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# Gone But Not Forgetting: Examining the Differentiation of Flourishing and Floundering in Emerging Adulthood in the Context of Family Development

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ABSTRACT

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In emerging adulthood, distinctive groups have been found to exhibit "flourishing" (i.e., simultaneously experiencing positive, maturing relationships with parents, exploring identity in numerous positive areas, and striving to attain and subsequently achieving criteria deemed important for the successful transition to adulthood) and "floundering" (i.e., experiencing pitfalls such as heavy experimentation in the form of high levels of binge drinking and drug use, and instability reflected in high levels of depression and anxiety; Nelson & Padilla-Walker, 2011). While these groups have been found to differ with regards to factors of individual development, they had not been examined for variation with regards to familial development. Therefore, the purpose of this study was twofold: First, to examine how experiences in emerging adults' family of origin may be linked to their flourishing and floundering in emerging adulthood. Second, to explore how emerging adults' attitudes towards family of formation, specifically aspects of individuals' marital horizons and family formation values (Carroll et al., 2007), may be linked to flourishing and floundering in emerging adulthood. In general, results showed that flourishing and floundering subgroups differed with regards to their perceptions towards family of origin and attitudes towards family of formation. Flourishing subgroups were found to have more positive perceptions of family-of-origin factors than the floundering subgroups, as well as lower ideal ages for marriage, stronger feelings towards marital permanence, more family centeredness, and less endorsement of cohabitation.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

# LIST OF TABLES

**Chapter 1: Introduction**

In the past half-century, sweeping demographic shifts have occurred in industrialized societies, creating a need for defining what was once a passing transition period to adulthood (Arnett, 1998). "Emerging adulthood" was coined in the late 20th century to describe the developmental period of 18-25 year-olds, a period theoretically and empirically distinctive from the adolescence that precedes it or young adulthood that follows it (Arnett, 1998, 2006). Emerging adulthood, then, has been established as a distinct period of the life course, between adolescence and young adulthood (Arnett, 2000, 2006).

When reframed with a family developmental lens (Rodgers & White, 1993), as suggested by marriage and family scholars (Carroll et al., 2007), emerging adulthood can be defined as a period between an individual's family of origin and his or her family of formation. This period of the life course, among the non-college as well as college population, has been shown to be a time of flourishing for some and floundering for others (Côté, 2000, 2006; Furlong & Cartmel, 1997; Nelson & Padilla-Walker, 2011; Schwartz, 2000). That is, while there are groups that "flourish" (i.e., simultaneously experiencing positive, maturing relationships with parents, exploring identity in numerous positive areas, and striving to attain and subsequently achieving criteria deemed important for the successful transition to adulthood), there are others that "flounder" (i.e., experiencing pitfalls such as heavy experimentation in the form of high levels of binge drinking and drug use, and instability reflected in high levels of depression and anxiety; Nelson & Padilla-Walker, 2011).

Some work has shown significant differences to exist between these subgroups in terms of current beliefs, behaviors, and relationships as well as in terms of outcomes seen as critical to the period of emerging adulthood (Nelson & Padilla-Walker, 2011). Yet, little work has been

done through a family developmental lens to determine the association of these subgroup differences with attitudes towards family of origin or formation. In consideration of emerging adulthood as a period between an individual's family of origin and his or her family of formation, then, the purpose of this study was twofold: First, to examine how experiences in family of origin may be linked to flourishing and floundering in emerging adulthood. Second, to explore how attitudes towards family of formation, specifically aspects of individuals' marital horizons and family formation values (Carroll et al., 2007), may be linked to flourishing and floundering in emerging adulthood.

## Chapter 2: Theory and Literature Review

### Emerging Adulthood

According to theorists, emerging adulthood materialized in highly industrialized or postindustrial countries as a byproduct of a shift in societal expectations for young people (Arnett, 2000). That is, in the early 20th century, late adolescents' labor was expected in a factory or in the family business, but as industrialism intensified in the latter half of the 20th century, such labor was no longer needed. Instead, other authorities—parents, college authorities, and other adults—began to take care of a portion of the responsibilities once required of 18-25 year-olds as such individuals pursued higher levels of education and specialization, in order to meet a higher standard for entry into prestigious and lucrative information-based professions (Arnett, 2006; Côté & Allahar, 1996).

This shift in societal expectations and opportunities for young people has resulted in later ages of first marriage (Kreider, 2005) and parenthood as well as establishment of long-term work and long-term residence in their parents' homes, which has afforded them a longer period of exploration of possible life directions, especially in the areas of school, work, love, and worldviews (Arnett, 2000, 2006). In fact, according to the theory, the exploratory nature of this time period is one of the main features defining emerging adulthood as a distinct developmental period. The other four main features said to characterize emerging adulthood as a distinct developmental period are: 1) instability (reflected in numerous changes in residential status due to frequent changes of direction with regard to explorations), 2) being self-focused (though not self-centered, emerging adults demonstrate high amounts of autonomy because of few enduring obligations or long-standing commitments to others), 3) feeling in-between (demonstrated by the feeling expressed by young people that they are not adolescent nor adult) and 4) perceiving an

abundance of possibilities (reflected in emerging adults' high hopes to live better lives than their parents and an almost universal view of ultimately finding one's soul mate). While recognizing that by the end of emerging adulthood young people will have made choices that have enduring ramifications, Arnett (2000, 2004) has asserted that these features and possibilities (and the very existence) of the emerging adulthood period are primarily positive.

**Flourishing in Emerging Adulthood**

Indeed, Arnett (2000) has recognized the years in the life course between 18 and 25 as a time of profound change and importance, and posited the features of emerging adulthood as manifesting a time period with few demands and an abundance of opportunities. He has theorized that junctures for positive development are evidenced in each feature of emerging adulthood. For instance, Arnett has said that identity exploration allows emerging adults to learn more about who they are and what they want out of life without the constraints of the degree of parental monitoring that occurred in adolescence nor the responsibilities of future roles such as marriage, parenthood, and career. Therefore, emerging adults are able to gradually try out various possibilities in a more serious and focused way than adolescents, and gradually move towards making enduring decisions in preparation for adult roles.

Some research has supported this notion of flourishing through identity development in emerging adulthood. For instance, scholars have found that there are many emerging adults who display adaptive forms of identity development (Smits, Doumen, Luyckx, Duriez, & Goossens, 2011). Also higher levels of identity development have been found to be negatively associated with anxiety and depression and positively associated with feelings of purpose in life (Schwartz et al., 2011), more affectionate and supportive romantic relationships (Barry, Madsen, Nelson, Carroll, & Badger, 2009), and higher levels of empathy and other-oriented helping (Smits et al.,

2011) in emerging adulthood. Taken together, it appears that there are positive outcomes that might characterize "flourishing" for those who display adaptive forms of identity development in emerging adulthood.

With regards to emerging adulthood being an age of instability, Arnett (2000) has suggested that emerging adults have the opportunity to move away from home and has noted a positive association between emerging adult children living away from home and positive psychological adjustment (Dubas & Peterson, 1996; O'Connor, Allen, Bell, & Hauser, 1996).

Regarding emerging adulthood being a self-focused time, Arnett (2006) has argued that emerging adults are self-focused in the sense that they have few social obligations (like adolescents), yet are markedly more considerate of other people's feelings. Again, some work has lent support to this aspect of emerging adulthood theory: participation in prosocial behaviors has been linked with adaptive identity exploration for some young people during this time period (Padilla-Walker, Barry, Carroll, Madsen, & Nelson, 2008).

As an age of feeling in between, emerging adulthood is a time when the majority of young people feel that they are adult in some respects and not adult in others (Arnett, 1997, 2001; Nelson, 2003). Arnett has asserted that this feature of emerging adulthood allows young people the opportunity to grow into the feeling of being an adult by learning to accept responsibility for oneself, make independent decisions, and become financially independent. One study has shown support for this, finding a positive association between young people who felt they had achieved these criteria and lower levels of depression (Nelson & Barry, 2005).

As an age of possibilities, Arnett (2006) has claimed that emerging adulthood offers two additionally positive opportunities: first, it provides a time of optimism regarding the future, as few paths are determined, and second, it allows young people who "experienced difficult

conditions in their family lives to move away from home and to steer their lives in a more favorable direction before they enter the commitments in love and work that structure adult life" (p. 13). Little work has been done to examine whether or not there is support for this part of emerging adulthood theory, especially in terms of the possible link between flourishing in emerging adulthood and experiencing distance from "difficult conditions" in the family of origin.

In sum, Arnett (2000) has declared emerging adulthood as a time "in which many different potential futures remain possible and personal freedom and exploration are higher for most people than at any other time" (p. 479). However, while he has posited that this allows for positive development (and some work has supported this), other scholars argue (and some research findings suggest) that emerging adulthood can be a time of floundering for these same reasons. That is, some scholars have claimed that the high degree of freedom and available choices offered by this period of development can cause difficulties and maladjustment for some young people (Côté, 2000, 2006; Furlong & Cartmel, 1997).

**Floundering in Emerging Adulthood**

Côté (2006), like Arnett, has recognized that the demographic picture of the time period between young people's departure from high school and attainment of adulthood has changed drastically due to societal changes in the last 50 years. Likewise, he has posited the time period as a crucial and deterministic one in the life course. Like Arnett, Côté has recognized that there are some benefits to the deinstitutionalized nature of the "moratorium" (defined by Côté as a time-out from particular social responsibilities that comprise a delay in transition) in this period, but he has also suggested that there are some notable risks.

Specifically, Côté (2000, 2006) has suggested that society has entered a late-modern period that is increasingly anomic (or lacking norms) and the accompanying risks are most likely

to be experienced by young people who come from disadvantaged backgrounds. Côté has offered, for instance, that emerging adults with little guidance from their family of origin who are coping with "decoupled and erratic life-transition options (such as from family-of-origin to family-of-orientation)" (Côté, 2006, p. 91) may find navigating this time period especially difficult. Indeed, Côté has claimed that anomie can make self-development troublesome since it provides little institutionalized contexts to guide one to becoming an adult.

Additionally, Côté has suggested that because young people's sustained economic participation is not as needed as it was in preindustrial societies, emerging adults may feel little normative pressure from mainstream society to grow up, which could present further risks. For instance, Côté has suggested that one could engage in what he has called "default individualization" (p. 92, or establishing one's self by default) by simply selecting a number of default options offered by contemporary youth culture. Or, for another instance, Côté has suggested that a young person could squander his or her life prospects by devoting the time of the "moratorium" offered by emerging adulthood mainly to hedonistic activities and immediate gratifications, and thereby diverge from occupational identity development and essential forms of "development individualization" (p. 92, establishing self through deliberate and continual growth). According to Côté, engaging in such pursuits could, therefore, perpetuate the anomic nature of emerging adulthood throughout one's life course.

Though this projection made in Côté's (2000) theory (i.e., the possibility that a focus on hedonistic activities in emerging adulthood may lead to a diminishment of one's life prospects) cannot be validated without longitudinal studies, nor has there been much research done regarding emerging adults from disadvantaged backgrounds, some cross-sectional research indicates support for many points of his theory, though largely among college-educated

emerging adults. It has been well established, for example, that externalizing problems, such as risky sexual behaviors (e.g., number of sexual partners, low or improper use of condoms), heavy drinking, alcohol-related problems, and drug use, often reach their highest levels in college populations during emerging adulthood (e.g., see Bachman, Johnston, O'Malley, & Schulenberg, 1996; Lefkowitz & Gillen, 2006; Schulenberg & Maggs, 2001, for reviews).

Recent work has also shown that these risk behaviors may be linked to still other risk behaviors especially prevalent in emerging adulthood. For example, one study has shown that video game use is linked to greater drinking behaviors, drug use, lower relationship quality with friends and parents, and, for women, lower self-worth and perceived social acceptance (Padilla-Walker, Nelson, Carroll, & Jensen, 2010). Taken together, there is evidence to support the point of Côté's (2006) theory that this period of development is used by some young people to engage in "hedonistic activities" (p. 93), and that those individuals may indeed experience some forms of maladaptive adjustment as a result.

Studies have also shown support for another of Côté's (2006) claims: that is, that the anomic nature of emerging adulthood can make self-development troublesome. Indeed, compared to their peers who perceive themselves as adults, emerging adults have been found to be less resolved with regards to identity issues of self and romantic partner, more involved in risk-taking behaviors, and more depressed (Nelson & Barry, 2005). These findings bolster Côté's (2000, 2006) claim that emerging adulthood can be a time of instability and uncertainty for some. One group that may especially struggle with the potential instability and ambivalence of emerging adulthood is those who are shy. Indeed, a recent study showed that shyness in emerging adulthood was linked to higher levels of anxiety and depression, lower self-perceptions (in multiple domains), poorer relationship quality with parents, best friends and romantic

8

partners (Nelson et al., 2008). Taken together, these findings demonstrate support for the notion that the lack of institutionalized contexts to guide young people to adulthood may make it especially difficult for some individuals to navigate this time period.

