



8-2004

# The Dynamics of Identity Development: Exploring the Relevance of Separation-Individuation

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*University of Tennessee, Knoxville*

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## Recommended Citation

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Jennifer N. Engler entitled "The Dynamics of Identity Development: Exploring the Relevance of Separation-Individuation." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Psychology.

Anne McIntyre, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Richard A. Saudargas, Brian Barber, John Lounsbury

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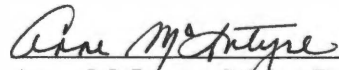
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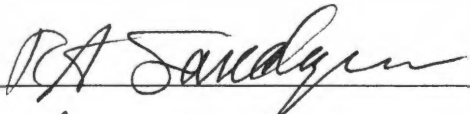
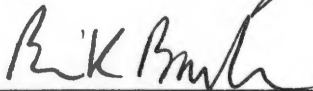
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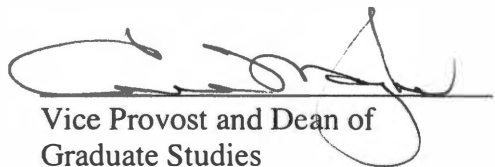


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Acceptance for the Council:

  
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Graduate Studies

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THE DYNAMICS OF IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT:  
EXPLORING THE RELEVANCE OF SEPARATION-INDIVIDUATION

A Dissertation Presented for the  
Doctor of Philosophy Degree  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Jennifer N. Engler

August 2004

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Harold Engler and Sharyn Lobell, and to two very dear friends, Chris Rold and Dana Hysock. You have all been important sources of support to me during my journey toward this goal. Thank you for your encouragement and generosity that appears, so often, to have no limits.

I am so blessed to have you in my life.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank everyone who has been so integral in assisting me toward completing my Doctoral degree in Clinical Psychology. For four years, I have had the distinct privilege of working with Dr. Anne McIntyre. She has encouraged and challenged me to pursue personalized academic interests and has remained a constant source of professional guidance and support throughout the process. I have also been quite fortunate to have the opportunity to work closely with several other psychology faculty, each of whom has uniquely influenced my development as an academician and clinician. Two graciously agreed to serve on my dissertation committee, assisting me in navigating this educational milestone. I would like to thank both Dr. John Lounsbury and Dr. Richard Saudargas for their involvement in this process and for the impact they have had in broadening my interests in the field of psychology. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Brian Barber for his active participation on my committee. He has brought an invaluable perspective and expertise to an area of my research interests, both of which have enhanced my own work throughout the dissertation process.

It has been a true pleasure working with each of you. Thank you.

## Abstract

The current study attempted to illuminate the patterns of relations between the processes of separation-individuation and identity development in a late adolescent, university sample. A total of 281 undergraduate volunteers participated in the study, each completing the Separation-Individuation Test of Adolescence (SITA), the Ego Identity Process Questionnaire (EIPQ), and a brief demographic survey. Results indicate that there are significant relations between these two processes and that those combinations of separation-individuation variables that are associated with more progress in identity development may differ by the identity task under investigation. Utilizing a stepwise multiple regression, degree of identity exploration was found to be best predicted by the combination of separation anxiety, healthy separation, nurturance seeking, and peer enmeshment components of separation-individuation. Identity commitment was best predicted by a distinctly different combination: practicing mirroring, nurturance seeking, separation anxiety, and dependency denial. Results also indicated that certain components of separation-individuation may have different meaning for men than for women, suggesting the need for ongoing sensitivity to possible gender differences in these developmental processes. Finally, results from the current study are compared with those of earlier investigations.



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The developmental stage of adolescence is unique in that it culminates the childhood years and experiences that have already been, and provides a more proximal foundation for the adult challenges that are still to come. While several crucial tasks emerge during these transitional years, the process of adolescent individuation is of particular importance for at least two reasons: a) the challenge of negotiating a balance between closeness and separateness (establishing individuation) is relevant to a number of additional changes characteristic of this lifestage, and b) sufficient individuation would seem critical to success in future endeavors, such as identity development and interpersonal intimacy.

Although most will likely associate the term individuation with the developmental theory of Margaret Mahler (see Mahler, Pine, & Bergman, 1975), both theoretical and empirical work are provided in this review to expand the construct of individuation into the developmental stage of adolescence. As will be demonstrated, rather than suggesting total separation between parents and adolescents, individuation has been and continues to be characterized by individual separateness within the context of ongoing interpersonal connection between them. In addition to this general foundation, research that illuminates the relevance of individuation to areas such as social and abnormal psychology has also been incorporated. The goal of these efforts is to highlight for the reader the significance of this developmental process in its own right, as well as its direct relevance to other areas of concurrent and future psychological well-being and adjustment.

## Developmental Contributions

### *Psychoanalytic Theories*

The process of separation-individuation, originally derived from the psychoanalytic theory of Margaret Mahler, is one through which the individual becomes able to distinguish between the self and the other and develops a unique identity (Summers, 1994). While Mahler's theory emphasized the childhood sequence and manifestations of this process, later theorists such as Peter Blos (1967) have proposed a second individuation during adolescence. Although Mahler and Blos have applied the concept of separation-individuation to different development epochs, both have suggested that relinquishing parental ties — external for Mahler, internal for Blos — is a necessary condition for psychological adjustment.

As described by Greenberg and Mitchell (1983), Mahler's theoretical paradigm dethroned Freud's Oedipal resolution as the sine qua non of successful development and proposed a sequence of interpersonal stages through which children establish identities independent of their caregivers and experience their "psychological birth." She has emphasized synchrony between the child's expressed needs and the caregiver's response and has suggested that the unsuccessful negotiation or resolution of these stages can be observed in later psychopathology.

Mahler (1968; Mahler, Pine, & Bergman, 1975) has delineated the stages of the separation-individuation process and their developmental precursors, the normal autistic and symbiotic phases. During the first few weeks following their physical birth, a period that Mahler defines as the normal autistic phase, infants remain relatively disinterested in the external world and attempt to achieve homeostasis over the variations in internal,

physiological stimulation. As infants progress into the symbiotic phase, an awareness of the external agents fulfilling these homeostatic needs emerges. Rather than recognizing these caregivers as separate entities, however, infants during the symbiotic phase view themselves and their caregivers as a fused system in which needs are voiced and met. Following these two phases of undifferentiation, infants enter into the separation-individuation phase of development and gradually come to understand their separateness from their caregivers.

