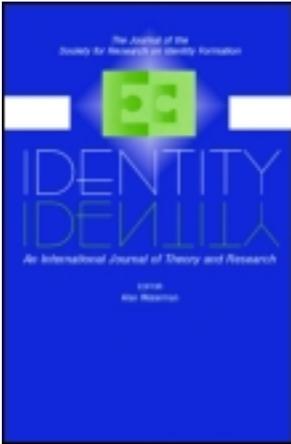


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Examination of Identity and Romantic Relationship Intimacy Associations with Well-Being in Emerging Adulthood

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This study examined identity and romantic relationship intimacy associations with emerging adults' well-being. Examination of identity status differences in well-being indicated emerging adults in foreclosed and achieved identity statuses reported higher well-being levels than identity diffuse and moratorium emerging adults. Results also indicated gender moderation of identity status differences in romantic relationship intimacy. Identity diffuse and moratorium women reported more intimate relationships than diffuse and moratorium men. Further, identity diffuse, foreclosed, and achieved emerging adult women reported higher romantic relationship intimacy than identity moratorium women whereas identity foreclosed and achieved emerging adult men reported higher intimacy than identity diffuse and moratorium men. Finally, results indicated positive associations between romantic relationship intimacy and well-being. This study supports previous identity status differences in well-being and also suggests that romantic relationship intimacy contributes to emerging adults' well-being. Findings are discussed with regard to the theoretical and empirical importance of considering identity and romantic relationship characteristics when examining emerging adult social and psychological well-being.

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Identity development is a central task in emerging adulthood (Hofer, Kärtner, Chasiotis, Busch, & Kiessling, 2007). Given the importance of identity in socioemotional development, studies in a special issue of *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research* (2007, vol. 7, no. 4) examined psychosocial identity associations with various indicators of adjustment including general mental health, psychological well-being, and social functioning (e.g., Luyckx, Soenens, Goossens, & Vansteenkiste, 2007; Waterman, 2007). A common conceptualization of identity involves classifying identity according to identity explorations and identity commitments (Marcia, 1966). Identity and well-being studies using statuses as a measure of identity have suggested that achieved identities (i.e., exploration of identity alternatives and commitment to specific identity choices) result in more positive well-being outcomes than identities characterized as identity diffuse (i.e., low levels of identity exploration and a lack of commitments), identity foreclosed (i.e., identity commitments made without exploration), and identity moratorium (i.e., identities being explored without long-term commitments to identity decisions).

Identity Status as a Predictor of Well-Being

Researchers have suggested that identity achieved emerging adults have higher levels of life satisfaction and positive affect and lower levels of negative affect (Hofer et al., 2007; Padilla-Walker, McNamara Berry, Carroll, Madsen, & Nelson, 2008) as well as more intimate interpersonal relationships (Kroger, 2007) than those in other identity statuses, and that these differences are due to the dual identity exploration and commitment characteristic of identity achievement (Marcia, 1989). However, a more extensive examination of identity research indicates that identity commitment, rather than both identity exploration and commitment, is a better predictor of well-being (Berzonsky, 2003; Johnson et al., 2009; Vleorias & Bosma, 2005). As a result, one would expect both identity foreclosed and identity achieved emerging adults (i.e., identity commitment present without exploration) to report similar levels of well-being.

Researchers have suggested that identity foreclosed emerging adults are likely to have more problems resolving future challenges than identity achieved emerging adults because (a) foreclosure commitments are not made through exploration and (b) foreclosed individuals have not had experience in handling uncertainties. For example, Luyckx et al. (2007) argued identity commitment without exploration is not sufficient to generate feelings of well-being given the lack of autonomy associated with the individual's personal decisions and that autonomy associated with an achieved identity is necessary for healthy identity commitments. However, A. S. Waterman

(2007; personal communication, November 2, 2010) maintains that a foreclosed identity status does not necessarily constitute a negative identity outcome if the commitments formed are perceived to be personally expressive. Further, Hofer et al. (2007) reported a "slight positive association between life satisfaction and commitment to goals adopted from significant others" in a portion of their sample (p. 281). Results reported by Vleioras and Bosma (2005) indicated the process of identity commitment alone is a significant predictor of well-being. Meeus, Iedema, Helsen, and Vollebergh (1999) and Waterman (1999) also reported that identity foreclosure is associated with higher levels of well-being than identity moratorium and diffusion and is comparable to well-being associated with identity achievement.

These findings suggest identity commitments associated with personally relevant life decisions may provide the sense of "direction and meaning" commonly associated with combined identity exploration and commitment. Meuss et al. (1999) stated that individuals may find decisions made without exploration an "acceptable end-point of identity development" because identity exploration is not a necessarily needed component of "progressive development" (p. 429). Waterman (1993) also argued that individuals who have made commitments without exploration may be as satisfied with their life choices as those who have explored their commitments and that these decisions should not be disrupted unless they interfere with one's ability to function effectively.