Finally, several studies lend support to the aspect of Côté's (2000, 2006) theory regarding the increasing difficulty of identity development during this developmental time period. Specifically, researchers have shown a substantial number of college-educated emerging adults report diffused identity statuses (representing identity confusion; Padilla-Walker et al., 2008), and others have shown that emerging adults who have less adaptive identity styles tend to engage in more self-focused helping as well as both physical and relational aggression (Smits et al., 2011). This again points to the notion that the moratorium offered by emerging adulthood may make developing in this time period especially difficult for some young people. Taken together, the findings regarding incomplete identity development in emerging adulthood seem to suggest that, while it might be even more apparent in non-college educated populations as Côté (2006) suggests, floundering is also being experienced by college-educated emerging adults—and perhaps as prevalently as flourishing.

In sum, since the establishment of emerging adulthood theory, research findings have made apparent the presence of both positive and negative factors (or factors indicative of flourishing and floundering) in this developmental period. Recently, the findings regarding the positive and negative aspects of emerging adulthood have been augmented by work that revealed broader typologies of emerging adults. That is, scholars have found that amidst the heterogeneity of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2006), distinctive groups exist within the college population that reflect flourishing and floundering with regards to important aspects of emerging adult development (Nelson & Padilla-Walker, 2011). The current study sought to examine these

distinctive groups in the context of family developmental theory. These groups will be described next, followed by a discussion of family developmental theory to contextualize them for the purposes of this study.

**Groups of Flourishing and Floundering Emerging Adults**

Consistent with the positive view of the developmental time period captured in emerging adulthood theory (Arnett, 2000, 2004), research points to various beliefs/attitudes, attributes, behaviors, and relationships during this period of time that appear to reflect positive adjustment, or a sense of flourishing. Indeed, Nelson and Padilla-Walker (2011) identified two clusters, or typologies, of characteristics (beliefs, attributes, behaviors, and relationships) that appear to reflect flourishing in emerging adulthood. The first flourishing group, described as "well-adjusted," reflected emerging adults who were experiencing high levels of closeness to mother and father, high internal regulation of values, high levels of self-worth and social acceptance, and low levels of anxiety and depression. The second flourishing group, called "religious-adjusted," consisted of emerging adults, largely female, who exhibited high levels of religiosity, low levels of risk behaviors, and average anxiety, depression, and self-worth (Nelson & Padilla-Walker, 2011). Indeed, 36% of young women (as compared to only 7% of young men) in Nelson and Padilla-Walker's (2011) sample fell into the religious-adjusted group.

It is also notable that the well-adjusted group, in particular, demonstrated significantly higher levels of striving to attain characteristics and qualities deemed important for adulthood. This group also reflected significantly higher levels of identity achievement (signifying more progress towards an important milestone in this time period) than the floundering groups, even though there were no significant age differences between the groups.

Taken together, the work of Nelson and Padilla-Walker (2011) suggests that there are multiple ways to flourish (i.e., for some, particularly young women, religion appeared to be important, while there were others, in the well-adjusted group, for whom religion was not necessarily a distinguishing factor) but that groups of flourishing emerging adults appear to have some important themes in common. Specifically, the complex interconnectedness between multiple internal and external factors present in two groups of "flourishing" emerging adults in Nelson and Padilla-Walker's (2011) study seems to demonstrate the embodiment of positive aspects of emerging adulthood to which Arnett (2004) has referred. Indeed, the presence of these groups of flourishing emerging adults demonstrates that some young people experience positive relationships with parents, strive to attain features and values deemed important for the successful transition to adulthood (Nelson & Barry, 2005), and actively engage in the process of identity exploration. At the same time, flourishing emerging adults seem to be able to avoid some of the potential pitfalls of instability (as evidenced by lower levels of depression and anxiety) and risky experimentation (as demonstrated by lower levels of binge drinking and drug use) that can be characteristic of this time period.

Conversely, research points to various beliefs/attitudes, attributes, behaviors, and relationships during emerging adulthood that appear to reflect negative adjustment, or a sense of floundering (consistent with the concern of the risks associated with the deinstitutionalized nature of this time period expressed by Côté, 2000, 2006). Indeed, two groups were found by Nelson and Padilla-Walker (2011) to be floundering in emerging adulthood, reflecting maladjustment on a number of the same factors on which flourishing groups thrived. One group, labeled "externalizing," was composed of emerging adults, mostly male, with high levels of drug use, drinking, video game use, pornography use, and sexual partners. Indeed, young men made

up 84% of the externalizing group in Nelson and Padilla-Walker's (2011) sample; in fact, young

men in the externalizing group comprised nearly 40% of the entire male sample in their study.

The other group, termed "internalizing," demonstrated high levels of anxiety and depression and

low levels of self-worth and social acceptance.

Both groups were found to put less emphasis on criteria for adulthood that focus on

responsibility, caring for others, and complying with societal laws and standards than their

flourishing peers. The floundering groups were also found to be less settled than their peers in

multiple areas of identity (including dating, family, and occupational). The presence of these

groups underscores Côté's (2000) concern that the anomie of emerging adulthood may be

detrimental to some. Indeed, the internalizing group seemed to be experiencing heightened

instability (as manifest by higher levels of depression and anxiety) and the externalizing group

was engaging in high levels of risk behaviors. Furthermore, both floundering groups contained

characteristics or practices that are linked to less developmental individualization (as evidenced

by less emphasis on criteria for adulthood and lower levels of identity development; Nelson &

Padilla-Walker, 2011) as Côté had projected. Though long-term consequences for these attitudes

and behaviors remain unknown, the present maladjustment they evidenced is notable.

In sum, the examination of flourishing and floundering in the context of Arnett (2000)

and Côté's (2000) theories has allowed researchers (Nelson & Padilla-Walker, 2011) to capture

typologies of various attitudes (e.g., self-worth and social acceptance), relationships (e.g., with

mother and with father), and behaviors (e.g., drinking, drug use, video game use) in emerging

adulthood. These typologies have been examined to account for some of the variance of

individual development (e.g., progress towards identity development) in this time period.

However, other types of development, such as family development, have not been examined with

regards to these groups. It has been suggested by Carroll and colleagues (2007) that more work be done to examine the period of emerging adulthood within a family developmental lens (Rodgers & White, 1993), as a period between family of origin and family of formation. Thus, the current study sought to examine subgroup differences of flourishing and floundering in emerging adulthood in the context of family developmental theory. Prior to discussing how the flourishing and floundering subgroups might vary with regards to factors and attributes of family development, a description of family developmental theory is necessary.

## Family Developmental Theory

Family developmental theory was constructed in the 1950's, following an explosion of social science research in response to the Great Depression (e.g., Blackwell, 1942; Nelson, 1955). In the 1980's, there were a number of methodological advances in the social sciences and subsequent critiques that yielded a re-conceptualization of family developmental theory by family sociologists (Rodgers & White, 1993). Though this re-conceptualization preceded the establishment of emerging adulthood theory, it parallels emerging adulthood theory in the recognition of sweeping demographic shifts in the past half-century. Indeed, Rodgers and White (1993) recognize the normative changes that have occurred for families over the past fifty years as well as the heterogeneity of family development. Due to these similarities, the re-conceptualization of family developmental theory (according to Rodgers & White, 1993) provides a sound basis for the current study's examination of flourishing and floundering subgroups of emerging adults within the context of family development.

Rodgers and White (1993) described the family in terms of the developmental view that the "present is both a consequence of what has gone before and what is anticipated for the future" (p. 235). According to their view, the family goes through stages comprising a "family

career," in which transition points, also called "transitional events", mark the departure from one stage to another. Transitional events, to qualify as such, must be developmental in nature. That is, they cannot just be events that have an impact on or pertain to individuals and families but events that create consequentially different normative expectations in the role content of family relationships as a result of their occurrence. In other words, the social rules (or norms) for the behavior of the positions assumed by the event will be different than the ones prescribed to the familial positions preceding it. For example, a wedding is a transitional event that Rodgers and White (1993) have suggested often marks the departure from one developmental stage in the family career (the stage between one's family of origin and marriage) to another (the stage of being married prior to having children). Therefore, when two people marry, there exist family institutional norms regarding changes in the role content of their relationship following the wedding that did not exist previously.

Indeed, considering such events to be developmental in nature, Rodgers and White (1993) have designated leaving home and marrying as transitional events which mark one stage, among many possible stages, in the family career. Similarly, Arnett (1998), in defining emerging adulthood, has recognized the uniqueness of the stage of life (around 18-25 years of age) when most young people live away from home and few have responsibilities towards a spouse or children. Indeed, in many regards Arnett has focused on a similar period in the life course to the previously mentioned stage in the family career between living with one's parents and getting married.

In fact, Arnett (2000, 2006) has suggested, like family developmental scholars, that the social rules (or norms) prescribed for behavior in emerging adulthood vary from those once assigned to the same individual when living in their childhood home. Yet Arnett's (2000)

definition of the period of emerging adulthood does not overlap entirely with this stage in family developmental theory (i.e., the end is rarely marked by marriage but rather by becoming an adult, according to Arnett). Still, his focus on a type of development in a similar period in the life course suggests that the current understanding of development in emerging adulthood might be enlarged or informed by the perspective of family developmental theory. Yet little work has examined emerging adult development within the lens of family developmental theory (Carroll et al., 2007).[1]

Thus, little is known regarding how emerging adults' attitudes towards the stage preceding emerging adulthood in the family career (i.e., family of origin) or the stage following it (i.e., family of formation) are associated with development in emerging adulthood. Family developmental theory posits that an individual's present family stage is a consequence of what has gone before as well as what is anticipated for the future and can be studied as such (Rodgers & White, 1993). Therefore, the goal of the current study was to determine whether the developmentally distinctive groups of flourishing and floundering emerging adults could be distinguished by attitudes towards past experiences in their family of origin and attitudes towards their future regarding family of formation.

**The Association of Family of Origin with Flourishing and Floundering in Emerging Adulthood**

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[1] It may be important to note that within family developmental theory, cohabitation is considered as a stage in the family career distinctive from when a child leaves home for the first time and when that same individual is married. Whereas, in emerging adulthood theory, cohabitation is considered as part of *the distinctiveness* of emerging adulthood; indeed, it epitomizes two of the defining features of the time period (Arnett, 2006): as an age of exploration and an age of instability (since 9 out of 10 cohabiting relationship end within 5 years; Bumpass & Lu, 2000).

Because of the increase in cohabitation *during* emerging adulthood since Rodgers and White's (1993) re-conceptualization of family developmental theory (Bumpass & Lu, 2000; Chevan, 1996; Seltzer, 2000), it was determined for the purposes of the current study that cohabitation should be examined as a possibility along an emerging adults' exploratory pathway to his or her family of formation, more than a markedly different family stage with different normative expectations in the role content of family relationships as a result of its occurrence. This is also keeping in line with the use of family developmental theory in previous emerging adulthood studies (Carroll et al., 2007), where endorsement of cohabitation has been studied as an attitude toward family of formation.

Theorists have expressed different opinions regarding the link between family of origin and development in emerging adulthood. Some have suggested that emerging adulthood can provide a time for young people to steer their lives in more favorable directions if they experienced difficult conditions in their family of origin (Arnett, 2000), while others have suggested that it can be a time of maladjustment due to coming from poorer family-of-origin environments (Côté, 2006). However, little research has been done to explore the association between family-of-origin environment and development in emerging adulthood.

Therefore, work done by marriage and family scholars examining the link between family-of-origin environment and *adult* functioning was drawn upon for the current study. Busby, Gardner, and Taniguchi (2005) have emphasized the principle that one of the most essential purposes of the family of origin is to "help individuals arrive . . . in adult life with the attitudes, skills and experiences that will help with the development of successful adult relationships" (p. 256). They have proposed a model in conjunction with this principle which encompasses aspects of the family of origin that are associated with adult functioning (e.g., self-esteem) and, subsequently, relationship satisfaction and stability. From this model, four aspects of one's family of origin seem to be particularly relevant in examining emerging adult functioning (i.e., flourishing or floundering), including parents' marital relationship, child's relationship with mother, child's relationship with father, and child's coming to terms with anything negative from the family of origin.

**Parents' marital relationship.** The first factor from an individual's family of origin experiences that may affect his or her well-being in emerging adulthood is his or her parents' marital relationship. The parental marital relationship has been shown to have an effect on a child's well being throughout his or her life course. For instance, in childhood, the quality of the

parental marital relationship has been positively correlated with emotional adjustment (e.g., Osborne & Fincham, 1996) and negatively correlated with internalizing and externalizing problems (e.g., Cummings, Goeke-Morey, & Papp, 2003; Schermerhorn et al., 2011). In late adolescence, parental marital distress has been shown to be transactionally related to young women's emotional adjustment (VanderValk, de Goede, Spruijt, & Meeus, 2007), and poor parental marital quality has been associated with more substance use and worse physical health and mental health (Hair et al., 2009). In adulthood, parental marital quality has been most often associated with well-being as it pertains to social functioning and the child's own marital quality (e.g., Amato & DeBoer, 2001; Holman & Associates, 2001).

In emerging adulthood, studies of parental marital quality have similarly focused on romantic relationship quality (Cui & Fincham, 2010; Cui, Fincham, & Pasley, 2008; Yu, 2007) and marital attitudes (Cui, Wickrama, Lorenz, & Conger, 2011; Hall, 2006; Miles & Servaty-Seib, 2010) in association with the quality and structure of parents' marriage. Thus, little work has examined the link between the quality of the parental marital relationship and emotional adjustment or internalizing and externalizing problems in emerging adulthood.