Mahler (1972b) has further subdivided the phase of separation-individuation into four subphases based on her observations of distinct behavioral milestones occurring during this period. During the first subphase, differentiation, the infant “hatches” from the symbiotic union with the caregiver (Mahler, 1972a). Activities during this period, from four to approximately seven months, reflect the infants’ growing interest in visually and tactilely exploring both the features of their caregivers and their surroundings. With the development of locomotor abilities, the child is able to continue this exploration, independent of the caregiver, during the practicing subphase of separation-individuation. As the child ventures off to test out and master newly discovered abilities, however, frequent checking-in behavior with the parent occurs as a means of “emotional refueling” (Mahler et al., 1975). From approximately the age of fifteen months through the second year, the previously “invincible” toddlers begin to recognize their smallness and vulnerability in the world and display ambivalence toward the separateness achieved from their caregivers. During this rapprochement subphase, the toddler’s cycles of clinging and distancing behaviors reflect what Mahler et al. describe as the conflicting desires for merger and autonomy.

Successful negotiation of the previous three subphases of separation-individuation facilitates the establishment of an independent identity and a “meaningful bond that is not threatened by merger, or the obliteration of self-object boundaries” (Summers, 1994, p. 30). These milestones represent the developmental tasks associated with Mahler’s (Mahler et al., 1975) final subphase of separation-individuation, object constancy, which begins at approximately age three and continues throughout the lifespan. With regard to establishing identity, the development of language, fantasy play, and time awareness, allows the young toddler to accumulate information regarding the nature of individual characteristics and to develop a more stable sense of self. In terms of maintaining an emotional bond, the internalization of parental images enables the individual to maintain a stable sense of the other and effectively function outside of parental presence.

Expanding on Mahler’s conceptualization of the childhood process of separation-individuation, Blois (1967) has proposed that the entirety of adolescence constitutes a second individuation process. Whereas the attainment of object constancy constitutes the measure of successful development during childhood, in adolescence, this criterion becomes the “shedding of family dependencies, the loosening of infantile object ties in order to become a member of society at large or, simply, of the adult world” (p. 163). Blois has suggested that this disengagement from internalized parental objects is necessary to successfully secure nonfamilial relationships that do not merely recapitulate earlier parent-child relations.

Many have interpreted Blois’ (1979) work to suggest that adaptive adolescent development necessitates complete disengagement from parental figures. In contrast, Blois and others (see Steinberg, 1990) have emphasized that most of the distancing occurs

on a cognitive and not a behavioral level and that the complete severing of parental ties is neither typical nor required for the individuation process to be successful. Because of the frequent misrepresentation of the individuation process, the phrase *related-separateness* might best describe the optimal outcome of this developmental task. Allen, Hauser, Bell, and O'Connor (1994) have argued that the co-existence of autonomy and relatedness within the parent-adolescent relationship may provide the effective foundation from which individuation can flourish. Steinberg has also presented several findings that suggest not only that parent-adolescent attachment bodes well for psychological well-being, but also that cohesive relations can and should be distinguished from enmeshment.

Because the goal of individuation in adolescence is the establishment of a personal sense of self, distinct from previously internalized parental ideals, the influence of other contexts and individuals in this developmental process is important to consider. In particular, various settings may assist the adolescent by either providing alternative perspectives with which one can personally identify or by providing a supportive environment in which an individual can “try on” a variety of different identities prior to committing to one. It is precisely to these tasks that Erikson spoke when describing the importance of a psychosocial *moratorium* in the adolescent's development (1968). During this transitional period, the individual can experiment with roles until an individualized niche in society has been identified or created.

### *Psychosocial Development*

Erik Erikson (1968) has proposed a series of eight psychosocial “crises” or challenges through which an individual ideally develops a growing sense of cohesiveness. When provided with a sufficiently responsive environment, he has

suggested that development will evolve in a programmatic fashion. In Erikson's formulation, he did not require that an individual successfully complete each stage before moving on to the next, but merely emphasized that unsuccessful or incomplete resolution of an earlier task would interfere with one's negotiation of subsequent challenges.

As an outcome of struggles with the trust/mistrust dialectic, the first stage of psychosocial development, the infant becomes able to gain a sense of stability both in oneself and others. The challenge of autonomy versus shame and doubt emerges in early childhood and presents the toddler with the task of negotiating between conflicting desires of cooperation and self-directed behavior. This stage has particular importance for the later stage of identity development as the struggle provides the individual with the first opportunity to practice independence. Recall from Mahler's formulation that it is approximately during this time that the child begins working toward separation-individuation and, ultimately, achieving object constancy. The ability to internalize a parental image, therefore, has considerable relevance to the ability to function outside of parental presence and, likewise, to exercise the independence characteristic of Erikson's second stage of development. Toward the end of the child's third year, he or she is faced with the challenge of initiative versus guilt through which a sense of direction and purpose is ideally established with a minimum of angst resulting from successful or failed attempts at ousting one's elders. During school-age years the child struggles with the developmental crisis of industry versus inferiority. In this stage, one must learn to balance the competing urges for leadership and compliance. Again, the lasting resolution of this process has important implications for future psychosocial functioning as the child begins to practice cooperative play without succumbing to total conformity.



Erikson (1968) has emphasized the importance of each of these preceding stages for successful negotiation of his fifth crisis, identity versus identity confusion. In addition, this fifth stage owns perhaps a special place of recognition as it lends considerable influence to the remaining stages of adult development. It is during the stage of identity development that the adolescent requires a “moratorium for the integration of the identity elements ascribed . . . to the childhood stages” (p. 128). Through the establishment of an identity, then, the adolescent consolidates and/or replaces earlier childhood identifications. The adolescent, with the increased capacity for self-reflection, is able to evaluate him- or herself in terms of societal norms and expectations and thereby embark on a realistic journey toward future goals that are consistent with one’s sense of self.

