism in our culture as both freedom and pressure. Young women developed daily practices inspired by moral commitments that were self-defined and enjoyed the freedom to choose projects and practices based on their personal concerns. However, goals and projects are determined and limited by individual needs. Pressure is felt most readily through finances. Most young people are happy to self-define and create an individual life so long as they can access the resources needed to accomplish these goals.

The challenge for young women during the transition is to begin trusting and understanding their own internal voice, or reflexive process. As Holly (19) describes, *“Even if you’re not there yet, if you have like an idea of where you wanna go and steps you can take to get there...”* (Holly, 19). Young women determined for themselves what moral commitments would shape their choices. In general, they agreed that promoting tolerance, acceptance, and love was an important part of providing space to generate a

better society. The path to a better society manifested in a variety of ways depending on the individuals' customized moral commitments.

Intimacy

Participants enact agency through their approach to personal intimate relationships. Young women are choosing to pursue romantic love, and connection, but they are striving to maintain the right balance of personal identity and intimate closeness. The primary motive in relationships is finding a balance between commitment to the relationship, and staying grounded as an individual. This was an especially delicate exchange for those who are still trying to discover what they want out of their adult lives, and what type of partner will best match that life. Because the devotion to both of these tasks is fluid and changing throughout the emerging adult years, I started to conceptualize intimacy as an extension of identity. The push for individualism and detachment from social institutions can explain why young adult women are now in pursuit of *identimacy*. A relationship with another person who confirms who you are, according to the way you have defined yourself. Intimate roles such as mother and wife are now drifting away from cultural expectations and toward individual's expectations as they are negotiated with a partner.

This shift in the concept of intimacy is most notable when considering the differences surrounding marriage. Specifically, marriage is gradually transforming from a required social institution to a personal choice. Participants did not view marriage as a requirement or guarantee, and so the participants all discussed to some degree, the distinctive complication of identity and intimacy emerging simultaneously during these years. Personal identity holds great importance to the pursuit of intimacy so romantic

relationships are sought out using the logic of opportunity (Archer, 2012). Those participants who were in intimate relationships described partners as people that confirmed their identity by helping them to pursue meaningful projects related to their concerns. The illustration below demonstrates how young women expressed a need and desire for balance between individual interests and close relationships. A signifier of closeness is the ability of one's partner to support and understand the individual concerns of the other person, and to help maintain that balance. Intimacy was less connected to social roles and defined by individual couples.

Due to the change in marriage expectations, and ideas about long-term relationships, general perceptions of what intimacy means have evolved. A prominent theme was redefining or adjusting womanhood, marriage, and motherhood. Privacy to make personal choices within relationships, and the ability to exercise agency with a partner, were fundamental beliefs expressed about the nature of intimacy. Participants believed that intimacy is determined, discussed, and defined within the partnership through relationship work. Traditional ideas about emotional closeness and communication were prominent, but outside approval and institutional support were not stressed as necessary to experience intimacy.

Adjusted Womanhood

When I interviewed the participants, I explicitly asked them to expand on their ideas and thoughts about feminism, marriage, motherhood, careers, and relationships. Certain themes emerged without direct prompts, especially concern for the division of domestic labor and balancing their career ambitions with family. Young women told stories of wanting to expand and change the perception of what it means to be a woman

in society, and how they interpreted what messages they had received about womanhood. Much like their identity work, understanding of intimacy is founded on personalized concerns and commitments, while relationships are self-defined to maintain close alignment with personal identity.

Marriage

Young women who interviewed for this study viewed their personal attitudes about marriage as different from previous generations. Statistics show the marriage rate has been changing for the past 50 years (Fry., 2014); and according to the participants a long-term relationship can be a great benefit, but is not a prerequisite for adulthood or necessarily right for everyone. Ryan summed up how her generation differed because less emphasis on marriage and children meant more freedom to make individual decisions. Kami believed there were benefits to marriage, but was less certain that emotional closeness must be in the form of marriage.

“Less kids. I think marriage and kids have become less important now compared to a generation or 2 ago. That much I’ve noticed for to being adult women. I feel like a lot more independence is put more into women like you should be more independent and you should get your education and you should get a job which is a lot better than like a generation or two ago was.” (Ryan, 18)

“Well, relationships with human beings are very important but relationship with “A” human being I don’t know for sure...” (Kami, 28)

Participants varied regarding their own personal desires and goals for marriage. For some young women, marriage fit into their life plans and customized moral commitments. Below are three young people who voice a mix of perspectives on the desirability of marriage. Lea was most enthusiastic about the idea. Carly was not interested in marriage, and even expressed fear of physical intimacy. Kai, was the most neutral and put little thought into the idea of their own marriage.

“I don’t know. I think it’s a beautiful thing, marriage. Just having someone you can, like, spend your life with. Having someone you can talk to about anything, like having this life-partner who loves you like even though they know all your flaws and like all your mistakes like they still love you, like they’re still attracted to you. I’m a hopeless romantic.” (Lea, 23)

“Umm, maybe. I’m kind of leaving the door open for a while, but I don’t know if I really want to get married or not. Still, I’m kind of more hesitant.” (Carly, 25)

“I think it depends on like who you are and like what you want. But, for me, it’s [marriage] like not important. Like, pretty much at all. So, it’s like... I can’t really think of that like many people who I would even like consider... Yeah, if I ever care about someone, maybe, or like want to do stuff with someone.” (Kai, 23)

Those who were in relationships emphasized that both individuals work to build a partnership with shared responsibility. Vanessa noted how different this attitude was from her parent’s generation. She had even had conversations where her mother commented about the role and responsibility as the woman of the house, she resisted these definitions and discussed trying to share the workload with her husband. Margret, on the other hand, was more traditional in her views and believed it was a part of her Sudanese heritage she wanted to retain. Lea was not in a relationship but was hopeful that men now days would take their home responsibilities more seriously.

“I’m like basing off of my Mom just because with my Mom’s generation, I feel like a lot of men are more of like, ‘You’re the woman of the house. You have to cook for me. You have to iron my clothes for me. You have to do...’ Like, the woman has to do everything?” (Vanessa, 26)

“I still keep my culture. Like, you know, keeping your house clean is a must and always cooking like for your man. You have to do that every day. And, like you have to like respect every adult. It doesn’t matter who it is.” (Margret, 20)

“I’m not sure. Are men changing? I feel like, yes, they are changing. I feel like in terms of like family life, they’re definitely becoming more involved domestically ‘cause like back in the 50s they used to just like bringing home the bacon with their job but now, like I feel like they’re involved in like child rearing and they’re more emotional because I think that’s okay now, is to be more emotional for men to take care of your wife, to love your wife, to love your children like to show that love, yeah.” (Lea, 23)

To summarize, participants discussed finding the relationships that would work best for them, whether this is marriage or not. Their hopes and future plans for marriage were varied, but no one promoted the idea that those who do not get married are incomplete. Those participants who planned for heterosexual relationships were more cognizant about establishing a partnership with shared responsibilities.

Motherhood

The majority of the participants had not experienced motherhood or come to a place in their lives where they knew for certain it would be a part of their life course. I selected two women's stories to represent how their perceptions were influenced by their experiences as young mothers. Vanessa had children with her fiancé at a relatively young age, and she had stayed with him through the years partially because of this shared commitment. She did not regret her decision and believed it made her a better person. Margret conceived with her boyfriend but due to medical complications did not carry the twin babies to full term. She still looks fondly on the idea of motherhood, and the time when she and her boyfriend agreed to try. Both women believed that being a mother was an important component of their identity.

"I think it really... It just really impacted me just because... I kind of view back, like, I try to picture myself if I didn't have any kids and I feel like me and Carlos [fiancé] would probably maybe not be together just because I probably would have been immature and just would have been like, well, we got together way too early and I just wanna enjoy me being young and stuff. So, I feel like that's probably what I would have done before if we didn't have kids.

And, I don't wanna say that just because we have kids means that we're together. I'm just saying that it just changed me and kind of changed like... It kinda made me appreciate like I'm so glad that I found him and we're growing as... like, together. You know, and... just making everything better." (Vanessa, 27)

"I just love kids. And, when me and Fabian [boyfriend] decided we wanted to have a kid, I was really happy. And... I don't know. It's just really joyful. And, I raised my Uncle's

son so I basically know everything about motherhood. Like, I took care of him every single day.” (Margret, 20)

Life situation, and especially having a partner seemed to influence how a young woman envisioned this part of their life. Kendra, a young lesbian woman, had always imagined adopting. Stephanie, who married young, conceived sooner than she had planned. She was overall happy about this, but this influenced the rest of her life course because she opted for an entirely different career in order to tend to her new child.

“I’ve always wanted to adopt ‘cause I’ve never wanted to have my own kids. Like, I want kids but I don’t wanna... Well, that’s starting to change though. I actually might have birthed kids. Like, I was against that.” (Kendra, 26)

“Yeah. Well, I went to nursing school. My actual intent was to go back to medical school but we got pregnant so yeah, I’m like, ‘Let me look into this midwifery thing more so I’m not doing eight years of this.’ And, so it just happened to be very flexible in the program I went to, and it was kind of the right thing to do at the time for me, having a young infant at home and all that.” (Stephanie, 27)

Kendra’s ambiguity is an example of how a goal or long-term desire becomes secondary to immediate concerns. Throughout the interview, Kendra emphasized her own desire to find a partner or a more serious relationship and thoughts of children were further down the road for her. Stephanie reflected the complication of relationships, motherhood, and personal goals. Ultimately she was pleased with her career choice, but when describing motherhood, she openly admitted she did not want to spend all of her time at home as a mother and was eager to return to the workforce.

Deciding to be a mother was connected to individual concerns and life plans shaped by those concerns. Brooke (23) discussed not wanting to be a mother *“I would say the environment ‘cause I’m a little worried about that. That’s actually one of the reasons I don’t want to have children because of the way that’s going.”* She is an example of how moral commitments are a driving force in these decisions. Young

women no longer feel an obligation to have children. Many participants still envision motherhood as an important component of their personal identity and adult lives.

Feminism

When discussing feminism young women took on the label, but many offered a caveat. Usually, individual's stressed that they did not hate men, or want to force their ideas onto anyone else. Considering the discussion of their concerns, and their highly individualized approach to shaping a life, it is no surprise they were wary of infringing on other people. The young women's perceptions of what it means to practice feminism were diverse, and personal interpretations helped them to fit feminism into their own preexisting concerns.

"See, yes. Yes. I will say that I do but I think that there's kind of a miscommunication with that sort of word. I think it has a certain connotation like a man-hater and I'm not. I believe in the equality of everyone and you know, I think that men are just as significant to the world as women are. I think that the differences with women have been completely oppressed in a lot of aspect so I think we still have to fight for those sorts of spots but I don't think that we should be tearing down men in order to elevate ourselves. I think that it needs to be a project for everyone to partake in. I don't know if men see it that way because I think we've labeled it "Feminist" so it just seems like it's strictly just for women but it's not and I think that's where the miscommunication comes from." (Alex, 22)

"I wanna be the type of feminist Beyonce is. That's all I have to say about that.

... [I] get upset of someone kind of shaming other feminist per se and, Beyonce is not a feminist and, I'm like, "Yeah. Whatever kind of feminist Beyonce is, that's me. That's who I wanna be.'" (Jordan, 24)

"So, I think I am a feminist. I just think I want an equal partner in my relationship.

Whether if someone else would define what I am as a feminist or not is probably completely different because, you know, not shaving my armpits sort of, you know... feminist doesn't really mean those things." (Kendall, 24)

Alex exemplifies the concern of feminism being an offensive or exclusionary community. Jordan, like many young women, wanted to personalize her ideas of

feminism and develop these into a realistic practice based on someone she considered a role model. Kendall described wanting equity in her relationship, for her practicing feminism was executed through her private life. Young women engaged with feminism in different ways, yet they all wanted to see women have more opportunity for individualized and personal definitions of womanhood.

Authentic Relationships

Participants expressed personal desires around relationships in subjective ways. What an individual wanted out of a relationship was shaped by personal experience and the present needs of the individual. Here I will highlight some the shared descriptions of what it meant to be in a healthy relationship, and for those who were interested in romantic relationships what they envisioned for their futures. Again, the spirit of individualism and personally defined paths resonates through their sentiments. Young people want to create a relationship privately and understand the parameters of their intimacy with their partners, and they are resistant to labels and outside approval (Giordano et al., 2009). Those who are new to relationships and seeking a partner faced the challenge of examining if their identity was a match with their partners. Participants seek to make choices in the relationship balanced between both partners, but there was no discussion of universal standards or rules for an acceptable relationship.

Sexual Attitudes

One of the questions used from the Emerging Adult Survey was about the appropriate time for sexual intercourse. Interestingly, not one young person said that sex is only acceptable within marriage. Stephanie and Briana, who were more conservative than the other participants, said that marriage was ideal, but they both acknowledged that

was only their personal, cultural standards. Nearly every participant had used some form of the word consent for their individual description of when someone should have sex. Now, consent appears to be the socially acceptable standard for sex. Of course, individual women still maintained ideas about when sex would be right for themselves as individuals.

“I really don’t think there is a timeline. It just depends on those two people. If they connect, they connect. If they don’t, they don’t.” (Kendra, 26)

“Ahm. Honestly I think it’s when both people, I don’t think there’s a certain time for say like 3 months or 90 days or whatever, I think it’s a when we’re both on 1 accord, when we both consent, when we both feel like this is the next step and we both want to. It’s not necessarily like what’s you know, what society deems right or you know this all these double standards for women and all these stuff. I think it’s when both- or if you both want to that’s when the time is right.” (Jordan, 24)

Kendra and Jordan describe the decision of sex as an individual one. Jordan is also mindful of the double standards for women emphasizing the importance of women dictating their own choices, for their own bodies. Sex was seen as a private and personal choice, and Kendra Jordan exemplified how social expectations are no longer centered on marriage. Participants described standards and expectations for when they would choose to share physical intimacy.

“I mean, from my religious standpoint I think that’s the ideal situation ahm but I do not believe that you know it’s going to like sent you to hell if you don’t abide by that or anything like that. Emotionally it’s probably the most ahm how do I say- ideal situation ahm however you know a lot of people don’t believe in marriage or like I have family who you know they’re homosexual and so they can’t get married and stay to Georgia currently and so obviously they could not get married into that way anyway so you know I think it’s a personal decision people have to make.” (Stephanie, 27)

“Yeah. You get to know them a little more instead of just like going it ahead and then getting your heart broken.” (Margret, 20)

Stephanie and Margret both offer perspectives about their own experiences influencing their choices. Stephanie recognized that her religion plays a large part in her

decision, but that is not necessary for all people. Margret describes a part of her story as learning from past relationships. Similar to the previous theme of emotional growth she is learning about trust and boundaries from past experiences and determining how to make the best decisions for herself. Sexual relationships are thought about as private choices reserved for those who feel ready.

Relationship Communication

Being able to discuss and communicate needs and feelings with a partner was necessary for maintaining closeness. As Kendall describes, the most important aspect of remaining close with her boyfriend is sharing her feelings. She is also selective about what issues she brings to him. Olivia left her first serious relationship because she did not think they would bridge their communication gap.

“So, like I guess... I guess that. Just like feeling safe and like feeling like I’m able to say like ‘hey, this is bothering me’. Or, my roommate gets really mad at me because she says sometimes like... she says... You know, sometimes, of course like we’ll talk and I’ll be like, ‘Oh, this is annoying me. He did this.’” And, she’s like, “Well, why didn’t you say something? I’m like, “

’Cause then I think about it, in the long run, is it really that big of a deal? Like, is it worth getting in a fight over?’” (Kendall, 24)

“No. I just think that we like view the world differently. I tend to look more optimistically. She’s more pessimistic. And, so I just think that there... And, like, I would say communication was huge. We have very different communication styles. And, I know... You know, it was hard for me to be that vulnerable and, so I think that there were times... and, like I don’t wanna speak for her. But, I know like myself aware [pause] I would like shut down and then I wouldn’t communicate at all—“ (Olivia, 26)

In Chapter 2 the concept of churning, or on-again-off-again relationships were introduced. The stories provided by the participants confirmed the fluid nature of couple status. Marilyn dated her husband in the early emerging adult years, and then maintained a close friendship throughout her twenties. As she neared the close of her emerging adult

years and moved into her first major career position, she felt more comfortable getting into a committed relationship with him again. Marilyn also described having time apart from her partner as necessary for her personal growth.

“Ahm pretty much like throughout the years we were together sort of on and off I would say when I was in New York we were together for a year and then I was too young like to keep — hold it together; I, back then and then this time around like when I was graduating ‘coz I was interviewing in L.A., and I like called him ‘coz I knew he was out there. And I was like I cannot call him and we were just like this is stupid like were adults now and obviously he was the one like we should just be together so that’s when – ever that since we’ve been together, yeah again.” (Marilyn, 29)

“I think I first knew I was in love with my husband when so, we like dated for a while and then we like took a break and I decided to take a month and go to Spain. I decided like I just gotta get out of here so saved up my money and I went to Spain and when I came back we kind of reevaluated our relationship and those few months afterwards. We really connected on a different level, I really was, I don’t know, I think in a better, more open mindset, I had like cleared my mind and I think I’m really allowing myself to like fall for him so, I feel like the time, I can remember like the place we were, I remember we were like eating at this restaurant called Flat Ranch in Missouri and we’re just staying there, eating something and just like looked at each other kind of like started laughing about something and I just realized like ‘I love him’ I love that guy and yeah, just I think once I was like in a better more open mindset because also part of that reason for the break was that we had these 2 exes that were still kind of like oh, ‘cause you know I went to school at University of Missouri and so then my ex he like went off and did something and then came back from medical school and so he was like ‘Oh look I’m here from medical school so what are you – maybe we should get back together.’ And his ex was like move to San Francisco so when I took that time off, he also took time to think about what we wanted and we just kind of realized like ‘No. We have true love. It’s like sitting right across from us.’ And we need to just tell these people kind of ‘Get out of my ear.’ ” (Casey, 29)

Both Casey and Marilyn are examples of the tension that exist between identity and intimacy. As identity and intimacy emerge together, the individual thinks of their identity in the context of the relationship. The exercise of understanding their identity in the relationship is a test of whether or not the intimacy is working. As can be seen from the story shared by Casey, finding love and committing to a relationship can require partners to give one another time and space to decide what is best for them as an

individual. In reference to the exes from the story, both Casey and her boyfriend received text messages that were an attempt to rekindle the previous romance. The attempted contact from both exes triggered the conflict that led to their initial break. For her, taking the time to think about what she wanted as an individual strengthened the relationship and helped them to appreciate one another. Other participants' who had been in serious relationships discussed going on breaks and needing time apart from a partner. These patterns again reinforce the importance of finding a partner that fits into an individualized lifestyle; intimacy is evaluated to see if it matches with unique personal concerns.

Career & Relationships

Many participants discussed prioritizing financial security and careers during their early years. This pursuit is seen primarily as an independent responsibility, and individuals had a range of independence. Stephanie and Vanessa chose to prioritize family and pursued careers that would allow some flexibility as mothers. Holly discussed how common and necessary it is for all people to make individual career plans; she believes the millennial generation must approach adulthood with this mindset. Marilyn, an ambitious young woman who had already completed her PhD reflected on her worries about missing her chance for a relationship because she had put too much time into her career. Lea exemplifies how many people just keep their focus on career and relationships unintentionally fall by the wayside.

“So, you know, I think there is like this pressure back then to like, you know get married at like 20 and have a child at like 24 and then have a career by 25. And, I think not all of those were possible because, you know... to get like a stable job at 25 and sustain that until they were 70. But, you know, I think also with like job market, like people need to like focus on finding their career first before they can like cultivate this like relationship, like, this stable romantic relationships.” (Holly, 19)

“But, I did ‘cause I’m like, you know, not only have I always wanted to get my PhD and everything but, I always wanted to get married and have a family. And, so it’s like, am I prioritizing only my career?” (Marilyn, 29)

These examples demonstrate how complicated it can be for young people to determine priorities during their emerging adult years. Primarily, the young people in this study had made plans to work themselves. Margret expressed a desire to stay home with children, again providing further evidence that individual desires, cultural background, and personal experiences all influence an individual’s choice. She also planned to pursue a career and had interests in doing non-profit work later on in life. Many young women in the study had to balance career pursuits and early dating relationships, while others were working on maintaining their work-life and committed intimate relationship.

Personal Emotional Growth

Several times participants discussed a sign of maturity as learning to discern one’s own emotions, and gauging personal relationships. Growth meant learning how to understand and make meaning of personal emotions and understand when a relationship (friendship or romantic) was a good fit. Some of these battles were hard fought through conflict; other participant’s processes were more personal and internal by nature.

Observing one’s emotions though was stressed as necessary for individual progress.

“Just by focusing and, you know, constantly learning about myself and, you know, just remove the toxic things about my life that I don’t like and, like learning to embrace the things that I once thought were toxic and then learning that they’re actually like, you know, not... they’re actually an asset or something like that.

You have to like learn not to like... I’m trying to say like... I’m sorry. I’m trying to say like, you know, there are some... there’s this girl who’s like there’s some baggage that, you know, you have to get rid of but, there are some baggage that you can’t—that can help you. So, like baggage from like a childhood or from like old relations. You know, some of them you do have to get rid of but, you know, some of them, that can actually help you for the future.” (Holly, 19)

“No. So, I said that I trust no one before, right? So, I guess my like definition of intimacy would be like, you know, anybody that I’m in a friendship or like in a relationship with, that I like trust to be like consistently not saying shitty things all the time. Like, a lot of people just say horrible things all the time. That really bothers me. So, I definitely like value my relationships with people who are also critical thinkers. So, yeah, I mean all of my close friends are very similar to me in that way.”(Tina, 23)

Tina and Holly both noted the importance of selecting relationships that are meaningful, and reciprocal. Tina stressed the importance of her negative experiences with work colleagues’, for her the broken trust was an important rite of passage. Several participants described similar scenarios, where having an unexpected breach of trust was an important learning experience. Holly recognized that emotional growth is obtained and understood through experience. She worked to trust her own emotions and inform her relationship choices by trusting her instincts about people and situations. Notably, both of these young women described incidents where they learned about relationships and boundaries through friendships, not romantic relationships.

Summary

Through their descriptions of what it means to come of age during this time, young people provided evidence of a continued struggle to balance identity and intimacy. Specifically, they stressed the importance of belonging to a generational cohort and how this has influenced their ability to achieve certain milestones. They also provided a rationale for why the millennial generation does not rely on social and cultural structures for defining their life paths. Contrary to previous arguments made in favor of emerging adulthood, participants were generally resistant to labeling the period during the twenties a new life stage. Some discussed how the economic downturn was a viable explanation for postponing certain responsibilities, and others discussed being cautious when making life commitments based on what they had experienced in their own families. Lastly, other

participants were critical of development theory in general and stressed that an individual's experience should be emphasized to determine growth, rather than age. Consistent with critical realist theoretical observations, the young people in this study are working to create and shape lives according to their inner desires, and their immediate projects and practices largely influenced their long term goals – an indication of reflexivity practices. In general, identity and intimacy were salient issues for the participants, accompanied by substantial obstacles connected to financial stability and independence.

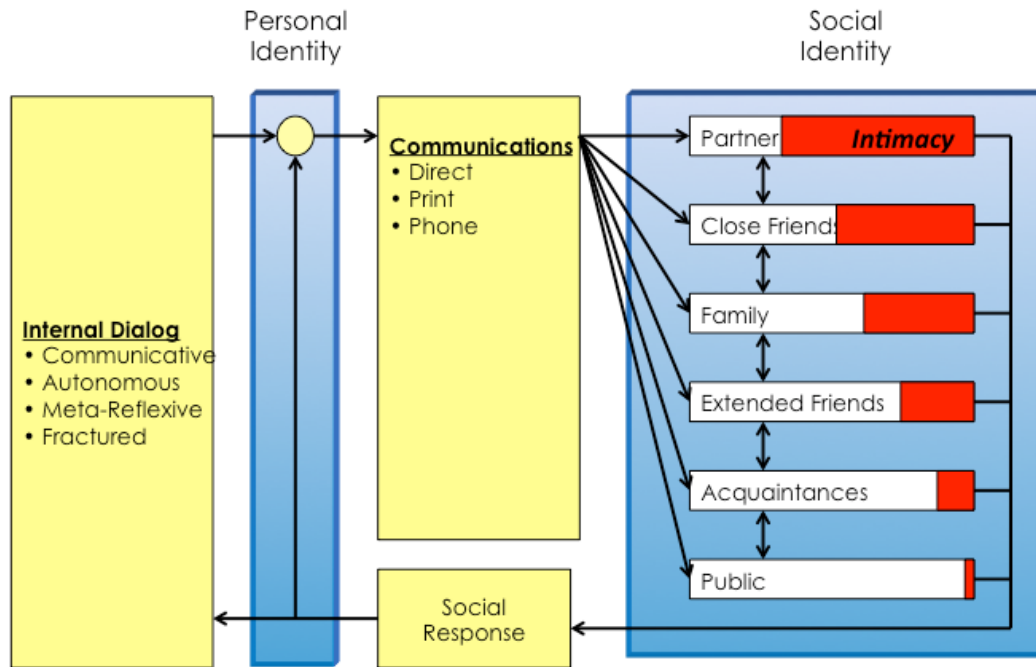
CHAPTER FIVE: EXPLORING THE REFLEXIVITY FRAMEWORK

“I believe that there are people who think as I do, who have thought as I do, who will think as I do. There are those who will live, unconscious of me, but continuing my attitude, so to speak, as I continue, unknowingly, the similar attitude of those before me. ...How much of my brain is willfully my own? How much is not a rubber stamp of what I have read and heard and lived? Sure, I make a sort of synthesis of what I come across, but that is all that differentiates me from another person? — — — That I have banged into and assimilated various things? That my environment and a chance combination of genes got me where I am?”

— Sylvia Plath, *The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath*

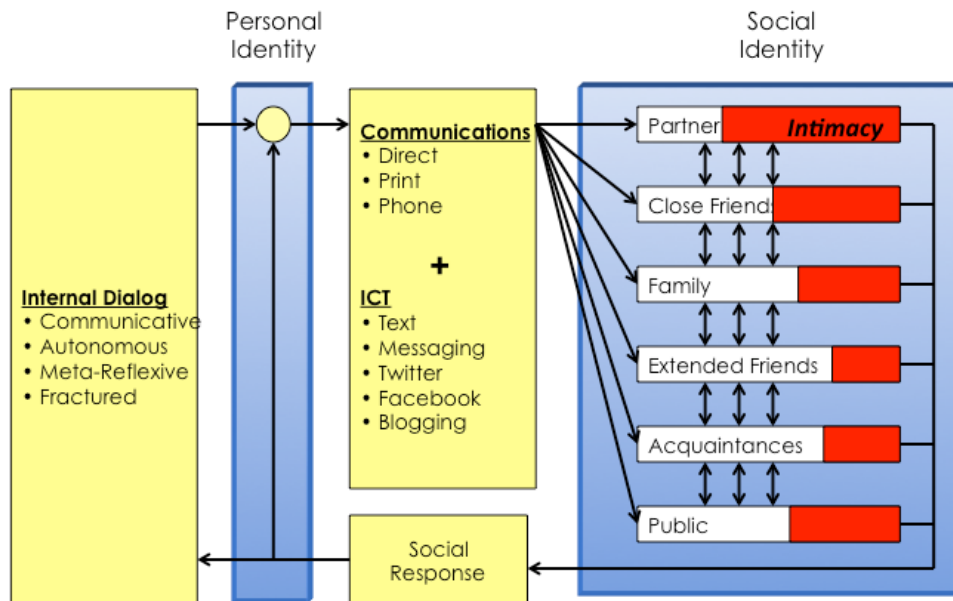
Emerging adult theory proposes that social trends are evidence of a new life stage. Critical realism offers a more acute lens examining how individuals, through the practice of reflexivity, take on the existing social changes in order to leverage their identity to engage the social structure. Chapter five discusses reflexivity and concepts of critical realism at length, focusing on research question number two: “Do emerging adult women describe their developmental experiences, as ways of engaging in morphogenesis, or maintaining social structures through morphostasis?” Throughout chapter two I discussed in more detail how the theory of emerging adulthood and critical realism varied. To put it most simply, Archer’s (2012) work has taken a more in-depth look at these larger sociological shifts and provides a map for what happens internally when people are given new freedoms to determine a life path. The internal process, *reflexivity*, is an ongoing inner-dialogue as one compares the desires of their personal identity with the practices of their different social identities. The figure below demonstrates how social interactions are processed through an internal dialogue by presenting one’s personal identity through social identity, receiving feedback and internalizing that feedback into the perception of the self.