The few studies that have examined the link between the parental marital relationship and well-being in emerging adulthood have reflected similar outcomes as those shown in childhood and adolescence. For example, one study demonstrated that a significant relationship existed between maternal marital satisfaction and young peoples' emotional health (e.g., Feldman, Fisher, & Seitel, 1997). Another study indicated that emerging adult men who experienced parental divorce were more likely to have unhealthier mother-son relationships than their peers whose parents did not divorce (Shulman, Cohen, Feldman, & Mahler, 2006). Still other studies have shown emerging adults' perception of their parents' marital satisfaction to predict sibling

communication, closeness, and support (Milevsky, 2004) and extrinsic religiosity (Milevsky & Leh, 2008).

Taken together, the limited but growing evidence points to a relationship between the parental marital relationship and various important aspects of children's development in emerging adulthood, and yet no research has been done to examine how broader typologies of development (or well-being) in emerging adulthood may differ with regards to parents' marital relationship. Therefore, the first purpose of this study was to examine whether there were differences in emerging adult well-being (i.e., as evidenced by being in Nelson and Padilla-Walker's, 2011 categories of flourishing and floundering – well-adjusted, religious-adjusted, internalizing, externalizing) with regards to the perception of the parents' marital relationship in one's family of origin. Given the evidence for associations between emerging adults' reports of parental marital satisfaction and more positive parent-child (specifically mother-son) relationships (Shulman et al., 2006), better emotional health (Feldman et al., 1997), and higher levels of extrinsic religiosity (Milevsky & Leh, 2008), it was expected that the well-adjusted and religious-adjusted subgroups would report significantly higher parental marital quality than the internalizing and externalizing subgroups.

**Parent-child relationships.** Other factors from one's family of origin that may affect his or her trajectory in emerging adulthood are the parent-child relationships. There is a growing body of research linking the current parent-child relationship with aspects of emerging adulthood development, such as regulation of values and prosocial behaviors (Barry, Padilla-Walker, Madsen, & Nelson, 2008), identity achievement (Bartle-Haring, Brucker, & Hock, 2002), self-worth (Kenny & Sirin, 2006), and perceived personal efficacy (Leondari & Kiosseoglou, 2002). There is also a fair amount of work that has been done examining the link between parenting

styles experienced in upbringing (i.e., in childhood and adolescence) and well-being during this time period. Indeed, longitudinal studies have shown that authoritative parenting in upbringing is associated with positive functioning for emerging adults, including in areas of competence and resilience (Masten et al., 2004) and self-esteem and self-actualization (Buri, Louiselle, Misukanis, 1988; Dominguez & Carton, 1997). Recent work has shown that retrospective accounts of authoritative parenting styles during upbringing (i.e., in childhood and adolescence) are linked with positive outcomes, such as identity formation, in emerging adulthood (e.g., Berzonsky, 2004; Smits et al., 2008).

Taken together, there is evidence that both the present parent-child relationship and past parenting impact well-being in emerging adulthood. However, much less work has examined emerging adults' perceptions regarding the quality and closeness of the parent-child relationships in the family of origin and their association with well-being in emerging adulthood. That is, emerging adults' attitudes towards the quality and closeness of the *relationships* with mother and father in the family of origin (as opposed to emerging adults' reports of the *parenting* exhibited by mother and father in the family of origin) are largely unstudied in relation to emerging adult development. Therefore, it would be important to examine these perceptions of relationships with mother and father since the limited work that has been done regarding them has illustrated that they have an effect upon well-being that persists into adulthood, specifically with regards to self-esteem and subsequent relationship satisfaction (Busby et al., 2005).

The second purpose of this study, then, was to examine whether perceptions of relationships with mother and father in the family of origin could differentiate types of emerging adult well-being (well-adjusted and religious-adjusted; externalizing and internalizing). Since little work has examined the differences between the quality of relationships with mother and

father, hypotheses were the same for both relationships. It was believed that well-adjusted emerging adults (Nelson & Padilla-Walker, 2011) would report the most positive perceptions of quality of relationships with both mother and father in the family of origin, in part, because the subgroup has been found to exhibit high levels of *current* closeness to mother and father. Furthermore, due to the research demonstrating links between the perception of the quality of the parent-child relationships during upbringing and feelings of self-worth in adulthood (Busby et al., 2005) and between perceptions of parental nurturance during upbringing and lower levels of engagement in substance use in emerging adulthood (Schwartz et al., 2009), it was expected that flourishing subgroups (who exhibit positive levels of self worth) would report significantly more positive perceptions of the quality of relationships with both mother and father than their internalizing (who exhibit low levels of self worth) and externalizing counterparts (who engage in high levels of risk behaviors).

**Coming to terms.** A final factor from one's family of origin that may affect his or her trajectory in emerging adulthood is the level to which one has come to terms with anything negative or anxiety-provoking in the family of origin. Marriage and family scholars have suggested that while it is important to examine family-of-origin relationships and the difficult issues and events that may have transpired within them, those relationships and things of the past cannot be changed. What can be changed, according to these scholars, are the attitudes towards the relationships and occurrences in the family-of-origin environment and the (sometimes negative) subsequent impact (Busby et al., 2005; Martinson, Holman, Larson, & Jackson, 2010). The term "coming to terms" has been used to capture an "outcome of a healing process that involves individuals' efforts to interpret, understand, find meaning in, re-story, reframe, come to a resolution, and to be at peace with difficult past experiences" (Martinson et al., 2010, p. 208).

Research regarding "coming to terms" with family-of-origin experiences is limited, but the work that has been done shows that it is significantly correlated with self-esteem (Busby et al., 2005) and relationship satisfaction (Martinson et al., 2010) in adulthood. While some studies have shown the impact of negative family-of-origin experiences in emerging adulthood (e.g., poorer conflict resolution strategies, Ahern, 2006; diminished ability to cope with stress, Luecken, Kraft, & Hagan, 2009; increased risk of substance use disorders, Skeer, McCormick, Normand, Buka, & Gilman, 2009), no studies have examined the potential impact of "coming to terms" with such experiences. Yet, this may be one of the most salient aspects of one's family of origin, as research shows that family conflict is more strongly associated with child maladjustment than is parents' poor marital functioning (Jaycox & Repetti, 1993).

Therefore, the third purpose of this study was to examine whether there was a difference between flourishing and floundering emerging adults with regards to coming to terms with negative family-of-origin experiences. Because negative family-of-origin experiences have been associated with both externalizing and internalizing factors of floundering in emerging adulthood, it was expected that those who reported lower levels of coming to terms would be floundering (externalizing and internalizing). It was additionally expected that the flourishing subgroups (well-adjusted and religious-adjusted) would report significantly higher levels of coming to terms than the floundering subgroups.

**The Association of Family-of-Formation Values and Marital Horizons with Flourishing and Floundering in Emerging Adulthood**

Family developmental theory suggests that broad differences in the behavior of emerging adults could be a reflection of varying attitudes towards the timing and sequencing of the next family career stage. Indeed, Carroll and colleagues (2007) have drawn upon family

developmental theory to develop "marital horizon theory", capturing this idea. The central thesis of the theory is that, "emerging adults' perceptions of marital importance, timing, and readiness are central factors in determining subgroup differences in the length of emerging adulthood and the specific behaviors that occur during this period in the family [career]" (p. 224). Some findings in the field have provided initial support for this theory, specifically with regard to sexual attitudes and behaviors, substance use patterns, and family formation values (Carroll et al., 2007; Carroll et al., 2009; Willoughby & Dworkin, 2009).

For example, one study showed differences between those who saw marriage as being nearer on the horizon and those who saw it as being further away, in that the latter group reported higher levels of sexual permissiveness (e.g., acceptance of uncommitted sexual relations and pornography use) and substance use (Carroll et al., 2007). Another study demonstrated that emerging adults who believed being sexually experienced to be a criterion for marriage reported significantly higher levels of sexual permissiveness, substance use, and endorsement of cohabitation (Carroll et al., 2009). The current study sought to extend the existing work regarding the relationship between emerging adults' marital attitudes and current behaviors, by examining whether differences in aspects of emerging adults' marital horizons could be linked to flourishing and floundering in emerging adulthood.

**Family formation values.** The study also sought to determine whether there was a similar association between family formation values and flourishing and floundering subgroup differences. Family formation values are values that individuals hold with regard to family formation practices such as non-marital cohabitation and having children (in and/or out of wedlock). While family formation values have not been examined for possible associations with behaviors in emerging adulthood, they have been found to be significantly associated with

marital horizons (Carroll et al., 2007). It seems worthwhile, then, to explore whether the values emerging adults have towards family formation are associated with whether one is flourishing or floundering in this time period.

Two family formation values were chosen for examination in the current study. The first family formation value that was chosen that may have an association with emerging adult flourishing or floundering is family centeredness.

*Family centeredness.* Family centeredness (as defined for this study) assesses whether it is the goal of an individual to both marry and have and raise children as well the strength of that individual's sentiment toward the fulfilling nature of those opportunities.

Family centeredness has been relatively unexamined in emerging adulthood. Work that has been done among high school seniors has indicated that 43% of young women feel that being a mother and raising children is one of the most fulfilling experiences a woman can have and 45% of young men feel that being a father and raising children is one of the most fulfilling experiences a man can have (Johnston, Bachman, & O'Malley, 1997). Because adolescence is not a time when thinking about children and parenthood is a particularly high priority (Whitehead & Popenoe, 2000), percentages may vary in emerging adulthood. Indeed, others studies surveying college freshman have shown that 70% of males and 72% of females consider raising a family to be an "essential" or "very important" objective (Sax, Astin, Kern, & Mahony, 1995). Still, there appears to be some variance regarding the family centeredness of emerging adults, suggesting a possibility of differences between those with higher and lower levels.

Indeed, more recent work has shown that the level of priority emerging adults attribute to having and raising children is linked to closer marital horizons, which have in turn been associated with lower involvement in risk behaviors (Carroll et al., 2007). Yet the link between

family centeredness and heterogeneity in emerging adults' attitudes and behaviors has not been directly examined. Therefore, the fourth purpose of this study was to examine possible differences in well-being (i.e., flourishing or floundering) in emerging adulthood based on family centeredness. Given the tie between emerging adults' feelings towards having and raising children and closer marital horizons (which have, in turn, been associated with lower involvement in risk behaviors) as well as research showing that the well-adjusted groups had higher levels of identity achievement regarding family than both floundering groups (Nelson & Padilla-Walker, 2011), it was hypothesized that the flourishing groups would report higher levels of family centeredness than the floundering subgroups.

*Endorsement of cohabitation.* The second family formation value that may differentiate emerging adult trajectories is endorsement of cohabitation. Studies have indicated that 59% of high school seniors feel that it is usually a good idea for a couple to live together prior to marriage (Johnston et al., 1997) and 60% of emerging adults approve of cohabiting whether or not a couple plans to marry (Willoughby & Carroll, 2010). Endorsement of cohabitation by emerging adults has been shown to have a positive (though moderate) correlation with number of lifetime sexual partners in emerging adulthood (Willoughby & Carroll, 2010) and a negative association with emerging adults' attribution of general importance and relative priority of marriage, which have, in turn, been associated with other risk behaviors such as binge drinking and drug use (Carroll et al., 2007). Some work has also shown that 25-31 year-old cohabiting men have reported significantly more alcohol problems than single and married men, and 25-31 year-old cohabiting women have reported more alcohol problems than married women (Horwitz & White, 1998). However, direct links between *endorsement* of cohabitation and *most* attitudes and behaviors in emerging adulthood remain unexamined. Therefore, the fifth purpose of this

study was to examine whether endorsement of cohabitation differentiated trajectories in emerging adulthood. Based on the studies cited previously, it was hypothesized that both the internalizing group and the externalizing group would endorse cohabitation significantly more than both the well-adjusted and religious-adjusted groups.

**Marital horizon factors.** Marital horizons capture other views regarding family of formation that are important to examine. Marital horizons research in emerging adulthood has focused on factors of views towards relative importance, timing, and criteria for marriage (Carroll et al., 2007; Carroll et al. 2009). The current study sought to examine views of general, as well as relative, importance of and timing for marriage. In other words, with regards to emerging adults' feelings towards marriage, the current study sought to examine two factors of marital horizons (relative importance of marriage and ideal age for marriage) as well as general importance of marriage.

*Relative importance of marriage.* A couple of the views that have been examined regarding the relative importance of marriage (or the sequential importance of marriage in relation to other life goals) were chosen for examination in this study. The views specifically chosen were feelings towards single life (i.e., feelings towards its advantages over being married) and current desire to be married. With regards to feelings towards single life, research has shown that while a majority of emerging adults rank having fully experienced the single life as an important criteria for feeling ready for marriage (Carroll et al., 2009), a limited number of emerging adults agree that there are more advantages to being single than being married (Carroll et al., 2007). Research has also indicated that emerging adult men's level of agreement with the notion that there are more advantages to being single than to being married is associated with more substance use and sexual permissiveness (Carroll et al., 2007).