By establishing a coherent sense of one’s self, the adolescent becomes better prepared to negotiate the next stage of psychosocial development, intimacy versus isolation. The formation of a stable identity is critical for successful intimacy according to Erikson (1968), as this sixth stage will require not only some capacity for evaluating compatibility but also a certain degree of merger with another individual. If the adolescent has emerged from the identity crisis with an inadequate sense of personal identity, any opportunity for merger will likely prompt heightened levels of anxiety about the potential for losing all sense of oneself. Often, to avoid this fear of engulfment, young adults may tend toward an extreme of interpersonal and/or emotional isolation. The two final stages of Erikson’s psychosocial theory of development span the middle and late adulthood years. He has suggested that these latter stages represent an additional form of identity crisis as the adult, with increased sense of finiteness, realizes “I am what

survives of me” (p. 141). During the seventh stage, generativity versus stagnation, the adult seeks to pass on the wisdom gained through his or her life experiences. Attempts to leave an imprint on future generations can be seen in increased motivation toward raising a family or in one’s commitment to a career of choice. Finally, as older adults reach the end of their lifespan they are challenged by the task of integrity versus despair. In this highly reflective developmental stage, one must ideally reach a degree of acceptance for what one has and has not accomplished during one’s lifetime.

### *Cognitive Development*

The attainment of specific cognitive abilities also has considerable influence on the individuation process. Jean Piaget has outlined a theory of cognitive development that follows the course of four sequential stages (Muuss, 1988). He has proposed three childhood stages, sensorimotor, preoperational, and concrete operational, and one stage typically reserved for late childhood/adolescence years and older. It is the latter stage, formal operations, that has most direct relevance to those tasks required for the successful separation-individuation process of adolescence. Specifically, the mental operations and cognitive sophistication gained by adolescence provide the necessary foundation from which the adolescent can attempt to establish a unique sense of self in relation to those around him or her.

One of the most notable accomplishments of the formal operational stage of cognitive development is the capacity for hypothetical reasoning. Unlike earlier years, the adolescent is no longer forced to consider solutions to only concrete or tangible problems. Nor is the adolescent limited to only extant solutions. Rather, formal operational thinking includes the ability to consider not just what *is*, but what *could be*. Incorporating both

creativity and abstract thinking, adolescents are able to both consider any number of possibilities and test the accurateness or likelihood of their assumptions. These mental operations are critical to both the separation-individuation and identity development processes. The capacity for abstract thinking not only allows adolescents to evaluate the reasonableness of existing assumptions or rules, either at home or school, but also provides them with the tools to develop new and unique ideas. Through the establishment of a personalized ideology, an individual is better able to observe similarity and contrast with others' perspectives (a component of separation-individuation) and gain a greater sense of a coherent and integrated self (identity achievement). These changes reflect normative and adaptive development but may often be reflected in temporary increases of conflict, particularly within the family setting, as the adolescent attempts to challenge the status quo in an effort to establish him or herself as an autonomous individual with a distinct set of opinions and ideals.

### Interpersonal and Social Influences

#### *Family*

In addition to the aforementioned intrapsychic processes, several interpersonal and social contexts have the potential to significantly impact the individuation process. Influenced by some of his early investigations of adolescent development, G. Stanley Hall (1904) provided the psychological community with the "storm and stress" image of adolescence, characterized by increased parental conflict, mood disruptions, and risk behaviors (Arnett, 2001). Although adolescence may be a time during which family relations undergo some distinct changes, these experiences do not generally appear to be as disruptive as previously suggested by Hall. The influence of cultural factors on the

tasks and expressions of adolescent development does, however, warrant brief mention. Comparative studies across cultures have indicated a considerable degree of variation in the level of distress associated with those changes of adolescence, with traditional, non-Western cultures evidencing less disruption (Arnett, 1999). Of particular importance appears to be the relative emphasis on individualism within the specific culture. Steinberg (1987) has suggested that much of the notable disruption characteristic of adolescent development in Western cultures may result from the adolescent's attempts to fulfill the "societal call" for autonomous functioning and parents' attempts to mete out that autonomy in reasonable doses. In cultures characterized more by interdependent relationships then, the tasks of adolescence may differ, whereby the striving for independence and the resulting increases in conflict would not be valid descriptors or indicators of the stage of adolescence. In this sense, the nature of the adolescent experience or process can vary significantly across cultures, depending upon differences in societal expectations, even though the onset of this lifestage remains approximately the same and tied to the biological event of puberty.

Offer and Schonert-Reichl (1992) have suggested that the myth of turbulent adolescent development was likely propagated by clinicians who worked primarily with either disturbed adolescents or disturbed adults recalling traumatic childhoods. They have further clarified that an increase in studies of nonclinical samples of adolescents demonstrates that only a small minority of adolescents have a turbulent experience. Although some research has indicated that the degree of closeness between parents and their adolescents decreases during adolescence and that the overall level of conflict tends to increase, Rice and Mulkeen (1995) have pointed out these findings may in part be

artificial. Specifically, they have noted that many studies have relied on cross-sectional data, which have not allowed for continuous examination of the developmental course of intimacy and conflict. In their longitudinal study of intimacy between adolescents and their family and friends, Rice and Mulkeen, for example, found an *increase* in parental intimacy over the course of four years. Likewise, Steinberg (1990) has reported that a large proportion of families continue to report generally positive interactions over the adolescent years.

Despite overall pleasant family relations, does conflict play a unique role in the process of adolescent development? Steinberg (1990) has summarized analytic writings on the nature and function of the parent-child relationship during this developmental stage, which suggest that increased conflict reflects the adolescent's internal push for a separate sense of self and is a *necessary condition* for the individuation process to progress. He goes on to describe the positive aspects or functions of parent-adolescent conflict, which include an increased likelihood that adolescents will spend more time outside of the family and the adolescent's heightened awareness of parental fallibility. With regard to the former, referred to as the *distancing hypothesis*, Steinberg has emphasized the evolutionary value of decreased *physical* closeness between parents and their adolescent children. Movement outside of the family of origin for intimate relationships and mate selection while retaining some ties to parents has direct implication for the robustness of one's lineage. Steinberg (1987) has reported findings from primate research that support this general physical trend away from the family – a trend that may be generalizable to other species. Although the specific pattern may vary, he has presented research noting a time of pubertal emigration among the vast majority of

group-living nonhuman primates (Steinberg, 1989). As discussed previously, however, related research reveals increased *emotional* closeness during adolescence between children, male and female, and their mothers (Rice & Mulkeen, 1995). Drawing from evolutionary research, Steinberg (1989) has again noted cross-species similarities for this finding. While most non-human primates demonstrate increased distance from the family group at the time of puberty, he has noted chimpanzee research that reflects a lifelong bond and closeness between mothers and their offspring. Combined, these findings again allude to the delicate balance of closeness and separateness that must be achieved during this lifestage.