Figure 1. Reflexive Processes before ICT



Narrative analyses were used to develop robust information about how young women today experience their transition to adulthood. To understand if the framework of reflexive modes were present in the lives of the young people in this study, I analyzed and examined their stories looking for evidence of Archer’s (2012) modes of reflexivity. By doing this not only am I able to see which theoretical frame is best suited to describe the transition to adulthood, but I can also see to what extent ICT use has contributed to this process. Through close readings of the data and the construction of narrative accounts, selected narratives address how the framework of reflexivity was supported and contradicted. Below is a figure showing how the internal dialogue can be influenced by the onset of ICT’s, specifically the opportunity to communicate and interact with more people in one’s network on a regular basis.

Figure 2. Reflexive Processes after ICT



The chapter will outline the four reflexive modes highlighted in Archer’s (2012) work — communicative, autonomous, meta-reflexive, and fractured. For each reflexive mode, I have selected two participants’ stories that stood out as meaningful, and relatively matched to the reflexive mode. In addition I have selected one story to share that exemplifies how complex it is to categorize reflexive modes through interpretation, and how the theory may not account for all individual experiences. The final story is also shared in order provide a reference to my own position in the research. I discuss some of my personal reactions in the spirit of transparency and explore the difficulty in categorizing an individual as they are transitioning to a different reflexive mode, or represent an outlier.

Major themes found through narrative analyses are discussed in the summary. Young women’s paths were so individualized and each story so unique that it was difficult to determine a universally shared goal or objective. Yet, three themes that

emerged offer substantial understanding of how young adulthood is now experienced; namely, *disruptive networking*, *defining moments*, and *driven agency*. First, young women experiment with expressing their concerns and moral commitments through ICT use by interacting with a *disruptive network*. Participants purposefully explore their own identity by exercising personal agency and engaging the social environment. This is intended to impact or cause morphogenesis, and one participant was especially noted as displaying morphostatic intentions. Secondly, ICT was used and thought to be crucial during major *defining moments* of young women's lives. Thirdly, ICT use provided a vehicle to exercise *agency driven* by the reflexive consideration of personal concerns. The following analysis provides evidence that individuals respond to the freedom provided in contemporary society by relying on their own reflexive process.

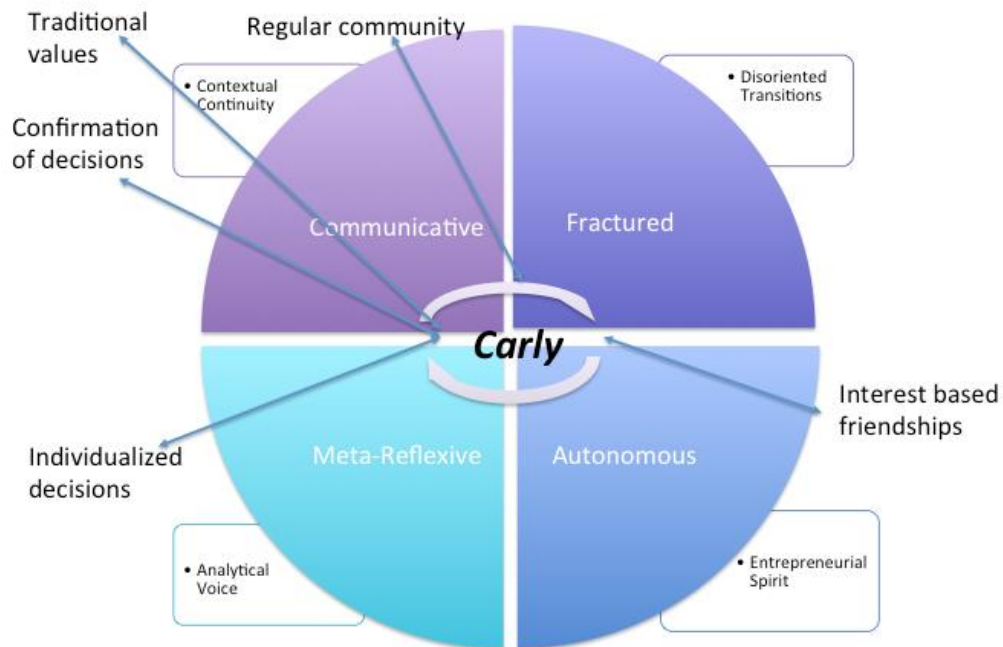
Communicative: Contextual Continuity

Among the 22 young women interviewed, I found four participants who could be described as having communicative reflexive styles. Those who are communicative take up contextual continuity, meaning they purposefully choose to develop their life plans in alignment with a familiar community. These types of young adults rely on confirmation and agreement from others, especially those from their original community, before determining a course of action. As Archer (2012) describes, through talk, they want to review decisions and circumstances with those people they have close personal relationships with. During their formative years, their parents acted as a couple, raising their children with consistent messaging or shared core values. The example Archer (2012) provides uses an Irish-Catholic girl; in this instance the couple would have based parenting decisions in Catholic values.

The first story shared, Carly, is a spiritually minded 25-year old looking to establish greater independence. The second, Stephanie, is a 27-year-old married woman who works to maintain and establish her own sense of southern values and Christianity. Both women fit the category of communicative reflexive in certain respects, but their narratives show how complex these labels can be depending on the parameters of each criterion. The markers I used to categorize communicative reflexivity are 1) seeking confirmation of decisions, 2) regular communication with a community, 3) traditional values, 4) remaining close to one's home community, and 5) a childhood with relational goods present, based on parents acting as a couple.

Before describing Carly in-depth I want to provide a visualization of how young women were categorized based on their qualities and characteristics within the reflexivity model. Below, Figure 3 shows how the reflexive model can be divided into four quadrants (communicative, autonomous, meta-reflexive, and fractured). The majority of her self-described qualities match with the communicative reflexive mode.

Figure 3. Carly's Reflexive Style



Carly

Carly is 25, currently living at home and working part-time. When Carly described her 16th birthday, the story took me by surprise. Not because of the events, but because when I asked Carly to tell me about her background she knew exactly the place she would need to begin. To fully explain who she is to another person, she recognized that first she must disclose her adolescent years battling with serious mental health issues. Her description of these years were hazy, a period where she had intense moments of growth in addition to regular tumultuous events. As Carly introduced me to this significant life stage, her words were not perfectly pruned for control. Yet, they roll with ease because she knows this is a fundamental part of her story, a shift in her personal universe she has explained many times.

“Umm, so, I think, when I became a teenager my mom’s health started to break down, she got schizophrenia. Umm. So, and actually I had some symptoms too because I was

reacting to the stress. So, it kind of runs in my family. So, I had, like, stress induced schizophrenia and I, umm, actually had to be hospitalized. That was actually on my 16th birthday. Umm, so. . . So, I went to therapeutic school for sophomore through senior year. Me and my sisters, they didn't react as strongly to my mom's death. Ummm. I was 15."

She described her mother as exceedingly religious and throughout her childhood her family devoted the majority of their free time to religious practices, including rigorous scripture study and multiple church services each week. She reflects on her Mother's religious practices, and parenting style, as a source of emotional distress during her childhood. Losing her mother was a difficult time for her personally, and her family recognized she needed help. Carly is one of a set of triplet girls, and she had always been close to her siblings. During her time spent in the hospital, it was not easy for her being away from family, especially her sisters.

"He [her father] was concerned about me, so, umm, he took me to the hospital and I kinda was in the hospital a lot for, like, 5 years or so. Umm. I was never as bad as how my mom suffered from schizophrenia. Again, I had a more mild version compared to her. Umm. But it is, I think, in some ways, my emotional growth was obstructed because of it. I kind of feel that I have been catching up pretty well over the years now that I'm 25...."

Despite having negative experiences with her mother's religious practices as a child, Carly still finds strength in personal spiritual practice. Carly belongs to a local church, but has also found comfort in broadly defined spirituality and positive thinking. It is unclear if this was before, or after her time in the hospital, but since 2009 she has participated in online groups that are focused on spirituality and personal growth. One of her most meaningful relationships is with Leroy, a 70-year-old man who lives in Oklahoma. He has mentored her informally for the past several years. What he thinks of her, and the encouragement that he provides her, are important for her own sense of

personal growth. Carly relies on her online spiritual community, especially her mentor, to process thoughts and ideas and receive confirmation of her personal choices.

“It’s really motivated me. It’s interesting how bad things can motivate you to do things faster. Umm. It might have hindered who I am, again, for figuring out my life. Umm. He [Leroy] actually said that I’m, like, fifteen years ahead of a lot of the people that he knows. Like, I’ve matured, like, a lot further because I wanted to work on these things. Like I, my therapeutic school, they helped me, umm, care about, you know, working on my mental, emotional health and taking responsibility, even though, like, I had to get my driver’s license a little bit later than most people... Umm. Yeah, I feel like I’ve caught up, and I feel like I’m just like any other 25 year old.”

Carly often relies on other people to help her make sense of events, or feelings she is having. As an example, she had a frightening dream where someone she knew (who had passed away) approached her and said her time was up. The dream was vivid, intense, and worried her. *“And like when I talked to people they’re like, ‘Maybe he doesn’t mean physical death. Maybe it just means that, you know, you’re like a butterfly you’re changing.’”* ‘They’ refers to her friends online, specifically her mentor Leroy. Later she expands on how important staying positive and practicing spirituality is for her. *“I think my health is a really big thing for me... So, definitely have that like, inner voice that helps me to do things. And so, I guess that’s my priority because I don’t want to go back to what I was when I was a teenager.”* Despite the hardships present during the early years of her emerging adult phase, Carly is determined to find her own path to happiness. Expressing herself online, and building an online community who believes in the same positive approach to living, has provided her with meaningful experiences and relationships.

Carly fits into the communicative approach based on three criteria that resonate with her day-to-day life. First, her traditional lifestyle, second the need for confirmation when making decisions, and third the use of (online) community for regular dialogue and

thought processing. She has created her own community that feels more authentic to her personal concerns through online support groups and her local Unitarian church. When I listen to her recount her day-to-day life she relies on other people who understand her in order to feel validation of her choices, but unlike the archetype Archer (2012) describes, Carly's relationships are not solely from her home community. She has made her own community through a local church and her online groups. She mentioned more than once that dating is less important to her than close friendships, and her immediate family. Yet, Carly expressed no anxiety about being on a path toward adult life missing key traditional elements like marriage. Her independent ideas and willingness to detach from traditions to her childhood to find her own practices resemble morphogenesis. Carly says she believes in commitment, honesty, and loving other people, so long as she is spreading positivity she feels fulfilled.

Stephanie

Stephanie, 27, lives in Atlanta with her husband and young son. For Stephanie, religion and conservative values are just a part of what it means to be a Southerner. Stephanie's upbringing was not entirely traditional; she was adopted as a baby and has never known her biological family. She describes her adoptive parents as traditionally minded people, but she stresses, "*that [conservative] has different meanings in the South than it does in the rest of the nation.*" Religion was a large part of her upbringing, and although church was important to her family, they were not afraid to disagree with the community. As an example, her parents switched churches during her teenage years because the congregation where they attended were too rules-oriented.

She has found ways to keep southern traditions central to her identity, although she does not see herself as compliant with all conventions of southern culture. Part of sticking with the culture was the choice to marry young. She enjoys being a mother and planning a future with her husband. However, she freely admits that the decision to marry was partially to keep their parents satisfied and avoid the stigma that comes with cohabitating.

“We got married really kind of quickly and it’s really sad to say, but we just did it. So like both of our parents are really traditional so they would not let us live together before we got married or if we did we probably would have been like shunned (laughter). So, we’re like, ‘well, its cheaper... we don’t have to pay for rent and two different places so we’ll just get married quickly and that we will go ahead to get rent on 1 house.’ Because in Birmingham, that’s actually like very expensive compared to buying I mean it’s because they had so many universities there, and, and so we had a kind of quick wedding so a lot of people didn’t know we were married...”

Stephanie recently finished graduate school for midwifery, and her husband is finishing graduate studies. She has ambitious career plans, including traveling abroad to help developing countries establish best medical practices. She is passionate about her work and loves her job. Stephanie maintains a fine balance between modern career woman and traditional southerner. During the past year, Stephanie has been experiencing a personal and professional crisis.

“I was applying for a job and I was in my mind discriminated against (ahm) about a certain belief I have (ahm). And so, that was sent to me in an e-mail and so (ahm) I’m now filing an equal opportunity lawsuit. Also and so (ahm) I thought it might settle and it did not so now it’s everywhere. (ahm) So yeah that’s all I really can say at this point, but if you Google my name (laughter).... you can see it, but that’s all I really can say.”

Given the nature of her situation, Stephanie can only tell me part of the story. Discerning her intent was difficult. She never described how the attorneys became involved or what outcome she hoped for. Yet, she did seem to care most about doing her job and simultaneously acting in accordance with her beliefs. Not dissimilar to her

parents, she was less concerned with the rules in place and more invested in the spirit of the job. Eventually, the case drew national attention. Conservative blogs applauded her efforts, and liberal blogs rejected her suit as nothing more than a gimmick. She became an object of internet fame. Ultimately, she had to change her day-to-day habits to avoid harassment.

“Because of that event almost all of my social media has had to be closed down or the privacy settings be like almost all the way up. So, I even had to de-friend people on Facebook who I wasn’t as close friends with just because their friends could see my information ahm and so yeah now so I have a lot less Facebook friends. So I had over a thousand so I had to like go way down on that ahm yeah I closed my Twitter, closed my Pinterest, my Instagram now is only with close friends or like on I’m following like some people who do fitness and that sort of thing or fashion but they can’t see my information so ahm yeah.”

Stephanie had shown through the lawsuit how important her religious convictions were for her sense of self. During her graduate program, she became a member of a Facebook group that shared her same beliefs and profession. Eventually, she joined a national network of other Christian professionals practicing midwifery. I was surprised at how progressive-minded and ambitious she was about her career. She dedicated herself enough to her religious beliefs that she had mixed these values with her career. Rather than compartmentalizing this piece of herself while on the job, she saw herself as a Christian professional. Stephanie wants to make the world a better place by practicing her religious values, but she is skeptical she can make much difference.

“I have some friends who believe that the world would eventually become perfect again ahm and they through their efforts can help that happen (Ahm). I guess I’m more cynical so I think I can make a difference, but I don’t think I could take what you consider evil or whatever out completely ahm just because I feel like there’s always going to be someone who wants power or someone’s recognition who’s going to do unethical things to get there ah and so I think we can take a lot out. Like I think we can eventually get clean water to everyone and health care, ahm and maybe even jobs for the majority of the population, but I don’t know if we are ever going to be able to eradicate all the disease or eradicate you know certain borderline personality types and that sort of thing. Unless

you are going to do a more killer version of Hitler like killing all certain genetic types which I'm really not for genocide you know!"

Stephanie fits the criteria for communicative in many ways. First, she has upheld and maintained the traditional values of her Southern culture in order to provide continuity. Her story highlights her own desire for change, but her description of how the world should change shows evidence of *morphostasis*. Stephanie interests are to reverse or restore some of the morality that she sees as diminished in present day society. Last, she grew up in a house with parents who acted as a unified couple without sending mixed messages. Stephanie diverges from others categorized as communicative in her ambitious nature and confidence in her own choices. Despite her ambitions and the decision to challenge specific government structures, her ultimate motivations stem from her Christian values and Southern culture.

Autonomous Reflexives: The Entrepreneurs

Those who practice an autonomous reflexive style are determined, career-minded individuals, who use logic to derive the most efficient path and maximize opportunity. Among participants from this study, six young women were categorized as autonomous reflexive. During their childhood years, there is an absence of relational goods (e.g., stability, trust, caring), and their parents do not act as couples, but as self-interested individuals. As noted by Archer (2012), these were often children of divorce, or the parents potentially had a dysfunctional relationship presenting mixed messages during childhood. Lastly, these individuals are focused on friendships with people who have shared interests, and they are willing to relocate in order to find the best jobs and secure financial stability.

The women's stories that I will share in this section include Brooke, a student finishing her undergraduate degree, and Olivia, an ambitious young woman who has already begun planning a career in politics. Each of these young women have successfully set up an independent life throughout their college years and their primary goal is to maintain independence. Each example was based on the following criteria: 1) acts based on the logic of opportunity, 2) interest based-friendships, 3) geographic mobility, 4) relational goods were absent, 5) mixed messages from parents during childhood, 6) and specific career ambitions (Archer, 2012).

Brooke

Brooke is a 23-year-old undergraduate student living alone. For the past several years, Brooke has worked as a camgirl. Her time spent online would best be described as a Porn Camgirl (Senft, 2008). When she discusses why she started this work, her motives were clearly defined. She wanted the freedom to set her own schedule while she was going to college. When Brooke started college she had been working in a traditional service industry job, which she enjoyed. Unsurprisingly, the primary motive for switching jobs was the money and the amount of independence that financial stability affords her.

“Um, yeah. When I was eighteen, I was working at Starbucks, and even if you work only part-time at Starbucks, they pay all your health insurance and dental insurance. It's really awesome, and I remember that was really important to me, and it-, I don't know why I have this thing about wanting to be able to pay my medical bills. It's very important to me. And so, that job was really, really important to me, and then I just stopped to-, because it was getting in the way of my classes, but I was really tense about that because I really, really wanted to be able to take care of myself, and so being able to take care of myself was a worry for me for a long time until I found camming actually.”

Brooke knew from the beginning that most people would not have a positive view of her work. Before she started to do cam work, she developed a plan to keep her

emotional-self intact and compartmentalize the interactions from the job. Specifically, she did not want camming to be influential on her self-worth. She noticed the way her roommate used camming work as a form of validation for her looks — something she considered emotionally unstable. Yet, many women of all shapes, sizes and forms do camming. For her, this is just a customer service job, like any service industry, she focuses on keeping her customers happy in order to succeed.

“Uh, yeah, and it’s cool that you, uh, you [the researcher] noticed that because a lot of people assume that there’s something psychologically wrong with you, and they say, like, ‘Oh, why do you feel the need to do this,’ and that’s one thing I don’t like about it ‘cause I don’t mind telling people about it, but there are a lot of assumptions people make because of it.”

And, like, when I worked at Starbucks, nobody ever said, ‘Why do you feel the need to give coffee to people,’ you know? [laughs] Right. Right. And I enjoy my customers in the same way I enjoyed my food service customers. Like, it’s like you just see your regulars, and you have your inside jokes, but, um, but no, other than that, it is just a job.”

Brooke has grown and learned about herself through some of her camming experiences. For instance, she had to learn to set boundaries and firmly say no to certain customer demands. Now, she uses her work to challenge what people perceive as normal sex. Brooke believes that she has a chance to combat the negative effects of mainstream online pornography through her camming interactions. Brooke does not label herself a feminist; she prefers to call herself a “gender egalitarian” so people know she does not “hate men.” She is passionate about men understanding and seeing women as capable decision makers using their agency even through sexual expression.

“I passionately hate mainstream, professional pornography because I think it normalizes a lot of things that should not be okay in the real world, and, um, one thing I do like about my job is that I don’t need to do any of that, I don’t do any of that, and if people make a request for something like that-, if they’re polite about it, I’ll just say I don’t do it, but if they’re rude about it or they’re demanding, I can just laugh at them and say, ‘Oh, you learned everything you know from porn, didn’t you?’ And it gives me a soapbox to

talk about what's realistic and what's not, and people tend to be very receptive to that too."

Given her background during her childhood years, and the types of life projects she devotes the most amount of energy to, the autonomous reflexive style is most suitable for Brooke. First, she emphasizes that people should find happiness through logic of opportunity (Archer, 2012). "*... I guess, figure out what you want and go with it. But a lot of people seem to think of things that happen to them rather than they can make it happen.*" She has already started to prepare a plan to work outside of camming, and has long-term career ambitions to be a counseling psychologist. The majority of her friends she met through a university club, the secular society, showing she is drawn to friendships with people who share an interest in secular ideas and logical deduction.

Brooke's childhood is further evidence of a strong fit to the autonomous reflexive group. She grew up in a home where her parents remained married but had conflicting values that sent mixed signals. "*So I-, my dad definitely, he was very family-oriented, and he was all about keeping the family together whereas my mom sometimes would tell me in private that she wanted to divorce, and it wasn't important to keep the family together.*" Her parents are staunch libertarians, and for her, leaving their home to make it on her own is one of her greatest adult accomplishments and pleasures. She did not share their political beliefs and was relieved not to be around the somewhat tumultuous relationship. Last, during her childhood she moved around frequently. She is mobile and dreams of traveling and living in many different places. Brooke represents all of the criteria of the autonomous reflexive, and her story has little to no divergence.

Olivia

Olivia is a 26-year-old woman living with roommates and working fulltime. *“I think I look at adulthood as, you are making those decisions that are going to impact you for the rest of your life.”* For Olivia, success is happiness. She volunteers on several boards in her local community, and she has a reputation for planning successful networking and fundraising events. Olivia is a thoughtful, organized person with a plan. Her compulsion for planning and maintaining stability is partially in response to her chaotic childhood.

Olivia’s parents were addicts. They were not planners; they lived moment-by-moment feeding their addictions. Olivia knew from a young age that she was interested in politics, probably as a career. She considered law school but ultimately opted for a Masters in Social Work as her stepping-stone toward a professional career. Olivia now works for a nationally renowned charitable organization managing several projects. Her ambition for politics already influences the way she carries herself in social situations. She sees her online life as a permanent imprint of who she is as a person.

“But, it is I guess interesting to see how much people actually like were really paying attention to my Facebook and like the message that it sends.

I will say I don’t ever like to use profanity on any of the social media sites just because like I don’t know who’s reading it. I have some of like my former teachers. I have some of my professors as friends.

And, so like I use it as a mix of like personal and professional and, so a lot of the times, I tend to lean towards doing more professional things on there just because I’m reminded of who my Facebook friends are. So....”

Olivia is a self-described political junkie who is always on Twitter. She follows several political blogs and watches for interesting news articles her friends post so she can stay up-to-date on all that is happening in Washington. Her love for politics started when she was working as an intern for a local congressional representative. After her

internship, the representative hired Olivia. Part of her professional duties included managing various social media accounts linked to the office of her employer. When posting about a polarizing political topic, Olivia was harassed on her personal social media accounts. The harassers found out she was the primary poster for the representative and searched for her personal social media accounts. Olivia turned the experience into an opportunity for personal and professional growth. At the advisement of her office, she did not engage with those users sending her harassing messages. Later on, she even met with the primary antagonist in person, and she realized how people could have different personas when they are online.

“And, I think it’s so easy to get lost in social media talking about, you know, things that we’re really passionate about. In this particular instance, it was regarding a bill. And, so then, you know, like not making assumptions and kind of coming back to what the real issue is instead of like attacking the person. You know, the real issue is the bill and what the bill does and, it’s not about the person.

In the scheme of things, you know, like it’s this very micro thing that’s happening and it’s happening around you but, in retrospect, like nobody else in the world is caring about it and, it’s like this small group of people who do nothing all day long but sit on social media and, you know, like wait for things like this. And, so like on a greater scale, it really has very little significance.

You know, some of them [the harassers], I had to interact with. And, for some of them, it was easier to like have a conversation afterwards and talk to them face-to-face like when I was back in [the home city]. And, so, you know, just kind of like managing that.

And, for me, it was interesting because a gentleman started this and [he] is the one who started kind of the whole thing. And, so when I went back [from Washington, D.C.] to the city and met with him, he was very different in person. Very, you know, much nicer, more understanding of the situation. He was like, “Sorry it got so out of hand.” and stuff like that. Yet, you know, his demeanor on Facebook was much different.

And, so it just was interesting for me to see that. But, then, you know, there are some people who interact differently online than they do face to face or in person.”

As she is moving through her twenties, Olivia has started to realize the importance of life outside of work. More recently, Olivia has turned her attention to

personal relationships. She has started to ruminate on how intimacy fits into her life and especially romantic love. I first learned about her interest when Olivia posted a link to the Facebook research page. She shared an online magazine article that told the story of a young man in his twenties who realized too late the love of his life was a previous relationship. During the second interview, I asked her what it was about the story that resonated, she cautiously admitted to a recent breakup.

“Yeah. Like, this entire conversation, I think that I’ve been avoiding the fact that I just came out of a relationship and so it was really... It’s like the first time I ever let someone that far in. So, I guess I have some emotions around that.”

And, so, for me, it’s like making sense of those emotions and on like a logical level. So, like emotionally, I’m like, “Oh, I’m having this feeling. It’s so new and different.” And, you know, when I started this relationship, if you will, with this person, there were all these emotions I’ve never felt for anyone else and so I was like, “This is strange” and trying to like make sense of it is, I guess, is really important to me. And, so I’ve...

I mean, I love Huffington Post and I generally read, you know, a number of their articles. And, more recently, I would say like since this break up, if you will, I’ve been like more interested in their relationship pieces and trying to understand it. And, I think because this is probably like the first, I’m gonna like air quote, adult relationship.”

Olivia wants to solve the puzzle of intimacy using the same principle — *logic of opportunity* — she has used to set up an independent life (Archer, 2012). Right now, a part of her inner dialogue involves going online to find information about romantic relationships. She views various blog posts from Huffington Post to consider how the expert experiences relate to her own. Sometimes she will continue the conversation through Facebook with her own friends, gathering more information and ideas. Although she spent her early twenties focused on career, now she wants to know intimacy and how to build close and meaningful relationships.

She fits the profile as an autonomous reflexive for several reasons. First, she is career savvy and has used networking to secure many professional opportunities. As

mentioned, many of her friends are also involved in politics, showing that common interests are key to her relationships. She is mobile. She has lived away from home, in different states and cities depending on her job.

Olivia provides an example of how the reflexive model does not fit perfectly with each individual, and as a researcher I was left making decisions about which characteristics were emphasized during the participant's story. Most difficult to analyze, and categorize, were the meanings of her childhood experiences. She left her parents' home as a teenager and based on her brief story there seemed to be what Archer (2012) would describe as *relational evils*, going beyond an absence of relational goods. There may have been traumatic events, but she was clear during the interviews that discussing these in detail was beyond her scope of comfort. The events that were mentioned, although brief, would indicate her reflexive mode could be aligned with the fractured reflexive style. Olivia has worked to develop her own meaningful life, despite her childhood experiences. Last, her political ambitions are progressive and linked to a desire to change the social order. This quality may be more in line with the meta-reflexive style. Because of her ambitious nature, and focus on personal independence, the autonomous reflexive style is best suited to Olivia.

Meta-Reflexive: The Analytical Voice

The inner-voice of the meta-reflexive individual embodies the spirit of social change. Five participants were grouped as meta-reflexive mode. According to Archer (2012) these individuals capitalize on the logic of opportunity in a similar way as those with autonomous reflexive styles. However, they are more likely to build value-based friendships, as opposed to friendships based on similar interests. Further, they come from

a home with parents who provided stability and relational goods, but for varying reasons their parents also sent mixed messages. Many of the case examples used by Archer (2012) note that a meta-reflexive individual will likely feel as though they are loners in their family of origin. The most distinguishable and prominent characteristic of this group is the ability to form a critical detachment in order to assess the nature of social problems.

