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Looking at the Marital Horizons of Emerging
Adults Through the Lens of
Identity Formation

Dallin Alexander Belt

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science

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ABSTRACT

Looking at the Marital Horizons of Emerging Adults Through the Lens of Identity Formation

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Seventy years ago Erikson proposed successful identity formation in adolescence was the foundation for successful intimacy formation in young adulthood. With the extended period of identity exploration in emerging adulthood, it is unclear if intimacy formation continues to be connected to identity. The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between identity in three domains of love, work, and worldview with long term views of intimacy using Marital Horizons Theory. Results from a sample of 777 college students in the Project READY dataset indicated that identity formation in love is positively associated with views of marriage, identity formation in work has no significant association with views of marriage, and identity formation in worldview is negatively associated with views of marriage. Implications for the transition into marriage and further identity research are discussed.

Keywords: emerging adult, identity, love, work, worldview, marital horizons, marital timing, age of marriage, marital importance, Project READY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	v
LIST OF FIGURES	vi
Introduction	1
Marital Horizon Theory	2
Identity in Emerging Adulthood	4
The Present Study.....	7
Methods	8
Participants	8
Procedure.....	9
Measures.....	10
Results	12
Preliminary Analysis	12
Measurement Model.....	13
Structural Model.....	13
Discussion	14
Limitations and Future Directions.....	17
Conclusion.....	18
References.....	20
Appendix.....	26

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Summary of Confirmatory Factor Analysis for Four Latent Variables.....	28
Table 2 Descriptive Statistics for Manifest Variables	30
Table 3 Bivariate Correlations of Main Study Variables.....	31

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Conceptual Model Testing Marital Horizons on Identity Achievement 26

Figure 2 Summary of Results of the Structural Model 27

Introduction

The stage of life known as emerging adulthood has been defined through several main characteristics, two of the central characteristics being an extended period of identity formation and a shift toward relationship experimentation (Arnett, 2000). Although identity formation among emerging adults has been well studied as a result, scholars still have a limited view of how modern intimacy formation occurs among emerging adults. Seventy years ago, Erikson proposed that the two are highly connected and healthy identity formation is a prerequisite to healthy intimacy formation (Erikson, 1950, 1968). Though more recent research shows that identity formation often precedes intimacy (Beyers & Seiffge-Krenke, 2010), it is unclear if and how intimacy is shaped by identity as Erikson theorized (1950). Therefore, determining the modern link between identity and intimacy could be vital to understanding modern intimacy formation in emerging adulthood. The ever increasing first age at marriage (29 for men, 27 for women; United States Census Bureau, 2014) suggests delays in intimacy formation, which may mean emerging adults are simply following Erikson's sequence (1950) over a longer period of the life course as identity formation continues throughout the early twenties. However, emerging adults have not retreated from marriage as an overall important life goal (Carroll et al., 2007; Willoughby, 2010) and the average age at first union does not seem to have changed as many still become involved in the committed, intimate relationship of a cohabiting union at a similar age to the age of marriage for previous generations (Manning, Brown, & Payne, 2014).

One key for understanding the current link between identity formation and intimacy formation among emerging adults lies in research suggesting that instead of marriage simply being delayed, the very meaning of marriage is changing and no longer serves as a central task to becoming an adult (Carroll et al., 2007, 2009; Willoughby, Hall, & Luczak, 2015a). If so, then

the connection between identity and intimacy may also be shifting. While some research does suggest that identity formation and emerging adults' concurrent intimacy behaviors and goals are still linked (Acitelli, Rogers, & Knee, 1999; Pittman, Kerpelman, Soto, & Adler-Baeder, 2012; Zimmer-Gembeck, Hughes, Kelly, & Connolly, 2012), it remains unclear if long-term intimacy formation and marriage is linked to identity formation among emerging adults. In addition, scholars have suggested that because marriage is no longer a normative part of the emerging adulthood period there is a need to focus intimacy-related scholarship on beliefs and attitudes toward future long-term relationships (Willoughby et al., 2015a). Yet to date, no research has explored links between identity formation and beliefs about future relationships such as marriage. Therefore the purpose of this study is to fill the gap in existing research by understanding how emerging adults connect their identity formation with their future of intimacy. Specifically, how are identity formation in the domains of love, work, and worldview related to how emerging adults view the timing and importance of marriage?