Conversely, those classified as identity diffuse and moratorium report lower levels of well-being than do identity foreclosed and achieved individuals. Failure to deal with identity issues (as seen in a lack of identity commitment) is associated with decreased psychological well-being (Vleioras & Bosma, 2005). Relative to identity foreclosed and achieved statuses, individuals classified as identity diffuse and moratorium statuses report higher levels of conduct and emotional problems (Adams, Munro, Doherty-Poirer, Munro, Petersen, & Edwards, 2001; Berzonsky, 2003), low levels of subjective well-being (Hofer et al., 2007; Waterman, 2007), and low levels of psychological well-being (Nurmi, Berzonsky, Tammi, & Kinney, 1997; Waterman, 2007). However, when comparing the identity diffuse and moratorium statuses, the instability characteristic of identity moratorium was associated with lower levels of well-being when compared to identity diffusion (Waterman, 1999). Although identity diffusion has been conceptualized as a less advanced identity status (Marcia, 1989), the lower levels of identity commitment and exploration are indicative of identity stability (Waterman, 1999). This identity stability, in turn, is thought to account for the higher levels of well-being when compared with the identity moratorium status (Meeus, 1996; Meeus et al., 1999; Waterman, 1999).

With respect to the role of gender in well-being, research has not found either consistent gender differences in well-being or gender moderation of the association of identity status and well-being (Meeus et al., 1999). For example, Hofer et al. (2007) found that women reported higher levels of negative affect than did men, but gender did not moderate identity associations with well-being. Further, Waterman (2007) found that female participants reported higher levels of well-being across several study measures (e.g., hedonic enjoyment, personal enjoyment, and personal growth), but the reported differences were not robust enough to warrant separate examinations of identity status differences in well-being. Therefore, our first research question (RQ1) asked if well-being reports differed according to identity status. We tested RQ1 by examining the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1a (H1a): Identity foreclosed and achieved participants would report higher levels of well-being than do those in the identity diffuse and moratorium statuses.

Hypothesis 1b (H1b): Identity diffuse respondents are expected to report higher levels of well-being than do those in the moratorium status.

Identity Status as a Predictor of Romantic Relationship Intimacy

In addition to the identity and well-being associations, identity has also been linked to intimate and committed romantic relationships (Loff & Johnson, 2008). One aspect of establishing an identity relative to personal life decisions involves the increased importance of romantic relationships during emerging adulthood and specific identity domains relevant to romantic relationships (e.g., relationship commitment, intimacy, and love) become a focal point of the identity formation process (Arnett, 2000). The transition to intimate romantic relationships is considered a normative developmental process. However, individuals vary in their capacity for developing and maintaining these relationships, and one factor associated with the capacity for developing intimate romantic relationships is each member's identity commitment. Research has suggested that identity and intimacy progress concurrently during adolescence and emerging adulthood (Craig-Bray, Adams, & Dobson, 1988; Dyk & Adams, 1987; Loff et al., 2005; Paul & White, 1990), and individuals characterized as having made identity commitments may have more intimate romantic relationships than individuals characterized as not having made identity commitments.

The relation between identity and intimacy has been theorized to differ for men and women (see Dyk & Adams, 1990; Josselson, 1987; Markstrom

& Kalmanir, 2001). This research suggests that men and women take different identity pathways toward developing relationship closeness and intimacy. Female identity development is often characterized as primarily focused on interpersonal connectedness, which is associated with an integration of identity and personal relationships (Patterson, Sochting, & Marcia, 1992). According to Dyk and Adams (1987, 1990) and Surrey (1991), women's identity and intimacy development may unfold simultaneously whereas for men identity development may precede intimacy development. As a result, women are likely to report more intimate romantic relationships across identity statuses than are men. Further, women who have made identity commitments (i.e., identity achieved and foreclosed) may report higher levels of intimacy than women who have not made commitments (i.e., identity diffusion and moratorium), regardless of their explorations. However, men who have not made commitments or who have made commitments without exploration may not report intimacy levels as high as men who have explored and committed to their identity decisions (e.g., identity achieved).

Given the identity status, gender, and romantic relationship intimacy associations, our second research question (RQ2) asked if emerging adults' romantic relationship quality differed according to the interaction between gender and identity status. Specifically, we hypothesized:

Hypothesis 2a (H2a): For women and men, identity foreclosed and achieved respondents are expected to report higher levels of romantic relationship intimacy than that reported by identity diffuse and moratorium respondents.

Hypothesis 2b (H2b): Female participants would report higher levels of romantic relationship intimacy than male participants across identity statuses.

Romantic Relationship Intimacy Functioning as a Predictor of Well-Being

Given the identity status associations with well-being and romantic relationship intimacy, another factor possibly associated with well-being is the involvement in intimate romantic relationships. Establishment of romantic relationships has been viewed as an important developmental milestone during emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000, 2004), and there has been a general consensus regarding the benefits of romantic relationships with respect to well-being (Brendgen, Vitaro, Doyle, Markiewicz, & Bukowski, 2002; Campbell, Sedikides, & Bosson, 1994; Demir, 2008; Hook, Gerstein,