The selected case examples, Holly, and Tina, both have taken their critical abilities and leveraged their voice to evaluate cultural norms. Both young women garnered a great deal of attention online for their eloquence and passion. Their end goals remain the same, to influence day-to-day life by engaging others in critical dialogue, yet their individual career ambitions are notably dissimilar. I have selected these two women partly because their courage and persistence to engage in critical conversation inspired me, and also to show the power of young people using social media. The following criteria were used to classify their narrative accounts 1) an emphasis on value-based friendships, 2) using the logic of opportunity to make individual decisions, 3) an interest in re-ordering social norms, 4) the presence of relational goods and mixed messages, and 5) a critical detachment from social institutions.

Holly

Holly is a 19-year-old young woman living in the south. Holly has risen to a coveted status among youth — she is ‘Tumblr famous.’ Tumblr is a youth dominated online space, where posts and discussion focus on youth culture. The platform allows individual users to develop and personalize a visual blog; the technical structure is a mix between Instagram and Myspace. Her reputation could be the equivalent of being apart of

the it-crowd. How she gained popularity, and sustained a large network of followers does not resemble a typical high-school or college trajectory.

During a popular awards show, Holly wrote a passionate blog about a white woman pop star appropriating Black culture and exploiting African American women's bodies for show. The next morning when she awoke she had gained approximately 7,000 new followers. Her blog post about the pop star had become extraordinarily popular. As she describes the event, she did nothing intentional or purposeful in order to attract followers. Yet, she is taking full advantage of her now large following. She uses her popular online presence to weigh-in on current events and challenge institutions that promote sexism and racism. As a young African-American woman living in the south, she has not experienced this same power in her life offline. Tumblr provided her a space to experiment with her identity as a cultural activist and enhanced her perception of self-worth. She has also found a community receptive to deconstructing influences of racism and patriarchy.

"I think it's always when someone is just like, 'oh, I found your blog and you're one of my favorite bloggers because now I don't wanna bleach my skin' or 'now I wanna wear my hair in its natural state' or something like that, and you've inspired me to do that. It always throws me off. Like, they're the sweetest messages that I could never like fully, you know, tell them how appreciative I am of that. Because, I'm like, I am just this 19-year old girl who blogs like excessive amounts of photos of Michael B. Jordan and sometimes I'll have a popular post that will inspire people. So, it's just always weird about that because I don't think of myself as like this inspirational person. But, to see like there are lots of people that do is always, you know, nice and shocking."

Holly has not always been popular. During her adolescent years, and throughout her childhood, she never felt close to a steady group of friends. Throughout her senior year of high school she dealt with a traumatic break-up from friendships that she had tried to build. The group she considered her friends decided unanimously to leave her out

of activities and stopped talking with her. She has no memory or recollection of when and why her friends began to distance themselves, no single defining event. However, Holly learned through interactions on Facebook that she had different views on race than the group of primarily white friends she had grown up with. At the time, the Trayvon Martin incident was national news. Trayvon Martin was a 17-year-old African-American boy shot by a neighborhood watchman in February 2012. George Zimmerman, the watchman had called police saying that Martin looked “real suspicious” (Blow, 2012). She was overwhelmed by the overt racism and lack of compassion for this incident as she read her friends posts on Facebook. Looking back, she says she should have known better.

“I think it was really just like after the whole Trayvon Martin, you know and all the George Zimmerman trial and everything.

And, I was on Facebook that night. You know, the verdict was released and all of a sudden I just saw all these people I’ve been friends with for like ages and they were just spilling out all this racism and, I was just like, what is happening, you know? I’m just like, I’ve known these... I went to dinner with these people. I joked around with these people. And, they just like, out of nowhere, flipped the script.

So, you know, I think that’s one of my main motivations to delete my Facebook in its entirety and, you know, and then I became more involved on Tumblr and following more social activist blogs and then, you know reading what they were writing and the links they were posting and everything.”

Recognizing the clash in values amongst her high school peers completely changed her friendships and the network she would build in college. Eventually, she deleted her Facebook account altogether, part of the reason that she switched to Tumblr. Since she graduated high school, Holly has flourished on Tumblr and Twitter. Her experiences are of course complex and changing day-by-day. *“I say that like Tumblr or like online experiences are like simultaneously my biggest stressor but also my like biggest like, you know, stress relief.”* This past year Holly has been promoting “Melanin

Monday,” a hashtag she created through her Tumblr community. Melanin Monday is now widespread among various social media users. She started the informal ritual for people of color to gain visibility, and feel supported and accepted in a Eurocentric culture. Each Monday for the past nine months she attentively oversees participation and promotes the selfies of her peers. Throughout Tumblr, the term Melanin is being used to promote positivity about young people of color and counteract the negative imagery they perceive as regular in traditional media. Online, Holly is clever, engaging, and confident. For her, there is no need to attach her ideas to authority figures or the adults in her life because she trusts her own insights.

“Like, you know, when you’re younger you just like kinda mindlessly attach yourself to adults because you’re just like, oh, they’re the adults, of course they know what they’re doing so, I’ll just follow on their path. But, like when you get older and you like start like having thoughts and stuff of your own, you’re just like mmmmm what’s right for me?”

And, then you think about all the things they told you and I’m just like, you know, I don’t think that was the best thing to say to me or to do or whatever, until you kinda have to learn like who’s the best like to look to for guidance and who’s not so much.”

Right now, she lives at home, but her relationship with her parents is not a close emotional relationship. She was unsure what she wants to do in the future. During the time of the interviews, she was weighing her options. Holly has attended community college since graduating, and was taking a hiatus to figure out more about what she wants. She is not sold on the value of a four-year degree seeing the amount of personal debt some people take on. Holly dreams of being a screenwriter; and practices her writing through poetry and blogging. Becoming an adult does not mean buying a house, or finding a romantic relationship; instead she saw adult fulfillment as removing toxic things from her life and learning more about herself.

Holly's story demonstrates many of the criteria of meta-reflexive style. During high school she learned the importance of value-based friendships and has been invested in an online network of friendships ever since. Much of her life is devoted to online activity that critiques and challenges the social order. Last, she shows an investment in making decisions based on *logic of opportunity*. Regarding her childhood, she had a unique upbringing. The age gap between herself and her parents is unusual, and both of her parents grew up around the time schools were first being integrated. Holly is also the only girl in her family, and the youngest. She has felt somewhat isolated in her own family, and as Archer (2012) described meta-reflexive individuals may even view themselves as loners within their family. She described her family relationships as supportive even she did not think her family necessarily understood her views entirely. Holly's daily practices online, and strong focus on social problems indicated the meta-reflexive profile was best suited to describe her.

Tina

Tina is a 23-year-old graduate student who recently moved to Los Angeles to work on a Ph.D. From a young age she has been a deep thinker who critically analyzes what is going on around her. *"Yeah, just like be critical of like everyone. Even myself, I get really critical like the things that I'm really like reflective. Like self-reflective. So... Yeah."* When Tina was in the second grade she stopped going to church because she knew that she did not believe in God. Much of Tina's identity has stemmed from differentiating herself from her parents.

"Yeah. I've never gotten along with my parents very well. And, I think they have weird morals that I did not. So..."

Well, I do and I don't. Like, so they... I don't know. I definitely not... God, I do not know how to say this without sounding like an asshole. Like, they're not as smart as I am? I can't even say well educated 'cause my Dad has like a million degrees.

But, I guess I have a hard time saying they're not open minded because they are open minded but, they aren't like experiencing things to like open their minds, I guess. And, you know, [they] kind of like choose not to. So, like my parents say racist shit all the time.

That really bothers me. And, that's always bothered me since I was a kid. And, I did not inherit that from them."

When asked about what values she inherited from her parents, Tina is stumped.

"I have no idea. Yeah, I don't know. I have nothing to tell you.

I guess one thing that I like did get from them is, you know, being open to LGBT issues. And, I don't even know why. Like, why they were so open to that. 'Cause like... I don't know... it didn't affect their lives at all.

But, I think I like learned that from them then [as a child] sort of like carried that over into every other aspect of my life. That's probably why I was more into queer theory than I was feminism at first."

Since high school Tina has been thinking about, and writing about, gender and how society influences identity. Before she self-identified as a feminist, close college friends would introduce her that way. *"I was into like gender deconstruction, I guess. But, instead of like calling it that, they like, 'Oh, this is my friend Tina, the feminist.' I was like, whatever, sure, that sounds good."* Throughout college she surrounded herself with like-minded friends. She also sought out opportunities, such as study abroad, in order to push her understanding of people and cultures.

Tina used her critical abilities to write for the school newspaper. Her articles were widely circulated online. In particular, one article she wrote about the media's treatment of trans children and their bodies was picked up by the Huffington Post. Soon after, Laverne Cox, a famous trans activist and actress, shared the article to her fans through social media. Later, Janet Mock a trans television host and public figure, interviewed

Tina about the article for a TV show that unfortunately never aired. Tina was flattered and excited about the attention the issue was getting.

Later on, Tina reevaluated her decision to focus on trans issues. She decided as an outsider to the community her contributions could be used more efficiently by tackling social justice issues more closely related to her own experience. Her status as a researcher in relation to the trans community came up during the second interview while she and I discussed research topics and graduate school. After the interview had concluded, Tina reached out to me through Facebook to share more about her plans for future research.

Below is a modified version of her message to me.

“but i wanted to mention re: socioeconomic awareness and academia guess that it has been a very strange experience to realize that sort of the perspectives i am most likely to understand and not essentialize and critique subtly and probably like do the most to influence for the better are rich white people's

i think that a lot of people both in and outside of academia do great things for people and groups that they are not members of themselves. but a lot of times they don't....but i just feel like i can do better things and more influential things and more realistic things and more better analysis of 'reality' by working with people who i can identify with in terms of socioeconomic situations especially which is probably something you can relate to too, in terms of emerging adulthood”

Her research plan includes looking into how and why young women's vernacular is deemed as silly and inferior. Tina is critical of the social category adulthood. She believes that the *adult gaze* is a form of generational discrimination. When she and I began to talk about what her ultimate concern is, or how she will know if her life is fulfilled, she thoughtfully pushed back on the question challenging the notion that anyone can ever know this for certain. Tina emphasized that her values would change and fluctuate throughout her lifetime. When I asked her to clarify, she stressed to me the importance of her own personal growth.

“Yeah. I don’t think I do [have set values] though. I just like to do what I like to do like at the time that I’m doing it. That hasn’t really changed though. I’ve always been into writing. Not like fiction, like critical analysis. But, I’m getting like better at it every year.

So, I guess like my goal is to like get better at writing and like disseminating information. But, if I decided I didn’t wanna do that anymore like tomorrow, it wouldn’t crush me either. It’s not my life goal. Yeah, I don’t think I have a life goal.”

Tina’s story is aligned with each criterion of the meta-reflexive style. She has used her critical voice to engage in *double morphogenesis* by finding ways to thoughtfully critique and challenge social systems throughout her life. Tina reiterated that she had connected with friends if they shared her values and enthusiasm for critiquing. During the interview process, Tina was determining whether she would pursue a PhD. In the end, she decided to move to Los Angeles because she understood this was a unique opportunity that allows her to continue doing what she loves most, thinking and critiquing. Lastly, Tina was drawn to social critique in part because she saw certain shortcomings in her own family. Her view of the family was potentially a response to mixed messages sent by her parents, her mother was working class, and her father was a businessman. Similar to Holly, the other woman selected for metareflexive, Tina’s concerns were centered on the ability to define individuality in a way that not only helps her but also helps the world around her. When discussing their experiences, goals, and motivations, Holly and Tina were the embodiment of *double morphogenesis*.

Fractured Reflexive: Disoriented Transitions

Those who have an inner voice identified as fractured reflexive are individuals who experienced trauma and relational evils during their formative years. Often, these individuals have been tending to the trauma throughout their lifetime, and, therefore, they make decisions based on short-term survival. For them, defining a set of logical

responses based on present opportunities is out of grasp or challenging. There were four women identified as fractured reflexive mode among all of the participants.

The defining characteristic of this group is their inability to match their personal concerns with life outcomes. Given that issue, I have selected two young women who at the time of their interviews felt stuck. Both seemed to have identified certain goals but had not figured out how to achieve them. First, I will discuss Brianna and her confusion about where to look for love and an intimate partner. Secondly, I will describe how Amber was struggling to decide where to go next in her career and how to identify the best course of action for completing her undergraduate degree. Each was examined for the following characteristics 1) dependent relationship style in friendships, 2) relational goods absent during childhood, and 3) a survivalist mentality in planning day-to-day life. Archer (2012) notes that fractured reflexives may actually just be individuals who are currently displaced, and depending on their ability to resolve conflict may resume a different reflexive style. In both of the individuals' stories this is possible, and the narratives presented likely reflected a time of distress and transition.

Brianna

Brianna is a 28-year-old woman working fulltime and living alone in Salt Lake City, Utah. In many ways, Brianna has spent her life trying to make sense of living between binaries and balancing cultures. She is biracial, African American and white, and grew up Mormon (Latter Day Saints). From an early age she felt the people in her own religious community sent her messages that she was an outsider, or different than the ideal. Lately, she feels consumed with the question of whether or not God would want for her to look for love in another culture. She has always planned to get married in the

temple, an LDS ritual that requires both the man and woman are members of the Mormon church. However, she is worried that she will not find a husband who is a traditional Mormon and she will miss out on marriage altogether. Brianna leads a full and busy life, but as she approaches the end of her twenties, she is fixated on the desire to find a life partner, settle down, and start a family.

“Well it’s-, I was talking to my friend about this whose actually from [laughs] – he’s actually from-, he’s actually Arab, and-, but we’re really, really close, and I kept telling him – because I’ve only dated in my religion – but it’s like the only options that I have so it’s really frustrating because, like, I want to marry-, it’s really-, and I feel kind of like a little pissed off about it because I was kind of brought up my whole life thinking that I wasn’t [laughing] attractive because of the culture standards that I’m in, and then finding out that I’m attractive to certain cultures, I was just, like, so pissed because I was just, like, so it is my culture that doesn’t value my beauty, other cultures totally valued my beauty. Like it was-, so it’s extremely frustrating to maybe want an ideal of marrying in the Temple, marrying in the Mormon church, going to church each week, and none of the guys are interested, but then, you know, going and being approached and wanted and there’s interest in a different culture, you feel really confused about that and kind of maybe asking God, like, what should I do? And so I was on this dating site that’s an international dating site, and so I had it on the American one, and I would get maybe one or two messages, like, in a day and they’re not too bad. I switched it over to the country that I’m visiting. Like, no shit, Megan, like, 200 messages a day like that I get from those. So I’m thinking like, ‘What the heck is going on?’ Like, it stinks.

So it’s-, like, it’s interesting, but it’s-, like, so frustrating as well. Like, I am, like, in the wrong culture. Like, I need to go, like, find my husband, like, in a different culture ‘cause this is like-, like, I could, like, be married by now. I could have a life partner by now, but being in this culture, it’s just so slow.”

Brianna feels as though she has been torn between two worlds since childhood. Her upbringing was filled with inconsistency and a push-pull dance between contrasting cultures. Plus, her family moved around frequently adding to the turbulence. Because during her youth interracial marriages were less common, different communities received her family differently. Specifically, she had harmful interactions (e.g. people calling her racial slurs) in a small town in Colorado, whereas in California the family felt relatively normal. She also described herself as a people pleaser when she was young. She would

do anything to be helpful or pleasant for adults. Brianna has become skilled at adapting to help those around her stay comfortable.

“I think being a mixed child, you kind of learn to adapt to the culture that you’re in, and so it can be a very confusing experience because when you’re in White culture, you act white; when you’re in Black culture, you act black, and so what I think tends to happen is I think that I have a core of who I am, but I think that it gets shaken depending on where I’m at. What I mean by that is, like, when I’m around Muslims, I can probably be more traditional and not have a problem with it. When I’m around feminists, sure, I can be a little bit more feminist and not have a problem with it as much. When I’m around Mormons, it’s, like, I’m whatever [laughs]”

Brianna has used her adaptable nature in her career as well. She works with the refugee community helping newcomers settle into American life. Facebook has been helpful for her worklife and has given her a chance to learn about the cultures of those she works with. When she is online many of her interactions are with friends she has from across the globe. She enjoys getting to know people from international cultures and discussed being envious of some of the traditions she has learned about from her global friends.

Currently, several of her social needs are met through online interactions. She uses social media and Skype to keep in touch with international friends. On a typical day she is Skyping with friends or talking with online acquaintances until she is ready to go to bed. Facebook is her preferred online community because it has a blend of her church friends as well as international friends. Recently, having these different networks of relationships joined together has caused tension because there is an obvious political divide. For example, Brianna posted an opinion she had about the events in Ferguson, Missouri, and one of her friends from church “unfriended” her. In August of 2014 a young, unarmed black man was shot by a white police officer. The surrounding community protested after the shooting because the officer failed to secure medical help

and the teen later died (Mandle, 2014). During the time of the research interviews, the state was making decisions about whether the officer would face criminal charges. Yet, people of color, and her international friends were more likely to understand the need to critique police and law enforcement.

“So that stuck out to me, something interesting that kind of Facebook, uh, helped to kind of bring to the surface, like, um, kind of the two different worlds that I lived in. Um, and if I was to say, you know, pro-Israel to the pro-Palestine’s or pro-Palestine to the pro-Israel’s, it would cause a lot of controversy, and I did sometimes post, you know, like, ‘Oh, you shouldn’t,’ you know, ‘this is how I feel about that. We should love each other,’ or ‘This is how I feel about this,’ and I did kind of get eaten up a little bit on both sides for my views, and so-, and that was all on Facebook, and so that was a really interesting month and a half...

The same with the Ferguson issue. Um, my black family, and a lot of my-, even-, so a lot of my friends that are coming over, or have refugee status, or have lived in very dangerous situations, they’re somewhat anti-police because of the corruption from their experiences in their country. Um, a lot of my Mormon friends are kind of pro-police. From my experiences, I like the Salt Lake City police department, but from my dad’s experiences, and kind of what was kind of brought up in my head as a child, I kind of lean with the more make sure that they’re doing their job correctly. If something bad’s happening, you have to speak out about it.

And it’s really interesting. That was another dilemma where a lot of my Mormon friends were just, like, you know, Ferguson, they shouldn’t be going after the cop, this-or-that. You know, I lost a friend over it. Like, she deleted me because I, like, posted something on it; whereas, like, a lot of my black family were posting the protests they were doing in their community in Oakland to talk about the trials that they go through with the police there, and targeting youth and targeting the black community, and a lot of my refugee friends were also posting a lot of Ferguson videos about the corruption there. And so that was another interesting thing where, like, my Facebook feed was really split between two sides, and it was extremely polar. There wasn’t a lot of people that were in the middle. Both of those instances, it was just, like, both of my sides of the friends were extremely polarized, and that’s kind of how I feel being their friends, is sometimes I kind of feel pulled between these two worlds, um, although I think a lot of times, I do somewhat lean more towards the side of the those that are in disadvantaged states more than the sides of my Mormon, more conservative leanings. So, um, but I get to see both sides because I’m in both of those communities.”

The fractured reflexive is most prominently displayed in her inability to decide what to do next. She can see parts of herself in multiple communities, but is struggling

with what feels like outsider status in her own religious group. Brianna is concerned if she gives up parts of her personal identity to conform to the community, she may lose too much of herself. So, she continues to date and meet men outside of the religion, but when she describes her intentions she does not seem committed to the idea of actually settling down with someone who is not LDS. Brianna's story was not simple to categorize, and she discussed several characteristics that could be better explained by other reflexive styles. Certain characteristics from her childhood seem in line with meta-reflexive, especially being given mixed messages. As I thought about what separated her current reflexive style from the communicative, it was her consistent mention of being an outsider to her own community. Brianna is passionate about her religion even though it is not always an easy fit and she sees herself as a change agent where ever she goes. She wondered out loud during the interviews if she could ever completely abandon the beliefs of her faith. She continues to struggle with the idea of finding a husband from her community, her most pressing concern at this time.

Jennifer

Jennifer is a 25-year-old woman living at home while she works part time and attends community college. She considers herself an internet pioneer. She was on Youtube before it was purchased by Google and became a platform for mini-television stars. Her online life is extremely involved, and much of her time socializing is spent with online friends. She is a gamer. She uses multiple social media platforms, and she met her current boyfriend through gaming. Online communities were fundamental to her transition as an adult. She spent a great deal of time socializing in different online communities during her early twenties and most of her relationships, and social support

were online. She was not conventionally attractive or popular during her adolescent years and was bullied throughout high school. Online spaces gave her a chance to experiment with social interaction. One online community that was particularly impactful during her early emerging adult years was “Stickcam” a Youtube forum for people to interact and meet up via webcam — here users could chat, stream video, and incorporate their own video streams onto the larger site. For Jennifer, these online interactions shaped who she is today. When I asked if online life had impacted her development she burst into laughter.

“I didn’t mean to laugh....It’s just because my life sort of revolved around being online. That’s like the crazy thing. I since then pulled myself out a little bit more. But, you know, being 18 through... I’m sorry it made me laugh. 18 through 23, before I met my boyfriend, everything was involved online.

Like, the Stickcam thing, they supported me... I don’t know. People in high school made fun of me, bullied me – everything. And, then meeting people online... Like, all my relationships are through online and I’ve done all long distance relationships.

I know it sounds weird. I’m not an orthodox person.

And, also because, don’t get me wrong, just because I meet everybody online doesn’t make me a person that I’m not able to be sociable because, that’s my job. I’m a Customer’s Service person. So, I’m just a people person all around. So, actually, I think being online a lot in my life has actually made it a lot easier to be sociable.

If that sounds kinda strange... Like, because I met such a diversity of people, I’m able to... what’s the word? Acclimate?”

Her current relationship is with a man living in Canada. They flew out to see one another in person after about six months of online hangouts. They are reliant on ICT to keep their relationship thriving. Once a week they set aside a date night, a six to ten-hour block of time where they participate in a shared activity. Using Skype or Google Talk, they watch movies, play online video games, or just share a drinking game. Also, because they are long distance and do not see one another physically, she believes this makes it

even more important that they talk at least once every day, even if it is just a quick hello. As Jennifer and I discussed her relationship she became emotional. She is in love and wants to start a life with the man she has been with for the past two years, but she is overwhelmed by the prospect of moving forward. To obtain a secure adult life she is unsure if she should focus on her relationship or if she should focus on school.

“I feel like it’s kind of... It’s hard to see where I’m going ‘cause it’s unclear, I guess is the word. I was like, “Oh, what word am I thinking of?” It’s really unclear. There are so many different things that can happen. Like, I don’t know if school’s gonna work out. I don’t know if I’ll get a job with whatever I’m doing in school. I don’t know where I’m going in my career. I don’t know if I’m gonna have the money to get married to my boyfriend. ‘Cause we wanna get married. That’s the whole idea. We already know we wanna be together but, financially, it’s expensive for immigration and a wedding and everything. So, I don’t know if that’s gonna work out or not. If he’s gonna be able to find a job.

It’s really unclear. It’s hard to figure out what you’re doing. There’s no clear path as to what’s going on. It’s like too many decisions to make, you know?”

Jennifer has successfully achieved goals during her adult life. For example, in her early twenties through healthy eating and exercise Jennifer lost over 70 pounds. Her situation never feels stable for long because there are too many crises happening at once. Jennifer moved out when she started going to college. While she was working to take care of herself and figure out college her family was going through significant hardship. Her mother was on the streets with severe mental health issues, and she refused to receive treatment. Her Father ended up losing his house because of unpaid medical bills. Simultaneously, she was struggling with college despite being an excellent student in high school. Because of her family’s financial hardship from unpaid medical bills, she did not want to ask for extra support. Not knowing where to turn for advice about what to do she dropped out of college after one year. This is one of her biggest regrets. She returned to college at 23 but still does not feel she has much to show for it.

“Again, the lack of life experience - I didn’t know what I was doing. So, I ended up dropping out of school, which was a bad idea, which I thought it was like the best idea. It was my biggest regret. I wish I had finished four years after I had done what I had done. But, there’s so much pressure for you to like figure out what you’re doing in the first place. And, after high school, you can’t. There’s just no way.

And, you know, after that year, my Dad lost his house to medical bills. We had all these stuff. That’s when I decided to move out. We had all these stuff going on. It was just like, you know, how do you figure anything out when you have all these other life events and, then you’re trying to keep up with school, and work, and everything? No one’s there to help you juggle anything, you know? There are no resources available for that.”

Jennifer’s story fits the fractured reflexive style based on all of the criteria. First, she described experiences of trauma and stress during her youth that have carried over into her day-to-day living as an adult. Secondly, she approaches problems with a survival mentality resulting in reactions to situations as opposed to planning and preparing in a way that is advantageous. Jennifer seemed overwhelmed by what was currently happening in her life; she wanted to be with her boyfriend and get married. She wanted to stay focused on school, pick a major, and finish what she had started. Another criteria discussed by Archer (2012) are when a fractured reflexive starts to rely on their relationships too much, becoming dependent. Based on how frequently she and her boyfriend communicate that is a possibility, but without knowing him that is difficult to discern. Primarily, Jennifer’s inability to process her emotions and confidently determine her more important goal(s) demonstrate the fractured reflexive mode.

Complicating Reflexive Modes: Challenging the Analysis

As soon as I ended the first Skype session with Lea I was jarred and uncomfortable with some of our similarities. We had many things in our lives that were different, as I listened to her story my heart raced. It felt as if time snapped, and my body

was back in my own parents' living room. Listening to her describe her emotions and current life felt special because I knew all too well the vulnerability of her current conflict.

Lea grew up Christian and attended a Christian school during most of her youth. Growing up in a home with a working single mother, she tried her best not to add any burden. For most of her life, she felt close to her Mother and wanted to remain her “*good girl*” as long as possible. They talk on the phone every day; if she does not call, her Mother gets upset. Now, things have changed. She is trying to find a way to tell her Mom that she no longer believes in organized religion. These tense and uncomfortable feelings become more pronounced when she visits home and her Mother asks her to perform her spoken word piece at her local church. Over winter break, she sent me a private message through the research Facebook page asking for advice. We had discussed religion and parents candidly during the first two interviews, and she was unsure if she would ever let her Mom know what she was feeling. Eventually, she decided her best course of action was to write her mother a letter explaining why her feelings had changed. Below are excerpts from the letter she shared with her mother:

“I don't want to perform my spoken word piece anymore because I no longer believe the things I wrote about. I would feel extremely dishonest to tell people to follow a God that I'm not sure even exists. I'm agnostic, and I've been feeling this way for several months now; I've just been too afraid to tell you because I know how you feel about religion. I'm telling you this because I want to stop hiding this from you. I want you to love me and accept me as I am, not who you want me to be. ... I have other doubts about Christianity and the Bible, but I don't want to overwhelm you, and I know you probably don't want to hear them all anyway. I'm not saying that I don't believe in a God. I'm saying that I'm not sure. If there is a God, I doubt that he's the God that Christians believe in. I know that this will be hard for you to accept, but I hope you can accept me for who I am and for what I believe, and I hope that this confession won't make you think less of me.”

Lea is a 22-year-old African-American woman living in rural Missouri as she finishes up her bachelor's degree. She is originally from Chicago, so going to a school

with a predominantly white student body was not her first choice, but her mother was adamant and believed Lea would have more opportunity at her current university. Right now she spends most of her time thinking about graduate school and moving to a new city and new opportunities. She is passionate about her schoolwork, and she is both excited and nervous about the next steps. What Lea wants for her future most is a family, but before she settles down with anyone, she wants to have financial independence.