Marital Horizon Theory

Marital Horizon Theory (Carroll et al., 2007) provides a backdrop for understanding how emerging adults view their future in terms of the role of intimacy formation and serves as a structuring theory for the current investigation. The concepts behind Marital Horizons focus on “anticipation” and “planning” for marriage (Carroll et al., 2007) highlighting the role emerging adults expect marriage to play in their life. Previous research has primarily explored the marital horizons of the expected age at marriage and marital importance, with only limited exceptions which have explored marriage readiness criteria (Carroll et al., 2009). For example, those who expect family and marriage to play the most central role in life compared to those who emphasize other roles, such as career establishment, are more likely to expect and desire earlier

marriage (Osgood, Ruth, Eccles, Jacobs, & Barber, 2005) and place greater importance on marriage (Willoughby & Hall, 2015). Such findings provide a solid basis for investigating expected age at marriage and marital importance in association with identity development. For this reason, I focused in the present study on these two elements of Marital Horizon Theory.

Marital Horizon Theory has been the basis of many studies in recent years showing the importance of marital beliefs on emerging adult development. For example, emerging adults with more distal, or low importance and later timing, marital horizons have been found to participate in more risk-taking behavior (Carroll et al., 2007) and sexual activity (Willoughby & Carroll, 2009). Marital beliefs have also been directly linked to relationship development among emerging adults. One study found that more positive attitudes towards marriage were associated with increased commitment in romantic relationships (Willoughby, 2014), while another study found that the desired age of marriage was connected to mental health outcomes based on how closely emerging adults' actual age of marriage matched their desire (Carlson, 2012). Such scholarship has suggested that marital beliefs are a key indicator of healthy development among modern emerging adults. Despite such findings, little research has explored how marital beliefs may be associated with more traditional markers of development, including identity development.

Despite the lack of research in this area, several scholars and studies have hinted that possible links between marital beliefs and identity development may exist and be important to consider. In one study, for example, emerging adults who rated themselves higher in identity formation were more likely to focus on romantic relationships (Barry, Madsen, Nelson, Carroll, & Badger, 2009), suggesting successful identity formation as a marker for a shift in focus to intimacy formation. Other research has shown that those with family-oriented identities are

more likely to make family transitions, including marriage, earlier in life (Salmela-Aro, Aunola, & Nurmi, 2007), suggesting that what one adopts into their identity is also linked to intimacy formation. Taken together, these studies suggest a link between identity and intimacy behaviors but do not provide a clear picture as to how identity formation in emerging adulthood is connected to intimacy beliefs.

Identity in Emerging Adulthood

To understand how identity and marital horizons can be connected, it is important to define identity. Although the exact definition of identity has varied across scholarship, it generally represents a collection of an individual's beliefs and perceptions of how one fits in the social world (Erikson, 1950). Such beliefs are collected through the process of exploring possibilities followed by decisions about which possibilities to commit and dedicate one's life to, culminating in what is called identity achievement (Marcia, 1966). Specifically, the exploration of possibilities in three domains of identity have been highlighted as key for emerging adults on the road to adulthood; love, work, and worldview (Arnett, 2000).

Within each identity domain are distinct goals and efforts put forth in exploration and commitment. In studies on the formation of one's love identity scholars have generally assessed the exploration of identity through dating behaviors (Pittman et al., 2012; Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2012). Such studies highlight involvement in noncommittal but deeply intimate dating behaviors of emerging adults for the purpose of deciding on what kind of person one wants to be with in the long-term (Arnett, 2000). In terms of work identity, the primary goal is the discovery of one's skills and ability to contribute in the workplace (Roberts & Côté, 2014) and is often explored through such pursuits as education and work experience (Arnett, 2000). Identity in the worldview domain primarily refers to the formation of one's ideological views and provides a

broad sense of the meaning of life often explored through such processes as political and religious involvement (Roberts & Côté, 2014).

As emerging adults first explore and then commit to a variety of possibilities in each identity domain they gain a sense of not only who they are, but begin to focus on their future adult roles (Crocetti, Scignaro, Sica, & Magrin, 2012). In other words, making the transition into adulthood involves fitting new adult roles into their identity. Indeed, based on Erikson's definition of intimacy as the fusing of two identities (1968), successful intimacy requires not just finding intimate relationships, but making them part of one's sense of self (Shulman & Connolly, 2013). Determining the link between the marital horizons of timing and importance with identity development could provide some understanding of just how well emerging adults accomplish the task of merging their identity development with relationship formation. While no previous study has linked marital horizons to identity development during emerging adulthood, previous scholarship provides clues as to why and how such links may exist for each identity domain.