A second positive aspect of parent-adolescent conflict described by Steinberg (1990) is the adolescent's resulting awareness of parental fallibility, a realization that may facilitate the individuation process. As previously mentioned, both Blos (1979) and Steinberg have emphasized that most of the distancing during adolescence occurs on a cognitive level. By experiencing some degree of de-idealization, the adolescent may be able to better gain some mental "distance" from parents and form a more realistic and autonomous opinion about them. With an increased awareness of imperfections, adolescents become less inclined to blindly accept parental edicts and develop a more questioning stance toward ideas that would have previously gone unchallenged. Although frustrating at times for parents, this becomes an important life skill for the adolescent to develop as it has direct impact on later autonomous functioning. As emphasized by Cooper (1988; cited in Steinberg, 1990), parent-child disagreement can be beneficial to the adolescent's psychosocial development if it occurs within a cohesive and supportive relationship.

Some research indicates that the degree of family conflict increases during adolescence, but that many of these disagreements center around relatively trivial issues such as privileges, extracurricular activities, and curfews (Arnett, 2001). In their longitudinal study of parent-adolescent conflict, for example, Galambos and Almeida (1992) administered a self-report questionnaire on four occasions to assess areas of disagreement and the manner in which the disagreement was handled. Five general areas of conflict were identified – chores, appearance, politeness, finances, and substance use. For all participants (mothers, fathers, and adolescents), the greatest area of conflict irrespective of time of measurement was household chores. Collins (1990) has also reported findings that support the impression that many of the conflictual exchanges in adolescence tend to be provoked by everyday issues (e.g. household chores, personal appearance).

In attempts to better understand increases in parent-adolescent conflict, several authors (e.g. Eccles et al., 1993; Paikoff & Brooks-Gunn) have revisited Smetana's (1988a, 1988b) perspective that with the capacity to challenge and test assumptions, the adolescent becomes much more questioning of those issues that fall under the personal versus conventional domain. He or she may begin to challenge the reasonableness that certain domains, such as room cleaning or body piercings, should fall within the jurisdiction of social mores or convention and may argue that these are more appropriately understood as ways in which one can express oneself freely and exert personal choice. As Arnett (1999) has proposed, however, many of these seemingly "trivial" arguments may actually be a substitute for parents directly expressing concerns about more serious, underlying issues (e.g. risky sexual behaviors, substance use). The

adolescent, armed with an increased capacity for logical and hypothetical thinking, may become so frustrated by restrictions that do not seem to fit with the issue under discussion that he or she may decide to rebel against the seemingly irrational logic presented by the parents. If Arnett is correct in suggesting that parents may be often uncomfortable addressing the larger issue at hand and focus on a related, but more trivial, substitute, then it is quite possible that the resultant reasoning comes across to the adolescent as quite irrational and unreasonable. With professional assistance or support, perhaps parents might become more comfortable discussing sensitive or poignant issues with their children, and can thereby foster an environment of improved communication and increased negotiation. Establishing and/or maintaining this type of environment could have extensive benefits as research indicates that there continues to be a great deal of agreement between parents and adolescences on key issues of education, work ethic, and value-systems.

In search of explanations for increased parent-adolescent conflict, Paikoff and Brooks-Gunn (1991) have also presented Selman's (1980) proposal that a greater capacity for perspective-taking elicits an increased desire for discussion and compromise in the adolescent. In their two-year longitudinal study, Eccles et al. (1993) found that adolescents endorsed an increasingly greater desire for participation in family decision-making and that a mismatch between the desired and available levels of participation was related to negative outcomes in both measures of psychological well-being and school motivation. Results such as these have been used to support the importance of good stage-environment fit. Specifically, Eccles and her colleagues have argued that optimal development is most likely to take place within settings where there is maximal



congruence between the needs of the individual and the opportunities offered by the environment. Although the above findings relate specifically to interactions within the family, this stage-environment model has also received considerable support in the school setting as will be discussed in later sections

As several authors have pointed out (e.g. Paikoff & Brooks-Gunn, 1991; Rice & Mulkeen, 1995), very little longitudinal research has been conducted regarding interpersonal changes during the adolescent development process. Most research to date has relied on cross-sectional designs and self-report methodology. With regard to the latter concern, Offer and Schonert-Reichl (1992) have reviewed a number of studies that suggest the self-report of an adolescent to be quite accurate and reliable. Referring specifically to the area of parent-adolescent conflict, Eccles (1993) has reported consistency in findings across both observational and self-report studies. To address the limitation of cross-sectional interpretations in adolescent research, investigators have more recently begun to pursue well-designed longitudinal studies. Conger and Ge (1999) have attempted to address some of these methodological limitations and to address some of the inconsistencies in previous findings through their investigation of changes in parent-adolescent interactions. Utilizing both observational and self-report measures within a longitudinal design, these authors assessed changes in levels of conflict/hostility and cohesion/warmth/supportiveness over the course of three years. Although their findings revealed an increase in levels of conflict and hostility and decreased cohesiveness and warmth over time, these changes occurred much more gradually than would be suggested by the historical “storm and stress” perspective of adolescence.

In contrast to the frequently cited “detachment model” of adolescent development, Steinberg (1990) has described several alternatives that de-emphasize the strife and conflict previously attributed to the process of individuation. An alternative that is especially salient to the present discussion characterizes the changes of this developmental period as indicative of a move toward an *interdependent relationship* in which the adolescent remains engaged with the family, but retains individuality. If the ties between parent and child are severed at this critical time then this developmental process comes to a halt and the opportunities to engage in and practice the skills of negotiation and compromise within the family are hindered. Because the family is often the “testing ground” for many newly learned skills and these skills are then later applied in other relationships or contexts, it is not difficult to anticipate the negative impact of this developmental arrest on psychosocial functioning.

As suggested in the preceding paragraphs, increased parent-child distance and conflict during adolescence are likely due to a combination of biological, cognitive, and psychological factors. Although this period of time can be uncomfortable for everyone involved, these “growing pains” are actually a positive sign and indicative of healthy and normative development. The long-term benefit of a temporary surge in familial discontent is that the phenomenon sets the stage for adolescents to develop the levels of autonomy and self-sufficiency that will ideally secure their success in adulthood.