“Priority for uhhh, long-term fulfillment. I wanna be financially like independent. I think that’s a big one. Like one of the reasons I don’t feel like an adult now is ‘cause I still depend on my mom very much and also like my mom’s a single mom so she struggles like raising me and my brother sometimes. So I don’t wanna struggle like my mom struggled. Even though my mom has a college degree she was raising two kids by herself and I don’t wanna do that because I know how hard it is so I think financial independence is really important.... Oh yeah. I really want a family too. Yeah, I really want a family, maybe not a huge family but I want a family.”

Lea is caught between different experiences, ideas, and people she has met through college. She still relies heavily on her relationships with people back home in Chicago, a sign of communicative reflexive. Her description of her friendships through college, and Black youth from back home presented striking differences. She discussed how important use of social media was surrounding the events of Ferguson, Missouri. Even the students who Lea considers close friends at her school have been quiet about the story. Lea is outspoken and receives positive reinforcement from her black peers back home via social media.

“Oh man. I don’t feel like I would’ve had a place to vent my feelings. I definitely would not have had a place to vent and I feel like I would be more stressed than I am right now because that would just be building up inside of me like social media is a way like I can vent, I can like get things off of my chest but if social media were not around, I would be doing terribly, I know that for a fact.”

Lea’s outspoken criticisms of the police are much more aligned with the concerns and values of the meta-reflexive. Yet, her ongoing friendships are centered in her home

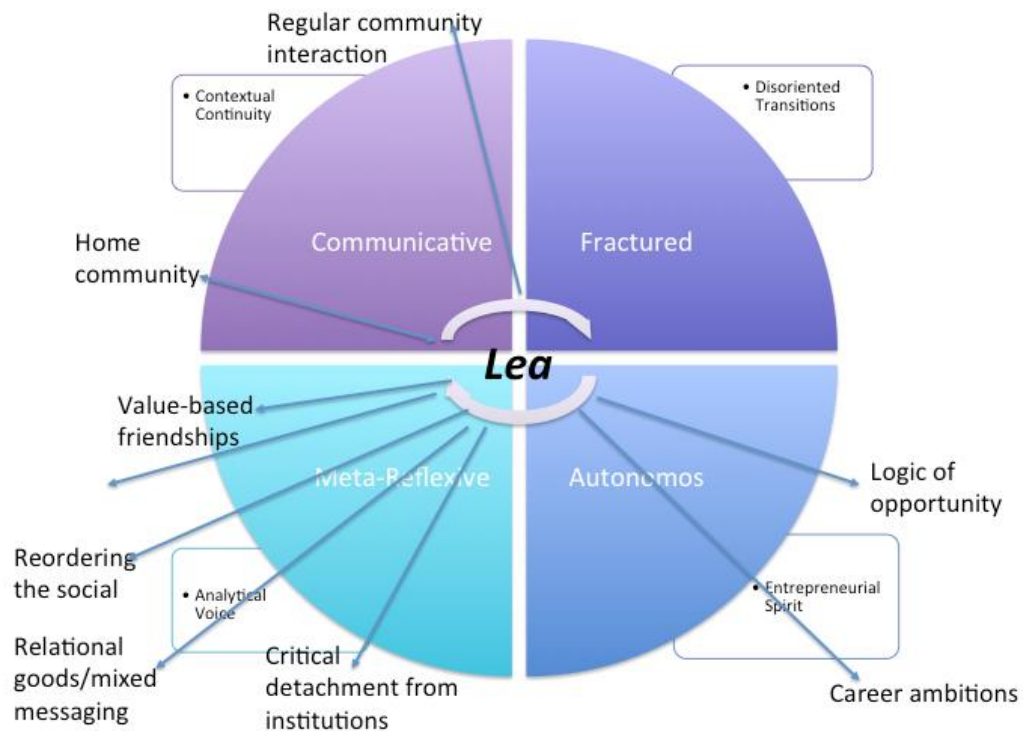
community, but based on her description this is value-based — people who perceive the problem the same way that she does. When Archer (2012) describes meta-reflexive as people who want to reorder the social world through a cause, this example of a young African-American woman presents a complication. For Lea, to do what she feels is right, she must connect with her peers at home, and her original community, which are authentically aware of the individual and shared struggles of Black people in the United States.

The consciousness she shows regarding racial social justice issues may more closely align with the behaviors of the meta-reflexive style. However, her family and home relationships support the criterion of an autonomous reflexive. She grew up with her father being involved in her life, but minimally. As a child of divorce, she talked openly about receiving different messages and parenting styles from each parent. She approaches personal relationships now with tight boundaries and an emphasis on privacy. She is ambitious about her career and mentions several times how important long-term financial stability is for her, before having a family.

Lea's story was selected as an exemplar because she is currently at a crossroads. One other participant, with notable similarities to Lea, was categorized as evolving between reflexive modes. Her own perceptions of where she fit, and who she is, at the time of the interviews, were influencing her relationships and what she planned to do with her life once school finished. She was trying to find ways to divulge vulnerable parts of herself to her mother in hopes of maintaining their relationship without sacrificing her identity. I was unable to categorize Lea into a single reflexive style, but she embodies the process. Lea is refining and shaping her life by carefully detaching from certain ideas,

and experimenting with relationships. At the time of her interviews, she was developing more trust by using her inner voice and inward understanding to decide her future based on personal concerns. Below in Figure 4 we can see how certain qualities and characteristics match the communicative style in the model, others the meta-reflexive, and some with the autonomous.

Figure 4. Lea’s Reflexive Style



Specifically, throughout their twenties, young women described similar processes; developing concerns, projects, and practices. The description of this process looked different depending on external factors, and what the young woman had dealt with during her childhood. Lea was focusing her current efforts on career identity, but at the same time longed for a family. She had spent her childhood years pleasing her parents and respecting her Mother’s strong Christian values. During this crossroads, Lea seemed to be

transitioning from a young woman concerned with pleasing those around her, to an independent voice trying to influence society. Her decision to come forward to her mother and risk the closeness they have always had demonstrates how being true to her values trumped her need to remain connected to the familiar relationships and institutions of her upbringing. Her story reveals the significance of individual beliefs over institutions. She did not emphasize stress or anxiety about leaving Christianity and discontinuing church attendance, only confusion about how to maintain a close relationship with her mother.

Summary

The stories of these young women demonstrate how the reflexivity model can explain transitioning to adulthood. The model does not hold perfectly, and interpreting stories was an imperfect process. Yet, young women did describe a shift to more freedom, and pressure, to design their own life according to their inner desires. Young people described moving away from social institutions for their life goals, sense of self, and security. In turn, they do define their personal sense of identity in combination with social roles, but purposefully maintain distance from these roles in order to allow for the flexibility needed to maintain individualism. The young women in this study were more likely to rely on their own ability to connect with people and create purpose rather than follow a road map of expectant adult roles. Archer would say that young people especially are at the forefront of dealing with the change from stability in social roles to “no authoritative source of normativity” (Archer, 2012, p. 82). Three themes found across participant experiences show the importance of using the reflexive voice to identify concerns, projects, and practices. Young women use online spaces as a continuation of

their developmental activities by — incorporating new technologies into their interactions during life's defining moments, presenting concerns and identifying information relevant to those concerns based on interacting with disruptive network(s), and using ICT to exercise agency through self-defined concerns and leveraging identity to engage with social institutions. Below is a discussion of how different participants showed evidence of these themes.

Disruptive Networks

A disruptive network influences individuals concerns, by potentially influencing the perception of where an individual belongs in the social world and providing consistent interactions with people and ideas outside of one's traditional network. New technologies not only expose young women to different information, the experience of interacting regularly with purposefully selected networks and cultures may also shift their personal identity. Jensen and Arnett (2012) compared this to immigrant status, and believed that all people would develop the ability to morph hybrid identities that would be malleable to different communities. However, the stories and perspectives young women share go beyond adapting to other cultures. Some young women shared instances of deserting their local cultures because their primary concerns were to create a more inclusive world, especially the stories of Olivia, Tina, Holly and Brianna. Of course, concerns are varied and influenced by reflexive mode. Other young women shaped their concerns based on a connection to a local community or set of values, specifically Stephanie. Certain participants reevaluated their personal concerns because of their exposure to a disruptive network.

Young women developed relationships with people online based on interests and shared connections through ideas rather than geography alone. Carly developed relationships with an online community of people who focused on positive thinking; she relied on these people to process experiences, and she received positive feedback about her own ideas and perspectives. Carly also talked a great deal about being liberal and not wanting to participate in traditional Christianity because it excluded other people, e.g. gays. Brianna has developed friendships and connections globally, and discussed in depth her ability to adapt to cultures because of her biracial upbringing. She has dedicated her professional career to helping refugee communities adapt to their new homes. Jennifer credits her social skills, and the ability to acclimate around new people, from meeting her friends primarily online. These individuals exemplify the importance of developing a personal identity that connects and relates to many groups of people. Participants were invested in creating social experience that expanded their lives, and they were willing to adapt to fit these new networks.

Lastly, many young women identified personal concerns related to a cultural shift brought on through social justice efforts. Olivia is passionate about progressive politics and involved in local government. However, much of her time spent volunteering is centered on human rights work. Holly is concerned about racism and frames anti-blackness as a global issue found across cultures. Through her online presence, she wants to combat the cultural damage of white-supremacist ideology connected to colonialism. Similarly, Tina is concerned about gender construction and the degradation of young women, she primarily focuses on how upper-middle class white women regulate young women and minimize their own privilege. Lea wants to help other Black people, and

recognizes this is a community connected through shared experiences of racism, so in turn relies on her friends from back home. She also questioned her religious upbringing after taking a religious study course. Specifically, she did not see how one religious group could be right, and another could be false. These examples show that exposure to a disruptive network can overlap with online activities, but is not limited to online experiences. Participants in some form expressed a desire to improve society through their personal efforts, how they would achieve this manifests differently dependent on reflexive mode and daily practices. Their ties to disruptive networks supported their efforts to engage the social structure and develop practices that confirm these identities.

Defining Moments

Individual's online presence was incorporated into their personal stories, and ICT use emerged as a part of major life events. A defining moment could either be the experience of defining one's self and sharing a piece of personal identity to a network of people, or it may be the experience of having an online interaction change the way you see yourself. The intensity and degree were dependent on what the individual's daily ICT use habits were, but all young women had described how their online lives were intermingled with defining moments at some point.

Carly often relied on her online spiritual group for support. Further, she began to see herself in a more positive light when one of her essays became widely shared and spread among those in her network. She proudly recounted how quickly you could find her 'thinking positive essay' on Google. Both Holly and Lea had national events that precipitated and turned their attention to connecting with other Black youth. During the college years, it is common for African-American's to immerse themselves in activities

and peer groups with others who are also African-American (Tatum, 1998). They both received affirmation and a space to talk about serious historical and current events within their online communities. Notably, neither, Lea or Holly would have had the same access without social media since Lea attended a predominately white college, and Holly was not currently in school. Speaking out against racial injustice became an important piece of who they are as people, and social media gave them space to personify this part of their personal identity.

Brianna is currently experiencing stress from her ongoing interactions online. She was confused about how seriously she should act on the advances of her international suitors, and what it would mean for her own identity. The availability of partners found through international dating sites had been causing a crisis to some degree. Jennifer's choice to go online as a teen was the catalyst for social skills and confidence in building relationships. She is experiencing a similar stressful situation as she decides how to move forward with her long distance relationship. All of these young women had the opportunity to interact with people who took their personal concerns seriously, and gave them a chance to connect and build relationships.

Lastly, certain participants used online opportunities to enhance their career and professional identities. Brooke achieved financial independence through her work as a camgirl; the ability to go to school and maintain her autonomy was invaluable given her personal concerns. She may have found other ways to accomplish this, but Brooke was pleased with her decision to take a risk in order to build her future. Stephanie used online groups to meld her personal values with a professional practice during her graduate school years. Later on, this blend of Christian and health care professional were the logic

behind her lawsuit, a major life event. Olivia chose which parts of herself she would share and how she could be online strategically. Her ability to express ideas, and connect with others, was incorporated into her job as a policy intern. Tina did not describe her article going viral as meaningful immediately, but as we talked about the events she discussed how important it was for her to find people who appreciated her critical voice. The recognition was likely a part of her decision to pursue grad school, knowing that her ideas were worthy of attention. All of these examples show how events, relationships, and interactions can influence how a person develops their sense of self. The online presence is an important element throughout development, and ICT's can be thought of as technologies of the self (Floridi, 2011).

Driven Agency

Driven agency is complex and interweaves with the socio-cultural structures that determine who is allowed freedom. Online interactions offered additional opportunities to link personal concerns with social identity and presentation, further it allowed young women a chance to engage with larger social institutions. "Why this [agency] is so significant is that it allows us to pose the questions about what the historically emergent powers of persons might look like, so that as well as encompassing the properly productive power of the discursive in the constitution of the self, it also enables us to distinguish these from other emergent powers" (Clegg, 2006, p.316). Traditional markers of status influenced how a young person can engage the world around them, and barriers such as socio-economic status, race, size, education, and gender can all limit certain opportunities (Butler, 1989; Crenshaw, 1991; hooks, 1994). However, all young women exercised agency to some degree and furthered these choices by connecting online.

Holly uses her clout on social media to push back on what she deems oppressive practices and institutions. She has mastered turning digital capital into social capital through her persistent work on Tumblr and Twitter. She uses her online presence not only to promote anti-racist ideas, she will often times confront celebrities. As an example, when she wrote her original post about Miley Cryus, she also tweeted Miley directly and confronted what she considered problematic use of Black culture.

One form of exercising agency was to decide and choose which online networks to connect with. As mentioned in Jennifer's story online relationships were key to her development of social skills and peer interactions. During her emerging adult years, her relationship with her father became strained because he believed she was online too much. Eventually she moved out because she did not want him interfering with these decisions. Jennifer did not believe the opinion of her father was more important than the online relationships she was building. Carly made the choice to distance herself from traditional Christianity. She does not like to confront her father, or create unnecessary conflict, yet the support she receives from online friends and especially her mentor, help her to move forward in her decisions with confidence. Lea is exercising agency in the same way, by deliberately choosing her networks of friends. After deciding that her spirituality did not fit into Christianity she deleted certain people from her Facebook page and completely deleted her Twitter account. She chose to start an entirely new Twitter account to reshape her network and shift her online presence.

The young women who were white and had attained some education, or socio-economic standing had different experiences than previous participants mentioned. When her lawsuit was at the peak of receiving public attention, Stephanie began to disengage

from social media. Stephanie did not let online harassment define her but instead used her agency to change behavior and continue to pursue her lawsuit even if it was not popular. Her online presence was secondary to the other pursuits in her life, especially her career. Brooke used camming to exercise agency through her sexuality. She discussed her work as being upsetting for mainstream online pornography and leveraged her work to informally educate her customers about women's sexuality.

Olivia took on a great deal of responsibility at an early age because of her upbringing. She primarily used online spaces with a dose of restraint in order to keep things professional. Her decision to come out online, by writing a personal blog, was the exception to her typical demeanor. Even though her presence was mostly professional, she did not let this hold her back from a personal connection in her network. Each of these young white women who are discussed still use agency to some degree, yet their choices seemed to reflect the types of power they have experienced given the historical context of what it means to be white. Most consistently, they mentioned their concerns for careers and professional reputation in the future.

The exception to this example is Tina, who was less concerned with career and took greater risks through her writing. Tina openly discussed how she grew up with privilege, something she did not fully recognize until she was in college. Tina's life work centers on finding ways to critically examine privilege and think about how to create more equity. She uses this critical voice in her writing but keeps her social media presence relatively personal and light-hearted.

Most these young women had intersecting identities that belonged to more than one marginalized group. Because this is qualitative research I have no way to quantify

impact or intensity, but through these data I see a distinct pattern of marginalized groups using online spaces more boldly to create some influence in their lives. At least, I would describe their online presence as an opportunity for agency in direct relation to the lack of power found in social systems offline. Holly seems like the most prime example of this pattern. She has no employment, no money, and is currently not in school. As a young African-American woman, her voice has historically been minimized and overlooked (hooks, 1994). Yet, online she draws strength and courage from the opportunity to reach out to a group who cares about her ideas. The embodied experience of less power seems to give her a deep appreciation and drive to continue her online presence where she has some control. Stephanie's experience could be seen as the other end of the spectrum. She backed away from online spaces to preserve the energy she had during the lawsuit. Stephanie did not need to have a voice online for the issue, because she had the backings of a large and powerful law firm.

Throughout Chapter Six I will explore these three themes in more depth. Specifically, I will continue to provide examples and instances where young women develop concerns because of exposure to a disruptive network, where participants discussed stories of ICT use as being integrated into their defining moments, and instances where online interaction became a part of exercising agency. An additional overarching theme of personal relationships and ICT use will be discussed. Finally, experiences of young women will be connected to previous research literature about young women's online experiences.

CHAPTER SIX: THE ROLE OF ICT

"We each sit alone, staring at this black screen with a whole range of emotions. But in a strange way, we are all doing it together, and we should take solace in the fact that no one has a clue what's going on."

Aziz Ansari, Modern Romance: An Investigation

The final chapter of research findings addresses the third research question, "How does ICT use influence emerging adult women and their reflexivity during the developmental process?" Regarding this, I was excited at the prospect of bringing users subjective interpretations of daily experiences into the center of the conversation. Young women were engaged with the topic and eager to share their ideas about what a world of constant connectivity means for them. Their theories ranged, with some skeptical and worried about potential harm; other young women viewed new technologies as their personal saving grace and emphasized the positive attributes. What struck me most was the ways in which technology had woven itself into daily life so discreetly that much of the use goes unnoticed. As Tina (23) describes, "*Yeah. I don't know. It's weird. I don't really like conceptualize myself as being separate from the Internet...*" Participants were going online every day, and because their needs were so individual and unique there is no clear or simple answer for what this experience means.

Below is a discussion of how patterns of ICT use emerged during the participants' stories about their developmental trajectories. For some young people ICT's were a large part of dating and meeting new people, for others it was a part of maintaining the connection with their partners. For young people ICT's 1) enhance personal relationships, 2) provide an opportunity to participate in a disruptive network, 3) contribute to defining moments, and 4) provide a space for agency. Certain participants were deliberately working to build an online presence, other young women were intentionally pulling back

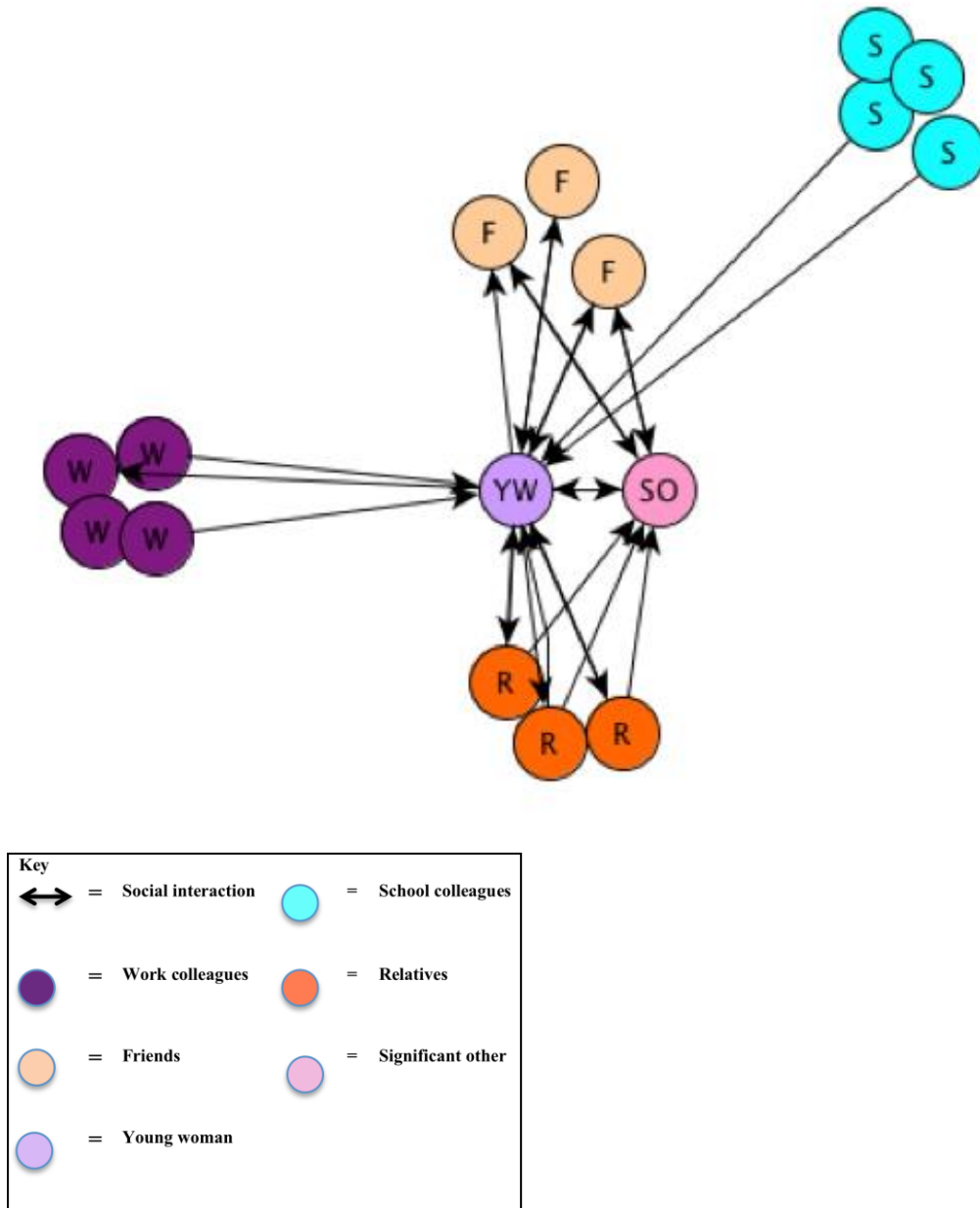
or limiting their online interaction. Each user's experience is as subjective as their life experience and as fluid as their current concerns.

Augment Personal Relationships

ICT is relational. ICT's are regularly used to build new relationships and sustain the relationship's one has. Because many of the participants had left for college or had family that lived away from their local community, ICT's were a vital part of sustaining those close relationships. I was struck by how consistently participants' first responses were a description of family communication and staying in touch with parents and siblings. Also many offered stories and insights about how their dating and romantic encounters were intertwined with social media, dating sites, and texting. Lastly, the use of ICT has become a presence in committed romantic relationships as well.

Below is a figure of what could be considered a traditional, or pre-ICT, network of a young woman. This conceptual model shows how people have always balanced multiple social roles during the time of their transition to adulthood. The primary and important difference being shown below is the amount of interaction, and the separateness of each group. A young person is expected to interact with a romantic partner, relatives, friends, schools colleagues, and work colleagues. These networks of relationships were likely to have influenced and shaped a young woman's reflexive process, as demonstrated in Figure 5, the interactions were never simple. Young people have always presented their personal and social identities in many contexts.

Figure 5. Traditional Network Interactions



Family Relationships

“Well I will say that I’m a crazy family person and none of my family lives in Arizona, all of my extended family either lives in Switzerland or New Orleans still so I think that one experience that like kind of like happened via social network is my cousin had a baby and throughout the whole process like we were so connected with all of them because of Facebook and it was really special I mean special in the way that we can only be connected with them to like kind of see what was going on and obviously like private messages too but just like seeing pictures of the baby and still being updated on them like weekly and monthly and how he’s growing up ‘cause I still haven’t even met him so he’s like a year and a half now so I’m still, I’m just like seeing his growth through technology which is kind of cool when you really think about it because we never had this sort of like capabilities before so yeah.” (Alex, 22)

“Well, my cellphone is like the biggest sort of technology device that I use as far as like communicating from a family... But, yeah, I use my cellphone. Like, constantly texting, emailing [her mother]. I do email her sometimes as well...I’m like looking at my cellphone now.

But, I do use this like... It’s like a part of my hand. So, I call her, text her throughout the day or, other family members and friends. Yeah.” (Kendra, 26)

Alex and Kendra both have relatives who are not geographically close, for them ICT offers an ease and convenience that helps them to maintain their existing bonds. Alex wondered if she would know much at all about her cousin’s baby. Kendra realized as she was speaking just how significant her day-to-day interactions with her mother were. They have an intimate connection, and friendship; she describes her mother as “her heart.” Throughout the interview, Kendra recounted conversations she had shared with her mother since the time she moved out of state. ICT’s assisted people as they strived to maintain closeness with those they love.

“Okay. So my husband started this clan its like you build your own clan castle like you have your own little town and ahm and then you can go to clan wars and like the whole clan attacks another clan together and so it’s like this synchronize, like in one, 24-hours-a -day everybody has to attack and you have to like it’s-you have to just strategize and so my whole — like my sister, my mom, my nephew is on there and her hu—my sister’s husband which has got- and my aunt and uncle there in California...we all just play there and there’s like a little chat so we could ‘a like playfully like joke with each other and were super dorky like we live up the clan- they like my name on there’s ‘queen’ and ahm

so I'm like the queen of our clan, it's sounds so dorky so I check up n that and see what's going on and I have to do like little things in the morning yeah...So it started with us 3 and then we got my sister, my aunt like everybody else and now my cousin -we just -it's like every new person that joins in my family like my cousin has new girlfriend we're like 'Oh you have to join ' so we got her on it over thanksgiving weekend.'" (Marilyn, 29)

"So I didn't take the picture down ahm I left it out there but like that's when I started making the changes to my Facebook as to who can post what on my on my Facebook. Ahm and the conversation you know he [father] was- he asked questions about I told him the truth which you know at that time I had just turned 24, I had nothing to hide. Yeah yeah it was for a birthday celebration. You know he didn't really make much of it but it-it to me it was like an invasion of privacy because that's you know my parents aren't very computer literate and so they don't go on Facebook and — and snoop around somebody had to tell him that and that was kind of like an invasion of privacy which I think is why Facebook is very restricted and its very controlled because you know once that trust has kind of been broken It's like okay well, I'm not gonna start unfriending people I'm just gonna not use Facebook for personal stuff so..." (Jordan, 24)

Marilyn shared a positive experience when the family joined to play an online game. Later, when describing in more detail about the game she divulged some of the complications with keeping all of her relatives pleased. As a newlywed, her husband and family had to work together as they learned more about one another. Jordan had an uncomfortable situation when one of her close relatives, she believes her uncle, directed her parents to a picture of her out at a bar. At the time, Jordan was living in her parent's' home, and as seen from her excerpt she decided the best way to be on social media with her family members was actually to be less seen.

These examples highlight how time spent online, or on a mobile phone can be thought of in more constructive terms. Here I see the young people as actively investing their time into relationships, staying close to relatives and friends. Kendra and Marilyn's stories demonstrated how these interactions serve as valuable practice for establishing boundaries and adult relationships with family members.

Dating Relationships & ICT

To begin, Casey and Vanessa share the stories of how they met their current partners. They have both been in committed relationships for longer than five years. They also met their partners during a time when social media was not as dominate compared with today. Casey first met her husband in person, but believes that the quick facilitation Facebook offered was key. Vanessa was able to contrast her fiancée's behavior with the other men she met through Myspace. They developed a friendship before meeting and now they have been a couple since she was in high school.