Love identity. As emerging adults approach achievement in their love identity they begin to take relationships more seriously, seen in both their relationship behaviors and relationship outcomes. Research on identity status and dating behaviors shows that emerging adults focusing on exploration date primarily for the purpose of figuring out their own relationship preferences and options (Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2012) while those who have an achieved identity status begin to seek commitment and long-term relationships (Montgomery, 2005). Additionally, a clear commitment to one's love identity has been found to be associated with more positive perceptions of current relationships and relationship investments (Acitelli et al., 1999) as well as more positive relationship behaviors and trust (Barry et al., 2009). Such research clearly shows that individual identity achievement in love is associated with the

formation of strong intimate relationships (Beyers & Seiffge-Krenke, 2010), representing an increase in the importance of long-term relationships. It would then be expected that as emerging adults gain a sense of who they are in terms of love they would become more committed to the idea of marriage, which would be seen in placing a greater importance on marriage and expecting to marry sooner.

Work identity. As emerging adults settle into their future career plans, marriage tends to take second place (Willoughby & Carroll, 2015). Research shows that many emerging adults believe educational achievement and career establishment are precedents to marriage (Carroll et al., 2009), indicating a strong sense among emerging adults of the need for a stable career before marriage. Additionally, emerging adults in another study indicated that they felt their future career would play a more prominent role in their future than their spousal role (Willoughby, Hall, & Goff, 2015b). However, other emerging adults who place their spousal role as more central than career place greater importance on marriage and expect to marry earlier than their career-focused peers (Willoughby & Hall, 2015). These findings suggest that, unlike love identity and marriage, work identity and marital horizons detract from one another rather than act as complements. If so, then marital importance would likely be lower and timing later for those who are higher in work identity achievement, suggesting a separation of work identity from intimacy formation.

Worldview identity. Emerging adults consistently cite “decide on personal beliefs/values independently of parents or other influences” as one of the top criteria for adulthood (Arnett, 1998, p. 303), implicating worldview identity development as one of the top pursuits of emerging adults. Yet, understanding this pursuit in connection with their development of intimacy is incomplete. Previous marital horizon research indicates that

emerging adults see worldview identity development as necessary for marriage (Carroll et al., 2009), but no study has specifically attempted to connect worldview identity development with intimacy formation. Worldview identity development among emerging adults is characterized by the pursuit of autonomy from others and individualistic undertones (Arnett, Ramos, & Jensen, 2001), which has been found to be associated with a trend towards lower commitment to relationships and delays in serious relationship formation (Dion & Dion, 1991). Indeed the very phrasing “independently of other influences” suggests a separation of worldview development from the context of relationships. If so, then the formation of worldview development with a focus on independence would likely result in a trend towards delaying marriage and placing less importance on such a committal form of intimacy.

The Present Study

Previous research has explored a number of issues in identity development and relationship beliefs and formation, but little research to date has explored the two together, and much of this research has explored only short-term beliefs and concurrent behaviors (Barry et al., 2009; Montgomery, 2005; Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2012). Erikson’s (1950) sequencing of identity and intimacy development, however, suggests the need to consider the long-term views of intimacy formation as well, especially marriage. The main question left open is if the connection between identity and intimacy is indeed central to adult development seventy years after Erikson originally presented his theory. The present study uses a Marital Horizon’s (Carroll et al., 2007) perspective to explore how identity development in the three primary domains (love, work, ideology; Arnett, 2000), is connected to those marital horizons representing the centrality of marriage to emerging adult development, including the importance of marriage and the expected age at marriage. Previous research suggests that achievement in love identity

would be consistent with a central view of marriage seen in an earlier timing of marriage and greater marital importance compared to less achieved peers (Beyers & Seiffge-Krenke, 2010). Achievement in work identity, however, would likely compete for marriage as a central role seen in a later timing of marriage and less marital importance (Willoughby et al., 2015b). Similarly, achievement in worldview development is also likely to be associated with a later expected timing of marriage and less importance as marriage may be perceived as contrary to the pursuit of autonomous decision making about one's personal beliefs (Arnett et al., 2001). Based on the previous review of the literature, three hypotheses follow:

1. Identity achievement in love identity will be:
 - a. Associated with an earlier expected age at marriage.
 - b. Associated with greater marital importance.
2. Identity achievement in work identity will be:
 - a. Associated with a later expected age at marriage.
 - b. Associated with less marital importance.
3. Identity achievement in worldview identity will be:
 - a. Associated with a later expected age at marriage.
 - b. Associated with less marital importance.