With regards to current desire to be married, one study showed that 63% of young women would like to meet their future husband at college (Glenn & Marquardt, 2001). Yet other studies have shown that most emerging adults do not currently desire to be married. In one study that measured the perception of 19-23 year-olds (the majority of whom were not attending college), findings indicated that 61% of young people either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement "I would like to be married now" (Willoughby & Dworkin, 2009). Another study showed that only 17% of college students currently desired to be married (Willoughby & Carroll, 2010). While there seems to be a minority of emerging adults who currently desire to be married, research has indicated that emerging adults' current desire to be married is associated with less sexual permissiveness for young men and less substance abuse for young women (Carroll et al., 2007). Other research findings regarding emerging adults' current desire to marry have shown an association with a mix of levels of risk behaviors. That is, desire to marry has been negatively correlated with binge drinking, marijuana use, and birth control use for both young women and young men (Willoughby & Dworkin, 2009).

*Ideal age for marriage.* Regarding ideal age for marriage, research has shown that both emerging adult men and women, on average, identify about 25 years of age as the ideal (Carroll et al., 2007). However, the variance in the distance of emerging adults' ideal ages for marriage seems to reflect differences with regards to substance use patterns and sexual permissiveness. That is, the desire to delay marriage has been associated with higher alcohol consumption, binge drinking, cigarette smoking, and marijuana and other illegal drug use as well as more sexual permissiveness (e.g., endorsement of uncommitted sexual relations and pornography use) for emerging adult men and women (Carroll et al., 2007).

Taken together, these findings underscore the notion that behavior in emerging adulthood may be linked to attitudes about the future, especially with regards to views about marriage and family. Specifically, evidence suggests that the relative importance of marriage (or the sequential importance of marriage in relation to other life goals) and ideal age for marriage are negatively associated with substance use and sexual permissiveness. That is, disagreement with there being more advantages to being single than married, agreement with current desire to be married, and ranking the ideal age for marriage at an age lower than peers' rankings, are often negatively associated with substance use and sexual permissiveness in emerging adulthood. While this work leads to a general understanding of the link between marital horizons and risk behaviors, it points to the need to examine marital horizon factors with regards to other (including positive) attitudes and behaviors in emerging adulthood.

Therefore, the sixth purpose of this study was to examine whether marital horizon factors (specifically feelings towards single life, current desire to be married, and ideal age for marriage) could differentiate overall well-being (i.e., flourishing or floundering) in emerging adulthood. Given the findings regarding the various factors described above, it was believed that of the flourishing and floundering subgroups identified by Nelson and Padilla-Walker (2011), the externalizing group would report higher agreement of advantages of being single, disagreement with current desire to be married, and higher average ideal age for marriage than flourishing subgroups. Also, because the internalizing group exhibits the lowest levels of identity achievement regarding dating and family (Nelson & Padilla Walker, 2011), it was expected that the internalizing subgroup would also report more distant relative importance of marriage and higher ideal ages for marriage than flourishing subgroups. No differences were expected between floundering subgroups. Though, it was expected that between the flourishing subgroups, the

religious-adjusted subgroup would report the most disagreement of advantages of being single, most agreement with current desire to be married, and have lowest average of ideal age for marriage since religious individuals tend to marry at younger ages (Arnett, 2000) and may therefore be considering marriage more relatively important and desiring for it to occur sooner than their peers.

      **General importance of marriage.** Finally, the current study sought to examine whether emerging adults' attitudes towards the general importance of marriage differentiated their trajectories (i.e., flourishing or floundering) in this developmental period. General or global (in contrast to relative) importance of marriage assesses the ultimate importance of marriage to an individual, irrespective of the timing in which they desire it to occur.

      Carroll and colleagues (2007) have suggested that measures of global importance of marriage are prone to be poor indicators of variance in behavior in emerging adulthood because research indicates that over 90% of emerging adults are planning for and expecting to get married in the future (Krane & Cottreau, 1998; Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2001; Whitehead & Popenoe, 2001). However, there seems to be some disagreement among the findings regarding one measure of global importance: whether emerging adults expect their hopeful, eventual marriage to be permanent. That is, some research has shown that among those just entering this developmental time period (graduating high school seniors), only 61% of respondents feel it is very likely for them to stay married to the same person for life (Johnston et al., 1997). Yet, more recent work has shown that 82% of emerging adults feel that marriage is a lifetime relationship that should never be ended except under extreme conditions (Willoughby & Carroll, 2010). The figures in these studies seem to indicate some variability regarding views towards the

permanence of marriage, and it therefore is an important attitude toward family of formation to study.

Given this reasoning, the final purpose of this study was to examine whether views towards the permanence of marriage could differentiate types of emerging adult well-being (well-adjusted and religious-adjusted; externalizing and internalizing). It was expected that because the well-adjusted group tends to exhibit high levels of social acceptance which has been associated with strong attachment and greater romantic satisfaction (Busby et al., 2005), the well-adjusted group would report higher levels of agreement with marital permanence than the floundering subgroups (externalizers and internalizers). Additionally, it was expected that since religiosity in adults is connected to stronger views of marital permanence (Cherlin, 2009), the religious-adjusted group would also report higher levels of agreement with marital permanence than the floundering subgroups.

**Hypotheses**

In summary, the goal of the current study was to determine whether the developmentally distinctive subgroups of flourishing and floundering emerging adults (well-adjusted and religious-adjusted versus externalizing and internalizing; Nelson & Padilla-Walker, 2011) could be distinguished by attitudes towards family of origin and family of formation.

With regards to the family of origin, the supportive purposes were to examine whether flourishing and floundering in emerging adulthood could be differentiated by perceptions of family of origin specifically concerning a) parents' marital relationship, b) relationships with mother and father, and c) how much one had come to terms with negative experiences. It was expected that compared to the floundering (i.e., the externalizing and internalizing) subgroups, the flourishing (i.e., the well-adjusted and religious-adjusted) subgroups would report

significantly higher parental marital quality, more positive perceptions of quality of relationships with both mother and father, and higher levels of coming to terms with negative experiences in their family of origin.

Regarding family of formation, the purposes of the study were to examine whether emerging adult well-being (i.e., flourishing or floundering) could be differentiated by emerging adults' a) family centeredness, b) endorsement of cohabitation, c) relative importance of marriage (specifically feelings towards single life, current desire to be married) and ideal age for marriage, and d) general importance of marriage (specifically sense of marital permanence). It was hypothesized that a) flourishing groups would report higher family centeredness than floundering groups, b) floundering groups (particularly the externalizing) would report higher levels of endorsement of cohabitation than the flourishing groups, c) floundering groups would report more distant relative importance of marriage and higher ideal ages for marriage than flourishing groups, and d) flourishing groups would report stronger agreement with marital permanence than floundering groups.

## Chapter 3: Method

### Participants

Participants for this study were drawn from a study of emerging adults and their parents entitled "Project READY" (Researching Emerging Adults' Developing Years). This project is an ongoing, collaborative, multi-site study that is being conducted by a consortium of developmental and family scholars across the United States.

The sample used in the current study consisted of 483 undergratuate students (202 males, 281 females), ranging in age from 18-26 years-old ($M = 20.07$, $SD = 1.85$). The majority (75%) of the sample consisted of European Americans. Twelve percent of the participants were Asian or Pacific Islander, 4% were Hispanic/Latino, 4% were mixed/biracial, 3% were African American, and 3% were other. Ninety-two percent described their marital status as single (never married) and 8% described their status as cohabiting (living with partner in an intimate relationship). Seventy-nine percent of the participants had parents who were still married, 11% had parents who divorced five or more years ago, 4% had parents who were widowed, 3% had parents who divorced within the past five years, 2% had parents who were married but separated, and 2% had parents who had never married.

### Procedures

Emerging adult respondents were recruited from five universities across the United States. The survey was administered to emerging adults and their parents who often were living in separate locations throughout the country (though parent data were not used in this study) through an online data collection protocol (see http://www.projectready.net).

Participants were recruited through university faculty's announcement of the study in undergraduate and graduate courses. Introductory psychology courses or large general education

courses were used to access a broad range of students. Professors at the various universities were provided with a handout to give to their students that had a brief explanation of the study and directions for accessing the online survey. Interested students then accessed the study website with a location-specific recruitment code. Students were asked to give informed consent online, and only after consent was given could they begin the questionnaires.

The emerging adults filled out an online questionnaire with a battery of nearly 450 items. The items explored numerous aspects of development such as personality traits, values, identity development, self-esteem, attitudes regarding sexuality and marriage, risk behaviors, dating behaviors, prosocial behaviors and religiosity. Most participants were offered course credit or extra credit for their participation. In some cases (less than 5%), participants were offered small monetary compensation (i.e., $10–20 gift certificates) for their participation.

**Measures**

For the current study, emerging adults' perceptions of the family of origin specifically concerning parents' marital relationship,relationships with mother and father, and coming to terms were examined. Emerging adults' attitudes towards family of formation, specifically with regards to family formation values (family-centeredness and endorsement of cohabitation), marital horizon factors (feelings towards single life,current desire to be married, and ideal age for marriage), and general importance of marriage (specifically measured by feelings towards marital permanence) were also examined. The extent to which individuals were either flourishing or floundering was examined as well.

**Flourishing and Floundering: Group Membership**

Based on previous research, four groups were formed using cluster analysis. The first group ($n = 91$, 20%) was the *Externalizing* group. It consisted of emerging adults with high

levels of drinking, drug use, sexual partners, pornography use, and video game use. The second group was the *Internalizing* group ($n = 117$, 25%) and consisted of emerging adults with high levels of depression and anxiety, and low levels of self-worth and social acceptance. The third group was the *Religious-Adjusted* group ($n = 112$, 24%) and consisted of emerging adults with high levels of religiosity, low levels of risk behaviors, and average depression, anxiety, and self-worth. The fourth group was the *Well-Adjusted* group ($n = 146$, 31%) and consisted of emerging adults with high levels of closeness to mother and father, high internal regulation of values, low levels of depression, and anxiety, and high levels of self-worth, and social acceptance. A list of the means of the variables used to form the groups is presented in Table 1.

**Parents' Marital Relationship**

Emerging adult perception of the parents' marital relationship in the family of origin was measured by a scale from the RELATE instrument (Busby, Holman, & Taniguchi, 2001). The scale contained the items: "My father was happy in his marriage," "My mother was happy in her marriage," and "I would like my marriage to be like my parents' marriage." These items were rated on a five-point scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The scale yielded a value of high reliability ($\alpha = .93$).

**Relationship with Mother**

Emerging adult perception of the quality of relationship with mother in the family of origin was measured by a scale from the RELATE instrument (Busby et al., 2001). The scale contained the items: "My mother showed physical affection to me by appropriate hugging and/or kissing," "My mother participated in enjoyable activities with me," "My mother and I were able to share our feelings on just about any topic without embarrassment or fear of hurt feelings."

These items were rated on a five-point scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The scale yielded a value of high reliability ($\alpha = .80$).

**Relationship with Father**

Emerging adult perception of the quality of relationship with father in the family of origin was measured by a scale from the RELATE instrument (Busby et al., 2001). The scale contained the items: "My father showed physical affection to me by appropriate hugging and/or kissing," "My father participated in enjoyable activities with me," "My father and I were able to share our feelings on just about any topic without embarrassment or fear of hurt feelings." These items were rated on a five-point scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The scale yielded a value of high reliability ($\alpha = .83$).

**Coming to Terms**

To measure the degree to which emerging adults had come to terms with negative experiences from their family of origin, a scale from the RELATE instrument (Busby et al., 2001) was used. Emerging adults were asked to answer five items, namely, "From what I experienced in my family, I think family relationships are safe, secure, rewarding, worth being in, and a source of comfort," "From what I experienced in my family, I think family relationships are confusing, unfair, anxiety-provoking, inconsistent, and unpredictable" (reverse coded), "There are matters from my family experience that I am still having trouble dealing with or coming to terms with" (reverse coded), "There are matters from my family experience that negatively affect my ability to form close relationships" (reverse coded), and "I feel at peace about anything negative that happened to me in the family in which I grew up." The items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The scale yielded a value of high reliability ($\alpha = .83$).

**Family Centeredness**

To measure various emerging adult's long-term prioritization of family, a scale was created from marital horizon items used by Carroll et al. (2007). Items included: "Being a father and raising children is one of the most fulfilling experiences a man can have," "Being a mother and raising children is one of the most fulfilling experiences a woman can have," "Being married is a very important goal for me," and "Having children is a very important goal for me." Items were measured on a six-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*very strongly disagree*) to 6 (*very strongly agree*). The scale yielded a value of high reliability ($\alpha = .86$).

**Endorsement of Cohabitation**

Emerging adult feeling towards nonmarital cohabitation was measured using a scale created from marital horizon items used by Carroll et al. (2007). Items included, "It is all right for a couple to live together without planning to get married," "It is all right for an unmarried couple to live together as long as they have plans to marry," "Living together before marriage will improve a couple's chances of remaining happily married," "A couple will likely be happier in their marriage if they live together first," "It is a good idea for a couple to live together before getting married as a way of 'trying out' their relationship," and "Living together first is a good way of testing how workable a couple's marriage would be." Items were rated on a six-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). Cronbach's alpha for the scale was .93.