"Yeah, so I'll start with my husband so actually when I first met my husband he owns a restaurant and I went into that restaurant with people and it's funny because like 2 years before that I ran a summer program at a Hispanic resource center and my current husband's sister was enrolled in that program, I taught her but I never met my husband even though his sister was there and then 2 years later I show up at his restaurant that I've never been to and I, in his restaurant he was like "Hey! You should come back without your friends sometime." And I was like "What?" that's weird but obviously he wanted to see me again and I wanted to see him too because you know, I thought he was cute so when we got in the car I asked one of my friends like 'Do you remember that girl who was in that program? Do you remember her last name?' and then like, 'Oh yeah, it's Oldivia' and so I went on Facebook and I found him on Facebook and I friend requested him and then he sent me a message like, I can't remember what I posted but he was something like 'Oh, we should get to know each other more.' And so through that we like ran into each other at a bar and he got my phone number and we started dating and now that's that. So I mean I kind of think like maybe if I didn't, had never friend requested him and I've never gone back to that restaurant, like we wouldn't be married. I don't know." (Casey, 29)

"I don't know. I don't know if it would be really important but... I mean, I met Carlos off of MySpace when we had MySpace... And, so that's how he approached me and said, 'Oh, I know your boyfriend. We went to high school with each other.' And I was like, 'Oh, cool.' you know? And, he just kept... He just started messaging me. And, he wasn't like typical, other like perverts out there, you know? Like, you know, they won't be like... Like, I will used to get messages and they were like so gross and you're just like, 'Really?' Like, 'I'm not gonna talk to you.' And, he was really nice. Like, we would just talk about each other's relationships 'cause he was in a relationship as well. And, just like... And, he wasn't like typical other like pervert out there, you know? (Vanessa, 27)

Participants discussed using social media, texts, and phone calls to progress a flirtation. Kai was rarely interested in the people who flirted with them online, because of

a previous experience that had turned “stalkerish” creating a discomfort with these public displays of romantic interest. Kara talked about one of her early experiences where she enjoyed the public flirtation; and she recounts the awkward misuse of the platform as endearing. The online interaction may have mirrored the flirting you might expect to see among young people who are still striving to present as comfortable and confident on the dating scene in person. Kara thought the gesture was sweet, and later on they dated more seriously. Her experience of flirting through social media fits descriptions from Smith and Duggan (2013), showing social media interactions are an informal addition to flirting face-to-face.

“I can tell they're hitting on me based on the comments they make or them suddenly deciding to message or text me after. I also feel like the primary people who like my statuses/pics are ones who have previously said they like me” (Kai, 23)

“I'll send you this but he was on my Facebook, and he wrote on his own-, no. He meant to be on my Facebook and write on his wall, but he was actually on his Facebook still and wrote on my wall...and calling himself a sexy man. [laughs] ...It's basically just him talking to himself cause then he said, 'Oops. I was gonna say that Kara is super hot, but my massive ego got in the way.' And then he replied again and said that I am super hot.

So it was kinda weird. It all happened on my wall though, but it was just him talking to himself. “(Kara, 26)

Not every participant had positive experiences or even hope for what ICT would do to improve their current dating situation. Alex felt like social media, texting, and most forms of mediated flirting were creating false barriers between people. She expressed similar concerns about ICT diminishing face-to-face communication in other relationship contexts and was one of the more skeptical participants. Lea, told me a story of a young man she was not dating, but they were “talking.” She was flustered and hurt when she found out he was not only talking with other women back home in Chicago but also adult

film stars he was following on Twitter. This game frustrated her, and while she was doing her best to detach her personal feelings, she was still hurt.

“It [technology] enhances [dating games] because I mean I think it puts a level of distance between two people. I mean at least the game within like the past has been like face-to-face to a certain extent and there’s still like conversation happening, but you know, now it’s a text message. You know, you get to know someone through a text message, opposed to like a voice call or you get to know them through like Facebook or they’re like through Instagram opposed to like talking about it or whatever and you know, there’s positives and negatives to it you know? I mean, your whole life is kind of like put out there for the public to like kind of like decipher and like peak through but you know, it’s also like I would kind of like the chance to like tell my own story, you know? Without that sort of level of like ‘Oh, I’m just gonna judge for myself by like scrolling through your page.’ Opposed to you know, actually like talking about it and giving my own tidbits on each part of my like life events instead of like Facebook just like saying ‘You graduated from college.’ Whatever, you know?” (Alex, 22)

“So I was about to follow him [on Twitter] and then I saw like all these porn stars he was talking to like ‘Oh, I’ll fuck the shit out of you if you come in Chicago.’ And I was like ‘What?!’ like I know we weren’t in a relationship but at the same time, I don’t know, I kinda felt betrayed and I was like “ah!”... In that moment I was like, I felt betrayed, I was like, why is he talking to like these women who he doesn’t know, like what? Why? Like why are you telling women you wanna have sex with them like we just hooked up like why, I know we weren’t in a relationship like I said but at the same time it was like I don’t know.” (Lea, 22)

Previous research has examined how ICT may influence the inception of relationships. The examples demonstrate that ICT was helpful for certain daters because ICT provided a way to maintain the connection and excitement around a new relationship. However, the way people reported and described these interactions was largely determined by their own level of personal interest in the suitor and dating in general. Vanessa believes she fell in love with her husband because she had time to get to know him personally before they started officially flirting. Whereas for Lea, the additional information about the young man she was interested in seeing, deterred her from pursuing a relationship with him.-

Gathering information before dating can also be an asset. For Jennifer, Skype calls and online gaming were imperative in facilitating her relationship. Further, Jennifer may have fit the profile described in previous research; she self-reported as having social anxiety and some shyness in offline situations. Previous research discussed how gathering additional information about a romantic interest can ease the social tension in the situation (Stevens & Morris, 2007). Jennifer met her partner online through a game before they ever talked with one another romantically. Her attraction and instant connection was related to his understanding about her struggles with weight. The relationship itself was influential in how she would see herself as a person.

“Okay. So, we played the [online] game together. We weren’t talking directly. We were talking in the raid. I know him as a quiet kinda anonymous guy who sits in the corner. ‘Cause he’s just not a very... like, in the game... out. Like, he’s here with his friends, he’s like, “Whoa...” So, he’s different around other people. And, he would sit on the corner. And, our guild fell apart and I’m like, “What are we gonna do?” ‘Cause I had no... I just spent like 50 bucks to transfer to play with people and I’m like, “What are we gonna do?” and he’s like, “Let’s try to rebuild the guild.”

And, then we just started staying up late at night with each other talking about our issues. This was after New Year’s. He had been depressed. I had been bummed out. And, we just started talking about our issues and getting to know each other. And, he sent me a picture of him like three weeks later and I’m like, ‘Oh, you’re pretty cute,’ and, then I sent him a picture of me. And, that’s when I had my weight problem and I sent him a picture of just my face ‘cause I was so self-conscious. And he’s like, you’re really pretty. And, so then we saw each other picture-wise and then we email each other back and forth and then we got on Skype. ‘Cause I actually told him, I’m like, ‘Well, maybe we should start Skyping.’” (Jennifer, 25)

Jennifer is passionate about her relationship and maintains a close bond with her long-distance boyfriend. Because they met online, communicating and building a relationship through online spaces may have come more naturally. She recounted how the first time they said I love you was during a Skype call. When she did finally meet him in person, she was pleasantly surprised at how safe and familiar he felt. When they rode

back from the airport, she fell asleep with her head in his lap. Jennifer, as a fractured reflexive, experienced stress because of the long distance relationship. Brianna, also a fractured reflexive, was a frequent Skype user and had met more than one romantic interest though international communities she found online.

“When you’re in a long-distance relationship, because you don’t have the opportunity to see each other every day, you need to talk to each other a day. Even to say hello, say I love you. Just some kind of words knowing that the other person is thinking about you because you need to...”

You don’t have to be clingy. It’s not like, “Aahhh! I have to know everything you’re doing.” It’s more like, “Hey, what’s up?” you know? And, some days like I would be working all day, like a long day, and I hadn’t had time to text, ‘cause we use GoogleTalk so it’s cheaper that way, so he’ll message me in GoogleTalk like after a long day and I’m like... It feels like the perfect timing. This has totally made my day.

And, then we do this thing every week called “Date Night” and we set aside like 8 to 10 hours of just spending the entire time together. Sometimes it’s only six or seven. But, you know, we’ll do things. Like, we’ll watch movies, we’ll play video games together, we drink. We drink with each other. That’s fun. Getting drunk is fun. Just that one-day we set aside. That particular time. That something that we can just always look forward to.” (Jennifer, 25)

“I switched it over to the country that I’m visiting. Like, no shit, Megan, like, 200 messages a day like that I get from those. So I’m thinking like, ‘What the heck is going on?’ Like, it stinks.” (Brianna, 28)

Similar to previous research findings, ICT warranted positive and negative outcomes through the additional opportunity for interaction (Smith & Duggan, 2013; Yang et al., 2013). For young people still decoding and figuring out what they want to get from dating relationships, the extra information and interactions could feel overwhelming. Kai, unsure if they wanted to date at all was bothered when they thought people only interacted because they wanted to flirt. Alex would have preferred more in person interaction and thought people were not getting to know her, but judged her based on her profile. Lastly, Lea found out more about her romantic interest, but the

information was painful and difficult to process. Jennifer and Brianna both had extra opportunities through online communities, but these encounters were not simple and both women described conflict centered from long-distance dating. For Lea and Kai, dating was not the priority, and they seemed to be in agreement that extra information did not always make things easier. Each of these examples demonstrates how individual women interpret their experiences with ICT and dating. Yet, because the participants were at different stages of dating, different individual's reported a variety of expectations, preferences, and view about the contributions technology made in the situation.

Intimate Relationship Communication & ICT

However, for those who were in committed relationships ICT interaction often acted as a support and benefit for the relationship. For those who were already in relationships, ICT played a major role in sharing closeness with that partner. Daisa talked about how her boyfriend frequently sent her Snapchat messages throughout the day to help her feel less isolated when she was having a challenging day. Kendall recounted how her boyfriend, who was not a social media enthusiast, wanted to include her in his Facebook profile photo. The exchange was a small, but flattering gesture that reaffirmed the importance of the relationship.

“Yes I do snap - I actually have a couple of waiting for me from my boyfriend... He just sends me goofy faces like if I'm like I'm not okay right now, he'll just send me like these – they're hilarious. He does weird things with his face and it cracks me up and I screen save them so I have them and I laugh.” (Daisa, 20)

“Actually, we were at the wedding... You know, he's like not really a big Facebook person but, we're at a wedding for one of his friends a couple of weeks ago and we like took a picture and he's like, 'I'm making that my profile picture. You can't steal it.' and, I was like, 'Okay. You can have it.' So, that was like funny. That's the most like Facebook-y thing he's probably ever done in his life.” (Kendall, 24)

Trust with a partner was a determinant for how ICT use would manifest between two daters. Brooke described her boyfriend as supportive and open, in comparison to her previous boyfriend she was comfortable bringing needs to him. Margret and her boyfriend were less trusting of one another. Although she framed exchanging phones as an exercise in trust, from what she had described he was the first to initiate viewing one another's personal information. For Margret, she felt comfortable with this arrangement so long as he participated as well.

"Oh, um, so we've dating for two years, but what-, hmm...we've been dating a few-, we met as friends, and then we've been dating for about a month before we decided to go Facebook official, and he'd never had a girlfriend before so he wasn't sure about it. So I was the one who brought it up, and he was, like, 'Oh okay. Cool. Yeah, you can do that.' And so, yeah, it wasn't this complicated thing or anything." (Brooke, 23)

"No. I give him my phone and he reads it. He reads the text messages... It builds trust actually 'cause if he's actually letting me go through his phone, then... I mean, like I'm trusting him and he's trusting me." (Margret, 20)

The experiences and stories of these participants provide agreement and disagreement with previous research findings about social media and romantic relationships. For instance, Daisa's description of the stream of snap chat messages she got from her boyfriend is not dissimilar to the findings Coyne and colleagues' (2011) presented about text messaging among married couples. Small displays of affection via ICT can be a supportive romantic gesture. Kendall's description of her boyfriend's behaviors corresponded with previous research findings about young men in dating relationships; additionally she followed his lead on social media keeping a low key public persona (Zhao et al., 2012). The story of Jenifer is an example of what Steven and Morris (2007) discussed when examining webcam video calls; she talked about how much of her social anxiety was overcome by having access to these additional spaces.

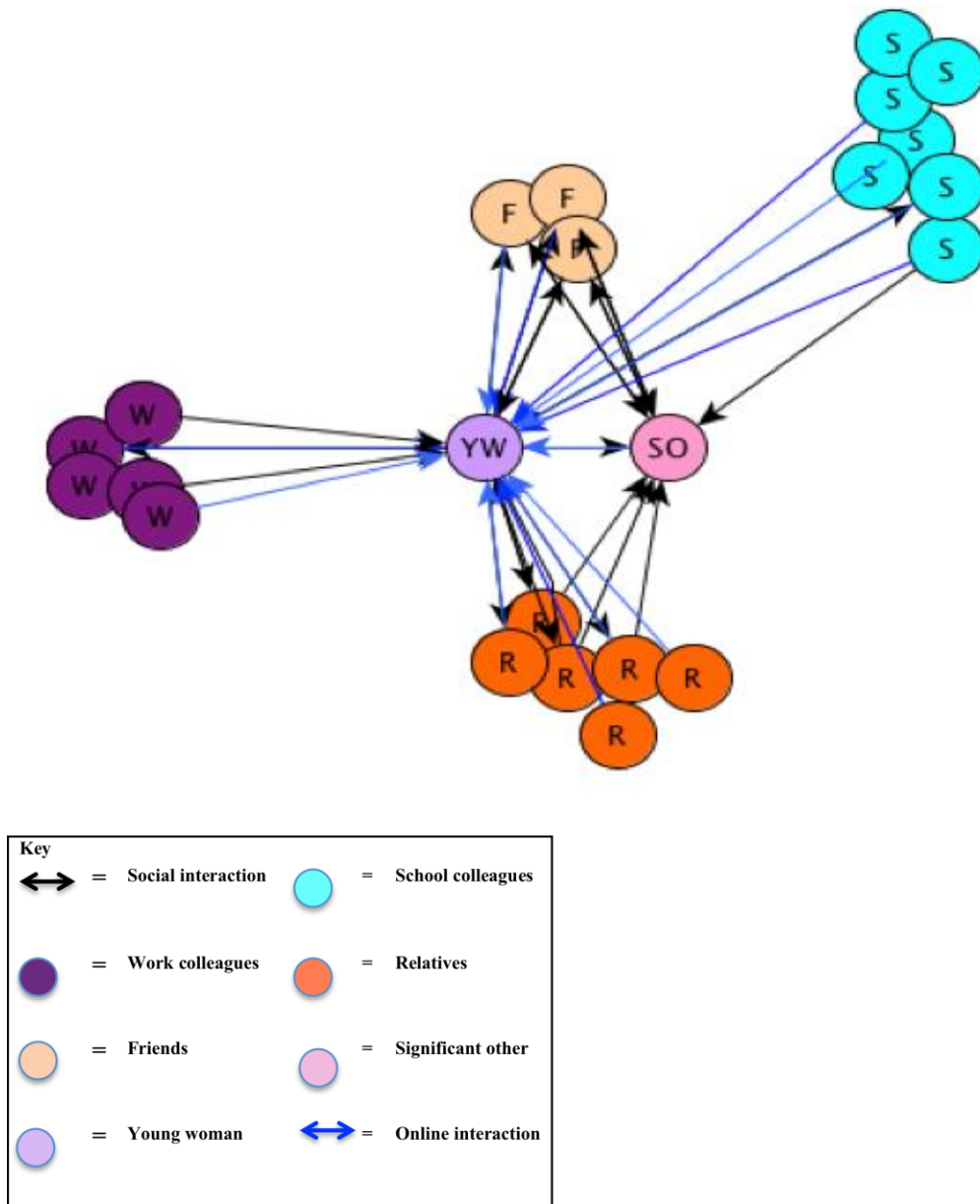
Other trends that participants mentioned were flirting online, vetting a potential date, and the decision to update a Facebook status (Papp et al., 2012; Smith & Duggan, 2013; Yang et al., 2013). Alex voiced frustration over the vetting process, and Vanessa believes that social media was the foundation of her successful long-term relationship. Participants from all age groups had some exposure to dating sites, dating apps, and online groups and forums specific to finding a mate— in contrast to previous research finding online dating services are typically for those 25-years and older (Smith & Duggan, 2013).

Lastly, Margret discussed issues surrounding social media and jealousy. Of note, she is younger, and some studies have noted that relationships jealousy is likely connected to age (Elphinston et al., 2011). However, her boyfriend was the first to suggest swapping phones, after observing a social media exchange that he did not like — previous research claimed that females were more likely to report jealousy related to social media interaction (Muisse et al., 2009). I want to stress how varied the participants experiences were, and how this leads to supporting and contradicting evidence about the role of ICT in relationships. To better understand any influence ICT may have, research will need to investigate a range of relationship statuses and also account for the emotional state of each individual.

To summarize, if relationships are augmented by technology then ICT's can be thought of as part of relationship development and mastering intimacy. Notable to research question one, certain participants credited their success in romantic and dating relationships to the use of ICT. Other women, primarily single women, reported ICT use to be creating barriers when finding partners and communicating openly during the dating

process. All young women described enhanced, or additional interactions with friends and family members, via ICT. Figure six below demonstrates the additional interaction or augmented relationship effects. Each blue line represents interactions made possible through the use of ICT.

Figure 6. Augmented Relationships



Disruptive Networks

The idea of disruptive networks was introduced previously in chapter five. Essentially the networked society, and especially new technologies plays an imperative role in the way people now push toward individualism and away from social institutions. As discussed in chapter four, many see this as a generational shift. Archer (2012) calls the exposure to many different cultures, social structures, and world-views— *contextual incongruity*. I propose that online interactions enhance the experience of contextual incongruity through interactions that flow more readily via disruptive networks.

Through examples previously provided, I found that participant's reflexive styles were connected to the ways they interacted with these disruptive networks. Those who were communicative and fractured were more likely to organize relationships and groups of people to confirm their ideas and sense of self; however these networks can be considered disruptive because they often did not connect to someone's local culture. Those who were meta-reflexive and autonomous were more interested in organizing collective action amongst their group, a disruptive network in a more literal sense. Their stories included attempts to produce collective social action, meant to change the social structure. The following subthemes will be discussed in the context of disruptive networks — daily ICT routines, pluralist societies, and social media use. Each subtheme provides useful examples of how contextual incongruity manifests in experiences and interactions among young women.

Daily ICT routine

Participant's day-to-day lives are entwined with online activity, to the point that daily habits are routine. Description of daily ICT routines included gathering news,

checking email, browsing social media, and checking for text messages and phone calls. Often, participants reported the first thing they would do when they wake up is connect back to their preferred networks. They relied on these sources to get caught up on what happened when they were away. Throughout the day, they check back in.

“I think like when I wake up, like whenever I, I usually like check my email while I’m drinking coffee and then I check Facebook, Twitter, Instagram kind of casually and then of course I go and check like my YouTube analytics to see if people who have watched my videos and I would say I don’t check my blog views every day. I’m not sure why but probably should. So yeah, I might do that in the morning, usually like I have a morning routine as I do that, make a to-do list and drink my coffee and then do whatever work I have to do that day and usually at night then I come back and kind of do the same thing whether it’s posting on there or just checking to see what my friends have posted and yeah, throughout the day if I like I’m eating lunch or something then I’ll go with my Instagram and like pictures or during the day I take a picture about my post-it or yeah.” (Casey, 29)

“Okay ahm well when I wake up I check my email which I know is not necessarily related to social media but I will check my email first just in case I’m missing things ahm I tend to check Facebook a lot more than I would like to admit because a lot of people tend to reach out to me on Facebook and I always tell them don’t do that but they do so I took Facebook to see what’s going on somebody will probably tag me something so I probably go through that and get all the notifications out of the way. Ahm, Tumblr’s is kind of complicated because I don’t- when I was in college it was ironic because that’s the time you would expect me not to have time ahm to focus on Tumblr, I used to be on Tumblr all the time and so I would have conversations with people or I would you know join one of those long post where people would talk about some sort of social injustice that’s happened here or there or something that’s happened in pop culture and I’ll kind of you know do that but nowadays I kind of just que and I’ll – I’ll jump in every now and again. ahm Twitter is something I also heavily involved in but I’ve kind of fallen back a bit since being out of school ahm – I was- during the campaign I was heavily on Twitter ahm I have 2 different Twitter accounts ahm one for my professional work and then the other one’s for social so I can talk about Scandal and reblog craziness and or retweet craziness ahm but I think every day I check those 3 sites at least- oh let’s say about 4 times a day ahm just checking them not necessarily staying on them for long hours at a time just going through if anybody’s contacted me or there’s something going on . I usually give a lot of my news from Twitter ahm if things are going on especially I’ve been the following the Mike Brown situation at Ferguson and I’ve been kinda been following those tags and seeing what’s going on there. Ahm I kinda join the conversation every now and the- every now and then ahm but yah- it’s kind of like- Twitter- Twitter I would say I used more than any of the other social media platforms ahm just because I have 2 different accounts but ahm yeah that’s pretty much my routine everyday. It’s like kinda

just check in to see what's going on if something interesting I'll participate if not I'll just kind of check back later." (Jordan, 24)

Jordan and Casey demonstrate how high ICT users may turn to multiple platforms to have each of their needs met. On a daily basis, this means checking in with each network, or group, yet the expectations of interactions depend on the purpose of the group. Interestingly, in these instances we see a counter-example of previous research about social media. The idea of context collapse promotes that people flatten, rework, and mold their identity to provide an online presence that will be acceptable for individuals with different relationship contexts (boyd & Marwick, 2011). However, Jordan and Casey both discussed how they selected a variety of platforms to avoid mixing certain social groups. A part of online routines is constructing online spaces that are divided and parsed into different platforms to customize the interactions. In turn, a part of daily ICT routines is to check in with various groups. These networks of people are a regular presence in the lives of young people and the experience of shaping the networks will be further discussed.

Gathering Information

Participants spend time online specifically for the purpose of gathering information, finding news, and researching various topics that interest them. Sometimes the activity is a private experience where one reads and privately consumes information. More commonly the participants would use this information as a way of starting a dialogue with other people. Below Lea describes how Buzz Feed, a news and entertainment site, has become engrained with her routine. Kara and I talked about the concept of gender fluidity in the second interview. She had shared an article to the

research Facebook page. Here, Kara describes how she learned about some of these concepts through a forum on Reddit.

“I go on Buzz Feed, read some articles that standout to me, sometimes I go to Yahoo News, Facebook, I used to have a Twitter account and then I deactivated it. Do you want like Instagram? Things like that? Yeah, Instagram, I get on every day, yeah, well, not as much as like, no, not every day, maybe every other day, not as much as I get on Facebook and I read Buzz Feed every day.” (Lea, 23)

“Reddit. And social media. I don’t really get on it that often either. Maybe like once a week, and I actually look at-, there’s a sub-Reddit for relationships, and I follow that sub-Reddit because I always think it’s really interesting, and I read about relationships and stuff like that a lot, but I think, like, forums like that where people can discuss their ideas and their urges—just like the urge to dress differently if they want to and stuff—really helps to empower them to do that, to know that they’re accepted...and the forum is there because of the internet...and so I think they’re definitely related. Um, the reason, like, I posted that role-, that specific article from NPR is cause I think-, like, within my circle, especially around social media, social justice is, like-, like, I love social justice, and you can hear anything you want and stick to these morals and, like, mores and stuff like that, and so for me, it’s a lot more prevalent I think than the general population would say. “ (Kara, 24)

Other young women described how their information gathering activities centered on personal growth. Carly mentioned several times how her favorite online activity is research, much of the information she gathered was about living a positive lifestyle.

Jordan was enthusiastic about watching TED talks, an online series of speakers who present research for lay audiences.

“Umm. I like to research, like, self-growth topics. So, whenever I’m, you know, I wonder how I’m doing in my life then I like to research it. And, like, I’ll be trying to use what I’ve learned. In my house I understand myself better. I don’t think I would have made it this far without, like, all the different tools and things, you know, on Youtube. I was into, like, some meditation or whatever it is. I actually, it’s like a tool that helps me grow. That’s how I. . .” (Carly, 25)

“But, TED Talks is kind of like church for me, in a sense, ‘cause I’m like, ‘I learned so much and I felt like I left a better person after watching it.’ ... I love TED Talks.” (Jordan, 24)

For participants going online for information is an important part of their daily ritual. This desire to learn more about what is going on in the world, and present opinions and thoughts with others about current events; can be seen as developmental work. Voicing concerns is a way to affirm one's identity. Online activities are integral to their experimentation with their adult identities, whether that be finding information or exchanging information.

Pluralist Societies

Young people are exposed to a multicultural world, through technology and other means. Multiple participants discussed growing up in mobile families, and adjusting to new places and people throughout their childhood years. For certain participants this seemed to be an intentional move by their parents, *"..but, when I lived in Luxembourg, my parents would put me in international schools and so all the kids were from a different country. And, I think...I think that definitely made foreign people and foreign ideas less scary to me and it just more normalized them"* (Brooke, 23). Participants provided examples of creating online networks comprised of people outside of their regional group or cultural background. Sometimes these groups were found online, other times these were friends and acquaintances that lived further away but online communications helped to sustain those relationships.

"It opens a lot of stuff for anyone when they go online, of course it opens up to bad and good avenues but I think it's a lot more positive basically since technology aids with any – connect with instead of the like thousand we have around town to the billions we have out there which is amazing in itself..." (Ryan, 18)

"Oh yeah. I did a make-up swap which is where like you get a package of make-up goods and then you send it to someone else and then they send one to you and I did it with a girl in the UK she lives like in Northern England and so I sent her a bunch of American beauty products and she sent me a bunch of English beauty products and she has like 20,000 subscribers or something so she said, "Oh, this person, Casey, sent me these

products and showed me them” and she was like “I’m really happy with the products that I got” and I got a ton of subscribers from that because they were like “Oh, I wanna go over to her channel and see” and then I got a lot of people like “Oh! Do you wanna do a swap with me?” because they saw the things I sent to her and yeah, and so, and actually that girl from England is coming to New York this week and I was gonna go and meet up with her in New York but my parents are coming in to town so we can’t but next week there’s a girl who’s from Canada who is another YouTuber and we’re actually meeting up in Baltimore, so it’s crazy...How the YouTube world, we’re gonna bring it into real life.” (Casey, 29)

Ryan spent many afternoons and evenings chatting with people from all around the world on MSN messenger. They met their first love interest, a boy living in Mexico, through the chatting service. The romantic relationship lasted for several years and although they put the romance on pause when Ryan started college, the two remained good friends. Casey was enthusiastic about those she met through vlogging. She is outgoing and friendly a personality characteristic that translated into her online interactions as well.

Selective Networks

Participants described several activities surrounding social networking sites that demonstrate a balance between identity work and relationship work. For instance, Lea discussed how disconnected she felt from certain friends, and how this led to a period of Facebook cleansing. This disconnection was in part because of her changing and evolving identity as if looking into her network was direct evidence that these people no longer knew who she was. Casey intermingled many of her social activities during college with social networking sites. Specifically, social media enhanced and contributed to her ability to organize a successful social club on campus. She continued these friendships after college, keeping in touch through Facebook. In both instances, young

people are assembling groups of people with similar interests, who reflect the types of experiences and discussion they want to invite into their adult lives.

“Yeah, on Facebook so, I just deleted a lot of friends on Facebook, if that matters...So this summer I had like over 900 friends. One day, in my feelings one day and I just like cleaned off my friends list and now I’m down to like 400. I deleted like 500 people at that time, I was like “I don’t talk to you, I haven’t seen you since high school so like what’s the point of us being Facebook friends? We’re not even communicating.” Yeah, so that’s why I cleared my friend’s’ list.” (Lea, 24)

“Right, absolutely! So in college I was the president of the International Club where when new international students would come. A group of us college students who were American like help them acclimate to life here, [unintelligible 00:28:38] you know and help them out and we had a Facebook group because there’re so many international students that even if you stood outside like in the what’s it called? Like they have little fairs in the fall semester, winter semester with all the organizations giving out flyers and stuff but some of the international students like didn’t go to those so we posted on Facebook and most of them had Facebook so we would post in Facebook like “Hey! If you know any international students then share our Facebook group with them.” And they would join and we would have parties and organizational events and we’d all post them on the group and new people would come out and I could think of like now, there are so many countries that if I go to, like for instance, for the World Cup, me and my husband went to Brazil and one of those people that I met through this Facebook group for international students he actually let us stay with them while we were in Brazil and the same happened when we went to Mexico City and I have a ton of friends in Europe as well that if we go there they’re like “Yeah! You can stay with me.” Or I would visit them, they’re like long term friends all from you know, having this group. So we like used Facebook to meet up in person... Yeah, I mean that’s an interest I always had growing up was I wanted to like get out and wanted to see different things. So, yeah, so when I did I really took advantage of it” (Casey, 29)

Young women were interested in seeking out networks of people who were interested in similar social issues and topics. Kendra went online to find other LGBT women of color and especially Black women. Brooke enjoyed a Subreddit thread where users put women’s experiences at the center of the conversation. Part of experiencing these networks is not only receiving information but interacting and joining these conversations.