### *School*

The school setting is another context primed for adolescent socialization, of which individuation plays an important role. The information covered and the potential for increased use of discussion in high school courses creates opportunities to contemplate

issues and ideas that may have only just acquired a personal relevance to adolescents. Again, with the achievement of formal operational thought, the adolescent is able to consider and challenge the weightier issues, such as politics and religion. Because the school environment often offers increased diversity when compared to the family context, the adolescent may be exposed during these experiences to opinions or beliefs that differ with those to which his or her family subscribes. In this sense, the school context could ideally facilitate the process of individuation by providing the adolescent with a safe context in which to challenge and think critically about both the practical and philosophical issues in life.

Entwisle (1990) has summarized relevant research on the social and organizational characteristics of the school setting, providing a social ecology approach to understanding influences on adolescent development. Of particular importance for the individuation process appears to be teacher characteristics and the general classroom environment. While teacher attitudes and behaviors have obvious potential impact on an individual's academic achievement, a less direct and/or obvious influence is on those elusive qualities that foster autonomous functioning. Here I am speaking to those qualities, such as creativity and self-direction, which Entwisle has identified in her review. Unable to be directly taught from a lesson plan, these crucial pieces of cognitive development are facilitated within a climate of exploration and creativity. Within this type of setting, our educators have the important opportunity to facilitate the adolescent's drive toward individuation by encouraging a questioning stance toward knowledge-seeking and the opportunity for independent problem-solving.

As Eccles et al. (1993) have discovered, however, there is frequently a poor fit between the developmental needs of the adolescent and those opportunities provided in the school setting. They have reported longitudinal findings that indicate a number of negative outcomes that can result from a poor stage-environment fit in the academic setting, including decreased motivation and personal expectations. A finding of particular concern, and one directly relevant to the process of individuation and identity development, is that opportunities for participation in classroom decision-making activities appeared to decline precisely at the developmental juncture where adolescents begin striving for increased autonomy. In light of these findings Eccles and her colleagues have advocated for an optimally supportive and demanding environment in which the adolescent can master newly acquired abilities while remaining compelled to face increasingly complex challenges. Recall that Erikson (1968) made the same argument regarding family interactions as a means to continuously stimulate the onward progression of development. These findings only further support the importance in more clearly and comprehensively understanding the nature of adolescent development. When caretakers and professionals establish a greater working knowledge about the specific tasks, challenges, and changes associated with this lifestage, they can be better equipped to provide a maximally facilitative environment.

Through increased exposure to diverse opinions in the school context, the adolescent may be more inclined to invite discussion among members in his or her family of origin. As the introduction of alternative ideas may throw off the earlier balance felt within the family system, increased conflict has the potential to arise. Eccles et al (1993) have also pointed out that the social context of the adolescent's school setting provides

for increased exposure to relationships more equal in terms of power and authority. They have suggested that following this exposure, adolescents may seek to restructure family relations in a similar way, advocating for increased democracy. As everyone struggles to accommodate the changes, the home environment may appear to an outsider as temporarily more chaotic; however this conflict may reflect positive and adaptive movement within the individuation process. In a sense, a quiet adolescent household may suggest a rupture in normal developmental phenomena.

A notable trend has occurred in America within the last two centuries. During this time frame there has been a general increase in the school attendance of adolescents, which has corresponded to a general decrease in labor work for the family (Arnett, 2001). Although it seems overly simplistic to attribute a direct causal link between increased schooling and individuation, it is worth acknowledging the influence of the sociopolitical context on behavioral acceptance. With the rise of schooling, adolescents were encouraged to challenge their minds and to develop new ideas – a push that physically moves the developing teen away from the family for a set amount of time and one that unavoidably increases one's sense of distinctiveness.

Trends such as this have led some to question the legitimacy of adolescence as a distinct period requiring a moratorium of soul-searching or identity formation. As Offer and Schonert-Reichl (1992) have pointed out, the period of adolescence has historically been quite influenced by the sociopolitical context of the time. Specifically, they have reviewed and compared findings between periods of economic hardship and wartimes. During the former times, when the economy suffered and employment was scarce, theories emphasized the immaturity of adolescents and advocated for an extended time

during which they could fully develop themselves emotionally and academically through the school system. Contrast this, however, with the hardy and competent view of adolescents that has emerged during times of war when soldiers were recruited and job openings left unfilled. Modell and Goodman (1990) have also spoken to the idea of adolescence as socially constructed by the needs of a changing society. With the rise of industrialization, they have described the related decreases in farming opportunities and parents' attempts to encourage education in hopes that their children might become qualified for a profession. While a social deconstruction of adolescence is beyond the scope of the current review, socio-political influences are important to consider when one speaks to developmental tasks such as individuation, independence, or identity development.

### *Peers*

During adolescence, there is a general shift from familial to peer support (Arnett, 2001). The oft referred to "generation gap" does not, however, appear to be a sufficient explanation. As discussed by Brown (1990), parents and their adolescents continue to agree on issues related to religion, politics, and morals. Arnett has also cited research that suggests parents typically remain primary resources for educational and career related questions. In terms of daily companionship or decision-making, however, teens become much more reliant on friends. Even in cross-cultural studies where time spent with family and friends differs, the primacy of the best friend as a confidante remains consistent (Claes, 1998). In addition to their importance in their own right, the influence of parent-child interactions on future interpersonal relationships has been addressed by several researchers. Brown has presented findings that suggest adolescents' relationships with

peers reflect a similar pattern to their family relationships. Arnett has further specified that the degree of attachment one has with parents is related to one's capacity for attachment to friends. Both research endeavors highlight the importance and potential impact of an optimal individuation experience.

Neo-analytic writers such as Sullivan have emphasized the importance of interpersonal relationships, especially in adolescent development (Sullivan, 1970). Sullivan introduced the concept of a "chum" to describe the intimate friendship that serves to further one's psychological growth, particularly through the level of connectedness that facilitates the development of empathy. Savin-Williams and Berndt (1990) have also highlighted Sullivan's discussion of the importance of "chumships" in later romantic relationships. Specifically, it is with one's chum that an adolescent can first practice those skills (e.g. self-disclosure) that will be necessary in future intimate relationships. If one were so inclined, then, a developmental trajectory of influence in relating could be now drawn from parent-child interactions, to peer/friend relationships, to romantic relationships.