**Feelings Towards Single Life**

Emerging adults' feeling towards being single long-term was measured by the item, "All in all, there are more advantages to being single than to being married." This single-item measure and other single-item measures have been used in this study, as opposed to the six-item

scale for which they were intended, because of a low internal consistency of multiple scale items. (See Carroll et al., 2007 for further theoretical reasoning regarding the use of similar single-item measures in this line of research). All single-item measures used in the current study were assessed on a six-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*very strongly disagree*) to 6 (*very strongly agree*).

**Current Desire to be Married**

To measure emerging adults' current desire to be married, a single item measure was used, "I would like to be married now" (Carroll et al., 2007).

**Ideal Age for Marriage**

Emerging adults' ideal age for marriage was assessed using another single item measure, "What is the ideal age (in years) for an individual to get married?" (Carroll et al., 2007).

**Feelings Towards Marital Permanence**

Emerging adults' feelings towards the permanence of marriage was measured by the item, "Marriage is a lifetime relationship and should never be ended except under extreme circumstances" (Carroll et al., 2007).

## Chapter 4: Results

### Family of Origin as a Function of Gender and Group Membership

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to determine differences between groups in measures of family of origin. Independent variables were gender (men and women) and group (externalizing, internalizing, religious-adjusted, well-adjusted). The dependent variables consisted of the family-of-origin measures, including parents' marital relationship, relationship with mother, relationship with father, and coming to terms. Means and standard deviations for these variables with regards to group are presented in Table 2, and with regards to gender in Table 3. Results revealed no significant Gender x Group interaction. However, results indicated a significant main effect for gender, $F(4, 453) = 3.40$, $p < .01$, and group membership, $F(12, 1199) = 8.45$, $p < .001$. Subsequent univariate analyses indicated a significant effect of gender existed for childhood relationship with father, $F(1, 456) = 9.73$, $p < .01$. Examination of means showed that males reported more positive childhood relationships with father ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 1.08$) than did females ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 1.14$). There was no significant difference between males and females with regards to parents' marital relationship or childhood relationship with father.

Results of subsequent univariate analyses indicated a significant difference as a function of Group existed for parents' marital relationship, $F(3, 456) = 8.78$, $p < .001$, childhood relationship with mother, $F(3, 456) = 12.02$, $p < .001$, childhood relationship with father, $F(3, 456) = 10.36$, $p < .001$, and coming to terms $F(3, 456) = 29.46$, $p < .001$. Based on post-hoc comparisons (LSD), it was determined that, with regards to parents' marital relationship the well-adjusted group reported significantly more positive views of their parents' marital relationship ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 1.22$) than did the internalizing ($M = 3.18$, $SD = 1.32$) and

externalizing ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 1.35$) groups. Similarly, the religious-adjusted group reported significantly more positive views of the parental marital relationship ($M = 3.79$, $SD = 1.20$) than did the internalizing group.

With regards to childhood relationship with mother, the well-adjusted ($M = 4.46$, $SD = .80$) and religious-adjusted ($M = 4.37$, $SD = .72$) groups reported significantly more positive childhood relationships with mother than the internalizing ($M = 3.83$, $SD = .97$) and externalizing ($M = 4.07$, $SD = .90$) groups, with the externalizing group also reporting significantly more positive childhood relationships with mother than the internalizing group.

In regard to childhood relationship with father, the internalizing group reported having significantly less positive childhood relationships with father ($M = 3.15$, $SD = 1.10$) than the well-adjusted ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 1.12$), religious-adjusted ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 1.02$), and externalizing ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 1.07$) groups.

With regards to coming to terms, the internalizing group reported significantly lower levels of coming to terms ($M = 3.21$, $SD = .97$) than the well-adjusted ($M = 4.27$, $SD = .86$), religious-adjusted ($M = 3.89$, $SD = .95$), and externalizing ($M = 3.76$, $SD = .86$) groups. Results also showed that the externalizing group reported significantly lower levels of coming to terms than the religious-adjusted and well-adjusted groups. Finally, results showed that the religious-adjusted reported significantly lower levels of coming to terms that the well-adjusted group.

**Attitudes Towards Family of Formation as a Function of Gender and Group Membership**

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to determine differences between groups with regards to attitudes towards family of formation. Independent variables were gender (men and women) and group (externalizing, internalizing, religious-adjusted, well-adjusted). The dependent variables included two family formation values measures (family

centeredness and endorsement of cohabitation), three marital horizon measures (feelings towards single life, current desire to be married, and ideal age for marriage), and one measure regarding the general importance of marriage (feelings towards marital permanence). Means and standard deviations for these dependent variables with regards to group are presented in Table 4.

Results revealed no significant Gender x Group interaction. Results revealed a significant main effect of group membership ($F(18, 1270) = 2.44$, $p < .01$), but not of gender ($F(6, 449) = 1.09$, ns). Subsequent univariate analyses indicated a significant effect of group existed for four of the six family of formation and marital horizon variables: family centeredness ($F(3, 454) = 5.99$, $p < .01$), endorsement of cohabitation ($F(3, 454) = 5.19$, $p < .01$), ideal age for marriage ($F(3, 454) = 2.67$, $p < .05$), and feelings towards marital permanence ($F(3, 454) = 4.23$, $p < .01$). Results showed no significant difference between groups with regards to feelings towards single life and current desire to be married.

Based on post-hoc comparisons (LSD), it was determined that, with regards to family centeredness, the well-adjusted group reported significantly higher amounts of family centeredness ($M = 4.96$, $SD = .89$) than the externalizing ($M = 4.63$, $SD = 1.03$) and internalizing ($M = 4.52$, $SD = 1.01$) groups. Similarly, the religious-adjusted group ($M = 4.96$, $SD = .83$) reported significantly higher amounts of family centeredness than did the internalizing group.

With regards to endorsement of cohabitation, the externalizing ($M = 3.96$, $SD = 1.01$) and internalizing ($M = 3.77$, $SD = .95$) groups reported significantly higher endorsement than the well-adjusted ($M = 3.44$, $SD = 1.28$) and religious-adjusted ($M = 3.24$, $SD = 1.20$) groups.

Regarding feelings towards marital permanence, the well-adjusted ($M = 4.74$, $SD = 1.20$) and religious-adjusted ($M = 4.80$, $SD = 1.29$) groups reported significantly stronger feelings

towards marital permanence than the externalizing ($M = 4.40$, $SD = 1.19$) and internalizing ($M = 4.36$, $SD = 1.22$) groups.

With regards to ideal age for marriage, the internalizing group reported significantly higher ideal ages for marriage ($M = 25.45$, $SD = 2.17$) than the well-adjusted ($M = 24.87$, $SD = 2.05$) and religious-adjusted ($M = 24.67$, $SD = 1.49$) groups.

**Chapter 5: Discussion**

This study sought to determine whether the developmentally distinctive subgroups of flourishing and floundering emerging adults (well-adjusted and religious-adjusted versus externalizing and internalizing; Nelson & Padilla-Walker, 2011) differed as a function of their attitudes towards both family of origin and family of formation. In general, it was hypothesized that flourishing groups would differ from floundering subgroups as a function of their perceptions towards family of origin and family of formation. Overall, the findings of this study generally supported the hypotheses. It has been posited by family developmental theorists that an individual's present family stage is a consequence of what has gone before as well as what is anticipated for the future in regard to family life (Rodgers & White, 1993). Thus, the findings provide evidence that the stage preceding emerging adulthood in the family career (i.e., family of origin) and the stage following it (i.e., family of formation) are associated with development in emerging adulthood.

**Emerging Adult Well-being and Family-of-Origin Factors**

Regarding family of origin, results revealed that, in general, the flourishing groups of emerging adults reported higher parental marital quality and more positive perceptions of relationship with mother than the floundering groups. Results also revealed that the internalizing subgroup reported more negative perceptions of relationship with father than all the other subgroups. Finally, results revealed that the internalizing subgroup reported lower levels of coming to terms than all the other subgroups (i.e., well-adjusted, religious-adjusted, and externalizing), while the externalizing subgroup also reported lower levels of coming to terms than the flourishing groups.

In general, the results suggest that perceptions of family-of-origin relationships and experiences are associated with emerging adult functioning. While factors such as parental marital quality and parent-child relationships have been found to be related to functioning in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood (Busby et al., 2005; Hair et al., 2009; Osborne & Fincham, 1996), the results of the present study contribute to the literature by providing evidence that an emerging adult's past experience in his or her family of origin may be related to his or her well-being in emerging adulthood. Specifically, the results suggest that positive family-of-origin relationships may be connected with flourishing while more negative family-of-origin relationships may be connected with less positive trajectories or floundering in emerging adulthood. Each of these associations will now be discussed, followed by a discussion of the link between coming to terms and well-being in emerging adulthood. Finally, gender differences with regards to family-of-origin factors will be discussed.

**Positive Reports of Family-of-Origin Factors and Flourishing**

With regards to flourishing, the results of the current study indicate that young people who tend to embody the positive aspects of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2004; Nelson & Padilla-Walker, 2011) have significantly more positive perceptions towards the quality of relationships experienced in the family of origin than do their floundering peers. Given that flourishing emerging adults are able to avoid some of the potential pitfalls of instability (e.g., depression and anxiety) and experimentation (e.g., high levels of drinking and drug use) that can be characteristic of this time period (Nelson & Padilla Walker, 2011), it is worth considering that perceptions of positive parental marital relationships and parent-child relationships may act as protective factors against internalizing and/or externalizing attitudes and behaviors in this developmental period. This adds to the growing body of literature suggesting that nurturing and

involved parenting benefits young people in their transition to adulthood (e.g., Conger & Conger, 2002).

Indeed, it seems that positive family-of-origin relationships may particularly set the tone for becoming a well-adjusted emerging adult, as results of this study found that this group of young people reported more positive relationships than both floundering subgroups (i.e., externalizing and internalizing) on almost all family-of-origin measures. It may be important to consider that positive relationships in an emerging adult's family of origin (relationship with mother, relationship with father and parental marital relationship) could lead to flourishing in emerging adulthood in a number of ways. First, positive relationships while growing up may serve as buffers against characteristics typical of young people who are floundering, including high levels of anxiety and depression, and promote characteristics that aid flourishing including self-worth and social acceptance. Second, it is likely that positive relationships while growing up tend to continue into emerging adulthood, thereby, becoming an asset for young people as they make their way to adulthood.

This is consistent with research that demonstrates that emerging adults who received parental approval and support as a child are more likely to report high levels of self-esteem (Buri, 1987), experience close friendships (Furman, Simon, Shafer, & Bouchey, 2002), and form successful romantic relationships (Dalton, Frick-Horbury, & Kitzmann, 2006). It is also consistent with research that demonstrates that young adults' recollection of levels of parental marital conflict was linked with current relationships with parents, perceived social support from others, and levels of anxiety (Riggio, 2004). Therefore, it is reasonable to believe that the positive family-of-origin relationships that well-adjusted emerging adults report may in fact set them on the positive trajectory in emerging adulthood that they are currently experiencing

(exhibited by higher self-esteem, social functioning, and levels of closeness with their parents as well as lower depression and anxiety, than their floundering peers).

In particular, a positive relationship with one's mother while growing up appears to be significant in promoting one's well-being. Indeed, with regards to this one relationship, both flourishing subgroups reported more positive perceptions of the quality of the relationship they had with their mothers than both floundering groups. It may be that the mother-child relationship experienced in the family of origin acts as a particularly strong protective factor for emerging adult development. This may be because mothers tend to be more involved in the everyday lives of their children than are fathers (Baumrind, 1980; Dempsey, 2000; Ozgun & Honig, 2005; Pleck, 1997). Indeed, mothers serve as the focal point of parental activity, maintaining responsibility for a majority of child-care roles (Pleck, 1997) even when both parents are employed (Biernat & Wortman, 1991). It is possible, then, that the time a mother spends with her child and the closeness she establishes with the child during childhood and adolescence acts as an especially important influence in setting the child on a positive trajectory in emerging adulthood.

Taken together, the findings regarding positive perceptions of family-of-origin relationships and flourishing in emerging adulthood suggest that emerging adults who feel that they experienced positive relationships in their family of origin may more easily avoid some of the potential pitfalls of instability (e.g., depression and anxiety) and experimentation (e.g., high levels of drinking and drug use) that can accompany the anomie of this time period (Côté, 2006) and instead experience high levels of self-esteem, social functioning, and continued closeness with mother and father. Yet given the cross-sectional nature of the data, causal directions cannot be determined. Longitudinal work is needed to substantiate the notion that factors from one's

family of origin are leading to the positive characteristics displayed by flourishing emerging adults.