“But, with Twitter... Well, the same thing with Instagram. But, I don’t use Instagram. But, with Twitter, I post everything that’s on my mind. Gay... Gay-related or not, like, it’s

on there. So, I do have certain divided spaces where I use certain things for different purposes. But, I will say on Facebook, I'm noticing that I'm more apt to post things that are gay-related.

For instance, I'm actually doing a study for class as well and it's looking at sexual minority in women of colors - so, African-American women who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. And, I was actually having doubts about posting that on my Facebook because of that reason. But, I'm noticing that I'm starting not to care what... I'm just starting not to care—" (Kendra, 26)

"Um, probably, um, there's this one sub-Reddit called '2X Chromosomes,' and it's just a place where females can talk about female stuff or being female, you know. It could be anything at all. Um, but people often-, you know, there are some threads that are, for instance, like, rape support threads or I have this frustrating thing that men don't need to deal with happening, and there's always gonna be somebody who comes in and says, 'Oh, well, men used to deal with something like this too,' and they don't seem to realize that having one person complain about one thing that they're hurt because of gender differences doesn't mean that the other gender doesn't have their own problems, and it doesn't mean that they're trying to diminish them. It's just they wanna have their own space to talk about their issues. " (Brooke, 23)

Multifaceted Social Media Use

Individuals lead rich and varied lives through social media. Of note, young women used different social media platforms for different reasons. Part of using multiple platforms was to parse out and construct selective networks of people. Additionally, young people had different activities that they would carry out in different spaces. Alex designated her Tumblr account for sharing personal writing, especially poetry. For her, Tumblr was more of a private diary than a social experience— she also noted this was the social media space where she felt most authentic. Casey had several social media accounts, including more than one Instagram account. She had personal accounts, where she engaged more traditionally, and other accounts designated to online communities and activities. When thinking of social media use, it is crucial to consider social media practices as customized for individuals needs, and unbounded for high users.

“You know it’s funny because probably Tumblr even though I don’t use it as much but I post like my personal writing on there more so ‘cause no one follows me in Tumbler but yeah, probably Tumblr, you know I’m a pretty private person when it comes to just like what I’m thinking or you know, I would call myself a “writer” but I don’t necessarily share it with everyone so like my few Tumbler followers will like be able to read it but I would say that I’m most authentic on there though I don’t really think that I’m inauthentic anywhere else, I just think that I’m more genuine on Tumblr probably ‘cause my lack of following. I don’t know.” (Alex, 23)

“I think Instagram actually. I feel like the people who follow me on Instagram see like the real me because I have actually had 3 Instagram accounts. I have one Instagram account for the Tone It Up community so we post like workout things or food or recipes and so I mean will see, I don’t post like every meal I eat or something like that but they will have a good idea of like what I eat more, what I like to eat or like I do like active wise in my day then I have an Instagram account from that’s linked to my YouTube channel and so I feel like those people see the least of me, they see like the products that I like to use sort of stuff but then my life private or my personal Instagram, yeah, I post the places that I go and my husband and the things that we do, my friends, so I feel like that’s – Instagram is where I feel the most comfortable posting things about me because I don’t know why... When I first set up Instagram I was like there was no Facebook option. Like I got Instagram like years ago where you had to like search manually for people and I didn’t quite understand it so at first I thought it was like how you could like make photos for yourself using filters and so I posted like a bunch of photos so I don’t know it wasn’t clear to like everyone’s going to see them but whenever I try to link it with Facebook on the first time I only had like 2 friends using it so I haven’t used that option a lot like I will ask one of my friends, do you have Facebook? So I do have Instagram. I’m like what’s your Instagram name because I kind of, I have a lot more Facebook friends and have like some professional Facebook contacts that I don’t want them to see or I mean it’s not that I’m hiding anything but just, I prefer if they didn’t you know, see that much like “Oh! See what I ate this weekend” or something.” (Casey, 29)

For both Jordan and Ryan, they felt a genuine connection with friendships and people they had met online. Each of them discussed using Tumblr for connection with peers, and spending less time on Facebook in order to spend more time in other social media spaces. Ryan never mentioned meeting people from their online circles in person, but they used Tumblr to learn about gender, promote their personal artwork, and socialize on a regular basis. Jordan often arranged in-person meetings with online friends. This was partially because of her work as a political organizer, but she also talked about just how supportive these relationships were on a personal level. All of these young people

manifested their social media use in different platforms, with different purposes, and different routines. Social media played a major role in connecting with peers and pursuing personal projects; however they were defined.

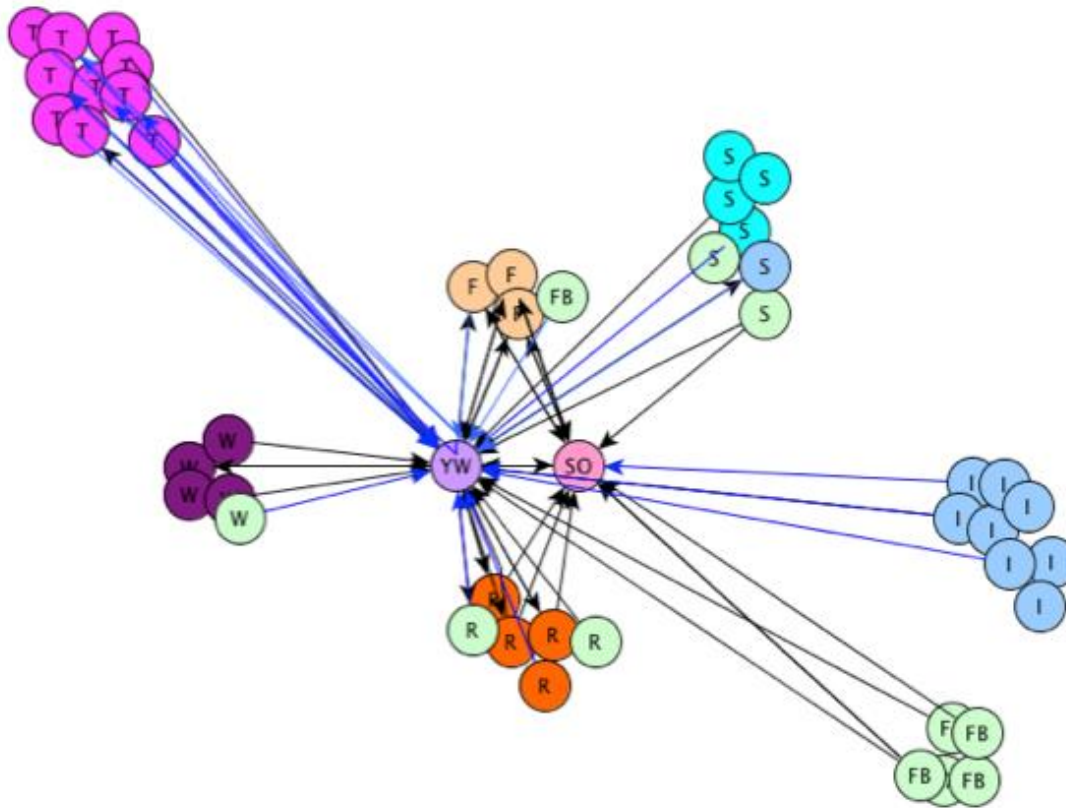
“Like with Facebook I feel like it’s too people orientated, I mean like I like it for the social calendar like you said but while for Tumblr I feel like you put more into your own blog to make your own portfolio of what you like so that’s the aspect I like about it and you could follow people. It’s so weird that you get attached to some people that you follow and you don’t even know like you actually get like a connection to them which is pretty cool, it’s weird but it’s cool.” (Ryan, 18)

“Especially, some of these people I’ve never met in person before and then I meet them in, you know, real life and it’s like... Or, I met them through social media and then I meet them through real life and it’s like... It’s almost like a continuation of the atmosphere that we had in our chat group or, you know, in our direct message feed or whatever. It’s never...

It’s just kind of like, “Okay. This is where we left off. Hey, how you doing?” hugs and, you know, even talking about personal life. It just kind of picks up where it lefts off... or it left off.” (Jordan, 24)

As seen from these stories, online interactions provide rich opportunities for interactions with people outside of the local community. Certainly the chance to interact has been available through mass media, books, telephones, and travel. However, based on the way young people develop selective networks in order to satisfy different personal concerns show a more robust opportunity for this endeavor. The young people in this study were seeking out additional exposure and occasion for growth through disruptive networks. Figure Seven is a visualization of disruptive network inclusion. Specifically, the new clusters of nodes represent different social media platforms— such as Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram, and Facebook.

Figure 7. Disruptive Networks



Key		
\leftrightarrow	= Social interaction	
\leftrightarrow (blue)	= Online interaction	
●	= School colleagues	●
●	= Work colleagues	●
●	= Friends	●
●	= Facebook	●
●	= Significant other	●
●	= Young woman	●
		= Instagram

Defining Moments

During their young adult years, young people go through many significant life changes. Much of these experiences become interwoven with online activities and mediated communications. Below is a discussion of two prominent subthemes. First,

instances when ICT use was a necessary channel during a defining moment for purposes of self-presentation and self-discovery. Next, I will discuss abuse experiences; these events were significant and traumatic for the young people. In certain instances the experiences were carried exclusively online, in other situations the experiences were exasperated by the use of ICT. Young women were not explicitly asked to discuss abusive situations, but they were common enough among participants that repeatedly these experiences were described as a part of their personal life stories.

Influential ICT Use

Young women had influential experiences and relationships online. These interactions were to some degree internalized and taken up as a part of who they wanted to be themselves. Certain participant's spoke of role models, or people they found on social media to be inspiring. Other young women described social media as a significant part of their own perception of self-worth. Research about identity work and social media found that the online presentation could lead to meaningful internalized self-perceptions (Walther et al., 2011). Examples that will be discussed show how young women used online presentation to construct a version of the person they were striving to become. Lastly, participants spoke about how their decisions and identity presentation were practiced in online spaces. What participants considered life-changing moments existed in the online world through interactions and events.

"I started following her and I just started talking to her and I realize I was like " my mom was black, and I realize it's like I don't know anything about my background, and so reading the things that she was posting about like being black and about her like walk with God really change the way that I saw myself and I was like I always tell people that I am mixed and I would never really openly be like "I'm half black" and like now "I'm half black, like whatever." If somebody says the N word around me I'm like "I don't like that" and they'll be like "oh.haha, you're half black" and I'm like "I still don't like

that.” So she helped me really learn more about myself and open myself up to learning more about myself and she really influenced me to go back to God too, so...” (Daisa, 20)

“Oh, it’s more like – there’s also another artist ‘cause this one really did help me. There’s one artist named Vinnimale, they’re an artist in [current state] as well even though we’ve never met but like they’re the one who really introduced me to the A-gender concept, what is – like I was young and they’re older than me now. They’re like 21 so they really taught me about going above or at least just learning about gender and like there isn’t a set one... Well, with my interaction with Vinni I identified as a cis woman at that time. I was around I guess high school when I first found their art page and like they also identified as a woman to at that point so, and then they started like changing their profile and their pronouns to they/them and it kinda threw me off ‘cause I knew they went by she/her so I was like oh, what? And then like it really like it really just made me start questioning my own gender ‘cause I know I had felt different, I get differentness and otherness that I was dealing. I guess this is how you feel your genderqueer or Agender like you just feel this detachment from the gender you’re assigned ‘cause when you’re born you’re just given a gender and then you’re like okay, you just go so like okay, you just try to follow like the social expectations that are given with that gender then when I first found that out it kind of felt like a freedom, like I could be what I wanted to be and I really like the Agender concept that was there like I wasn’t a woman. I remember experimenting a lot in high school gender and like thinking I was like male but then that didn’t feel right either so when I saw the Agender concept it was like “Oh, it’s great, it’s actually me. That’s what I am. There’s a word for it.”” (Ryan, 18)

Both participants looked up to their informal mentors and thoughtfully observed how these peers presented their identity. Daisa and Ryan both wanted to embody some of the characteristics they saw in these mentors. Ryan observed from more of a distance, and Daisa would reach out for direct advice. Interestingly, both Ryan and Daisa turned to their online mentors curious about how to make sense of who they felt they were as people, and what it means to be a person of color. Ryan described in the interviews the discomfort and frustration she felt with seeing only white-thin bodies being labeled androgynous or Agender, until she found Vinni. Daisa’s mother had passed away and she felt confused about how to connect with her African-American roots. Her online mentor encouraged her to find out more about her Black family.

“I saw myself, well yeah, for instance I think like with the Tone-It-Up Instagram community I think when I first started it I didn’t have as much self-confidence as I do now

and I think from connecting with the people on there, with the women on there I gained more self-confidence because the more the people like could leave you positive messages or things, the more confidence you build up and socialite when you post something like “Oh! This is my progress.” And when people validate that progress you start to feel good about yourself so that I think has influenced my other online presence that I was kind of like “Oh I’m not good enough or pretty enough” or whatever to make a YouTube channel or to make a blog but through this community, seeing other women I’m kind of like getting that motivation to like go! You should do it, have the confidence, I think it really gave me more confidence and bravery to, you know, extend and put my ideas out there...” (Casey, 29)

“I don’t know. The power of social media is amazing when it comes to organizing. I think that’s probably why... I think social media will always be a part of my life as long as I’m an organizer and even after I’m... I’m always gonna be an activist. I may not always be an organizer but, I’m always gonna be an activist. And, it’s just always gonna be a tool.” (Jordan, 24)

Casey has made her online presence partially as an escape from her stressful job, but also to grow and push her own personal limits., going online is a practice of self-validation for Casey, especially in regard to her Youtube vlog . During the second interview, she discussed how she struggled with self-esteem during her college years. Social media gives her an opportunity to engage in a pleasurable hobby as well as build her confidence. Jordan provided similar descriptions about the importance of social media for finding a social voice. She was especially grateful for the manner in which she was able to connect with other people interested in activism. For Jordan, becoming a political activist was a defining moment because it meant an entire career change. She was proud of her decision and hopeful about her future.

“Well, I mean in October I came out and I used Facebook to come out because it was like the... I don’t know. It was this like massive push. And, so it was like the fastest way, I guess, for me to share something that I’ve been struggling with for a few years and, then just kind of was like, I’m gonna push [it] in Facebook world and whatever happens, happens.

And, I mean the response... Like, I didn’t really anticipate getting any negative responses from it and, I think that’s probably why I felt comfortable like pushing it out. Because, I know, you know, my friend group and people that I communicate with that way, I

did... You know, the responses that I got, like, a number of people sent me like personal messages and stuff. And, so I think that that's probably, you know, one of the most significant ways that social media has impacted my life." (Olivia, 26)

Lastly, Olivia chose to come out as LGBT identified using social media. As she described, part of her decision was a big push coming from a political movement for marriage equality. She talked about receiving messages of support, but before she chose to post this personal information she had considered potentially negative outcomes. Ultimately, she decided it would be worth it to open up and take on the risk.

All of the examples provided are exemplars of young people using social media in ways that influenced their perception of themselves, and how they fit into the world. Reflexive style can be connected to the examples discussed. Casey, as an autonomous reflexive is motivated and ambitious about her online presence. She treats her vlog like she would a professional opportunity with attention to detail. Ryan and Daisa, both in their early young adult years, looked for online mentors. Archer (2012) mentioned that is common for young people to transition from one reflexive style to another during these formative years. Both Ryan and Daisa could have been shifting from a more communicative style to meta-reflexive, or autonomous. Importantly, these role models seemed to lend them courage to be bold in their ideas. Online activities provide a unique and significant opportunity for self-experimentation during a time when individuals are eager to connect to their inner-voice.

Abuse experiences

Regrettably, the young women I interviewed experienced different forms of abuse in personal relationships as well as through their interactions with strangers. The examples provide important context for how online abuse and harassment can manifest

and in many ways present familiar patterns found in gender-based violence research. Situations are varied. Kami's sexual assault experience worsened when her abuser continued to harass her via text message after the incident. Carly experienced the type of online abuse that previous research has shown to be most common (Mitchell, Jones, Finklehor, & Wolak, 2013). As a teen-aged-girl her interactions with strangers would become sexual and she felt older men targeted her. The violation she felt from this experience still influences her perception of sexual intimacy to this day.

*"Yeah and that like 28-year old people are gonna pass a phone around and call a girl that they don't really honestly know that well but she's like a **big slut**. Like I was 23 when that happened, I'm 28 now and granted, that I have been through a lot of things, but I feel so far passed the maturity level or whatever considered doing that, ever and I feel like I've reached that point when I was like 12 so I just don't imagine the caliber of people that would be doing that, you know, passing a phone around like that, it's so ridiculous I can just like "What the hell?" but obviously they're, you know, friend with someone that would do that kind of act but that doesn't say much though because people you would never expect to do that thing, you know? It's more often a regular guy and he definitely is perverse and people know that about him but by all other measures you would just think he's a perverse but sort of an asshole normal guy." (Kami, 28)*

"Carly: I actually, I kind of have, in some ways I have a negative view of it because when I was a teenager, I got abused online. I understand people, so I kind of have, like, a negative view on sexuality because of that.

Megan: Oh, I'm so sorry to hear that. That must have been very traumatic. And I'm curious; you seem to have a very strong online presence so, it didn't necessarily stop you from going back.

Carly: No, it hasn't. I mean, that was just — I think, when I was, like, 13-years-old, and I didn't know what sex was. I would go in this chat rooms and then people start talking to you and they do role playing, you know, and I just go along with it, didn't really know what it was. But, I actually stopped myself and said I didn't like it anymore, but I'm, kind of, more scared about it. I'm afraid of it too." (Carly, 25)

Tina was harassed because of her outspoken and radical feminist writing. Her school newspaper article became widely circulated online and drew attention from a broad audience. Eventually, an individual began consistently leaving negative comments

using her name. The comments were an attack on the ideas in previously published work. Having the harasser using her identity felt like a violation; so she asked the newspaper to please block that specific commenter. The school newspaper said it was against their policies to block any comments, and they could not make an exception. Lastly, Jennifer consistently ran into issues within the gaming community. For her, male users would often harass her during live games. Her response was mostly annoyance and she did not think the online gaming community would ever change because that is just how men are.

“Yeah. So, I mean I used to write for my school newspaper when I was in college, like in undergrad, and I think... Yeah, so I had like really had bad experiences with, I guess, commenters getting really stalker-ishy and, I think that’s why I stopped writing for a whole year publicly.

...It wasn’t that stalker-ishy. They just like pretended to be me and would comment on other people’s articles like really bad things. So, they would use my name though. So, it’s bad.” (Tina, 23)

“So, I come in and I’ll start speaking, they’re like, ‘Oohhh, you’re a woman. Oh, my god! I didn’t know you were a girl. Blah, bah, blah.’ And, then, you know, they start calling you... Well, a guy told me to suck his dick. Things like that. You know, so they start... Like, the tone of Mumble or the air in which we speak with everybody changes. You become this sex icon and everybody just wants your number and, you know, they just start hitting on you and stuff. And, it’s just like, ‘Dude, I’m just here to get some achievements. Chill out.’

And, sometimes people have... Then they start having respect for you when I start showing them hey, I know how to play better than you. I know how to do this achievement and get this done. I know how to lead this group. And, then they come up behind you with some kind of respect. But, they are still, like, drooling over you. It’s kind of annoying...Like, here, for example, they’ll do backslash hug... Or, here, let’s see if I can show you, backslash hug or backslash kiss or these things. They start emoting and start getting all like intimate and stuff and I’m like, “What? Why are you doing this for?”

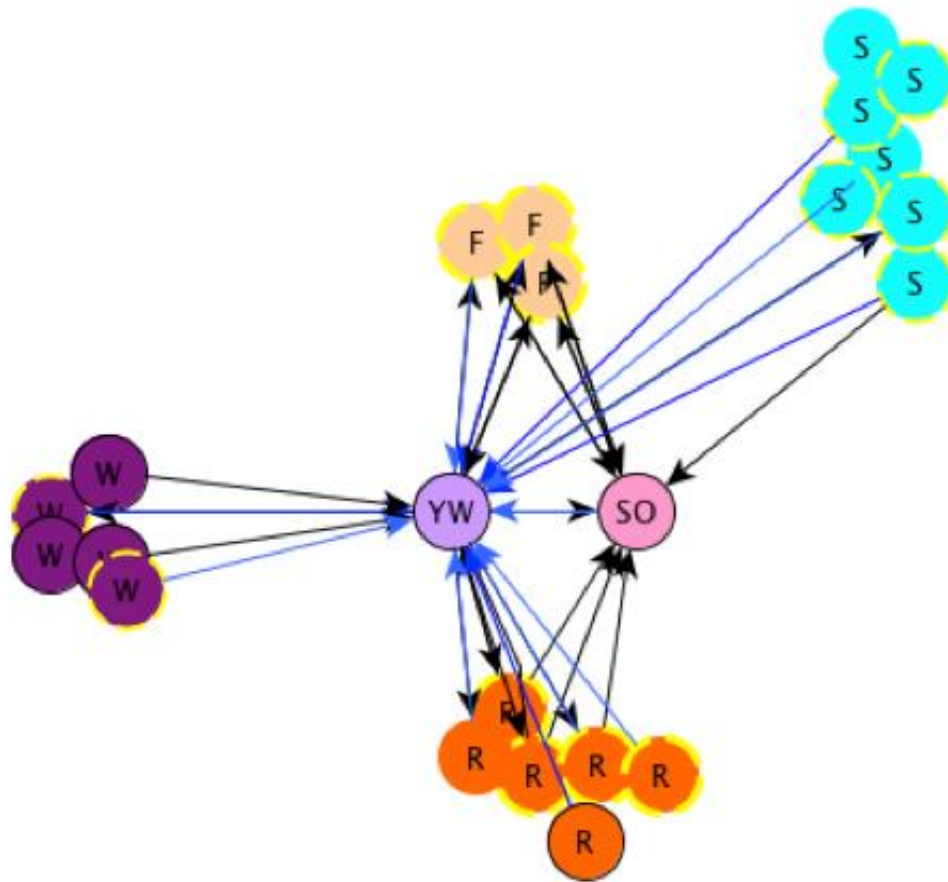
So, it’s like they start getting... I don’t know how to say it. Like, you know how guys when they get flirty, they get all like riled up and stuff. They start doing this stuff and... Yeah.” (Jennifer, 25)

These stories indicate that the harassment and abuse of women that happens in everyday life transfers directly into online communications and relationships. Yet, none

of the young women in this study were permanently deterred from participating in social media and going online. As previously mentioned, a valuable but difficult common theme amongst participants was learning that trust is a fragile and fluid component in relationships. Going through an online experience that is not only an abuse of trust but also a violation of individual worth, was a rite of passage for many young women in this study.

The above themes and stories identified how young women experience defining moments of identity and agency during their transition to adulthood. For some, a defining moment was meeting an online mentor and then modifying their own perception of their values based on these interactions. For other young women, a defining moment came at a time when one would present a piece, or component of identity through their online networks. Figure eight below exemplifies how these moments are shared and experienced through new forms of interactions. What may have been lived and experienced with only a handful of people, can now be broadcast to your network. The yellow highlighted nodes represent people in the network experiencing or being witness to a defining moment.

Figure 8. Defining Moments



Key		
\longleftrightarrow	= Social interaction	● = School colleagues
●	= Work colleagues	● = Relatives
●	= Friends	● = Significant other
●	= Young woman	\longleftrightarrow = Online interaction
		● = Facebook
		● = Instagram
		● = Shared life event

Driven Agency

Overlapping with the theme of defining moments is the way participants described their personal agency used online. I note the overlap because a part of the process of *lifestreaming* (Marwick, 2012) includes individuals' making decisions about

what they subjectively deem important and valuable enough to share with their online networks. Primarily, participants displayed agency by actively defining how they would present themselves to others online. Also, participants used online presentation to address concerns and challenge traditional social structures through different social justice causes. Individual concerns that were most prominent included gender, sexual orientation, and race.

Online Presence

The participants all molded their online presence to fit their concerns; the way they engaged with social media was connected to the ongoing practices and projects in their lives at the time. Below I have selected two examples of young women who engaged with social media with nearly opposite philosophies. They were both trying to find ways to cope with serious and traumatic events. Margret had decided that sharing information about her miscarriage through social media was a way to honor the children that she had lost, and let those who care about her know what was going on. Kami never disclosed outright that she was a victim of sexual assault, but she frequently posted articles, info-graphics, and social commentary about rape culture. I wanted to contrast these two young women to show that the subjective nature of these experiences was the driver of how they chose to represent the issue. Margret openly shared her experience for others to know and learn about her life even though it made certain people uncomfortable. Trauma consumed Kami because of her own experience with rape, but she purposefully kept her status as a victim private and hid any negative emotions she was having. They both shared information and ideas relevant to their concerns, but the

execution was determined by their internal reasoning about what information the network should have about them.

“Well, my family on my side said that it was wrong to put the picture. Like, that I shouldn’t be putting like pictures of like dead babies online. So, I was like, “Okay. So, obviously, you and I think differently. So, if you thought it’s uncomfortable around, I guess I’ll take it down.” But, I thought like, you know, I should like share it with everybody that was like... [everyone] that wanted to know about how I was doing and everything.” (Margret, 20)

“I do and I don’t. I was thinking about that the other day because I try and be like happy and positive in things that I post like even if I say I’m happy, been like a bad day but like I have this you know, that is sort of really how I am in my real life ‘cause I’m really encouraging to other people but I’m really not encouraging to myself and I think more so lately, it is, it’s more so lately like I can’t, I’m like having more trouble like pretending that I’m okay... Yeah but I got lost again. Oh! Authentic, yes, I do think I’m authentic but there are definitely things that I haven’t like out rightly said...” (Kami, 28)

Casey and Alex both had decided, that they would share certain types of content in order to portray a certain image of themselves. Casey wanted to challenge herself by going online and starting her vlog. She did not make this decision rashly, but discussed how overcoming her fear was helpful for her. For Alex, she observed a maturing and evolution in her own online presence. Overtime, she chose to keep certain personal materials offline; especially any content that she felt could tarnish her personal image.