Detterich, & Gridley, 2003). The context of romantic relationships provides each member with feelings of companionship and connectedness that can lead to positive well-being (Brendgen et al., 2002; Davies & Windle, 2000), and the intimate quality of such relationships has been predictive of well-being (Furman & Shaffer, 2003; Reis, Clark, & Holmes, 2004; Zimmer-Gimbeck & Ducat, 2010). Because relationship intimacy is an important component of romantic relationships during emerging adulthood, emerging adults benefit from experience in intimate romantic relationships. For example, research has supported associations between romantic relationship quality (as measured by intimacy, closeness, and commitment) and increased happiness and self-esteem and decreased depression and loneliness for the relationship members (Bernardon, Babb, Hakim-Larson, & Gagg, 2011; Collins & Sroufe, 1999; Demir, 2010; Joyner & Udry, 2000; Levesque, 1993; Paul, Poole, & Jakubowyc, 1998). When emerging adults perceive their relationship partner as being supportive and responsive to their needs, they believe their “[personality qualities, emotions, needs, etc.] are recognized, valued, and behaviorally supported by their partner” (Reis et al., 2004, p. 203). Romantic relationships possessing these intimate qualities likely provide a source of emotional support and positively contribute to emotional, social, and psychological well-being since the positive relationship behaviors associated with intimacy (e.g., self-disclosure) provide emerging adults with a sense of security and contribute to positive self-conceptions (Davies & Windle, 2000; Furman & Shaffer, 2003; Meier & Allen, 2008; Montgomery, 2005).

In comparison to gender differences in well-being associated with romantic relationship involvement, the relation between emerging adult reports of romantic relationship intimacy and well-being has not been as clearly differentiated. Conceptualization of romantic relationship intimacy importance suggests that female emerging adults benefit more than male emerging adults from involvement in romantic relationships (Simon & Barrett, 2010). However, research has suggested that both female and male emerging adults benefit from the intimate nature of these romantic experiences. For example, examination of romantic relationship associations with well-being has revealed that women’s and men’s reports of psychological and emotional well-being increase with higher levels of perceived romantic relationship intimacy and support (Brunell et al., 2010; Giordano, Longmore, & Manning, 2006; Mackinnon, Nosko, Pratt, & Norris, 2011; Simon & Barrett, 2010; Zimmer-Gembeck & Ducat, 2010). Further, both women’s and men’s reports of psychological distress have been associated with low romantic relationship intimacy or a relationship characterized by problematic behavior (Jouriles, Garrido, Rosenfield, & McDonald, 2009; Joyner & Udry, 2000).

Given the associations among romantic relationship intimacy and well-being, our third research question (RQ3) asked if emerging adults' well-being reports were associated with reported romantic relationship intimacy. We examined RQ3 by proposing the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3 (H3): For both women and men, reported levels of romantic relationship intimacy should be positively correlated with well-being and negatively correlated with indices of problematic functioning.

METHOD

Participants

We used data from 437 emerging adults (156 men, mean age = 19.07 years, range = 18 to 22 years; and 280 women, mean age = 19.02 years, range = 18 to 21 years) to examine the identity, relationship variables, and well-being associations. Participants were recruited from the general student body of a large northeastern university commuter campus. Consistent with campus demographics, 2.7% of the sample were members of an ethnic or racial minority group. A subset of 295 emerging adults (93 men, mean age = 19.25 years, range = 18 to 21 years; and 206 women, mean age = 19.19 years, range = 18 to 21 years) taken from the overall sample reported involvement in a dating romantic relationship and we used this subset to examine the proposed identity, intimacy, and well-being associations.

Instruments

Demographic Information and Indication of Romantic Relationship Involvement

We obtained personal data (i.e., age and gender) from each participant. When reporting on their romantic relationships, participants were asked to indicate whether or not they were involved with a romantic partner. (This relationship indication was differentiated from same-sex and cross-sex friendships within the data collection procedure.) Participants who indicated they were involved in a romantic relationship were then asked to think of their romantic partner and indicate what the relationship type (i.e., dating, engaged, or married), report on the length of time they have known their partner (years and months), and indicate the average amount of time per day that they typically spent with that person (hours and minutes).

Romantic relationship type was used as the only exclusionary criteria. Participants in a nondating relationship (i.e., engaged or married) were not included in this study. Sexual minority participants were not excluded from the study as participants' sexual orientation was not recorded.

Identity Measure

We used the Ego Identity Process Questionnaire (EIPQ; Balistreri, Busch-Rossnagel, & Geisinger, 1995) to assess participant perceptions of their current identity process characteristics. The EIPQ is a 32-item scale that measures dimensions of commitment (e.g., "I have definitely decided on the occupation I want to pursue") and exploration (e.g., "I have considered adopting different kinds of religious beliefs") on a 6-point scale that ranges from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). Consistent with procedures reported by Balisteri et al. (1995), we used median split procedures to categorize individuals as either high or low in identity commitment and exploration (commitment: range = 52, median = 66; and exploration: range = 47, median = 61). We then combined the identity commitment and exploration categories to categorize individuals according to a specific identity status: diffuse (low commitment and exploration), foreclosed (high commitment and low exploration), moratorium (low commitment and high exploration), or achieved (high commitment and exploration). Cronbach's alphas for the commitment and exploration subscales were .86 and .81, respectively.

Intimacy Measures

The positive intimacy subscale of the Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationships–Modified inventory (PAIR-M; Theriault, 1998) is a 5-item subscale that assesses participant perceptions of positive intimacy experiences (e.g., "I can tell my feelings to my romantic partner"). Responses to the PAIR-M are recorded on a 5-point Likert scale that ranges from 1 (*very rarely*) to 5 (*very often*). Cronbach's alpha in this study was .88.