Methods

Participants

Participants for this study were drawn from a study of emerging adults and their parents entitled "Project READY" (Researching Emerging Adults' Developmental Years). This project is a collaborative, multi-site study that is being conducted by a consortium of developmental and family scholars, and data used in the current study were collected during 2009 - 2010.

The sample for the current study ($M_{age} = 19.51$, $SD = 1.69$, $range = 18-29$) consisted of 777 undergraduate students, all who were unmarried at the time of data collection (538 women, 239 men). Participants were recruited from four universities across the United States, (including 37% ($n = 289$) from a university in the western region, 30% ($n = 234$) from a university in the central region, 19% ($n = 146$) from a university in the southern region, and 14% ($n = 110$) from a religious university in the eastern region. Response rate varied by site (ranging from 50-71%), with an overall response rate of approximately 60%.

In terms of year in school, 40% of emerging adults were in their first year, 27% second year, 20% third year, and 9% fourth year. The majority of emerging adults were Caucasian (69% Caucasian, 3% African American, 18% Asian American, 5% Latino American, and 3% mixed/biracial). The average reported combined parental income was \$50,000 to \$75,000. Roman Catholics had the strongest representation (30%) followed by Conservative Christians (19%), Liberal Christians (14%), non-affiliated individuals (13%), and Agnostic/Atheist (combined for 12%).

Procedure

Participants completed the Project READY questionnaire via the Internet (see <http://www.projectready.net>). The use of an online data collection protocol facilitated unified data collection across multiple university sites and allowed for the survey to be administered to emerging adults and their parents who were living in separate locations throughout the country. Participants were recruited through faculty's announcement of the study in undergraduate courses. Undergraduate courses were primarily Introduction to Psychology courses or large general education courses of the like in an attempt 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 class-specific recruitment code. Informed consent was obtained online, and only after consent was given could the participants begin the questionnaires. Each participant was given a survey that took approximately 45 minutes to complete. Most participants were given a \$20 Amazon gift code for their participation.

Measures

Identity achievement. In order to measure identity achievement, participants answered questions from the Ego Identity: Dating, Occupation, and Values/Beliefs Subscales (Balistreri & Busch-Rossnagel, 1995). Participants answered questions on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). Sample questions include, “My values are likely to change in the future,” and “My beliefs about dating are firmly held.” Each participant was asked to respond to 12 items, 4 for each area of identity. All items were coded so higher numbers indicated greater identity achievement. Scale reliability was slightly less than acceptable for belief identity ($\alpha = .60$), and moderate for occupation ($\alpha = .55$) and dating ($\alpha = .51$). Since this measure has previously been established, the low reliability is noted and a full reliability and factor analysis will be conducted to determine how reliability may best be improved.

Marital horizons. Two elements of marital horizons were assessed for the present study. The *expected age at marriage* was assessed with a single item asking respondents “At what age do you expect to marry?” and response was open. *Marital importance* was assessed using four items measured on a scale from 1 (*very strongly disagree*) to 6 (*very strongly agree*) assessing the centrality of marriage, such as “Being married is a very important goal for me.” Scale reliability was acceptable ($\alpha = .70$).

Controls. Control variables were selected based on previous literature showing associations with marital orientations. Parents' combined income and parents' education level were included as measures of socio-economic status, which has been previously shown to be associated with the transition to marriage (Cohen, Kasen, Chen, Hartmark, & Gordon, 2003). Parents' combined income was measured on a scale from 1 (<\$30k) to 7 (\$250k) with 4 indicating \$50k to \$75k and parents' education summed from two items assessing the highest education achieved by the respondent's mother and father. Respondent's current college level was also measured as previous research indicates the anticipation of completing a college degree to be associated with marital horizons (Carroll et al., 2009). Year in college was selected in a range of 1 (*1st year of college*) to 8 (*3rd year or higher year of graduate school*). Religiosity has also been shown to be associated with the marital beliefs of emerging adults (Ellison, Burdette, & Glenn, 2011), and was calculated using four items assessing the salience of a respondent's religious beliefs, such as "my faith is an important part of who I am as a person." Each item was rated on a five point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*), and the scale was very reliable ($\alpha = .97$). Respondent age was included to control for the possibility that identity achievement and marital horizons simply increase together over time and was measured with an open-ended question asking for participant age in years. A measure for relationship length was also included to control for the possibility that those in long-term serious relationships at the time of data collection would be more likely to feel more achieved in love identity or perceive marriage more favorably and was assessed with an open-ended question asking how long participants had been in a committed relationship in months.