Adding to the previous suggestion that unsuccessful individuation within the family may impair one's capacity for peer attachment, a more distal consequence might be observed in one's problems with intimacy. This prediction may sound somewhat familiar as it speaks to the sequential developmental tasks suggested by Erikson (1968). Without successful identity development, of which several researchers (e.g. Allison & Sabatelli, 1988) have suggested the process of individuation to be a significant precursor, one should anticipate later difficulties in the young adult's psychosocial crisis of intimacy versus isolation. Recall that in Erikson's formulation he did not require that an individual

successfully complete each stage before moving on to the next, but merely emphasized that unsuccessful or incomplete resolution would interfere with one's negotiation of subsequent challenges.

Supplementing the aforementioned findings regarding the benefits of peer relations, Brown (1990) has presented several possible explanations for the increased attention to and need for the peer group during the adolescent period. One of these identifies the peer group as a temporary "weigh-station" on the adolescent's journey to full psychological autonomy. Recall that during this time the adolescent has begun to engage in cognitive distancing from parents in an effort to establish a unique sense of self who can be related to, but distinct from the family unit. Elkind (as cited in Lapsley, FitzGerald, Rice, & Jackson, 1989) has suggested in his research on the phenomena of the imaginary audience and personal fable that this transition away from the idealization of the parents can be extremely traumatic for the adolescent. He has gone on to describe the restorative functions of the imaginary audience (the perception that others are observing and/or evaluating oneself) with regard to this change. With this view of the individuation process, then, it seems reasonable to expect the adolescent would grasp for alternative sources of reinforcement or support. The peer group is perhaps especially appealing due to the shared commiseration of developmental woes.

Brown (1990) has also described an alternative social-cognitive explanation. In line with the theory of Erikson and others, this perspective emphasizes the utility of the peer group in assisting adolescents in their psychological development. As these individuals test out belief-systems and ideas in an effort to establish a unique identity within the family or society in general, they seek out groups that will foster and support



their efforts at exploration. As discussed in the following section, these groups may frequently emerge in response to an adolescent's personal interests.

### *Work and Leisure Activities*

For better or worse, extracurricular activities exert influence on the adolescent's attempt to negotiate a balance between a sense of connectedness and a unique sense of self, or identity. Arnett (2001) has summarized some research that identifies "crowds" commonly found within the American high school setting. Some of these categories, including jocks, nerds, and headbangers, are directly reflective of the leisure activities that unify the individuals. Through these social groupings, an individual is able to establish a more narrowly defined identity within the larger social structure of the school setting. By identifying with one or more subsets within the crowd, also known as "cliques," the adolescent can further solidify a sense of belonging. As Brown and Lohr (1987) have discovered, however, crowd or group affiliation is not always beneficial to an individual's self-esteem. In their study of junior and high school students, these authors utilized a combination of sociometric and self-report techniques to determine which crowds were present, who was classified into the various crowds, and how one's extent of identification with a particular crowd was related to measures of self-esteem, sense of affiliation, importance of group membership, and satisfaction with one's position within the group. An important finding, and one that bears relevance to the goodness of fit perspective that has been proposed by Eccles et al. (1993) in the contexts of home and school, was the presence of variations within group subsamples. That is, level of self-esteem was not predicted simply by whether one was a member or an outsider of a group. Rather, self-esteem was more complexly related to the congruence (or incongruence)

between one's actual and desired position within the group. As emphasized by Brown and Lohr, group affiliation can be instrumental in adolescent individuation and identity development, but only insofar as the group is sufficiently responsive to the needs of the adolescent.

Fine, Mortimer, and Roberts (1990) have identified leisure activities as the second most frequent social institution of adolescents, with school being at the top of the list. These authors have also cited research that suggests "leisure activities allow adolescents to deal with the challenges of aggression and sexuality or to come to terms with both the desire for group membership and the need for solitude" (p. 229). Survey research has revealed that adolescents frequently list several preferred activities, some of which naturally require the participation of others (e.g. group sports) and others where independent participation is more typical (e.g. resting or fantasy). The finding that most adolescents prefer to sample from both group and individual activities supports further the premise put forth by Blos (1979) and others that a typical and adaptive solution of the individuation process is a balance between connectedness and separateness. Fine et al. have also pointed toward the adaptive nature of leisure activities in preparing adolescents for adult life. Not only does leisure allow for the experience and working through of difficult emotional experiences as suggested in the quotation above, but leisure also provides the opportunity for the adolescent to structure and schedule his or her own time – a skill that becomes critical in the workforce.

Outside of the somewhat contrived environment of school, Fine et al. (1990) have presented research that argues that work activities allow adolescents to develop an understanding about the importance in areas such as timely task completion and

following directions in a real-world, practical setting. Unfortunately, while employment can exert powerful influences on developmental progress in the area of career planning and workplace behavior, it can also reduce the amount of time available to the adolescent for interactions in other contexts (e.g. family and friends). A work-related identity is, indeed, a crucial piece of the developmental picture but other components of one's identity must be given the opportunity for discovery and expression.

Although employment may allow the adolescent to develop an independence from the family, it is important to reconsider that the adaptive outcome of the individuation process is a position in the middle-ground of a relatedness continuum. Over-involvement in the work setting may not allow the adolescent sufficient opportunity to negotiate this balance and, out of frustration and/or limited foreseeable options, he or she may opt for identification as an employee to the exclusion of roles in other, equally important, contexts. Some efforts are made to restrict the number of hours a minor should be expected or allowed to work, and I believe this practice, if monitored carefully, could facilitate the psychosocial tasks of adolescence and thereby minimize later maladaptive adulthood sequelae.

### Individuation and Psychological Adjustment

As detailed throughout the preceding section, several social and interpersonal experiences have the potential to exert considerable impact on the individuation process. To better illuminate the importance that these experiences fit with the developmental needs of the adolescent, providing the necessary components to facilitate a successful individuation, a review of how individuation relates to general psychological well-being is presented.