The Miller Social Intimacy Scale (MSIS) is a 17-item scale that measures dimensions of intimacy frequency and intensity (R. S. Miller & Lefcourt, 1982). Six questions are used to assess intimacy frequency (e.g., "How often do you show your romantic partner affection?"), and responses are recorded on a 10-point scale that ranges from 1 (*very rarely*) to 10 (*almost always*). Eleven questions are used to assess intimacy intensity (e.g., "How close do you feel to your romantic partner most of the time?"), and responses are recorded on a 10-point scale ranging from 1 (*not much*) to 10 (*a great deal*). Cronbach's alphas for the frequency and intensity scales were .86 and .85, respectively.

We measured sexual intimacy using the sexual intimacy subscale of the Relationship Rating Form (Davis & Todd, 1985). The sexual intimacy subscale is a 4-item scale that measures participant's basic level of sexual engagement with a specific individual (e.g., "Do you enjoy being touched by this person?"). Responses measured on a 7-item Likert scale that ranges from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*completely/extremely*). Cronbach's alpha for the subscale was .80.

Well-Being Measures

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) is a 10-item scale used to assess participant views of their self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965). The RSES asks participants to respond to 10 statements that describe how they feel about themselves (e.g., "I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others"). Responses to each item are measured on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). We scaled responses so that higher scores on the SES were associated with higher levels of self-esteem. Cronbach's alpha for this study was .82.

The Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, Peplau, & Cutrona, 1980) consists of 20 items that assess feelings of loneliness. The measure is comprised of 10 items reflecting satisfaction (e.g., "There are people I feel close to") and 10 items reflecting dissatisfaction (e.g., "I am unhappy being so withdrawn") with social relationships. Responses to these questions range from 1 (*never*) to 4 (*often*). The reliability of the measure in this study was $\alpha = .91$.

We used Franke and Hymel's (1984) Social Anxiety and Social Avoidance Scales to assess participant perceptions of difficulty with social situations. The measure consists of 12 items comprising two separate subscales of six items that assess social anxiety (e.g., "I worry a lot about what others think of me") and social avoidance (e.g., "I have the most fun when I'm with others"). Responses range from 1 (*not at all true about me*) to 5 (*always true about me*). Reliabilities were $\alpha = .89$ for social anxiety and $\alpha = .82$ for social avoidance.

Procedure

The data that we used in this study were part of a larger study examining interpersonal and intrapersonal factors associated with college students' friendship and romantic relationship intimacy. Data collection occurred during a session lasting 1 hour and 30 minutes. Participants were informed by the researchers that the study was examining relationship intimacy and closeness. They were then given one of a series of relationship booklets asking them to report their demographic information and to think of either a

same-sex friend, cross-sex friend, or romantic partner. Participants were asked to read the instructions carefully before beginning and instructed to describe the length of time they had known the person who was the focus of the relationship and the amount of time spent with this person daily as well as the intimacy and emotional closeness experienced with the person. These first relationship booklets were collected after participants completed the description and participants were then given the identity questionnaire (as well as several others not used in this study). After completing the identity measurement, participants were given a second relationship booklet asking them to describe another of their relationships (depending on which relationship was described previously) and report on the same relationship characteristics. On completion of the second relationship booklet, participants were given a series of questionnaires that assessed well-being. Finally, participants were given the third and final relationship booklet and requested to follow the same instructions. Once participants completed the third relationship booklet, they were debriefed and compensated for participating. For this article, we used only data pertaining to romantic relationships and associated intimacy, identity, and well-being.

RESULTS

Preliminary Analyses

Chi-square analysis of participant identity and romantic relationship involvement classifications indicated a significant Gender \times Identity Status difference and a significant Gender \times Romantic Relationships Status difference. As shown in Table 1, examination of identity status gender differences indicated a higher proportion of men classified as identity diffuse. Examination of romantic relationship involvement differences indicated a higher proportion of men reported not being involved in a romantic relationship in comparison to women. Further, *t*-test analysis indicated significant gender differences in romantic relationship positive intimacy, intimacy frequency, intimacy intensity, $t_s(293) = 2.65$ to 7.28 , $ps < .01$ to $.001$, and social avoidance, $t(435) = -2.71$, $p < .01$. As shown in Table 1, women reported higher levels of romantic relationship intimacy than did men. Further, men reported higher levels of social avoidance than did women.

Identity Status Differences in Well-Being

To examine our proposed identity status differences in well-being reports proposed in RQ1, we conducted a series of 2 (Gender) \times 4 (Identity Status) ANOVA. We included gender in these analyses given the gender difference

TABLE 1
Identity and Relationship Status Frequency and Mean Intimacy and Well-Being Gender Differences

	Women	Men	Test Value
Identity status			$\chi^2(3) = 12.01^{**}$
Diffuse	47	48	
Moratorium	85	40	
Foreclosed	97	48	
Achieved	51	20	
Relationship status			$\chi^2(1) = 9.57^{**}$
Not involved in romantic relationship	74	64	
Involved in romantic relationship	206	93	
Romantic relationship intimacy			
Positive intimacy	27.36 (2.46)	26.54 (2.54)	$t(297) = 2.65^{**}$
Intimacy frequency	50.97 (6.17)	45.02 (7.23)	$t(297) = 7.28^{***}$
Intimacy intensity	96.94 (7.45)	92.37 (11.59)	$t(127.6^+) = 3.49^{***}$
Sexual intimacy	61.89 (7.37)	62.11 (6.65)	$t(297) < 1$
Well-being			
Self-esteem	28.06 (5.82)	29.15 (5.49)	$t(435) = -1.95$
Loneliness	43.28 (13.73)	44.53 (13.19)	$t(435) < 1$
Social anxiety	18.23 (5.85)	17.91 (4.39)	$t(399.8^+) < 1$
Social avoidance	13.32 (3.69)	14.35 (4.06)	$t(435) = -2.71^{**}$

Note. Significant differences in row values indicated by $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, or $***p < .001$. Relationship intimacy and well-being standard errors are shown in parentheses.