Results

Preliminary Analysis

In order to ensure proper model specification, a number of preliminary analyses were conducted. First, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted for four proposed latent variables: love, work, and worldview identity achievement and marital importance (see Table 1). Loadings below .40 were considered low. Two indicators for love identity showed low loading estimates (Item 1=.26; Item 3=.34), one indicator for work identity did not load well (Item 2=.06), one indicator for worldview identity did not load well (Item 3=-.33), and two indicators for marital importance loaded poorly (Item 1=.23; Item 3=.31). Reductions to the factors as suggested by the CFA resulted in greater reliability between items. Descriptive statistics for all manifest variables are summarized in Table 2. Bivariate correlations were then estimated to assess preliminary associations between study variables as well as check for collinearity (see Table 3). All three identity domains were significantly associated with each other, worldview and work identity having the strongest association ($r = .47$). However, such association is reasonable and expected as each represents an aspect of identity generally. Marital importance and the expected age at marriage were significantly correlated ($r = -.22$) suggesting that a higher marital importance is associated with an earlier expected timing, but the small correlation suggests the two measure different aspects of marital horizons. All three identity domains were significantly correlated with marital importance in a positive direction, with love having the strongest association ($r = .37$), but only love identity was significantly correlated with the expected age at marriage ($r = -.12$) indicating a lower expected age when love identity is more achieved. Of particular note, the control variables for parents' education and income were not significantly related to any of the identity or marital horizons. As the sample also shows homogeneity across

these measures parents' income and parents' education were dropped from further analysis. Participant age, year in college, relationship length, and religiosity were significantly associated with multiple study variables and were maintained as controls for all further analysis.

Measurement Model

The final step before conducting the structural analysis was to test the measurement model for the four latent variables to assess model fit. The measurement and structural models were assessed using MPlus software (Muthen & Muthen, 2015). Model fit was considered acceptable with a non-significant chi-square, a CFI no less than .90 but preferably greater than .95, an RMSEA less than .08, and a TLI greater than .90 (Wang & Wang, 2012). Initial model fit was outside of acceptable parameters, so modification indices were estimated. This resulted in the modelling of seven covariances between the error variances of identity indicators in all three domains. These covariances were considered theoretically sound as the items reflect the dimension of identity commitment generally, beyond their specific domain. Chi-square for the final model was significant ($\chi^2 (22) = 108.21, p < .001$) but it is noted that the chi-square statistic is sensitive to large sample sizes. Further indices indicate acceptable model fit (CFI = .96, RMSEA = .07, TLI = .93).

Structural Model

After assessing measurement accuracy, the structural model was specified. The latent variable assessing marital importance and the manifest variable for the expected age at marriage were regressed on the three latent variables for love, work, and worldview identity achievement controlling for age, year in college, relationship length, and religiosity which were each included as manifest variables. The model yielded significant results for both the expected age at

marriage ($R^2 = .09, p < .001$) and marital importance ($R^2 = .37, p < .001$). Results are summarized in Figure 2.

In support of hypothesis 1A, love identity was negatively associated with the expected age at marriage ($\beta = -.26, p = .04$). Emerging adults one standard deviation higher in love identity than the mean expected to marry .26 standard deviations sooner, or 1.3 years. Worldview identity was positively associated with the expected age at marriage ($\beta = .20, p = .02$), supporting hypothesis 3A. Emerging adults one standard deviation higher than the mean in worldview identity expected to marry about .20 standard deviations later, or about one year. Work identity was not significantly associated with the expected age at marriage ($\beta = .03, p = .63$), which does not support Hypothesis 2A.

Love identity was also significantly associated with marital importance in the hypothesized direction ($\beta = .75, p < .001$), supporting hypothesis 1B. Emerging adults with a love identity one standard deviation higher than the mean placed importance on marriage by .75 standard deviations higher than the average emerging adult. Worldview identity was negatively associated with marital importance ($\beta = -.41, p < .001$), in support of hypothesis 3B. A greater worldview identity was associated with less marital importance, with emerging adults one standard deviation higher than the mean in worldview identity placing marriage as less important by .41 standard deviations. However, work identity was not significantly associated with marital importance ($\beta = -.13, p = .14$) which does not support hypothesis 2B.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine if, and how, identity formation remains connected to the future of intimacy formation. This was accomplished by assessing the

relationship between identity formation in the three domains of love, work, and worldview with the marital horizons of the expected age at marriage and importance of marriage as representing a future view of intimacy among emerging adults (Carroll et al., 2007). This builds on previous research showing a connection between concurrent identity formation and intimacy formation and behavior among emerging adults (Acitelli et al., 1999; Barry et al., 2009).