“I think like, it was almost 8 months ago exactly, I basically built up the courage because it’s a lot to put yourself out there online especially these days when you know, like one person can get a link to your video and then everyone sees it and you can’t like take that back. So I think I thought a lot about the content I wanted to put out there and then prepare myself for judgment kind of because I see the comments on a lot of people’s videos, how they’re like just mean things and so I think it was 8 months ago, I think I started in March last year that I just decided like “Alright, I’m just gonna do it and put it out there.” And I did it to see if people would find it through like a search engine you know? I don’t know, yeah, so I just – I think the thing that I was lacking, I would’ve been doing this for years but I just kind of got the confidence and bravery to do it and just did it.” (Casey, 29)

“You know, it’s kinda funny ‘cause I kinda use Facebook as, I think we’ve talked about this too, a way to save my favorite quotes from my books or say just like quote that I just found inspiring that day or to complain about how I’m procrastinating or it’s a tool of

procrastination for me too, social media and I don't really know why I don't say, because you know, I feel like maybe in the past I would share more of like my personal writing like on there. I would post like some, like really short poem or something maybe years ago and I don't really know what the shift was when it came to that but I just, yeah, I became a little less like active on it as I got older to a certain extent. I also think it kinda stems from like a sort of professionalism like I know that a lot of people that are trying to like hire might look at, see your social media or just trying to like kind of gauge as to where you are like maturity levels or something and I think that's always been something like my dad's like drilled into my head, he's like "don't post anything on there that you wouldn't be proud of in a few months or even a few years." And like that really stuck with me, like a lot and not that it's like really hindered my self-expression but it's definitely made me think about the things that I post more often. So I think that plays a lot into like the way that I use my Facebook. I think it's really funny 'cause people perceive me in a totally different way if they don't know me in person like on the internet, so I think that plays a lot into it too. I don't know, I think I sound way more adventurous and intelligent on the internet than I actually am." (Alex, 22)

All of these women share the perspective that they are the most capable and appropriate person to determine their own personal online image. Granted, these situations all had complicated contexts and agency is not a flat or simple exchange that manifests as either present or absent. For instance, Margret determined that sharing personal information was worthwhile if it meant reaching out to those she considered close personal relationships in her network. Casey was also willing to take a larger risk because she saw a potential benefit. Both Alex and Kami were exercising their agency by restricting content. Participants reported feeling in control and thoughtfully engaged in producing their own online presence.

Social Justice Causes

Many of the stories shared included instances where young women were invested in concepts, ideas, and actions that would influence oppressive social institutions. The social justice causes worked on two levels. First, young people could turn to their networks to find information or support about certain ideas and then internalize these ideas as practices. Secondly, they could reciprocate and refine those ideas based on how

they interacted online. Most participants developed daily practices based on the networks they connected with in addition to speaking out against injustice using their social media. Stories from chapter five highlighted how meta-reflexive individuals are particularly invested in using online spaces to draw attention to different social issues. Below are examples of the concerns that were most prominent for the participants in this study. Young people were interested in deconstructing gender, hetero-normative ideologies, and racist practices.

Gender & LGBT Concerns

Ryan and Kai both identified outside of the gender binary. Ryan identifies as Agender or androgynous. Ryan partially attributes their non-gender conforming identity to being Native American, a culture more accepting of the practice. However, much of the learning and thought process for Ryan came from interactions with other Agender individual's Tumblr blog. Kai describes their identity as Genderqueer. Kai was interested in transitioning but was hesitant until they learned about the natural approach to transitioning. They found out about this new approach because they were invited to an education event via Facebook.

“Yes. It [social media] was very vital ‘cause I remember when I was identifying as non-binary or genderqueer that I had to have a look again too in that thing ‘cause like the look for being androgynous or like sort of like devoid gender or just looking like a combo of both like you have to be this, like this white short haired like looking like a guy even though you’re not a guy like you still pose a little bit of femininity in there but It’s very masculine and looking and very, you got to be skinny too to fit all the men’s clothes and to look like the certain look.” (Ryan, 18)

“Kai: No. Well, I don't know if this counts, but it was like maybe one of the first things that come to mind.

'Cause like I didn't have like any one important event happen online but, like one thing that came to mind was like, I guess led to an in-person thing, was going to a Facebook event so like to discover like gender what, to like discover gender new

things...Yeah. Someone invited me. It was like the president of the club. But, like when I brought it up, so then when they were like, "Oh, how did you find out about us? How did you even come to this meeting?" I was like, "You invited me." And, then they were like, "I didn't invite you. I invited so many people." and I was like, "Well, you still invited me."

Megan: So, what happened at the event? It was a discussion about gender?

Kai: Yeah. It was like natural transitioning.

Megan: Mm-hmm. Very cool. And, that you said that that was really important and...Do you think of that moment as like a catalyst for your own decision to transition?

Kai: Yeah, basically, because I feel like so then starting going to gender what like taught me about like gender everything and like I didn't know, like, the trans existed as like a thing other people did and like were and all that." (Kai, 23)

Kai and Ryan relied on education and relationships found online to understand their own gender identity. Kai's story highlights the importance of viewing the online world as an extension of offline relationships. Below is a story Kai shared about navigating their gender identity in an online community that was restricting gender presentation. Since Sugar Daddy as a site facilitates sexual and romantic relationships between adults Kai was bothered by the regulation because it would impact the visibility they experienced in the space.

"...and like having like a Sugar Daddy for like a very short amount of time. So, like when I first signed up for like an account on it, then they were like, "No, you're a boy so we're gonna change you to a male account." And, it's like, no, why did they do that? Because like then, like certain accounts...

I think they set it so you have to be straight, maybe, or like... I don't know. Maybe the majority just hides themselves from guys. And, I was like, "I'm gonna be hidden from virtually everyone if I have like a guy account." So, then I like message like the mods back being like, "No. Take me back to female. I'm not a guy." (Kai, 23)

Participants were able to use social media to learn about gender issues and express personal concerns related to feminism. Holly discussed how learning about feminism through social media had helped her personally. As I discussed previously, Kami was using blogs and writing about sexual assault to help her to understand her own

traumatic experience. She did not disclose the status, but she did passionately share information with others. Holly and Kami were both using online spaces to gather information about feminism, and express their feminist identities.

“I think, you know, technology has definitely helped, you know, spread the message about, like, you know, feminism and stuff like that in a way that I don’t think-, you know, if I’d, like, you know, grown up during the ‘90s and was trying to learn about, like, feminism, I don’t think I would have been able to, to the extent that I have within just like a year. It may have taken me a few years whereas, like, it only took me just like a few months to really grasp what, you know, my feminism was trying to be. So I think, you know, technology has definitely helped with that.” (Holly, 19)

“I post a lot of stuff about women’s rights, sexual assaults and then I post a lot about like

I guess mindfulness, thinking and quotes and whatever and I did that a lot this spring when I was really having a hard time I was like, honestly I was living off of weird quotes that I was giving on Facebook websites and I was just posting the shit out of them and I was thinking and I was painting and I was watching Netflix between after class and I was writing reaffirmation report for rape stuff and just trying not to collapse. I was having a really hard time but I keep posting these pictures like a mad woman and then you’re self-conscious that like your quotes like a mad woman, picture quotes, you’re self-conscious that people are gonna be like “Why is she posting so much stuff?” and like oh man, they’re probably all blocking me but I didn’t care ‘cause I was so busy and post like little thoughts for what was getting me by until I just post them and save them and look at them. It was kind of ridiculous honestly...They were helpful like the things that I was following where I was accessing like women’s rights articles and sexual assault survivor articles and like Jezebel and HuffingtonPost women and different things I was following. They were super helpful like you know ‘cause it was tailored to what I had been like you read a couple of articles or posted a couple of articles and so that’s just what was showing up in my feed for all of these articles relevant to sexual assault. I didn’t go out searching for those, they were automatically linked to me and they were helpful, honestly not all of them but many of them were.” (Kami, 28)

For those who were identified as LGBT finding networks of people to discuss and disclose information about their sexual identity was a helpful part of their personal development. Coming out, or revealing LGBT identity was partially defined in the way that people comprised networks. Holly talked about being an ally for those who were LGBT-identified. In her Tumblr bio she differentiates herself from radical feminist who would exclude trans people, the tagline reads “no terf’s on my turf.” Below, Olivia talks

about how one of her best friends from her childhood was not surprised by her decision to come out. Olivia was outspoken about mainstream LGBT politics, especially marriage equality. For her, it was part personal and part professional.

“Well, like I said, I’m a womanist but that I’m here for like all women for the most part as long as they don’t disrespect me as like... or as a black person and as like a woman as well...And, I’m also like, you know, trans-inclusive feminist and, you know, a big helper or ally with the LGBT community. You know, I’m just here for like all women.” (Holy, 19)

“And, so for me it was like, nope, it’s all like work related. And, then when I called her to I guess come out to her, she was like, “Yeah. I’m not surprised.” and I was like, ‘Okay.’ And, I guess, for me, like at the time, like, I didn’t know and so it was really shocking for people to not be surprised because I think that I was like surprised and shocked myself like when I was coming to this. You know, and maybe that[social media] was like an unconscious way of like me sharing that with the world.” (Olivia, 26)

Racism

The last social cause that was consistently a topic among the research participants was racial equality. The historical context of this research matters, and during 2014 when data collection began there were several national events being given attention by the traditional media outlets. During the data collection period I had candid conversation with participants about Ferguson Missouri, and the issue of police brutality in the United States. The young people involved in the study were also outspoken advocates about these injustices.

Lea and Jordan both participated in protests in their local communities. Given the close proximity of events in Ferguson, as a student living in Missouri, Lea was particularly disturbed by how apathetic the other college students on her campus seemed. Jordan was pleased and comforted by how seamlessly the online relationships that she had formed translated into meaningful relationships when the activists met together in person.

“Lea: Yeah. So, I guess I will say how I was feeling yesterday. Somebody protested yesterday in the student center at MIZZOU and I thought we were doing something good but MIZZOU posted pictures on like their Facebook website and like obvious comments were just like negative comments, negative comments, ‘I’m so glad I don’t go to MIZZOU, why is MIZZOU taking a stand on this? This is stupid, they don’t know anything. This is what my tax dollars are going to.’ Things like that and then like racist, white people were like ‘Ah! Go back to Africa.’ ‘Get out the floor.’ ‘You’re trash.’ And I was like I didn’t wanna come here in the first place. My mom made me come here. I loved it like my four years that I’ve been here, I loved it but yesterday was just like, that was like really the thing that made me like resent my mom for like not letting me go to Howard, not letting me go to like at HBCU so, no, no, I shouldn’t say resent. I was just like really pissed off at the moment but I was upset, I was like I don’t wanna be here like I’m so over this institution and like ‘I don’t know.’ Yeah, so that’s that was my like, my frame my like, my set last night.

Megan: Do you feel like people are hearing you when you’re on Facebook about it? I mean you’d posted like a screenshot of comments that people are making or was it a story? I’m having a hard time to remember.

Lea: Definitely, my black friends are hearing me but my white friends – it sucks too ‘cause like my – there are for the most part white but back home my friends are black and I feel like I can’t talk to them about it. They never talk about it with me like there’s no open dialogue about it like they don’t, they haven’t liked one of my statuses in a really long time. Yeah, my black friends are like very open about it but not my white friends except this one guy, he’s such an awesome human being. His name is Chris, he gets it, like, he gets it. We had dinner the other night, Monday night and we were just talking about everything that was going on with like Ferguson and like all these social justice issues like there needs to be more people like you Chris.” (Lea, 22)

“It’s never an awkward feeling like you would... Like, I guess, I personally would have thought, you know? Especially, some of these people I’ve never met in person before and then I meet them in, you know, real life and it’s like... Or, I met them through social media and then I meet them through real life and it’s like...

It’s almost like a continuation of the atmosphere that we had in our chat group or, you know, in our direct message feed or whatever. It’s never... It’s just kind of like, “Okay. This is where we left off. Hey, how you doing?” hugs and, you know, even talking about personal life. It just kind of picks up where its left off... or it left off.” (Jordan, 24)

The ongoing national events were on the minds of the white study participants as well. Alex was bothered and disturbed about what was happening, but she was unsure about whether or not she should speak out about it. In the past, she had run into issues with her family members making uncomfortable and racist comments on her Facebook

posts. For that reason, she was hesitant to speak out not knowing if she could say the right thing. Marilyn is married to a police officer. For her, she felt empathetic to people's outrage, but certain friends making comments that she felt went too far also bothered her. She did unfriend work acquaintances that she found to be too radical. After she and I discussed the issues in depth we had a follow-up conversation via email. The excerpt below represents the apprehension she felt talking about these events.

"I have not posted about it on Facebook but it's been something that I've been just talking about with everyone. Yeah, I mean, I am always just reading articles and trying to – and it's hard because I feel like people might come at me for being white and having an opinion and I feel like that's not fair 'cause I feel like everyone has the right to give an opinion and just because I'm not African-American doesn't mean that I can't support them or their cause, you know? And I feel like people are just being so hateful with this whole thing and I feel like we're just gonna – we're kind of still living in a society that's divided by race and I think that's really scary. I think that we have tried to progress for so many years in order to get the rights of everyone to be equal but I think we're kind of backtracking right now. I mean, I don't know if we're doing a chokehold on a black man, but he just got relinquished of that and he's not getting charged with anything and there're a bunch of protests last night happening. I'm in New York and I just like I think this is a thing that is just gonna continue to happen if we're gonna allow people, the people who are supposed to protect our society killing the ones that are civilians, you know? It's just not fair, it's just not right." (Alex, 22)

"I have to tell- I don't know if we're gonna agree on this ahm so I feel a little uncomfortable 'coz I think your feeling is different than mine on this but recently with everything happening with Ferguson that ahm and there's been other situation that actually maybe I'll go back steps and both these have to do with police and like law enforcement but ahm one of 'em the more the older situation that was similar to Ferguson, in LA there was this guy Dorner who ahm he- I don't know if you know yeah, the- so when that was happening some people had post like oh I'm glad he's like killing police officers." (Marilyn, 29)

Social media was a way for young people, who are concerned about the state of racial affairs in America, to keep the public focused on injustices. The young African-American women in this study had individual and unique styles for bringing attention to these issues. Jordan discussed how she live tweeted the events on the night prosecutors announced what would happen in the case of Darren Wilson, the police officer who was

responsible for shooting Michael Brown. Holly below describes how one of her followers, mimicking her own style, confronted a celebrity about the overlapping issue of cultural appropriation and social injustice. For Holly, and other followers in her Tumblr network the insult and problems of appropriation are directly connected to the fact that young Black people still face unwarranted discrimination, stereotyping, and violence.

“I think it’s putting that perspective out there even if there I mean it is just — Black Twitter is not just one single perspective but its- its at least putting the issues that we care about to the fore front and its starting the conversation and I think that’s why it’s such an amazing thing whatever you wanna call it it’s bring something to the forefront of everyone’s thoughts and mind ahm yeah-“ (Jordan, 24)

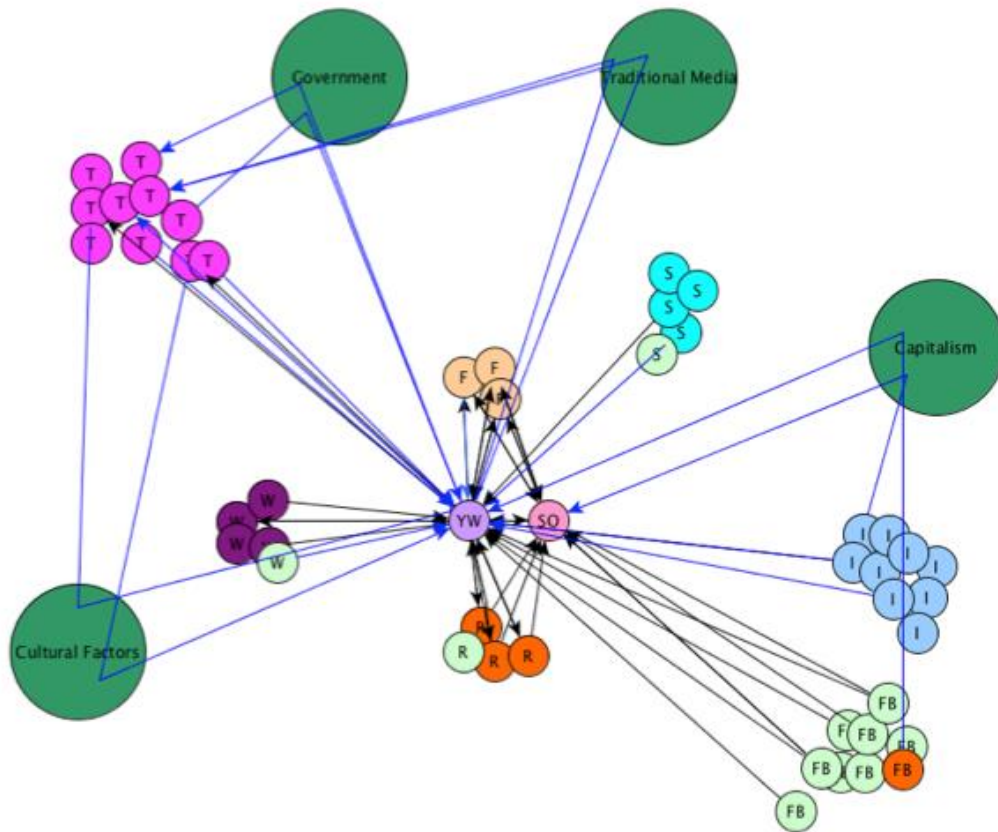
“It was like the day after the Ferguson non-indictment, and so one of my followers made a post like ‘Oh, look at all these white artists who appropriate black culture but want to stay silent when something is actually going down.’ And so, Iggy just, like, went on this whole spiel about, like, ‘Oh, you’re blaming me for a non-indictment, and these two things aren’t the same thing. Don’t blame me just because I have a rap career. How about you actually go out and do something,’ whatever. And then she blocked my follower, so that was hilarious.” (Holy, 19)

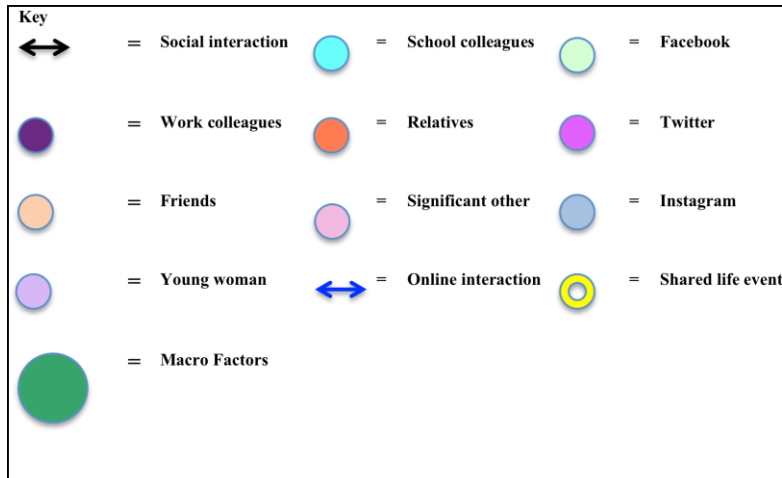
African-American participants spoke out against racism more frequently and usually visited the issue using more depth than white participants. Even certain participants who were outspoken on other social issues were less public about their sentiments around race inequality and social injustices. Staying silent, or being selective about when to speak up, may have been an intentional move on the part of participants. Allies could have been quiet in order to ensure people of color had a chance to properly vent frustrations. However, based on White participants who did discuss the issues during interviews, they expressed stress and concern about saying the right thing, or whether it was their place to discuss these issues at all.

The last visualization is a conceptual map to show how these acts of agency may influence or engage larger macro factors. Specifically, the young women and participants

in the study described their stories as powerful personal experiences. I perceived these events as impacting larger forces through their online experiences and decision to self-define their lives. Figure Nine shows the links between their online presence and macro factors.

Figure 9. Agency through Online Interaction





Summary

Young women today intertwine their lives with relational use of ICT's. Online expression and experiences are a fundamental part of their lives. These interactions are meaningful and internalized as significant to personal identity and relationships. Young women in this study discussed ways that new technologies were used to sustain personal relationships. They also showed an investment in creating multicultural world by exposing themselves to new people through disruptive networks. Defining moments were often experienced because of these new spaces and people, and certain events were documented or relived for online networks to share. Lastly, young women capitalize on the agency online spaces provide. They are pushing to see progressive and positive social change in the world. ICT use proved to be indispensable to them in the conduct of this practice.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

This dissertation was a study of how young women experience the transition to adulthood, and how ICT use impacts that process. No other studies have specifically focused on ICT use, human development, and young women as a unique user group. Using a phenomenological approach participants were interviewed about their developmental experiences and ways ICTs were incorporated during their emerging adult years. Additionally, this research was used to explore theories surrounding the transition to adulthood, and specifically expanded on the reflexive model provided in critical realism, as a more plausible framework than the popular emerging adulthood theory. Findings suggest that traditional developmental tasks — identity and intimacy — are still essential for moving toward adulthood. The stories suggested these tasks are intertwined, highly individualized, and vary depending on the unique path of the individual. Lastly, the young women described how ICT's are interwoven with their development, demonstrating how technology affords new interactions and experiences that are meaningful and can impact an individuals' trajectory.

Key Findings

To conclude, I want to summarize a portion of findings relevant to each of the research questions. Specifically, research question one— “What are the concerns of emerging adult women and how do they fit with the traditional developmental tasks of identity and intimacy?”— addressed traditional theories and reviewed how the developmental tasks of identity and intimacy are still applicable today. Research question two was a reflection of my broader curiosity about theories regarding the transition to adulthood. Research question two asks: Do emerging adult women describe their

developmental experiences, as ways of engaging in morphogenesis, or maintaining social structures through morphostasis? Below I will summarize the importance of the theoretical findings and discuss how the transition to adulthood may have evolved. Research question three addresses ICT use directly: How does ICT use influence emerging adult women and their reflexivity during the developmental process?

Identity & Intimacy

The traditional developmental tasks of identity and intimacy are still pertinent during the transition to adulthood. Traditional theories proposed that adult women had drastically different lives than men, and individual women were more likely to build an identity based on their ability to nurture other people in intimate relationships. Psychological research has steered away from these assumptions of the traditional theories of Erikson; however, the findings in this study did not support a procession of events from identity to intimacy for women. Study findings support critical theory in that the tasks of identity and intimacy are coexisting projects that emerge, and continue to progress, dependent on the experiences and personal concerns of the individual. To put it most simply, identity and intimacy are bound together and continue – most probably throughout the life course. During the emerging adult years, there is a pronounced beginning, and intense focus on these tasks, yet these facets of self-development were not abandoned or closed. The findings of this study support further research that examines identity and intimacy as continuous human projects that develop, emerge, evolve and are expressed at many points throughout life.

The discussion surrounding motherhood is of particular note to traditional theories. Since young women are creating and determining individualized paths not all

participants were interested in, or planned to pursue motherhood. However, those young women who did plan for children described postponing and planning for career and education goals to be finished during their twenties in order to create a more stable life for their future family. One participant who was a young mother had decided to tend to her young children and then return to school when they were older. Of those women who did plan on, or currently have children, all had dreams, aspirations and goals in addition to being a mother.

Social workers must continue to find ways to advocate for social policies and practices that support a woman's decision to have a child. Discussions about the millennial generation should consider that women have been working diligently for the past few decades to pave the way for young women to define their own lives. Many young women are encouraged by these examples and plan to pursue careers and motherhood simultaneously. Social workers need to continue the promotion of family values by supporting motherhood in all of its different forms— single mothers, married couples, young people, middle-aged, adopting, and foster care.

Theoretical Implications

The subjective interpretation of the world, in combination with an ability to exercise agency, demonstrate how reflexivity is key for understanding young people and contemporary life. This research set out to know more about the theories set forth by Archer (2007,2012) and Arnett (2000). Specifically, I wanted to know if the emerging adult theory would resonate with the stories of young women, or if the reflexivity framework put forth by Archer (2012) would expand our understanding of this age group. First, the emerging adulthood theory did have relevance, and specific participants

stressed the idea that adulthood is delayed, and especially as young people try to find a path toward financial independence. However, as I analyzed the life events of young women I thought about two potential explanations. Either, they were delaying adulthood in order to explore their worldview, love, and career. Or, the young people were not delaying adulthood, but engaged in the process of defining personal concerns, developing projects and practices that would match these concerns. Based on my conclusions, the observation of Arnett concerning the delay in realizing adult roles was confirmed, partially because participants expressed the experience of more freedom to explore their identity, but also because contemporary capitalism has presented formidable obstacles to financial independence for a substantial portion of American youth. However, I would stress this freedom is contingent on a great deal of pressure in a rapidly changing society.

Many participants' with specific personal experiences were critical of the concepts set forth by emerging adulthood. Certain participants' stories did not match the tenants of the theory because their definitions of love or intimacy were more broadly defined based on their personal concerns. Or, other participant's life events thrust them into adult roles earlier than the predefined categories outlined by Arnett, showing how his theories are directly related to an individual's personal circumstances, connection to resources, and privilege. In other words, delaying adulthood for the sake of individual pursuits seemed to be a privileged experience that was not the norm or common among the young women I interviewed for the study. This further indicates that the delay may be considered caution for those already living under stress. Lastly, generational shifts should focus on how a burden of responsibility to establish oneself as an individual, in a less stable and secure environment, changes young women's pursuits of certain social roles.

Because young women had varied goals and ideas about what intimacy would look like in their lifetimes, Archer's (2012) theory did have advantages. Especially, describing concerns, projects, and practices as a development process that would be experienced throughout the adult life. All of us work on identity and intimacy throughout our adult years. The tasks are ongoing, and subjective, it makes more sense to identify an information processing style (reflexive style) than it does to identify milestones or tasks each person must carry out to be considered well adjusted, or successful enough to move into adulthood. Specifically, intimacy is self-defined to match the specific concerns of the individual. A more useful set of questions a social worker may ask regarding intimacy and adulthood could include: What are their moral commitments? Are their relationships in line with these commitments? Does this individual have a network, personal relationship, or emotional support person who is supporting their projects and practices in line with these concerns?

Role of ICT

Lastly, ICT use was interwoven with individual's developmental experiences in four ways. First, they augmented their personal relationships through the benefit of additional interaction. Depending on the quality of the relationship this was usually a benefit. Next, they participated in disruptive networks. Here they would prune and refine who they socialized and interacted with during their routines. Further, these networks allowed them to access information tailored to their personal concerns. Third, the women would describe ways that ICT interaction was integral during defining moments. Their interactions and self-expressions during major life events extended to their online lives.

Finally, the participant's described instances when ICT enhanced their ability to exercise agency. During chapter one I defined agency based on Archer's (2007) description that, *we are what we care about*. In different instances young women would act against a specific regulation brought on through social institutions. This usually triggered what, in Archer's terms, a double morphogenetic experience. In other words, online spaces became an opportunity to practice defining one's self, as well as leveraging personal identity to influence traditional structures. Participants universally wanted and believed they were exercising control of their lives. Yet, all the participants discussed the consequences of behaving in accordance with the culture and the restriction of a platform, where the exercise of agency came in the form of operating multiple social media accounts.

Study Limitations

When writing this dissertation I had several opportunities to learn from my committee, fellow doctoral students, and from colleagues across disciplines. I believe this qualitative study filled an important gap in the literature, but specific limitations need to be addressed to provide context to the findings. Further, some of the study outcomes may have been improved had I planned differently or known what to expect. The following section reflects on my own lessons learned and other potential methodological limits by discussing how I grappled with the data, and ways for determining rigor in qualitative studies.

Grappling with data

First, I want to address how challenging it was to bracket or set aside my own expectations. I did my best to account for this bias by taking part in activities like

journaling, going through the interview process myself, and actively reporting back to a peer-debriefing partner. However, as I sat down to write there were still certain biases and agenda's that seemed to have shown up in my writing presentation. For instance, when describing young women and their life events I unintentionally took on a defensive posture about the financial difficulties of the millennial generation. I also happened to be in a place personally where finances were burdensome and uncertain. One way to recognize, and work to limit the biases that did show through, came from working closely with my dissertation chair to review my writing presentation. Also, informal conversations about my work with people who are researchers, and those who are not, helped me to think of the data in new ways and revisit some of my original ideas. When writing about critical realism I had to resist the temptation to prove or demonstrate the perfections in this theory. I became personally enthusiastic and excited about the concepts. This may be a personal limitation that I can improve with practice, and I hope to do more collaborative qualitative research in the future to help reduce these biases.