⁺Test degrees of freedom adjusted due to unequal group variances.

in social avoidance scores indicated in the preliminary analyses despite not hypothesizing gender differences in well-being or moderation of the identity–well-being relationship by gender.

Self-Esteem

Results indicated a significant main effect for identity status, $F(3, 428) = 2.89$, $p < .05$. Examination of the identity status main effect

TABLE 2
Identity Status Differences in Reported Well-Being

	Diffuse	Foreclosed	Moratorium	Achieved
Self-esteem	7.88 ^a (.58)	29.32 ^b (.51)	27.96 ^a (.47)	29.90 ^b (.68)
Loneliness	42.63 ^a (1.38)	42.04 ^a (1.20)	46.52 ^b (1.12)	42.31 ^a (1.60)
Social anxiety	18.01 ^a (.55)	17.71 ^a (.48)	18.08 ^a (.45)	19.09 ^a (.64)
Social avoidance	14.41 ^a (.39)	12.86 ^b (.34)	14.34 ^a (.32)	12.83 ^b (.45)

Note. Standardized errors are in parentheses. Row means with different superscripts are significantly different at $p < .05$.

supported H1a (see Table 2). Identity foreclosed and achieved participants reported higher levels of self-esteem than did identity diffuse and moratorium participants. Results, however, failed to support H1b in that identity diffuse and moratorium participants did not differ in their self-esteem reports.

Loneliness

Results indicated a significant main effect for identity status, $F(3, 428) = 2.85, p < .05$. Tukey *b* multiple comparisons revealed partial support for H1a and supported H1b. As show in Table 2, identity diffuse, foreclosed, and achieved participants reported lower levels of loneliness than did identity moratorium participants, but the diffuse respondents did not score significantly lower on well-being than those in the foreclosure and identity achievement statuses.

Social Anxiety

Results failed to indicate any significant differences in the participants' reports of social anxiety.

Social Avoidance

Results indicated a significant main effect for gender, $F(1, 428) = 3.89, p < .05$, and for identity status, $F(3, 428) = 7.47, p < .001$. Examination of the gender main effect was consistent with our preliminary analyses shown in Table 1 in that men reported higher levels of social avoidance than did women. Examination of the identity status main effect supported H1a (see Table 2). Identity foreclosed and achieved participants reported lower levels of social avoidance than did identity diffuse and moratorium participants. Results, however, failed to support H1b in that identity diffuse and moratorium participants did not differ in their social avoidance reports.

Identity Status Differences in Romantic Relationship Intimacy

We used a series of 2 (Gender) \times 4 (Identity Status) ANOVA to examine the gender and identity status prediction of romantic relationship intimacy proposed in RQ2.

Positive Intimacy

Results revealed significant gender, $F(1, 287) = 4.14, p < .05$, and identity status, $F(3, 287) = 14.5, p < .001$, differences in reports of positive intimacy. The gender main effect was consistent with preliminary analyses shown in

TABLE 3
Gender and Identity Status Differences in Reported Romantic Relationship Intimacy

	<i>Diffuse</i>	<i>Foreclosed</i>	<i>Moratorium</i>	<i>Achieved</i>
Positive Intimacy				
Women	27.57^a (.39)	28.40 ^a (.29)	26.07 ^b (.28)	27.83 ^a (.35)
Men	25.50^a (.40)	28.29 ^b (.47)	25.96 ^a (.44)	27.56 ^b (.76)
Intimacy Frequency				
Women	99.34^a (1.09)	101.53^a (.84)	92.45 ^b (.78)	97.86^a (.99)
Men	88.81^a (1.96)	95.33^b (2.26)	91.26 ^a (2.13)	101.67^b (3.70)
Intimacy Intensity				
Women	51.80^a (.95)	54.67^a (.72)	48.01^b (.67)	51.86 ^a (.86)
Men	43.91^a (1.25)	43.79^a (1.45)	45.59^a (1.36)	51.22 ^b (2.36)
Sexual Intimacy				
Women	63.14 (1.19)	64.45 (1.19)	59.87 (.83)	60.67 (1.07)
Men	62.19 (1.22)	62.13 (1.41)	59.41 (1.33)	65.56 (2.31)

Note. Standardized errors are in parentheses. Row means with different superscripts are significantly different, $p < .05$. Column means in bold type are significantly different, $p < .05$.

Table 1. The identity status main effect indicated identity foreclosed and achieved participants reported higher levels of positive intimacy than did identity diffuse and moratorium participants. However, these main effects were incorporated in the significant Gender \times Identity Status interaction for romantic relationship positive intimacy, $F(3, 287) = 2.86$, $p < .05$. As shown in Table 3, examination of the Gender \times Identity Status interaction indicated identity diffuse, foreclosed, and achieved women reported higher levels of positive intimacy than did identity moratorium women and partially supported H2a. Identity foreclosed and achieved men reported higher levels of positive intimacy than did identity diffuse and moratorium men and supported H2a. Second, results indicated partial support for H2b in that only identity diffuse women reported higher levels of positive intimacy than did identity diffuse men (see Table 3). Contrary to expectations, no significant gender differences were indicated for identity foreclosed, moratorium, or achieved participants.