Identity achievement in the domain of love showed a clear connection with intimacy formation. Specifically, hypothesis 1A and 1B were supported showing that love identity achievement is associated with proximal marital horizons, as shown through an earlier expected age and importance of marriage. Building on previous research showing that love identity influences the short term dating behaviors of emerging adults (Montgomery, 2005; Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2012), these findings suggest a desire for marriage as a possible reason for this shift. Indeed, this would help explain the increases seen in relationship investment and relationship building behaviors of emerging adults with a more achieved love identity (Acitelli et al., 1999; Barry et al., 2009). As emerging adults perceive marriage as more relevant they may be encouraged in maintaining existing romantic relationships. Overall, these findings suggest love identity formation in emerging adulthood would give relevance to marriage as an important and close goal.

Identity achievement in the domain of worldview was also significantly associated with future views of intimacy formation, but in the opposite direction as love identity. Emerging adults with a more achieved identity in worldview expected to marry later and placed less importance on marriage as a whole. This is particularly interesting as it highlights the possibility that not only the process of deciding on one's beliefs encourages independence (Arnett et al., 2001), but that the very beliefs being adopted by the majority of emerging adults encourage later

marriage and less importance of marriage (Muraco & Curran, 2012). This may be particularly relevant as the pattern of later timing more closely matches the actual ages at first marriage than the pattern suggested in love identity formation (United States Census Bureau, 2014). Two questions in particular arise from this pattern. First, which beliefs may be prevalent among emerging adults that compete with the idea of marriage? Second, do many emerging adults even have a clear view of the future role of marriage? Further research could provide further insights by exploring prevailing beliefs about marriage among emerging adults and what that might mean as they attempt to fuse their worldview identity with that of another during intimacy formation.

Unlike love and worldview identity formation, work identity does not appear to be connected to the future of intimacy formation for emerging adults in this study. This could carry some important implications for future relationship success as being able to consider the goals and plans of another in one's career plans may be an important part of forming successful relationships (Shulman & Connolly, 2013). However, the lack of connection could be more benign as it may also represent the adoption of more egalitarian views among emerging adults (Carroll et al., 2009). In other words, work may no longer be seen as the means for a man to support a family as much as it is something that should be done by both men and women to prepare for adult life generally, especially among college students. Whatever the explanation, however, the results of this study suggest a separation of identity formation in work and intimacy formation in the transition to adulthood.

The connections between identity formation and long-term intimacy formation found in this study have significant implications for understanding the relationship outcomes of emerging adults making the transition into marriage. Recent research has shown that the centrality of one's intimate relationships in one's identity is associated with positive relationship maintenance

(Linardatos & Lydon, 2011) suggesting that a positive link between identity and intimacy formation, such as that between love identity and marital horizons, would be more conducive to a smooth transition to committed long-term relationships. However, if one's identity is formed without consideration of a close partner, such as that shown between worldview identity formation and marital horizons, then intimate relationships may be at greater risk for decreased marital satisfaction (Glenn, Uecker, & Love, 2010). The findings of this study suggest that future research could further elucidate these implications by considering the role of identity in intimacy formation.

Limitations and Future Directions

When drawing conclusions from this study, a number of caveats should be addressed. First, the final latent variables in the model more closely reflected identity commitment, which is only one dimension of identity achievement. While emerging adults are more likely to reach such commitment after exploration (Arnett, 2000), thus having an achieved identity, it is important to note the possibility of the less healthy identity foreclosure, associated with lower self-esteem, unclear decision making, and a lack of goal readjustment (Marcia, 1966), playing a role in the marital horizons of emerging adults. Future research is needed that includes an improved measure of identity status that can more reliably distinguish between identity foreclosure and achievement.

Another major limitation of this study is the cross-sectional nature of the model which does not allow for directional inference. Research suggests that marital horizons and identity statuses are not static (Beyers & Seiffge-Krenke, 2010; Willoughby, 2010), therefore to fully assess such associations in emerging adulthood it is essential for future research to longitudinally examine changes in marital horizons with changes in identity status and formation. Specifically,

it would be important to track changes in marital horizons as emerging adults move from identity moratorium to identity achievement as this would more accurately reflect the adoption of marriage into one's sense of self.