Furthermore, further work is needed to explore how various aspects of one's family of origin might interact to lead to positive outcomes in emerging adult children. For example, it might be interesting for future work to examine how the parental marital relationship interacts with the parent-child relationships to predict emerging adult well-being. Previous studies with younger children and adolescents have found that the quality of the parental marital relationship influences child behavior through its association with the quality of the parent-child relationships (Erel & Burman, 1995; Grych & Fincham, 1990). Recent studies have also shown that the *combined* effects of parental marital quality and parent-child relationships provide the strongest predictor of middle adolescent and young adult physical and mental health (Hair et al., 2009) and that emerging adults' levels of subjective well-being can be determined by whether or not they feel close to one or both parents (Sobolewski & Amato, 2007). In other words, it may be interesting to study how each of the family-of-origin relationships measured in this study (i.e., parents' marital relationship, mother-child relationship, and father-child relationship) are connected and how the family-of-origin relationships may be working together to promote positive development. Though the current study did not examine these connections, it still makes a valuable contribution in demonstrating a strong association between positive perceptions of distinctive family-of-origin relationships and flourishing in emerging adulthood.

**Negative Reports of Family-of-Origin Factors and Floundering**

Results also conversely revealed that emerging adults with more negative perceptions towards the quality of relationships in one's family of origin seem to embody the maladaptive attitudes and behaviors present in emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2004; Nelson & Padilla-Walker,

2011). In other words, individuals who appear to be exhibiting more instability (e.g., higher

levels of depression and anxiety) and experimentation (e.g., higher levels of drinking, drug use,

and number of sexual partners) than their flourishing peers were found to report more negative

perceptions regarding parental marital quality, relationship with mother, and relationship with

father than their flourishing peers. We may consider that as emerging-adult children espouse

negative perceptions towards their family of origin relationships (e.g., feeling a lack of closeness

to mother and/or father in the family of origin or supposing that one's mother or father was not

happy in marriage), it may put them on a more negative trajectory in emerging adulthood than

their flourishing peers.

It seems especially appropriate to consider the implications of the link between family of

origin and floundering for the internalizing subgroup. Indeed, it is notable that the internalizing

group (who are experiencing the highest levels of anxiety and depression and lowest levels of

self-esteem and social functioning when compared with their peers) reported significantly more

negative perceptions of their family of origin relationships and experiences than the flourishing

subgroups on every family-of-origin factor measured, and more than even the other floundering

(i.e., externalizing) subgroup with regards to relationship with mother, relationship with father,

and coming to terms. In other words, it appears that the internalizing emerging adults report

having had problematic family experiences while growing up and also appear to be struggling

more than their peers with coming to terms with those experiences. Indeed, it may be appropriate

to suggest that many individuals who experience poor family-of-origin environments may be at

significant risk of experiencing internalizing characteristics in emerging adulthood.

One reason for this may be drawn from family systems theory, which suggests that when

one's family of origin is characterized by "instability, chronic marital conflict, *and* impaired

parent-child functioning", the individual's emotional reserves may be low and prolonged anxiety may develop as a result (Holman & Busby, 2011, p. 5). While this study was unable to determine causal directions (and thereby confirm whether the internalizing subgroups' anxiety was chronic and/or developed from familial instability), it is worth noting that emerging adulthood scholars have also suggested that internalizing problems manifest in emerging adulthood most likely developed in the years prior to the emerging adulthood period (e.g., Nelson et al., 2008).

Therefore, the current study's results augment the notion that emerging adults' internalizing problems may have developed from important individual developmental factors (e.g., years of shyness and subsequent rejection by peers and development of negative self-regard; Nelson et al., 2008) by suggesting that such problems may also have developed through factors within the family of origin (e.g., poor family-of-origin relationships and difficulty coming to terms with those poor relationships). This could have important implications for the developmental tasks of emerging adulthood. For instance, exploring in love (Arnett, 2006) may be especially difficult for the internalizing subgroup since other studies have shown that low self-esteem derived from poor family-of-origin environments has, in turn, been associated with less romantic relationship satisfaction (Busby et al., 2005). Indeed, this implication seems to coincide with work demonstrating that the internalizing subgroup exhibits less identity development with regards to dating and future family (Nelson & Padilla-Walker, 2011), and adds to the growing evidence suggesting that relationships may be a particular area of concern for those emerging adults whose floundering is of an internalizing nature.

Although the internalizing group appears to hold perceptions of having had particularly poor experiences in the family of origin, the results suggest that the externalizing subgroup also reported more negative perceptions of their experiences in the family of origin than their

flourishing peers. Indeed, it is no less concerning that those in the externalizing group reported less positive perceptions of their relationship with mother and lower levels of coming to terms than both flourishing groups and less positive perceptions of their parents' marital relationship than the well-adjusted subgroup. These results underscore the notion that past family experiences, in this case negative, are indeed related to one's current development (Rodgers & White, 1993).

This seems to fit within the perspective that children in dysfunctional families are assigned roles in a family to ensure its continued operation (Scarr & Grajeck, 1982) and those who take on negative family roles can differ with regards to maladaptive outcomes such as shyness and "invisibility" or acting out and delinquency (Wegscheider, 1981). That is, it may be that an emerging-adult child's negative role in a poor family-of-origin environment could lead to greater instability (exhibited through greater levels of depression and anxiety, characterizing the internalizing group) and experimentation (reflected in higher levels of drinking, drug use and pornography use, characterizing the externalizing group) in emerging adulthood. For instance, some research has shown that low offspring codependency is associated with heightened vulnerability to the influence of a poor family-of-origin environment, reflected in greater drinking and risk taking (Fischer, Wampler, Lyness, & Thomas, 1992).

While the current study did not examine the influence of specific family roles upon maladaptive outcomes, it did suggest that there are more negative typologies (i.e., internalizing and externalizing) associated with perceptions of poor family-of-origin environments and that there is indeed a link between negative perceptions of one's family-of-origin relationships (i.e., parents' marital relationship and relationships with mother and father) and externalizing behaviors. Prior research, with regard to externalizing behaviors, has shown a negative

correlation between the quality of the parental marital relationship and externalizing problems (Schermerhorn et al., 2011) in childhood, and more substance use (Hair et al., 2009) in late adolescence as well as the quality of the current parent-child relationship and engagement in risk behaviors in emerging adulthood (Padilla-Walker, Nelson, Madsen, & Barry, 2008; Schwartz et al., 2009). The current study extends previous work by demonstrating a link between negative perceptions of family-of-origin relationships and a behavioral profile (i.e., externalizing) consisting of higher levels of drinking, drug use, video game use, pornography use, and greater numbers of sex partners in emerging adulthood.

Taken together, the findings regarding the family of origin's association with emerging adults who are characterized by higher levels of internalizing or externalizing attitudes and behaviors seem to challenge the notion that "simply leaving home is a big part" of allowing emerging adults from unhealthy family environments "to transform their lives . . . and to turn their lives in a new and better direction" (Arnett, 2006, p. 13). That is, although most (91%) of the participants in the current study had left home, those emerging adults who felt that they had come from poor family-of-origin environments still manifested higher levels of depression and anxiety (as embodied by the internalizing subgroup) or drinking and drug use (as embodied by the externalizing subgroup) than their peers. Therefore, the findings seem instead to reinforce the notion that self-development in emerging adulthood can be particularly difficult (amidst the anomie of the time period) for young people who come from poor family-of-origin environments (Côté, 2006). In other words, while emerging adulthood may provide the time to turn one's life around, its lack of structure, greater personal freedoms, and less oversight may set the stage for personal difficulties or experimentation to become magnified—especially for individuals who perceive that they have come from poor family-of-origin environments. Indeed, as Côté (2000,

2006) has suggested, it seems that young people who come from disadvantaged backgrounds (or at least perceive themselves as having come from poor family backgrounds) are experiencing greater amounts of the risks of instability and experimentation characteristic of the anomie of this time period.

**Coming to Terms with Negative Family-of-Origin Experiences**

While the findings regarding family-of-origin relationships do not seem to suggest that simply leaving home allows emerging adults to turn their lives in new and better directions, the current study's findings regarding coming to terms suggest the possibility that some young people from negative family-of-origin environments are able to come to terms with negative matters in their family of origin and flourish in emerging adulthood. Indeed, it appears that those who reported the highest level of coming to terms were well adjusted in emerging adulthood. It is important to acknowledge, though, that this study did not determine how many of those who reported high levels of coming to terms had experienced difficult issues and experiences that would necessitate the healing process associated with coming to terms. Still, it is notable that those who had come to terms with any difficult matters from their family experience (whether considerable or slight) were flourishing in emerging adulthood. It may be appropriate to assume that the majority of participants who reported high levels of coming to terms may not have experienced difficult experiences which would require individual effort to "interpret, understand, find meaning in, re-story, reframe, come to a resolution, and to [come to] peace with" (Martinson et al., 2010, p. 208). Yet, even if a portion of those who reported high levels of coming to terms were emerging adults who overcame significant negative experiences, these findings have important implications. Indeed, consistent with Busby et al.'s (2005) notion (and supportive research) that coming to terms with negative family-of-origin environments allows individuals to

50

adaptively adjust, these findings suggest that it is possible that emerging adults who experienced

negative experiences and/or relationships in their family of origin are able to turn their lives in

developmentally better directions by coming to terms with such experiences and relationships.

On the other hand, those who do not seem to have come to terms (reporting lower levels

of coming to terms than their peers) exhibit the lowest levels of self-esteem and social

functioning and highest levels of depression and anxiety (i.e., the internalizing subgroup).

Indeed, while the externalizing subgroup reported lower levels of coming to terms than the

flourishing (i.e., the religious-adjusted and well-adjusted) subgroups, the internalizing subgroup

reported significantly lower levels of coming to terms than their flourishing peers as well as their

floundering counterparts (i.e., in the externalizing subgroup). Again, the association between the

internalizing subgroup with this family-of-origin factor (in addition to the other family-of-origin

factors measured) is concerning. It underscores the possibility that problems of an internalizing

nature (e.g., anxiety, low self-esteem, depression) are some of the most prominent indicators of

poor family-of-origin relationships and suggests that it may be especially difficult to overcome

negative matters with regards to those relationships, which in turn may have implications for

emerging adult trajectories (Benson, Larson, Wilson, & Demo, 1993).

For example, there may be reason to be concerned with the romantic relationships that

these individuals may be able to form during emerging adulthood.  Martinson and colleagues

(2011) found that individuals who report unhealthy family-of-origin experiences and not having

come to terms with them tend to experience lower satisfaction with romantic partners than do

their peers. It is possible that emerging adults who experienced poor family-of-origin

environments and have difficulty overcoming matters from them may subsequently have trouble

forming healthy and satisfactory relationships in this developmental time period. Future work

should examine how coming to terms with differing degrees of challenging family-of-origin environments may be linked to this (i.e., relationship formation and quality) and other important developmental tasks in emerging adulthood (e.g., identity development, achieving financial emotional independence).

**Gender Differences with Regards to Family-of-Origin Factors**

Finally, regarding family of origin, it is important to note the findings with regards to gender differences: males reported more positive relationships with their fathers than did females. This may be because of the disproportional nature of father involvement with regards to the gender of children. That is, some research has shown that fathers are more involved with their sons than with their daughters regardless of the child's age (Aldous, Mulligan, & Bjarnason, 1998; Lamb, 1986; see also Pleck, 1997). Additionally, recent research has shown that fathers are more likely than mothers to connect with their child through companionship and "being there," which includes joint activities and feeling needed, as well as play and roughhousing (Bretherton, Lambert, & Golby, 2005). Taken together, these findings suggest that fathers may have been more involved with their sons than with their daughters in the family of origin and may have established stronger connections through joint activities as well as play. Given that the measures used in this study to assess the family-of-origin father-child relationship tapped into involvement (e.g., participating in enjoyable activities) and "being there" (e.g., sharing feelings without embarrassment or fear of hurt feelings), it may be that the males in the current study had more opportunities (than females) to connect with and subsequently feel close to their father in these ways. More work should examine gender differences with regards to emerging adult perceptions of the quality and closeness of the father-child relationship experienced in the family of origin.

**Summary of Family-of-Origin Factors in Relation to Well-being and Implications**

Taken together, the findings regarding the association between family-of-origin relationships and well-being in emerging adulthood have important implications for college educators and counseling service providers. Indeed, Busby et al. (2005) have suggested that while "it is inappropriate [for researchers, educators, and practitioners] to provide people with the impression that the family of origin creates patterns that cannot be overcome and addressed, it is also inappropriate to dismiss the influence of the family of origin as irrelevant" (p. 255). The findings of the current study underscore Busby et al.'s (2005) suggestion, specifically with regards to assisting emerging adults. Indeed, given that high levels of risk behaviors (exhibited to some extent by the externalizing subgroup) and depression and anxiety (exhibited by the internalizing subgroup) are of particular concern in this age period (Bachman et al., 1996; Lefkowitz & Gillen, 2006; Nelson et al., 2008; Schulenberg & Maggs, 2001), the findings of the current study may be particularly helpful to college counseling service practitioners and college educators who teach emerging adults.

Specifically, the findings may offer them a more complete picture regarding influences upon emerging adults' current attitudes and behavior as well as an opportunity to help emerging adults consider the role their family of origin may be playing in relation to their personal flourishing or floundering. The findings regarding coming to terms may additionally provide college practitioners and educators with the perspective that emerging adults who come from dysfunctional family-of-origin environments may be able to come to terms with considerable negative matters from those, and subsequently, experience positive outcomes (such as higher self-esteem and social functioning). Indeed, this perspective may help practitioners and educators develop new ways to help emerging adults overcome or even avoid some of the challenges they

may otherwise experience at college. Finally, it is important to note that emerging adulthood has received little attention from policymakers (Furstenberg, 2006), and that these findings provide useful information for them to put in place and sustain programs that, first, encourage healthy marriages for the benefit of children's subsequent development, and, second, strengthen parent-child relationships throughout childhood and adolescence.