Within the last several decades a fair amount of empirical research has attempted to clarify the components of separation-individuation and to examine their differential relations to psychological adjustment. Levine and his colleagues developed (Levine, Green, & Millon, 1986) and later revised (Levine & Saintonge, 1993) the Separation-Individuation Test of Adolescence (SITA). The current version of this measure consists of nine subscales designed to capture “specific resolutions of Mahler’s separation-individuation phases as they might express themselves during later developmental periods” (Levine et al., 1986, p. 124). The Engulfment Anxiety subscale measures the extent to which respondents are fearful of intimate relationships because of their potential to overwhelm them or restrict their autonomous functioning. Practicing-Mirroring describes the respondent’s level of narcissism, reflected in part by an excessive need for feedback or reinforcement from others. The Dependency Denial subscale assesses the degree to which individuals deny dependency needs perhaps, as suggested by Levine et al. (1986), to defend against fears of separation. Separation Anxiety measures the relative presence of fear concerning the loss, emotional or physical, of a significant other. Originally combined within a general Enmeshment Seeking subscale, Levine and Saintonge separated out Teacher and Peer Enmeshment subscales in their 1993 revision. These two subscales are designed to assess individuals’ attempts to secure intense relationships with teachers and peers, respectively. The Nurturance Seeking subscale assesses the desire for these intense, merged relationships with a parental figure or caretaker. Rejection Expectancy measures the extent to which respondents interpret significant others as harsh or indifferent. Finally, Healthy Separation describes those individuals who have successfully resolved separation-individuation conflicts and who

are able to negotiate a comfortable balance in the level of closeness of their interpersonal relationships.

Holmbeck and Leake (1999), comparing high and low scorers on the subscales of the SITA, found significant differences between groups and their scores on the validity and clinical scales of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI and MMPI-2). In addition, the authors found that those SITA subscales indicative of unsuccessful separation-individuation were more highly associated with elevations on the MMPI and MMPI-2 scales than were subscales typically associated with positive adjustment.

Borrowing from the tasks of the separation-individuation process in childhood, Hoffman (1984) has also attempted to delineate adolescent parallels and has developed the Psychological Separation Inventory (PSI) to that end. This measure classifies independence from parents into four categories: attitudinal, functional, emotional, and conflictual. Both Hoffman and Lapsley, Rice, and Shadid (1989) have found general support for the hypothesis that psychological separation is related to psychological adjustment; however, variations in this relationship were noted. Hoffman discovered that while increased emotional independence from both parents was related to better academic adjustment, it was conflictual independence — freedom from guilt, anxiety, and anger in relation to parents — that related to adjustment in love relationships. Attitudinal independence was also negatively related to personal adjustment in both men and women and negatively related to adjustment in love relationships for men. Other sex differences emerged and suggest that for men and women the interaction between the form of

independence and the parent from whom this independence is achieved may differentially relate to various forms of adjustment.

Lapsley et al. (1989) examined the relations between psychological separation and adjustment with a cross-sectional sample of freshman and upperclassmen and found differences between the types of dependencies reported by the two age groups, with upperclassmen reporting significantly greater conflictual dependencies. Results also indicated that functional, emotional, and conflictual independence from both parents were predictive of personal-emotional adjustment in upperclassmen, but that functional and emotional independence from mother and conflictual independence from father predicted this adjustment among freshmen. Similar to Hoffman's findings (1984), these results also support the suggestion that source and type of independence differ in their relations to forms of adjustment. In general, women in this study reported greater dependencies on parents but no sex differences between psychological separation emerged, suggesting that at least for women greater dependencies do not necessitate maladjustment.

The phenomenon of adolescent egocentrism, in which the individual is unable to accurately identify the object of another's attention, has also been explored in relation to the psychosocial tasks of separation-individuation (Lapsley, FitzGerald, Rice, and Jackson, 1989; Vartanian, 1997). The two components of adolescent egocentrism, Imaginary Audience (IA) and Personal Fable (PF), have been proposed as temporary means by which the adolescent can compensate for the loss of self-esteem associated with relinquishing internal parental representations. Vartanian has suggested that IA, the tendency to view the self as the center of attention, aids the adolescent in maintaining a sense of connection with others while attempting to separate from parents. In contrast,

PF, the view of oneself as unique and omnipotent, is believed to buffer against the felt loss of interpersonal ties. Both Lapsley et al. and Vartanian found that among their middle- and high-school samples IA correlated positively with those SITA subscales reflecting relational concerns (e.g., engulfment, separation anxiety). PF correlated negatively with some of these relational subscales and positively with both the need denial and self-centeredness subscales. Sex differences indicated greater PF, need denial, and self-centeredness among men and elevations on relational subscales for women. Going beyond the direct relationship between adolescent egocentrism and separation-individuation, Vartanian also explored the contribution of perceived social support and found that less support was associated with greater IA. In a comparison of sources of social support, parental support related to more areas of separation-individuation than did support from other sources. These results support Blois' (1979) and others' assertion that total dissolution of parental ties impairs adolescent individuation and highlights the adaptive functions served by parental support and attachment in this process.

Research employing the construct of autonomy has also identified the importance of parental support in the successful negotiation of the individuation process. Ryan and Lynch (1989) have suggested that what has previously been termed emotional autonomy would be better described as emotional detachment and may reflect an adolescent's response to a rejecting and unsupportive parental environment. Conceptualized in the manner, these authors hypothesized that emotional autonomy would be negatively related to both parent attachment and separation-individuation. Utilizing the Emotional Autonomy Scale (EA; Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986), results confirmed these hypotheses. The authors found that EA was negatively related to parental security, acceptance, and

utilization and that high scores on the EA-individuation subscale were inversely related to scores on another index of separation-individuation, suggesting a psychological distinction between interpersonal autonomy and detachment. Fuhrman and Holmbeck (1995) have more recently indicated that EA may serve an adaptive function for those adolescents who experience little parental warmth or high parental conflict, with higher levels of EA among these individuals corresponding with better adjustment. Likewise, comparisons of ethnic and socioeconomic groups indicated that the adaptiveness of EA might vary as a function of these demographics.