A third limitation is having a college sample. As has been noted in the field of emerging adult research, college samples do not represent the full population of 20-somethings (Arnett, 2000) and differences between emerging adults in college and without college have been suggested in identity formation and perceptions of adulthood (Luyckx, Schwartz, Goossens, & Pollock, 2008) which raises the question of how marriage may be approached differently by those who attend college and those who do not. The sample in this study was also predominately white, middle class and likely does not reflect the full range of possible marital horizons (Cohen et al., 2003). A more diverse sample would be needed to fully address these concerns. The final limitation of note in this study is the difficulty in assessing differences by gender which has been shown to play a role in marital horizons (Carroll et al., 2007, 2009) as well as identity formation (Cross & Madson, 1997) due to measurement variance in the identity domains and a skewed distribution of gender in the sample. Future research could further explore such differences, and indeed should, as it may reflect traditional versus non-traditional differences in the approach to marriage (Flouri & Buchanan, 2001) and why such differences matter.

Conclusion

Understanding identity formation during emerging adulthood provides significant insight into the delay of adulthood. This study provides evidence that identity development, however, may also play an important role in the transition to adulthood. The findings in this study specifically suggest that identity formation is linked to the role many emerging adults expect marriage to play as they transition into adult life. However, not every aspect of identity seems to

promote marriage as important. Instead, it is important to consider what the emerging identity looks like. In thinking about marriage, this suggests that marital horizons cannot be treated as the same across all emerging adults and should take into account differences in the pursuits and goals most prevalent among them. Most importantly, this study revealed a relationship between identity formation and marital horizons which may help in understanding the implications of various marital beliefs for the future marital outcomes of the currently unmarried. It is time to start considering how the development occurring during emerging adulthood paves the way for success in every adult role.

Establishing this connection will provide important insights into the perceived role of marriage among emerging adults and allow the field to move forward in understanding what this might mean for the future of marriage formation during the transition to adulthood.

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Appendix

Figure 1 Conceptual Model Testing Marital Horizons on Identity Achievement

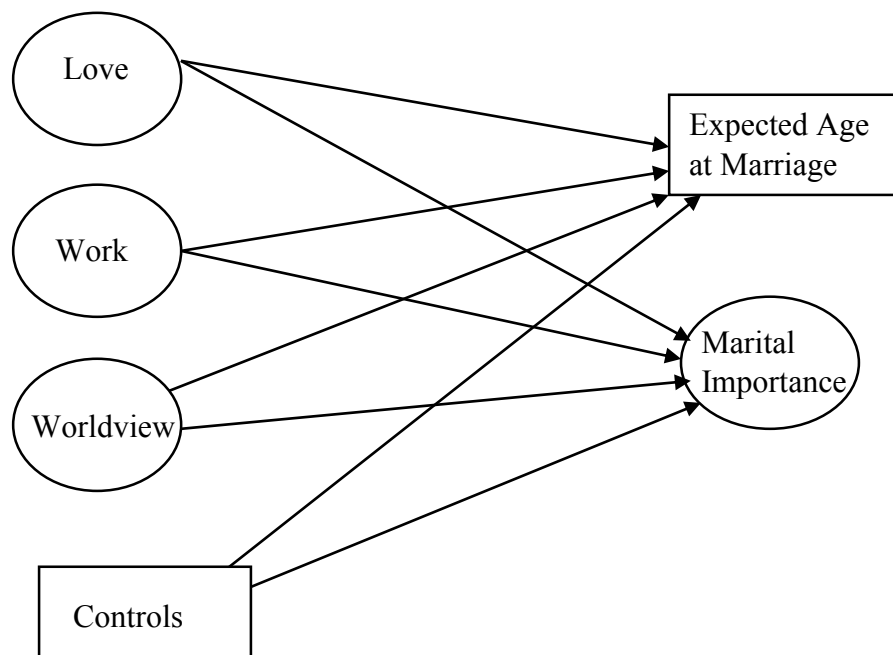
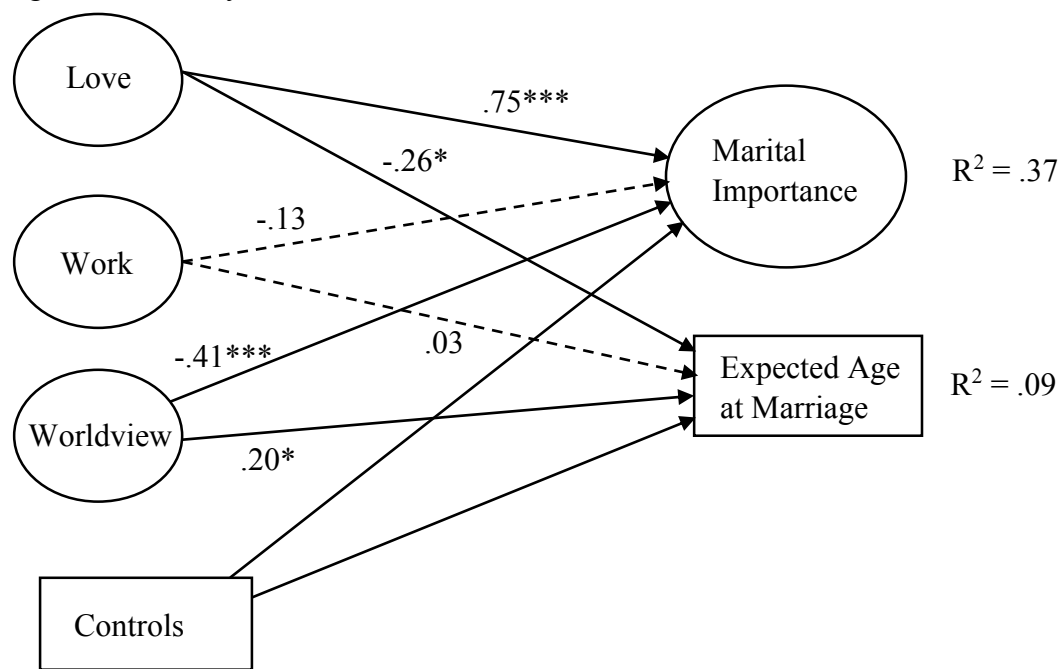