Intimacy Frequency

Results revealed significant gender, $F(1, 287) = 7.21$, $p < .01$, and identity status, $F(3, 287) = 10.21$, $p < .001$, differences in reports of romantic relationship intimacy frequency. The gender main effect was consistent with preliminary analyses shown in Table 1. The identity status main effect indicated identity foreclosed and achieved participants reported higher levels of intimacy frequency than did identity diffuse and moratorium participants.

However, these main effects were incorporated in the significant Gender \times Identity Status interaction for romantic relationship intimacy frequency, $F(3, 287) = 8.28, p < .001$. As shown in Table 3, results indicated identity diffuse, foreclosed, and achieved women reported higher levels of intimacy frequency than did identity moratorium women and partially supported H2a. Identity achieved men reported higher levels of intimacy frequency than did identity diffuse, foreclosed, and moratorium men and partially supported H2a. Second, results indicated identity diffuse, foreclosed, and moratorium women reported higher levels of intimacy frequency than did identity diffuse, foreclosed, and moratorium men, respectively (see Table 3). These findings supported H2b, although the anticipated gender difference for identity achieved participants was not indicated.

Intimacy Intensity

Results revealed significant gender, $F(1, 287) = 34.86, p < .001$, and identity status, $F(3, 287) = 3.55, p < .01$, differences in reports of romantic relationship intimacy intensity. The gender main effect was consistent with preliminary analyses shown in Table 1. The identity status main effect indicated identity foreclosed and achieved participants reported higher levels of intimacy intensity than did identity diffuse and moratorium participants. However, these main effects were incorporated in the significant Gender \times Identity Status interaction for romantic relationship intimacy intensity, $F(3, 287) = 10.06, p < .001$. As shown in Table 3, H2a was partially supported in that identity diffuse, foreclosed, and achieved women reported higher levels of intimacy intensity than did identity moratorium women. Results supported H2a in that identity foreclosed and achieved men reported higher levels of intimacy intensity than did identity diffuse and moratorium men. Second, results indicated partial support for H2c. Identity diffuse and foreclosed women reported higher levels of intimacy intensity than did identity diffuse and foreclosed men. However, contrary to our proposed difference in H2b, identity achieved men reported higher levels of intimacy intensity than did identity achieved women (see Table 3). No significant gender difference was indicated for identity moratorium participants.

Sexual Intimacy

Examination of romantic relationship intimacy reports indicated a significant main effect of identity status for sexual intimacy, $F(1, 287) = 5.87, p < .001$, and did not support our proposed gender moderation of identity and intimacy associations. Tukey *b* multiple comparisons indicated identity diffuse ($\bar{X} = 62.68, SE = 1.19.$), foreclosed ($\bar{X} = 64.35, SE = .84$), and

achieved participants ($\bar{X} = 63.11$, $SE = 1.27$.) reported higher levels of sexual intimacy than did identity moratorium participants ($\bar{X} = 59.74$, $SE = .78$.). Despite the lack of support for our proposed hypotheses, identity status differences were consistent with those reported for the other romantic relationship intimacy measures.

Romantic Relationship Intimacy Associations with Well-Being

To test the associations proposed in RQ3, we conducted bivariate correlation analyses examining romantic relationship intimacy and well-being associations. We did not specify specific gender differences in the association between romantic relationship intimacy and well-being, but we analyzed data separately for women and men given the gender differences indicated in the preliminary analyses (see Table 1).

As shown in Table 4, correlational analysis of women's romantic relationship intimacy reports indicated significant correlations between intimacy and well-being measures and supported H3. Positive intimacy was negatively correlated with social avoidance ($p < .01$). Intimacy frequency and intimacy intensity were negatively correlated with loneliness ($ps < .01$). Finally, correlations between positive intimacy and well-being scores indicated negative associations with loneliness and social anxiety and the positive association with self-esteem approached significance ($ps < .10$).

TABLE 4
Correlations for Reported Romantic Relationship Intimacy and Well-Being for Women and Men

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Romantic relationship intimacy								
1. Positive intimacy	—	.65**	.39**	.37**	-.12 ⁺	-.08 ⁺	-.19**	.11 ⁺
2. Intimacy frequency	.23*	—	.66**	.51**	-.25**	-.06	-.04	.10
3. Intimacy intensity	.66**	.56**	—	.56**	-.19**	.02	-.05	.06
4. Sexual intimacy	.63**	.28**	.57**	—	-.04	.05	-.08	-.01
Well-being								
5. Self-esteem	.16 ⁺	.02	.05	.17 ⁺	—	-.46**	-.11	-.20*
6. Loneliness	-.11	-.20 ⁺	-.10	-.10	.02	—	.35**	-.56**
7. Social anxiety	-.03	-.03	-.03	.00	.12	.16**	—	-.14*
8. Social avoidance	-.32**	-.29**	-.11	-.29**	.34**	.11	-.49**	—

Note. Women's correlations are presented above the diagonal and men's correlations below the diagonal.