When assessing the theoretical components, especially categorizing women based on reflexive style, I had to make interpretations about how their story signified the components of the theory— or contradicted the theory. This was most challenging for the groups where I felt some sense of being the outsider, for example those who identified as LGBT, people of color, and those who were actively religious in their young adult years. On more than one occasion, I reached out to participants to clarify, or do informal member checking, to be sure they would be in agreement about my interpretation of their story. These conversations were brief and carried out over email and instant messaging conversations. If I were to use this theoretical model again I would try to access the

measurement tool created by Archer; or, I could even ask participants directly which reflexive style is best suited to them and have them explain their choice.

Determining Rigor

To improve the trustworthiness of this study, it would be ideal to spend time reviewing the codebook with an additional researcher. Although I discussed my interpretations with my peer-debrief partners during the data collection period, less time was spent reviewing my interpretations, codes, themes, and findings. Further, during this study I experimented with social media as a means of data triangulation. The social media research site was useful because it offered me a way to see certain aspects of the participant's' online presentations, and have continued interaction after their interviews. However, this experience was also an important lesson in having clear and realistic expectations of research participants. When setting up interviews, I would email participants asking for screen shots, or links to content they found valuable or representative of their online life. Based on the uneven response among participants, I decided to only use social media information to triangulate and confirm stories that participants discussed during interviews. In the future I may provide more explicit instruction, or if the research question warrants an ethnographic method, I would collect and archive online data from participants myself.

Finally, the themes and findings in this study apply to a specific subset of the population. The sample consisted of young women and non-binary identified young people, who were high users of ICT, and each reported having had some college education or additional training beyond high school. To confirm the findings for transferability, it would be useful to interview young people in contrasting social settings

to see how the groups compare. For instance, future research may look at how young women in military service describe their online activities or a group of young people who have had less opportunity for education. Findings should be considered in context of the sample and further examination would be needed to confirm the theoretical implications and broad trends regarding online life.

Implications for Social Work

Social work can benefit from thinking of new technologies as a way to stay involved in a rapidly evolving society. Through research and practice it is important we continue understanding how the social world is influenced by these technologies, and how this impacts the people we strive to support and empower. Findings from this study warrant several relevant discussions about how social workers can improve the profession by learning more about the current changes going on. Below is a discussion about ways to improve social work practice, research, and policy.

Practice

A significant take-away from this study was the impact of ICT on relationships. Young women are using social media as a relational space where they do emotional labor to maintain and support people in their lives. Also, specific relationship contexts influence the way someone communicates via ICT, so if there is an established and close relationship text messaging may be seen as normal and even expected, whereas a new romantic interest is expected to maintain certain boundaries and follow a process. These new social mores may seem foreign or unusual to some social workers, but learning about the online practices of these individuals can be a useful way to understand their relationships and ways of relating to other people.

Currently, much of the activity that happens via online culture may be thought of as youth culture. Because many of the participants discussed finding additional platforms and social media sites to connect with peers, in the future it is likely that young people will always find a space or mode of interaction that is exclusive. For those social workers interested in working with youth knowing more about these online experiences will help them relate to their clients and maintain connected to their day-to-day lives. As an example, it may be more appropriate to distribute health information via Youtube advertisements rather than airing a promotional PSA during primetime television. To this end, one of the twelve social work grand challenges includes finding ways to incorporate digital tools for the social good (Uehara, Flynn, Fong, Brekke, Barth, Coulton, ... & Walters, 2013). As previously mentioned interactional agency should be an active discussion amongst social workers, and by learning how and why people use online spaces social workers can integrate new technologies to enhance services appropriately (LaMendola & Krysik, 2013).

Policy

Laws and policies need to be put in place to help protect women as they navigate online spaces. Just as the women in this study described, online life is just an extension of their day-to-day activities. If we think of online space as an extension of the existing world than it is no surprise that girls and women face specific threats, violence, and violations while interacting. The existing research about women and children can help to inform the way we think about these problems. If a young girl is sharing a nude photo of herself with a trusted partner, and somehow the photo gets out to her peers, the first question should not blame the victim for her choice to experiment with sexuality. Rather,

the questions should focus on the perpetrators in the situation; who leaked the photo, how did they get to the photo, why did they feel entitled to share the image without permission, what is an appropriate consequence. The young women in this study provided different examples of how abuse is continued and carried out through online activity, and these threats should be addressed through public policy and ideally the private companies who hold a great deal of power in these situations.

Findings from this study also demonstrated how social media was affirming and helpful in young people's day-to-day lives. For that reason, social work should be thinking about ways we can protect what is beneficial about online interactions and protect people from the harm that currently exists. Several of the participants in this study were connected to larger social justice causes and would use their social media accounts to show support for social change. The ability for a marginalized person to be seen supporting those who are in their community is a powerful and important tool. Social work should be wary of policies that may interrupt or prevent this type of activity. This may mean keeping a close watch on how private companies that sponsor these sites. Also, how government agencies monitor and share information from online life. Both public and private industry should include transparent and thoughtful procedures for their practices and social workers can advocate to empower and protect online experience of marginalized communities.

Research

Continued research in this area can guide social work practitioners and policy makers. There is also research methodologies that are new and experimental that social workers may consider adopting to further support ongoing research agendas. To do this

effectively social workers should consider the ethical and technical implication that come with these methods. For instance, should a researcher choose to use big data they should think about how the data set was supplied, if the participants actively and knowingly consented to the use of their data, and if the findings seem salient to providing solutions to social problems. Qualitative research, and continued understanding of online culture seems to be the best approach for guiding social workers decisions as they experiment with these methods. A social work researcher who presented an opportunity to use a large dataset from Twitter for sentiment analysis in a local neighborhood may want to think through several considerations. Do the Twitter users understand that their data would be used? Does the platform influence the social and emotional presentation? How does understanding the general emotions in a neighborhood help that community?

To conclude, the prospect of this research is invigorating and exciting. I hope to continue to find ways to translate and bring relevant and helpful information to social workers so that they can understand how these changes may influence everyday life. I also feel an immediate need to address ongoing problems. I plan to continue studying women and understanding their online lives, specifically connecting the research and information about intimate partner violence with literature about online harassment, cyberstalking, and monitoring. How can we use these experiences of technology abuse to detect and understand violence? What can social workers do to prevent abuse from continuing in online spaces? Given the importance young women placed on their online activities, how can social workers help those who are experiencing abuse maintain social networks of support through their online activity?

The way technology influences relationships, both healthy and abusive, seems to be an understudied area as well. Much of the findings from my research focused on the individual and their own understanding of identity and intimacy. In the future, I would want to study more about how the experience of intimacy is shaped or influenced by online interactions by interviewing couples. Further, by applying a developmental framework, research can go on to show how people may outgrow or change their online activities. Continuing to apply a developmental lens could be helpful in knowing what technology does to sustain support networks, intimate relationships, and understanding of the self throughout the life course.

Lastly, online culture and phenomena change rapidly. Context collapse seemed to be an indication that people would have to adapt to social networking by configuring a sense of self that would fit and be appropriate for multiple social relationships all gathered into one networked audience (Marwick & boyd, 2011). Participants in my study diverged with this idea, they established several different social media accounts for the very reason that they did not want to worry about pruning their posts to appease their family members, work colleagues, and school friends. To conclude, Internet research is complex and constantly changing, it may take a lifetime to understand how and why we are dedicating our time to this space — clearly, more research is necessary.

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APPENDIX A
IRB SUBMISSION

Instructions and Notes:

Depending on the nature of what you are doing, some sections may not be applicable to your research. If so, mark as “NA”.

When you write a protocol, keep an electronic copy. You will need a copy if it is necessary to make changes.

Protocol Title

Include the full protocol title:

Background and Objectives

Provide the scientific or scholarly background for, rationale for, and significance of the research based on the existing literature and how will it add to existing knowledge.

The onset of Information Communication Technologies (ICT) is considered a major influence in human development, and research suggests many social interactions are now mediated communications that occur via technologies such as cell phones or Internet. Women, ages 18-29, are in general high ICT users, and they create, curate, and produce more content than any other adult group online (Duggan, 2014). Certain scholars suggest ICT and other social changes have transformed how individuals transition to adulthood. In addition to technology, new social norms (e.g., marrying at a later age, the decline in marriage rates, and the rise of non-traditional families) could change the pathway to adulthood for young women. Using a phenomenological approach, unique stories about the transition to adulthood will be gathered to explore contemporary experiences among women who are high users of ICT. The narratives and stories shared by participants will address the impact ICT have on young women as they move toward adulthood. Further, the theoretical frameworks regarding the transition to adulthood – theory of emerging adulthood (psychology) and critical realism (sociology) -- will be examined using qualitative data. Additionally, the research questions will address the relevance of traditional developmental theories posed by Erik Erikson (1964). To date, there has only been one study that asked emerging adults about how they internalize experiences online during development and the focus was on same-sex-attracted youth (Kuper & Mustanski, 2014). Numerous research studies have focused on how emerging adults’ dating experiences are impacted by ICT (e.g., Facebook and/or Myspace use, surveillance, meeting new partners, flirting, and relationship development). Considering the rapid change in contemporary relationships— and the possible influence ICT have on feeling closeness with others— research is needed that captures a variety of experiences with intimacy. Thus, this study will fill an important gap in the current literature.

To inform this exploratory study, a phenomenological qualitative method will be used to create an account of the everyday lives of emerging adult women and their developmental experiences in relation to ICT use. Participants will share their stories, which in turn will produce data that materializes into patterns and themes. Phenomenology is being used to offer a rich description of the experiences of emerging adult females during the developmental process and to determine whether

their ICT use influences their daily lived experiences during this phase (Giorgi, 1997). To better plan for research, 4-6 practice interviews will be conducted (Kim, 2011).

This project intends to embrace the Internet as a means to accomplish study objectives. Recruitment criteria will include: age (must be 18-29), self-identify as female, and qualify as a high user of ICT (i.e., goes online everyday, owns a smartphone, and actively uses more than one social media account). Because parts of this study require a retrospective narrative about identity formation during the emerging adult years, age criteria focuses on females who are going through the emerging adult years as well as those exiting the phase. To formally enroll, individuals must identify their age, gender, and have an understanding of the study requirements. The study aims to enroll between 15-25 participants for interviews. During recruitment participants will be emailed a link to a Qualtrics survey, here they can review and sign a consent release.

Each participant will be offered a \$15-\$25 gift card to Amazon.com, depending on their level of participation.

Phase One: Semi-standardized individual interviews will be conducted with study participants. Additionally, probing and impromptu questions will be used to illicit more in-depth narrative descriptions. Video interviews will be the primary source of data. Online video chats will allow the researcher to analyze an interviewee's body language, which can aid in understanding the participant's narrative (Bezemer & Mavers, 2011; Sullivan, 2013). During phase one, young women will participate in a semi-structured interview via Skype. Participants will be asked to retrospectively describe their lived experiences from the ages of 18-25. The primary objective of the interview is to get participants to tell stories about their day-to-day experiences, including some description of ICT use during the emerging adult years.

Phase Two: Participants will be given the option to be interviewed a second time, and during the follow-up, they will be asked more explicitly about their perspective on the role of ICT use. Interviews will be open-ended with no formal questions prepared. The final opportunity for participation is interaction with three social media pages by which emerging adult women can submit digital content and contact the researcher with any remaining ideas. This strategy is an ethnographically-informed use of triangulation, popularized by digital media scholars as a way to collect content representing the online life of participants (Markham, 2013). Last, the researcher will analyze the videos using a multi-modal approach, in which the videos are used to verify the transcribed interviews (Bezemer & Mavers, 2011). In addition, narrative analysis and open axial coding will be used for data analysis.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Describe the criteria that define who will be included or excluded in your final study sample. If you are conducting data analysis only describe what is included in the dataset you propose to use.

Indicate specifically whether you will target or exclude each of the following special populations:

The research study will not be recruiting minors, adults who are unable to consent, or prisoners.

There is no intention or plan to seek out pregnant women, Native Americans, or undocumented individuals, however they would not be excluded.

Study criteria require participants to self-identify as female, go online everyday, and have more than one social media account.

Participants must be between the ages of 18-29

Number of Participant

Indicate the total number of participants to be recruited and enrolled: 15-25

Recruitment Methods

To acquire participants, advertisements will be posted in online forums (e.g., Craigslist or student listservs). Additionally, emails will be sent to those in my professional and personal networks for dissemination to the other emerging adult females and community members. Finally, social media pages will be created as a way to provide information about the study as well serve as informal advertisements. To better understand the successes and failures of the recruitment strategies, detailed records of how participants found out about the study will be kept during the screening period.

Social Media Research Sites: Twitter: https://twitter.com/20s_identamacy; Tumblr: <https://www.tumblr.com/settings/blog/20sidentityintimacy>; Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/megan.lindsay.338>

Procedures Involved

Describe all research procedures being performed and when they are performed. Describe procedures including:

Terms and conditions for the research will be finalized using the online survey distributed to participants before their first interview. Please see participation survey link below:

https://jfe.qualtrics.com/preview/SV_02R18Qk63EO7gXj?Preview=Survey&BrandID=asupublicprograms

Initial semi-standardized interview via Skype (recorded)

Participants will be compensated for their time, \$15 for the first interview and 10 for the second; a maximum of \$25.

Second open-ended interview

Social Media Site interaction. Participants can post online content, including text, pictures, and video's they find relevant to the study. The social media accounts will be available until the end of January.

Ongoing contact with researcher. Participants can email, message, or contact the researcher to clarify content, offer suggestions or ideas, or voice concerns about the research project. Research social media accounts will be available to participants through the end of January 2015.

Risks to Participants

Internet research not only offers benefits, but also increases certain risks. Specifically, the use of search engines, IP addresses, and traceable data left on the web during any exchange limits the amount of anonymity that can be offered to participants. Because of the personal nature of the study, the researcher will take all reasonable precautions to prevent the inadvertent disclosure of any confidential information within her control; however, participants who choose to share their stories online agree and acknowledge that the researcher cannot guarantee data will not be stolen during transmission (Markham, 2013). All participants will have access to the researcher through email, and social media sites set up specifically for the study. In order to honor and respect the personal nature of these stories, participants are encouraged to have ongoing contact with the research and voice any concerns, during the period of active data collection (approx. November 2014-Jan 2015).

Using social media sites to interact with participants could lead to potential problems. I intend to monitor the research pages and remove any harmful or offensive content added by users. Users who persist in such behavior will either be asked to leave the group or blocked from participation with the group. Persistent harassment may result in the research pages being either temporarily or permanently shut down.

Potential Benefits to Participants

Realistically describe the potential benefits that individual participants may experience from taking part in the research. Indicate if there is no direct benefit. Do not include benefits to society or others.

The participants may feel validation from sharing their ideas and perspective about what it is like to transition to adulthood during this time.

Prior Approvals

The graduate supervisory committee has reviewed and approved the research plan.

Privacy and Confidentiality

Describe the steps that will be taken to protect subjects' privacy interests. "Privacy interest" refers to a person's desire to place limits on with whom they interact or to whom they provide personal information.

Describe the following measures to ensure the confidentiality of data:

Data will be stored on the researcher's lap-top, using Dedoose qualitative software, and using an external back up hard drive.

Data will be stored for 2 years after data collection is completed. The only person with direct access to the data will be the student researcher Megan Lindsay.

If participants sign the Performing, Modeling, Narration release form the video data may be used in future presentations, publication, and teaching exercises. This will be explained in writing to the participants.

A master list of data will be kept, but no identifying information will be included on the list. Each participant will be given a pseudonym on the master-list, no real names will be used for tracking and organizing data archives.

Consent Process

Indicate the process you will use to obtain consent. Include a description of:

During recruitment participants will be required to either sign a performance so release the video data for public consumption, or opt to keep all interview data private and sign an alternative consent form.

To sign the release form participants will be asked to type in their name and agree to the terms and conditions of the release. If they choose to remain anonymous there is also an option to indicate that answer.

https://jfe.qualtrics.com/preview/SV_02RI8Qk63EO7gXj?Preview=Survey&BrandID=asupublicprograms

<p>Process to Document Consent in Writing participants read and sign the waiver online, above is a link to the quiz showing the terms and conditions of the study.</p>
<p>Training Provide the date(s) the members of the research team have completed the CITI training for human participants. This training must be taken within the last 3 years. Additional information can be found at: http://researchintegrity.asu.edu/training/humans</p>
<p>Megan Lindsay , 08/02/2013 Judy Krysik, 8/2/13</p>

APPENDIX B
CONSENT FORM

Females' Perspective on the Emergence to Adulthood: The Role of Information Communication Technologies

I am a graduate student under the direction of Professor Judy Krysik in the department of Social Work at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study to better understand the day-to-day lives of young women as they transition to adulthood. Study criteria require participants to self-identify as female, go online everyday, and have more than one social media account. Participants must be between the ages of 18-29.

I am inviting your participation; I would like to video record this interview(s). The interview will not be recorded without your permission. Interviews and recordings will take place via Skype. You can choose your level of participation. If you would like, you can participate with a one-time interview that is kept anonymous between the research team and yourself. You will be compensated \$15 for your time and the interview is anticipated to take between 90-120 minutes.

The second option is a more visible role. You will go through the same initial interview, and this will be kept private between yourself and the researcher. The second interview will be open ended, with no predetermined questions. The length of the interview is anticipated between 45-90 minutes. This interview will give you a chance to talk about your story in more depth, and parts of this recording will be used in public research presentations, publications, and potentially classroom settings. Select videos and clips may be used for publication and presentation; this will require your signature on one additional form. You do not need to reveal your name, but know there is a possibility for people to search and find more about you since you will be talking about your life. As a research team we think we will be able to choose appropriate times and places to share your information, and believe the ability to show these videos is a meaningful way for people to learn about this topic and preserve the human element that shapes your experiences. Lastly, if you opt for the second option you will have a chance to post online content that reflects what you do when you are online. Research social media sites include Facebook, Tumblr, and Twitter. The site will have examples, and if you have any question you can email the researcher or message her through the site. If you choose option number 2, you will be compensated \$15 for the initial interview and \$10 for the follow up interview and online content.

At anytime during the study you have the right not to answer any question, and to stop participation. Your safety is a priority for the study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty.

Internet research not only offers benefits, but also increases certain risks. Specifically, the use of search engines, IP addresses, and traceable data left on the web during any exchange limits the amount of anonymity that can be promised to you as a participant. Because of the personal nature of the study, the researcher will take all reasonable precautions to prevent the inadvertent disclosure of any confidential information within her control; however, participants who choose to share their stories online agree and acknowledge that the researcher cannot guarantee data will not be stolen

during transmission. All participants will have access to the researcher through email, and social media sites set up specifically for the study. In order to honor and respect the personal nature of these stories, participants are encouraged to have ongoing contact with the research and voice any concerns. Using social media sites to interact with participants could lead to potential problems. I intend to monitor the research pages and remove any harmful or offensive content added by users. Users who persist in such behavior will either be asked to leave the group or blocked from participation with the group. Persistent harassment may result in the research pages being either temporarily or permanently shut down. We believe the stories and ideas of young women matter and we want to spread information based on their perspectives. As a research team we think we will be able to choose appropriate times and places to share your information, and believe the

Due to the nature of this study, your participation will not be guaranteed confidential, but steps are being taken so that your identity is not revealed or advertised unnecessarily. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name will not be used. A pseudonym will represent you in any future public dissemination.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact the research team, Megan Lindsay mlindsa3@asu.edu and Judy Krysik, Judy.Krysik@asu.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788.

By signing below you are agreeing to be part of the study. **Here an electronic signature space is provided for participants.**

Name:

Signature:

Date:

APPENDIX C
PERFORMANCE RELEASE

PERFORMANCE RELEASE

Photo Release Form *Revised 4/29/2013*

I grant permission to the Arizona Board of Regents, on behalf of Arizona State University and its agents or employees, to copyright and publish all or any part of photographs and/or motion pictures and/or voice recordings and/or written/spoken statements taken of me on the date and at the location listed below for use in the ASU website on Self-Regulated Strategy Development for writing, and any related university publications, including those printed, moving, audio and electronic; and all exhibitions, public displays, publications, commercial art, and advertising purposes in any media without limitation or reservation.

I hereby waive any right to inspect or approve the photographs, publications, or electronic matter that may be used in conjunction with them now or in the future, whether that use is known to me or unknown, and I waive any right to royalties or other compensation arising from or related to the use of the photographs.

I hereby agree to release and hold harmless the Arizona Board of Regents and the developers and managers of the SRSD website, on behalf of Arizona State University, via electronic or media, from and against any claims, damages or liability arising from or related to the use of the photographs, including but not limited to any re-use, distortion, blurring, alteration, optical illusion or use in composite form, either intentionally or otherwise, that may occur or be produced in production of the finished product. It is the discretion of ASU to decide whether to use the image.

I am 18 years of age and I am competent to contract in my own name. I have read this release before signing below, and I fully understand the contents, meaning and impact of this release. I understand that I am free to address any specific questions regarding this release by submitting those questions in writing prior to signing, and I agree that my failure to do so will be interpreted as a free and knowledgeable acceptance of the terms of this release.

For those under the age of 18, this form must be signed by both the child and the parent or guardian. By signing, the parent or guardian attests that he/she is competent to contract in her/his own name; has read this release before signing below; fully understand the contents, meaning and impact of this release; and understands that he/she is free to address any specific questions regarding this release by submitting those questions in writing before signing, and that failure to do so will be interpreted as a free and knowledgeable acceptance of the terms of this release.

Signature: _____

(Individual age 18 or older, granting permission)

http://asupublicprograms.co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_02R18Qk63EO7gXj

APPENDIX D
STUDY PROCEDURES

STUDY PROCEDURES

Chronological Steps	Researcher Responsibility	Participant Involvement
Study Recruitment	Create research social media pages for advertising and data collection	Contact researcher and answer recruitment questions via email
	Advertise study using online forums (e.g. Craig's list) and using personal and professional networks	
	Screen potential participants and schedule initial interview	Schedule initial interview via email
Phase One Data Collection	Initial Interview (90-120 minutes)	Initial Interview (90-120 minutes)
	Write one page vignette about interview	
	Pay participant	
Phase Two Data Collection	Contact participant to schedule follow-up interview	Follow-up interview (60-90 minutes)
	Follow-up interview (60-90 minutes)	
	Facilitate and manage content on social media sites	Submit content to research social media accounts
	Second participant payment	
Reflexivity	Respond to concerns or questions brought forward by research participants	Reaching out to researcher to clarify previous contribution
	Discuss ongoing issues with peer debrief partner, keep list of potential biases, record in journal day of interview	

Appendix E

INITIAL INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

INITIAL INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Demographic Information
<p>How old are you? What is your self described gender? What ethnic group do you identify yourself with? (e.g. White, Asian, Multiracial) How do you identify your sexuality? (e.g. Heterosexual, Lesbian, Bisexual) Are you enrolled in school? If yes, where are you attending?</p>
<p>Do you work? If yes, where and are you employed full or part time? Did you grow up in an urban, rural, or suburban community?</p>
What are the concerns of emerging adult women and how do they fit with traditional developmental tasks of identity and intimacy? (I'm going to ask you a series of questions from a survey given to young adults, the questions are worded like a traditional survey, but the more in-depth your answers go the better.)
<i>a. How does it feel during your young adult years (e.g. 18-29)?</i>
<i>b. Do you feel you have reached adulthood?</i>
<i>c. What's most important for becoming an adult?</i>
<i>d. What's your current living arrangement?</i>
<i>e. How involved in your life are your parents?</i>
<i>f. What would you say is the key to success in adult-life?</i>
<i>g. Have you been able to get the education you desire? Did you have financial support?</i>
<i>h. How important is a college education in order to get a good job?</i>
<i>i. Are you currently in a relationship? When do you think it is ok for people to have sex with each other?*</i>
<i>j. How much do you rely on ICT for support from family and friends? Do you ever think that you use ICT too much?</i>
2. How does ICT use influence emerging adult women during the developmental process?
<i>a. What is your daily online activity like, walk me through your online routine (e.g. all social media platforms)? Tell me which social media sites you are on?</i>
<i>b. Have you had any online experience(s) that seem to stand out as vital during your development?</i>
<i>c. Do you have a regular online community where you feel most authentic?</i>
<i>d. Can you tell me a story or think of a time when online interactions influenced how you saw yourself?</i>
<i>e. How has using social media been a part of your current relationship/dating experience?</i>

<p>Do emerging adult women describe their developmental experiences as ways of engaging in morphogenesis, or maintaining social structures through morphostasis? (We are going to talk in more depth now about your personal story and life, these questions may require that you reflect so please do not feel rushed and let me know if you need clarification)</p>
<p>a. Can you briefly describe what your childhood was like, especially the values you learned in the home?</p> <p>b. When you were a young adolescent or even a child, how were your relationships with adults (especially parents or caretakers)?</p> <p>c. Can you think of a time when your relationships with adults changed?</p> <p>d. Do you have a set of values, or views you use to help you make choices?</p> <p>e. How do you feel about the future? Do you have a life goal, or ultimate concern?</p> <p>f. Can you tell me a story, or think of time when you made a decision that felt very adult?</p>
<p>g. What is your definition of intimacy?</p> <p>h. Have you experienced love/intimacy? How did you know?</p>
<p>i. How important do you think a partnership/relationship is for adults?</p> <p>j. Would you call yourself a feminist, why or why not?</p> <p>k. Can you describe what dating is like for young adults now, in 2014?</p>
<p>l. Can you think of a concern that you had when you were in your early 20's that shaped the way you view things now?</p> <p>m. What is your most pressing priority for long term fulfillment as an adult?</p>
<p>Close Out Question (explanation of second interview)</p>
<p>a. Was there anything that happened during the interview that made it difficult for you to answer the questions honestly?</p>

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW TWO OUTLINE

INTERVIEW TWO OUTLINE

- 1** Open with any lingering ideas/thoughts the participant had come to mind regarding interview number one.
- 2** Review and discuss any online content posted to research sites by participant.
- 3** Discuss any thoughts, suggestions, ideas from the researcher notes about interview number one.
- 4** Talk openly about what is the same and what is different for the generation of women who are now becoming adults compared to other generations of women.
- 5** Discuss any concerns or issues that the participants has for the future (individual concerns/family concerns/cultural/political)
- 6** Discuss the role technology plays in everyday life for young women.
- 7** Talk about any information that is purposefully NOT shared online.
- 8** Discuss how the participants try to project their online persona (what is the ideal impression online)
- 9** Discuss which relationships are currently most important to the participant.

Appendix F

RESEARCH SOCIAL MEDIA SITES INSTRUCTION SHEET

RESEARCH SOCIAL MEDIA SITES INSTRUCTION SHEET

I'm so glad you have decided to contribute to our social media sites. Any posts you provide will be public to those on the sites. All who participate in the study will be invited to visit the site, as well as people who contact the research study looking for more information about the study. The content that you add to this site is intended to help generate content for a second interview, and provide examples of what your everyday online life is like. Also, you may choose to show case content that is related to young adulthood, especially work/school, love/dating life, and personal identity. This is a chance for you to provide examples of the types of activity you do online. The same circumstances that apply when you are using social media privately are applicable in this space, especially; anything posted could be identifiable in this public format. Using any of the following sites you can submit content (e.g. meaningful status, conversations, popular posts, articles you read/share, photo's/video's) that you think represents your online presence and experiences. Content you post here will be discussed during the second interview.

Viewing the sites gives you an opportunity to see other participants' posts, you are free to interact and engage with their content and share experiences. As long as the sites are up and actively in use I will be watching to make sure interactions are safe for everyone invited to the site(s). If you do post something that can potentially cause harm or lead to another participant feeling unsafe the post will be deleted. Any users who are not considerate of the group may be deleted or blocked from the sites. In order to help get conversation going I have posted a few examples of my own on each site. Please email, message, or call me with any questions.

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/megan.lindsay.338>

Twitter: https://twitter.com/20s_identamacy

Tumblr: <https://www.tumblr.com/blog/20sidentityintimacy>