Figure 2 Summary of Results of the Structural Model



* $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$

Note: All estimates are standardized.

Table 1 Summary of Confirmatory Factor Analysis for Four Latent Variables

	<i>M</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>Loading</i>
Love Identity			
1. I am not sure about what type of dating relationship is right for me (reverse)	4.35	.05	.26
2. My beliefs about dating are firmly held.	3.69	.05	.70*
3. I have questioned what kind of date is right for me (reverse).	3.02	.05	.34
4. My beliefs about dating are firmly held.	4.03	.05	.65*
Work Identity			
1. I have definitely decided on the occupation I want to pursue.	4.07	.06	.83*
2. I have tried to learn about different occupational fields to find the best one for me.	4.35	.04	.06
3. I am unlikely to alter my vocational goals.	3.79	.05	.65*
4. I have never questioned my occupational aspirations.	2.80	.05	.46*
Worldview Identity			
1. There has never been a need to question my values.	3.79	.05	.41*
2. My values are likely to change in the future (reverse).	3.73	.05	.73*
3. I have consistently re-examined many different values in order to find the ones which are best for me.	3.76	.05	-.33
4. I am not sure that the values I hold are right for me (reverse).	4.37	.04	.67*
Marital Importance			
1. All in all, there are more advantages to being single than to being married (reverse).	4.26	.04	.23
2. I feel ready to get married.	2.73	.05	.96*

3. Being married is a very important goal for me.	4.80	.05	.31
4. I would like to be married now.	2.66	.05	.84*

*Factor Loading high enough to maintain in analysis

Note: All factor loadings reported are standardized. Standard errors reported are the standard errors for the indicator means.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics for Manifest Variables

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Expected Age at Marriage	25.96	5.05
Age	19.51	1.69
Relationship Length	9.84	15.90
Religiosity	3.30	1.29
Parents' Education	10.04	3.95
Parents' Income	5.32	1.64
Year in College	2.17	1.36

Table 3 Bivariate Correlations of Main Study Variables

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.
1. Love Identity	--									
2. Work Identity	.27**	--								
3. Worldview Identity	.47**	.29**	--							
4. Marital Importance	.37**	.17**	.09**	--						
5. Expected Age at Marriage	-.12**	-.04	.01	-.22**	--					
6. Age	.07	.12**	.07	.21**	.12**	--				
7. Year in College	.06	.12**	.06	.16**	.18**	.81**	--			
8. Relationship Length	.32**	.04	.05	.32**	-.12**	.20**	.18**	--		
9. Religiosity	.20**	.12**	.22**	.17**	-.09*	-.04	-.07	-.05	--	
10. Parents' Education	-.00	-.06	.03	-.02	-.07	-.08*	-.07	-.02	.07	--
11. Parent's Income	.02	-.02	.03	-.03	.03	-.00	.05	-.02	.03	.45**

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