⁺ $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

As shown in Table 4, correlational analysis of men's romantic relationship intimacy reports also indicated significant correlations between intimacy and well-being measures and supported H3. Positive intimacy, intimacy frequency, and sexual intimacy were negatively correlated with social avoidance ($ps < .01$). Further, the negative correlation between intimacy frequency and loneliness and the positive correlation between sexual intimacy and self-esteem approached significance ($ps < .10$).

DISCUSSION

Advanced identities characterized by identity commitments made through identity explorations are predictive of healthy psychological and social adjustment (Kroger, 2007; Waterman 2007). Because romantic relationships become an increasingly important part of normative development at the time when identity decisions are being made, we proposed that romantic relationship involvement and romantic relationship intimacy are also important predictors of well-being. Emerging adults involved in an intimate romantic relationship have reported higher levels of well-being than those in less intimate relationships (Reis et al., 2004; Zimmer-Gimbeck & Ducat, 2010). Therefore, we examined the proposed identity, intimacy, and well-being associations by determining if (a) well-being differed according to identity status, (b) romantic relationship intimacy differed according to the interaction between gender and identity status, and (c) well-being was associated with romantic relationship intimacy.

Identity Status Differences in Well-Being

Examination of identity status differences in well-being supported H1a, which stated that identity foreclosed and achieved participants would report higher levels of well-being than those in identity diffuse and moratorium statuses. This identity status difference suggests identity foreclosure and achievement are associated with positive well-being and is consistent with previous research suggesting that identity commitment may contribute to well-being more so than the individual contribution of identity exploration or the combined contribution of identity commitment and exploration (Berzonsky, 2003; Johnson et al., 2009). Although the process through which foreclosed and achieved individuals have made identity commitments differs between identity statuses (i.e., foreclosed through the identification with the beliefs held by others and achieved through a process of self-driven exploration; Kroger, 2007), both statuses have a created set of identity beliefs from which a sense of direction is provided. These identity beliefs

may provide the emerging adults with the life choice satisfaction necessary to minimize threats to their well-being relative to those with identity statuses characterized as not having made identity commitments (i.e., identity diffuse and moratorium). Results, however, failed to support H1b, which stated that identity diffuse participants would report higher levels of well-being than those in moratorium status. Although previous research has suggested lower well-being for identity moratorium participants due to the uncertainty associated with active identity exploration (Meeus, 1996; Meeus et al., 1999; Waterman, 1999), comparison of identity diffuse and moratorium to foreclosed and achieved participants suggested identity commitment likely differentiates well-being. As such, the minimal difference between diffuse and moratorium participants may possibly be attributed to the low identity commitment evident in both statuses, and additional research is warranted to further examine the identity process associations with well-being for diffuse and moratorium emerging adults.

Identity Status Differences in Romantic Relationship Intimacy

Results partially supported H2a, which stated identity diffuse and moratorium women and men would report lower romantic intimacy levels than identity foreclosed and achieved women and men, respectively. Consistent with previous theory and research supporting identity status differences in romantic relationship intimacy during emerging adulthood (e.g., Arnett, 2000; Montgomery, 2005; Waterman, 1993), findings indicated (a) identity diffuse, foreclosed, and achieved women reported higher levels of positive intimacy, intimacy frequency, and intimacy intensity than did identity moratorium women; and (b) identity foreclosed and achieved men reported higher levels of positive intimacy and intimacy intensity than did identity diffuse and moratorium men. Higher levels of relationship intimacy reported by female and male identity foreclosed and achieved emerging adults suggest their identity commitments, regardless of identity exploration, may result in clear romantic relationship expectations and lead to more committed, intimate, and emotionally close romantic relationships relative to the relationships of emerging adults with lower identity commitment levels. This intimacy difference is supported by previous research suggesting that identity foreclosure may be more similar to identity achievement than other identity statuses due to the strong association between identity commitment and interpersonal relationship constructs (Johnson et al., 2009; Pace & Zappulla, 2009; Patterson et al., 1992; Schwartz et al., 2011).

Inconsistent with H2a, identity diffuse women reported higher levels of romantic relationship intimacy than identity moratorium women. Similar

to the consistency afforded by identity commitments, previous research has suggested the lack of identity exploration and commitment also provides a sense of consistency to identity diffuse individuals as diffuse individuals may be content with their lack of obligation (Schwartz et al., 2011). Although prior research has suggested that identity diffuse romantic relationships are qualitatively different from those of identity foreclosed and achieved emerging adults (Johnson et al., 2009), the comparable intimacy levels indicated in this study may be indicative of the elevated receptiveness to and focus on romantic relationship experiences indicated in previous research (e.g., Archer & Waterman, 1990; Muuss, 1996; Waterman, 1993).