**Emerging Adult Well-being and Family-of-Formation Factors**

Family Developmental Theory (Rodgers & White, 1993) suggests that one's current stage of development is not only affected by the previous stage in the family career (in this case, one's family of origin) but also a consequence of what one anticipates with regards to the future (in this case, one's attitudes towards family of formation). The results from the present study suggest that emerging adult development is indeed associated with both the previous stage of the family career *and* attitudes towards the next stage of the family career. That is, just as perceptions of family-of-origin relationships and coming to terms were found to be associated with emerging-adult functioning (as was previously discussed), so too were attitudes towards family of formation, as will now be discussed.

The types of attitudes towards family of formation that were examined in the current study for association with well-being in emerging adulthood were marital horizons (specifically the components of relative importance of marriage in one's current life plans and ideal age for marriage in the life course), feelings towards marital permanence, and family formation values (specifically family centeredness and endorsement of cohabitation). In general, the results of the present study suggest that emerging adults in the flourishing (i.e., well-adjusted and religious-adjusted) subgroups had less distant ideal ages for marriage, stronger feelings towards marital permanence, higher levels of family centeredness, and lower levels of endorsement of

cohabitation than their floundering (i.e., externalizing and internalizing) peers. Conversely, emerging adults in the floundering subgroups had more distant ideal ages for marriage, weaker feelings towards marital permanence, lower levels of family centeredness, and higher levels of endorsement of cohabitation than their flourishing peers.

Consistent with the theoretical framework of family developmental theory (Rodgers & White, 1993), the results of the present study seem to suggest that values and beliefs about the future with regards to family of formation may influence well-being (as exhibited by flourishing and floundering groups) in emerging adulthood. However, due to the correlational nature of the data, it is equally plausible that well-being in emerging adulthood may influence values and attitudes towards family of formation. As both possibilities have important implications, each will be discussed in turn.

**Influence of Attitudes Towards Family of Formation Upon Well-Being**

With regards to attitudes towards marriage, Carroll and colleagues (2007) have suggested that when young people begin to anticipate marriage in their near future, lifestyle patterns may be initiated accordingly. Moreover, Carroll and colleagues (2009) have suggested that, "young people's views of marriage may differ not only in degree (i.e., timing or relative importance), but they may also differ in *kind* (i.e., the type of marriage one desires and is *preparing* for)" (Carroll et al., 2009, p. 353, emphasis added). Indeed, the results of the current study support these notions, suggesting that emerging adults who have less distant ideal ages for marriage and stronger feelings that marriage should be of a permanent nature (i.e., stronger beliefs that marriage should never be ended except in extreme circumstances) may be flourishing as a result of their views towards marriage, while emerging adults who have more distant ideal ages for

marriage and weaker feelings towards the permanency of marriage may be experiencing less positive trajectories as a result.

One reason for this may be that emerging adults with less distant ideal ages for marriage and stronger feelings towards marital permanence engage in anticipatory behaviors in emerging adulthood (Ajzen, 1991) that lead to more positive trajectories. Meanwhile, their emerging-adult peers with more distant ideal ages for marriage and weaker feelings towards the permanency of marriage (in the floundering groups) may be less intentional about their development and engage in less directed identity explorations in an age of possibilities (Arnett, 2006).

Indeed, the results of the current study show that individuals who have higher ideal ages for marriage and stronger feelings towards marital permanency tend to be flourishing (i.e., well-adjusted and religious-adjusted) which has been associated with higher levels of identity with regards to occupation, dating, and family (Nelson & Padilla-Walker, 2011), while young people who do not feel as strongly about the permanence of marriage and have higher ideal ages for marriage tend to be floundering (i.e., internalizing and externalizing), which has been associated with lower levels of identity in dating and family (Nelson & Padilla-Walker, 2011).

Taken together, it may be that amidst the "weakening of social prescriptions [in the last half century] concerning the necessity of marrying and staying married" (Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2001, p. 1011), young people who desire to ultimately create a lifelong marriage may feel a need, despite a lack of social prescription, to be more intentional in emerging adulthood about preparing for that type of future marriage through more purposeful identity exploration in a number of positive areas. Meanwhile, their emerging-adult peers with more distant ideal ages for marriage and weaker feelings towards the permanence of marriage, while likely still expecting to get married someday (Krane & Cottreau, 1998; Whitehead & Popenoe, 2001), may oppositely

feel afforded time during emerging adulthood for less purposeful identity explorations. Indeed, in viewing marriage as less permanent and farther off in the life course, these emerging-adults (whose marital attitudes are characteristic of the internalizing and externalizing subgroups) may feel afforded time to simply experiment and explore during this period of "moratorium" (Côté, 2006). Consequently, they may engage in more risk behaviors (i.e., externalizers) or be led to feel a sense of instability (i.e., internalizers).

In addition to emerging adults' *attitudes* towards marriage, young peoples' family formation *values* (e.g., family centeredness and endorsement of cohabitation) may similarly be connected to (or disconnected from) anticipatory behavior in emerging adulthood. For instance, it may be that emerging adults who have higher levels of family centeredness (i.e., feel that getting married and becoming a parent are very important life goals and foresee such opportunities as fulfilling) more strongly anticipate adopting the eventual roles of marriage and parenthood and, as a result, use the period of emerging adulthood to begin to prepare for those roles. For example, it seems reasonable to suggest that young people espousing high levels of family centeredness and low levels of endorsement of cohabitation would demonstrate more intentionality with regards to striving to achieve the characteristics, skills, and qualities deemed important for adulthood. Indeed, Nelson and Padilla-Walker (2011) found that, compared to their floundering peers (who exhibited lower levels of family centeredness and higher levels of endorsement of cohabitation in the present study), flourishing emerging adults (who exhibited higher levels of family centeredness and lower levels of endorsement of cohabitation) are striving to attain characteristics and qualities deemed important for adult roles and responsibilities. Considering that emerging adults see acquiring these roles and responsibilities (i.e., becoming an adult) as important preparation for becoming ready for marriage (Carroll et al.,

2009), it appears that values regarding family formation are indeed tied to current behaviors and strivings in emerging adulthood.

In contrast, emerging adults who have lower levels of family centeredness but higher levels of endorsement of cohabitation may be more focused on the current phase of their lives rather than the future. As such, similar to those with more distant ideal ages for marriage, individuals reporting lower family centeredness may feel less of a need to prepare for marriage generally during emerging adulthood and, as such, may be less purposeful in general in the way they lead their lives at this time. Indeed, their views towards cohabitation may reflect this. While scholars have found that some young people believe cohabitation to be a good way to test a relationship prior to marriage (Axinn & Thornton, 1992), many begin to cohabit without making a deliberate decision to do so; that is, often couples enter into a cohabitation arrangement gradually, without clear communication between partners regarding the transition (Manning & Smock, 2005). Given the loose, unstructured, and experimental nature of cohabitation, then, it makes sense that emerging adults who most strongly endorse cohabitation (i.e., internalizing and externalizing subgroups) also experience the highest levels of instability and experimentation in emerging adulthood. In line with this reasoning, since these individuals tend to be less family centered, they may be more self-focused (Arnett, 2004) and centered on the "here and now" of their lives.

Taken together, it appears that attitudes about the importance of marriage and parenthood in the future may be important in shaping the development of individuals during emerging adulthood. More future- and other-oriented beliefs may lead young people to be more purposeful in the direction of their lives in a way that leads to more adaptive (i.e., flourishing) trajectories. Specifically, it seems possible that emerging adults with less distant ideal ages for

marriage, stronger feelings towards marital permanence, higher levels of family centeredness and lower levels of endorsement of cohabitation (i.e., those in the well-adjusted and religious-adjusted subgroups) may experience fewer feelings of anxiety and depression (in contrast with their internalizing counterparts) as a result. Indeed, even in the midst of the exploratory (Arnett, 2006) and sometimes anomic (Côté, 2006) developmental period they are in, they may be looking forward to the thought of having fulfilling relationships in the future, for which they are now actively preparing. Such sentiments regarding the importance of achieving the distant (but desirable) roles of marriage and family may ultimately help emerging adults to navigate through this developmental time period with more stability, making the anomie of emerging adulthood less difficult. Conversely, beliefs that might be reflective of focusing more on the present stage of life rather than the future (i.e., more distant ideal ages for marriage, lower family centeredness, and greater emphasis on cohabitation) may lead some to engage in more experimentation and others to experience more instability during this period of development. Future work should examine the extent to which emerging adult attitudes may influence well-being in this time period.

**Influence of Well-Being Upon Attitudes Towards Family of Formation**

Given the correlational nature of the results, it is likewise possible that attitudes towards family of formation are influenced by emerging adult well-being or trajectory (as exhibited by flourishing or floundering). For instance, with regards to emerging adults in the well-adjusted group, it is important to consider that well-adjusted emerging adults (more so than their peers) have been found to be striving for and attaining criteria for adulthood (Nelson & Padilla-Walker, 2011), which scholars have suggested reflects development of relational maturity which could be used to prepare for future steps of marriage and family life (Badger, Nelson, & Barry, 2006).

Therefore, it may be that in striving for and attaining criteria for adulthood, well-adjusted emerging adults begin to feel closer to the preparation needed for future steps of marriage and family life.

Indeed, Carroll and colleagues (2009) have suggested that emerging adults regard becoming an adult and becoming ready for marriage as two distinct transitions in life with the first involving a shift from being cared for by others to taking care of oneself and the second consisting of a transition from self-care to caring for others. Therefore, it may be that as well-adjusted emerging adults begin to take care of themselves in a responsible manner they start to be able to imagine more fully the fulfilling nature of caring for others and begin to look forward to those roles and relationships (as exhibited in the present study by the well-adjusted group's less distant marital horizons, stronger feelings towards marital permanence, and higher levels of family centeredness).

The well-adjusted group's flourishing counterparts (i.e., emerging adults in the religious-adjusted group) may also possess attitudes and behaviors that influence their less distant ideal ages for marriage, stronger feelings towards marital permanence, and higher levels of family centeredness, as well as lower levels of endorsement of cohabitation. For instance, it may be that religious-adjusted emerging adults' high levels of religiosity explain their previously mentioned marital attitudes and family formation values. Indeed, religious organizations provide social support for marriage (Chafetz, 1995; Wilcox, 2004) and encourage norms of marital permanence (Wilcox & Nock, 2006). Furthermore, some denominations of religion particularly discourage cohabitation and encourage marriage (e.g., Heaton, 1992) and the combination of adolescents' religious affiliation, attendance and fervor has been shown to negatively predict cohabitation in emerging adulthood (Eggebeen & Dew, 2009). Therefore, it may be that religious-adjusted

emerging adults attend (or have attended) more religious services or activities, and therefore have been and/or are currently more exposed (than their floundering peers) to ideology supporting the importance and benefit of marriage and marital permanence and discouraging cohabitation. Indeed, it may be that religious-adjusted emerging adults' exposure to religious organizations, services, and activities therefore explains their less distant ideal ages for marriage, stronger feelings towards marital permanence, higher levels of family centeredness, and lower levels of endorsement of cohabitation.

Floundering (i.e., internalizing and externalizing) emerging adults may similarly experience attitudes and behaviors that influence their attitudes towards family of formation. Indeed, given their lower levels of self-esteem and social functioning, it seems reasonable to believe that those who are floundering through internalizing attitudes and behaviors may feel that they have more to figure out in terms of current romantic relationships and subsequent future familial roles. In that line of thinking, internalizing emerging adults therefore may feel, more than their peers, that they need more time to develop prior to marriage (as exhibited by their higher ideal ages for marriage). Additionally, those who are floundering through internalizing attitudes and behaviors experience lower levels of identity development with regards to dating and family (Nelson & Padilla-Walker, 2011) and therefore may have less of an ability to picture how marriage and family life will be personally fulfilling, or specifically what (or who) it would take as a partner to make it so. Emerging adults in the internalizing subgroup may additionally struggle, at least more so than their peers, to imagine a permanent type of marriage, since high levels of anxiety and depression (which they also exhibit) already often make *current* relationships difficult (Nelson et al., 2008; Vujeva & Furman, 2011). This may be a reason that internalizers also more highly endorse cohabitation. That is, as a result of their internalizing

characteristics, they may subscribe to the notion that cohabiting is a good way to test a romantic relationship to avoid committing to marriage (or marital ideals). Taken together, research suggests that the personal characteristics embodied by emerging adults in the internalizing subgroup may make it especially difficult for them to sense the extent to which *later* relationships will be both fulfilling and lasting, making marriage seem farther off in the life course and cohabitation seem like a more attractive option in emerging adulthood.