Results partially supported H2b, which stated women would report higher levels of romantic relationship intimacy across identity statuses. With the exception of identity achieved men reporting higher levels of intimacy intensity than identity achieved women, findings indicated women reported higher levels of relationship intimacy than did men across the identity diffuse, foreclosed, and moratorium statuses. Female and male emerging adults display similar patterns of identity development, although identity explorations concerning romantic intimacy generally do not begin until emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000; Schiedel & Marcia, 1985). Despite similar identity development patterns, women typically reported higher levels of relationship intimacy when compared to men with similar identity characteristics (Johnson, 2005; Schiedel & Marcia, 1985). Although this difference was not evident for our identity achieved participants, the pattern of differences is consistent with previous research examining intimacy differences. Identity and relationship intimacy development may be a merged process for women whereas identity development may precede the emergence of relationship intimacy for men (Dyk & Adams, 1987). This interpersonal identity focus is associated with higher intimacy for women than men in opposite-sex relationships (Craig-Bray et al., 1988). As a result, our findings suggest women in less developed identity statuses may view their romantic relationships as being more intimate than men in similar identity statuses (i.e., identity diffuse, foreclosed, and moratorium). However, previous research has suggested that men are likely to report higher intimacy levels in their romantic relationships as identity issues are resolved through exploration and commitment (i.e., identity achievement; Dyk & Adams, 1990). Our findings indicate that differences in female and male emerging adults' reports of romantic relationship intimacy decrease for those in a more advanced identity status (i.e., identity achieved) and this pattern of intimacy and identity development is likely to continue until adulthood (Josselson, 1987).

Romantic Relationship Intimacy Associations with Well-Being

Examination of romantic relationship intimacy associations with well-being supported H3, which stated that emerging adults romantic relationship intimacy would be positively associated with positive well-being reports (i.e., self-esteem) and negatively associated with negative well-being reports (e.g., loneliness), respectively. The romantic relationship intimacy correlations suggest higher well-being levels with higher romantic relationship intimacy and support our proposal that romantic relationship intimacy, in addition to identity, plays an integral role in emerging adults' well-being. These findings are supported by previous research that suggests romantic relationships are important developmental contexts during emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2004). The quality of these relationships has been associated with numerous well-being measures (Demir, 2010, Montgomery, 2005; Simon & Barrett, 2010; Zimmer-Gembeck & Ducat, 2010), and the associations between intimacy and well-being measures support previous research indicating both increased self-esteem and decreased internalizing behaviors when romantic relationship intimacy is perceived as high (e.g., Bernardon et al., 2011; Demir, 2010). Further, our findings also support previous research suggesting minimal gender differences in the association between romantic relationship intimacy and well-being during emerging adulthood as women's and men's reports of well-being were correlated with their romantic relationship reports (e.g., Brunell et al., 2010; Mackinnon et al., 2011). Prior research has suggested that intimate romantic relationships provide their members with a secure relational context, and this secure context has been hypothesized to be a protective factor that is associated with positive well-being outcomes for its members (Brenghden et al., 2002; Furman & Simon, 1999; B. C. Miller & Benson, 1999).

Limitations

Although the findings in our study further explain the complex relationships among gender, identity status, romantic relationship involvement, romantic relationship quality, and well-being, they are limited in several respects. First, the correlational nature of this study does not allow cause-and-effect determination of the relationships among the focal variables. Although we hypothesized specific well-being and intimacy differences relative to emerging adults' gender, identity status, romantic relationship involvement, and romantic relationship quality, the reverse predictive relationship is also plausible (e.g., an emerging adult's well-being may differentiate their identity status, romantic relationship involvement, and romantic relationship quality). Further, the interactions that we described in the findings limit

the external validity of the reported associations. According to Pedhazur and Schmelkin (1991), the extent to which findings can be generalized are limited by interactions. Therefore, the interactions that we reported in this study limit the external validity by specifying the specific identity and relational contexts in which the well-being outcomes will occur for female and male emerging adults. Finally, the nature of the sample limits the external validity of the findings. The sample in this study was recruited from a university setting and is not necessarily representative of the larger emerging adult population. Higher education may inhibit identity decisions (which is possibly evident in the low number of identity achieved men) and may skew identity status demographics toward statuses other than achieved. Therefore, without further study, it is difficult to determine if the results will generalize to emerging adults outside of a university setting.

Conclusions

Previous identity theory and research has proposed that identity achievement is a primary predictor of emerging adults' well-being (i.e., Hofer et al., 2007; Kroger, 2007). However, this research has indicated somewhat inconsistent findings regarding identity status differences in well-being, and we proposed identity in addition to romantic relationship involvement and intimacy are predictive of well-being. We found that (a) emerging adults with identity statuses characterized by high commitment (i.e., foreclosed and achieved) reported higher well-being levels than those characterized by low commitment (i.e., diffuse and moratorium); (b) identity diffuse, foreclosed, and achieved women reported higher romantic relationship intimacy than identity moratorium women; (c) identity foreclosed and achieved men reported higher romantic relationship intimacy than identity diffuse and moratorium men; (d) identity diffuse, foreclosed, and moratorium women reported higher levels of romantic relationship intimacy than diffuse, foreclosed, and moratorium men; and (e) romantic relationship intimacy was positively associated with emerging adults' well-being.

The unique contribution of this study is its support for previous identity status differences in well-being and intimacy as well as support for the well-being differences linked to relationship intimacy. Examination of these romantic relationship characteristics may increase researchers' abilities to determine the extent of emerging adults' well-being by examining both psychological and relational factors salient to this developmental period. Additionally, inclusion of relationship characteristics may increase researchers' abilities to further differentiate the qualitative differences in well-being among identity status categories when quantitative analyses fail to indicate theorized differences. Given the increased focus on identity-related issues

and romantic relationship formation during emerging adulthood, intimate romantic relationships may foster positive well-being in addition to the benefits linked to identity commitments by providing stable and secure relational support as well as protecting the individual from factors associated with a more negative well-being. As a result, future research should consider both identity and the salient characteristics relative to romantic relationship involvement when examining emerging adults' psychological and social adjustment.

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