Finally, though the externalizing subgroup did not differ from the flourishing (i.e., well-adjusted and religious-adjusted) groups in regard to ideal age for marriage, they did differ from the flourishing groups in regard to feelings towards marital permanence, family centeredness, and endorsement of cohabitation. Therefore, given the findings concerning externalizers, it is worth consideration that, similar to their internalizing counterparts, externalizing emerging adults' behaviors during the developmental period of emerging adulthood may influence their attitudes towards family of formation in the future.

It may very well be that the type of life being experienced by some young people may lead them to develop a more pessimistic view about future family life. Côté (2006) has suggested that some emerging adults may primarily pursue hedonistic activities during their period of moratorium (as externalizers seem, at least more so than their peers, to do; reporting the highest number of sexual partners and rates of drug, video game, and pornography use). Côté has further suggested that young people who pursue such a course may end up in a prolonged extension of emerging adulthood, in which it is "socially permissible to remain young for an indefinite period" (p. 94). Indeed, Nelson and Padilla-Walker (2011) have found that, compared to their well-adjusted peers, externalizing emerging adults' views regarding becoming an adult contain less emphasis on the need to be responsible, care for others, or comply with society's

laws and standards. Nelson and Padilla-Walker (2011) have also noted that, even though they are not significantly younger than the other groups (i.e., emerging adults in the internalizing religious-adjusted, or well-adjusted groups), externalizing emerging adults appear to be far from settled regarding any area of their identity. It may be, then, that the emerging adults in the externalizing subgroup are behaving in a way that is causing (or will later cause) them to experience a prolonged extension of emerging adulthood. Given that emerging adulthood is not a time when most people marry but rather a time of self-focus (Arnett, 2000), its prolongation for externalizing emerging adults may cause them to have weaker views towards marital permanence and less family-centeredness, partially because a potential future commitment- and other-oriented lifestyle is at odds with their current trajectory.

Taken together, there is reason to believe that emerging adults' current behaviors shape the way they view the future. Indeed, when looked at with the perspective that emerging adult well-being influences attitudes towards family of formation, the findings of the current study suggest that present attitudes and behaviors may shape emerging adults' attitudes towards their family of formation. Therefore, future work should more closely examine how current behavior shapes beliefs about the future. Additionally, future work should examine the potential bidirectional links between beliefs about the future, including attitudes towards family of formation, and current behaviors.

**Summary of Family-of-Formation Factors in Relation to Well-being and Implications**

In sum, the findings regarding the association between attitudes towards family of formation and well-being in emerging adulthood suggest that varying aspects of emerging adults' marital horizons (in this case ideal age for marriage), general importance of marriage (i.e., feelings towards marital permanence), and family formation values provide an important

conceptual lens through which to describe and explain emerging adults' current attitudes and behaviors. Indeed, extant research conducted through the lens of marital horizons has shown that ideal age of marriage and relative importance of marriage (e.g., feelings towards single life) can distinguish differences in behavior in emerging adulthood (Carroll et al., 2007). Results of the current study extend that work by showing other important attitudes towards family of formation differentiate developmental pathways of emerging adults as well. Taken together, the current study's findings with regards to family of formation suggest that there are multiple attitudes towards marriage and family connected with well-being in emerging adulthood. As such, the findings provide a strong basis for future work.

The findings regarding the association between family of formation attitudes and well-being in emerging adulthood also have important implications for educators and practitioners. The need for premarital preparation classes has been emphasized by scholars in order to help reduce the current U.S. divorce rate (Stanley, Amato, Johnson & Markman, 2006). The findings of the current study suggest that premarital education may help well-being in emerging adulthood as well. That is, the current findings underscore the importance of not only educating young people preparing for marriage about how certain marital attitudes and processes can be either beneficial or detrimental to marital satisfaction and, subsequently, individual well-being (as suggested by previous scholars, Hawkins, Carroll, Doherty, & Willoughby, 2004) but also about attitudes towards marriage and the pathways to it that can possibly affect their current well-being. Indeed, it may be important for college institutions to bolster their premarital education offerings and for policy makers to consider how to educate young people with regards to marriage since safe and stable marriages not only benefit adults, children, and communities

(Waite & Gallagher, 2000) but attitudes towards marriage and family may differentiate

trajectories in emerging adulthood as well.

## Limitations and Future Work

As noted previously, the main limitation of this study was that causal inferences cannot be

made due to the cross-sectional nature of the data. Indeed, it will be important to conduct

longitudinal studies to determine whether family of origin impacts flourishing and floundering in

emerging adulthood (or whether perceptions of one's family of origin are shaped by attitudes and

behaviors adopted in emerging adulthood). It will also be important to conduct longitudinal

studies to assess the extent to which attitudes towards family of formation contribute to well-

being (i.e., flourishing and floundering) in emerging adulthood and the extent to which

flourishing and/or floundering contributes to ideas about marital timing and importance as well

as family formation values.

Another limitation of the study was that the majority of the participants were college

students living away from home. This is important to consider, especially in light of the findings

regarding family of origin, since previous work has demonstrated more negative parent-child

relationships for emerging adults who live at home (Dubas & Peterson, 1996; O'Connor et al.,

1996). Scholars have also posited that those who do not use the moratorium provided by

emerging adulthood to pursue a college education (Côté, 2006) may be particularly

disadvantaged. Therefore, as has been noted in previous work (Nelson & Padilla-Walker, 2011),

there is a real need to examine how flourishing or floundering may look for emerging adults who

are not attending college or who may be attending community colleges or trade schools. This

study demonstrates that it would also be beneficial to examine how family developmental

influences may vary with regards to such a population's flourishing or floundering. Indeed, the

differences may be even more pronounced among college students living at home and non-college populations.

A third limitation of the study is the lack of diversity represented in the sample. The majority of participants reported being relatively highly educated and of a European American descent. Since marital meaning has been shown to vary across cultures (Cherlin, 2009), and multiple studies have shown socioeconomic and ethnic/racial differences in family formation patterns (e.g., Hummer & Hamilton, 2010), it would be useful to additionally investigate how these factors influence emerging adult well-being.

Next, due to a low internal reliability of some scales, several single-item measures were used to examine emerging adults' marital horizons. As has been previously noted by Carroll and colleagues (2007), future work should employ standardized scales to more fully test the utility of marital horizon theory with regard to the current findings.

Finally, in addition to what has been noted previously, future work should examine the extent to which an emerging adult's perceptions towards his or her family of origin may influence his or her feelings towards family of formation. That is, while the present study demonstrated an association between emerging adults' perceptions toward family of origin and current well-being as well as emerging adults' attitudes toward family of formation and current well-being, it may be that perceptions towards family of origin are connected with attitudes towards family of formation through the developmental trajectories manifest by flourishing or floundering. For instance, it may be due to the floundering groups' poorer family-of-origin environments that they feel less secure about marriage and therefore report higher ideal ages for marriage, weaker feelings towards marital permanence, less family centeredness, and higher levels of endorsement of cohabitation than the flourishing groups. Indeed, it seems reasonable to

suggest that the internalizing group, who reported the lowest levels of coming to terms with the past family career stage (family of origin) may have less family centeredness, or confidence in the fulfilling nature of family in the future family career stages (i.e., marriage and parenting) as a result, and those feelings may be exacerbated during emerging adulthood because of the problematic relationships they may continue to experience with parents (e.g., Nelson et al., 2008) and likewise begin to experience with peers, including romantic partners.

Meanwhile, the flourishing groups' positive family-of-origin environments may, conversely, encourage a certain confidence with regards to the stability and accompanying satisfaction of healthy marital and family relationships, thereby promoting lower ideal ages for marriage, stronger feelings towards the permanence of marriage, more family centeredness, and lower levels of endorsement of cohabitation. It seems natural that a group who experienced positive relationships with mother and father in the family of origin and experiences high levels of closeness with mother and father currently (as the well-adjusted group did and does) would expect the experience of future family to be more fulfilling than their peers who experienced negative family-of-origin relationships. There is certainly room for future work to explore these possibilities.

**Conclusion**

Despite these limitations, the study makes several significant contributions. Overall, the findings demonstrate that the stage preceding emerging adulthood in the family career (i.e., family of origin) and the stage following it (i.e., family of formation) are associated with development in emerging adulthood, as family developmental theory suggests (Rodgers & White, 1993). Indeed, the findings demonstrated that flourishing and floundering groups do not just vary in their individual development of identity and progress towards achieving criteria

deemed important for adulthood (Nelson & Walker, 2011), but also in the context of the family

career. The results of the present study particularly contributed to the literature by providing

evidence that an emerging adults' past experience in his or her family of origin as well as his or

her attitudes towards family of formation may be related to his or her well-being in emerging

adulthood.

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# Appendix A: Tables

Table 1

*Means (Z-scores) of Emerging Adult Characteristics by Cluster*

|  | Externalizing | Internalizing | Religious-adjusted | Well-adjusted |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Maternal closeness | -.32 | -.52 | .24 | .44 |
| Paternal closeness | .09 | -.65 | .15 | .36 |
| Religious faith | -.46 | -.47 | .45 | .35 |
| Prosocial behavior | -.19 | .14 | -.24 | .17 |
| Internal regulation | -.78 | -.12 | .15 | .52 |
| Drinking | .89 | -.24 | -.11 | -.29 |
| Drug use | .36 | .24 | -.33 | -.31 |
| Sexual partners | .57 | -.12 | -.10 | -.24 |
| Pornography use | 1.03 | .07 | -.58 | -.28 |
| Video game use | .72 | .00 | -.44 | -.11 |
| Depression | -.16 | .99 | -.08 | -.64 |
| Anxiety | -.48 | .81 | .20 | -.49 |
| Self-worth | .05 | -.99 | -.20 | .91 |
| Social acceptance | .07 | -.78 | -.22 | .76 |

Table 2

*Differences in Family of Origin as a Function of Group Membership*

| | Externalizing M (SD) | Internalizing M (SD) | Religious-adjusted M (SD) | Well-adjusted M (SD) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Family of origin | | | | | *F*-test (3, 456) |
| Parents' marital Relationship | 3.63 (1.35) | 3.18 (1.32) | 3.79 (1.20) b | 3.94 (1.22) ab | 8.78*** . |
| Relationship with Mother | 4.07 (.90) b | 3.83 (.97) | 4.37 (.72) ab | 4.46 (.80) ab | 12.02*** |
| Relationship with Father | 3.93 (1.07) b | 3.15 (1.10) | 3.65 (1.02) b | 3.87 (1.12) b | 10.36*** |
| Coming to terms | 3.76 (.86) b | 3.21 (.97) | 3.89 (.95) ab | 4.27 (.86) abc | 29.46*** |

*Note*. Means with differing letters are significantly different from one another based on LSD posthoc analyses.

* *p* < .05. ** *p* < .01. *** *p* < .001.

[a] significantly greater than *Externalizing group*

[b] significantly greater than *Internalizing group*

[c] significantly greater than *Religious-adjusted group*

[d] significantly greater than *Well-adjusted group*

Table 3

*Differences in Family of Origin as a Function of Gender*

|  | Male M (SD) | Female M (SD) |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Family of origin |  |  | *F*-test (1, 456) |
| Parents' marital Relationship | 3.70 (1.29) | 3.62 (1.30) | 2.50 |
| Relationship with Mother | 4.10 (.87) | 4.28 (.88) | .09 |
| Relationship with Father | 3.81 (1.08) | 3.53 (1.14) | 9.73** |
| Coming to terms | 3.83 (.93) | 3.80 (1.04) | 3.12 |

*Note*. Means with differing letters are significantly different from one another based on LSD posthoc analyses.
* *p* < .05. ** *p* < .01. *** *p* < .001
[a] significantly greater than *Externalizing group*
[b] significantly greater than *Internalizing group*
[c] significantly greater than *Religious-adjusted group*
[d] significantly greater than *Well-adjusted group*

Table 4

*Differences in Attitudes Towards Family of Formation as a Function of Group Membership*

| | Externalizing M (SD) | Internalizing M (SD) | Religious-adjusted M (SD) | Well-adjusted M (SD) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Family of formation | | | | | *F*-test (3, 454) |
| Family centeredness | 4.63 (1.03) | 4.52 (1.01) | 4.96 (.83) b | 4.96 (.89) ab | 5.99** |
| Endorsement of cohabitation | 3.96 (1.01) cd | 3.77 (.95) cd | 3.24 (1.20) | 3.44 (1.28) | 5.19** |
| Feelings towards marital permanence | 4.40 (1.19) | 4.36 (1.22) | 4.80 (1.29) ab | 4.74 (1.20) ab | 4.23** |
| Feeling towards single life | 2.99 (1.04) | 2.76 (.91) | 2.51 (.91) | 2.51 (.97) | 2.37 . |
| Current desire to be married | 2.38 (1.14) | 2.71 (1.27) | 2.91 (1.36) | 2.68 (1.28) | 1.53 |
| Ideal age for marriage | 25.66 (1.99) | 25.45 (2.17) cd | 24.67 (1.49) | 24.87 (2.05) | 2.67* |

*Note.* Means with differing letters are significantly different from one another based on LSD posthoc analyses.
* *p* < .05. ** *p* < .01. *** *p* < .001
[a] significantly greater than *Externalizing group*
[b] significantly greater than *Internalizing group*
[c] significantly greater than *Religious-adjusted group*
[d] significantly greater than *Well-adjusted group*