As articulated by Allen, Hauser, Bell, and O'Connor (1994), research continues to provide evidence that the co-existence of autonomy and relatedness within the parent-adolescent relationship may provide the effective foundation from which individuation can flourish. Utilizing a longitudinal design, these authors found consistent positive relations between adolescent autonomous-relatedness behavior, ego development, and self-esteem. Additionally, results indicated that fathers' autonomous-relatedness behaviors toward adolescents were highly predictive of ego development. Other research has also revealed the positive relationship between adaptive forms of attachment and adjustment during adolescence (Quintana & Kerr, 1993; Rice, FitzGerald, Whaley, & Gibbs, 1995) and has indicated that continued dependencies on parents do not preclude academic and emotional well-being. As McClanahan and Holmbeck (1992) have reported, individuals with high scores on indices of attachment to both parents tended to have high scores on both healthy-separation and positive adjustment scales and low scores on all measures of negative adjustment. These results and those most recently reported by Boles (1999) strongly suggest that positive relationships or representations of



parents relate to successful psychological differentiation and that these factors may, in turn, correspond with positive adjustment in adolescence.

### Individuation and Identity Development

Because both individuation and identity development have been proposed by theorists to be normal and expected adolescent processes, the manner in which these processes are interrelated and influence one another remains an important consideration. In her discussion of identity development, Harter (1990) has revisited Cooley's concept of the "looking-glass self," suggesting it is through the feedback received by others, including parents, classmates, and friends, that the adolescent gathers important information regarding his or her self-concept. The feedback of others is especially important to this process as it can counterbalance one's subjective distortions. Should the adolescent be disconnected from others, the opportunity for interpersonal attunement and, likewise, external feedback becomes compromised. A sufficient degree of connection to others, therefore, would seem integral to the identity development process. Relatedly, when research has shown that identity formation is "facilitated by individuated family relationship characterized by both separateness. . . and connectedness. . ." (Harter, 1990, p. 382), it becomes easy to anticipate the intimate relations that exist between the establishment of a related-separateness with others through a successful individuation and the outcome of identity development.

Although identity development is a task associated with adolescence, Erikson (1968) has made it a point to emphasize the ongoing influence of earlier crisis resolution on the identity development process. Rather than being a distinct phenomenon, Erikson has proposed that identity confusion can be linked back to disruptions in earlier

developmental stages. If the earlier crises remain unresolved, then their associated conflicts continue to re-emerge in each subsequent stage. Likewise, the degree to which one has successfully navigated through one's identity crisis continues to impact the later psychosocial tasks of adulthood. As Erikson has pointed out, one may not be acutely aware of unresolved identity issues until one attempts the developmental task next in sequence – intimacy with others. At that point, one who has failed to establish a coherent sense of self may fear the consequences of merging with another individual (e.g. losing any sense of separateness).

### *Assessing Identity Development*

Although Erikson recognized that the outcome of identity confusion could be reflected in a variety of ways, including a prolonged moratorium or “repeated impulsive attempts to end the moratorium with sudden choices” (p. 246), it has been primarily the work of Marcia (1966) that has operationalized and elaborated on the possible outcomes of this stage of psychosocial development. Though Erikson outlined many more, Marcia's work has focused on two components of the identity development process: *crisis/exploration* (one's struggle with choosing among available alternatives) and *commitment* (one's personal investment in selected alternative). When combined in various configurations, these two variables have been used to categorize individuals into one of four possible outcomes of the identity resolution: achievement, foreclosure, moratorium, and diffusion. Although Marcia utilized interviewing methods to determine identity status, several self-report measures have been developed to classify individuals in identity statuses. The Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status (OM-EIS) was developed (Adams, Shea, & Fitch, 1979) and revised (Bennion & Adams, 1986; Grotevant &

Adams, 1984) to classify individuals' identity status in both interpersonal (friendship, dating, sex roles, and recreation) and ideological (occupation, politics religion, and philosophical lifestyle) domains. Each identity status is represented by two items for each of the above eight areas. Individuals are then classified according to which status' items for which they have shown the greatest endorsement. More recent efforts to classify identity status by Balistreri, Busch-Rossnagel, and Geisinger (1995) have led to the development of the Ego Identity Process Questionnaire (EIPQ), a measure that utilizes continuous measures of exploration and commitment scores across the ideological and interpersonal domains rather than a categorical approach. Although Balistreri et al. have described a method to classify statuses utilizing a median split of a sample's scores, they point out the added advantage of being able to examine the possibility of statistical effects specific to either exploration or commitment. Initial efforts to explore these separate effects have indicated that for many personality variables (e.g. self-esteem, anxiety, and masculinity) significant relationships emerge with the commitment component and not with exploration.

### *Separation-Individuation and Identity Achievement*

Some efforts to elucidate the relationship between separation-individuation and identity status have been previously attempted by others. Early endeavors (Kroger, 1985) have utilized a projective measure of purported intrapsychic differentiation, the Separation Anxiety Test. Because the measure allows only for classifying individuals into one of three attachment groups (secure, anxious, and detachment), the likelihood that this particular characteristic fully captures one's experience in the process of separation-individuation seems low. This may, in part, account for many of the non-significant

findings from the study. Although the results indicated that identity achievers were more likely to exhibit secure attachment than the other two attachment styles, little support was found for most of the other hypotheses.

Considering alternative explanations for earlier nonsignificant findings between identity status and separation-individuation, Kroger (1995) has more recently employed four scales of the SITA that she believed to address most directly a separation from an internalized object (Separation Anxiety, Engulfment Anxiety, Nurturance Seeking, and Healthy Separation) to examine differences between individuals classified as “developmental” foreclosure and those classified as “firm” foreclosure. “Firm” foreclosure subjects were identified in her study if they were unable to consider changes to their current lifestyle or commitments. In contrast, “developmental” foreclosure individuals expressed an openness to changing in the future if change seemed appropriate at the time. Results indicated that Nurturance Seeking was the only subscale that showed significant differences among the identity statuses, with “firm” foreclosure subjects reporting higher nurturance seeking than “developmental” foreclosure, moratorium, and achieved subjects. No significant differences among the groups were found for the remaining subscales.

### Concluding Remarks

Erikson (1968) and others have addressed the importance of environment in the successful negotiation of the tasks of psychosocial development. He has specifically commented on the need for an adequate amount of guidance as the child develops and has alluded to the interactive process of development in speaking to the challenges that the developing person brings to the environment. In response to the changing needs of the

child, the family is left with the task of providing those experiences to further challenge the child through the development process. Allison and Sabatelli (1988) have more recently emphasized the interactive nature of individual and family development. These authors have stressed that identity is the outcome of successful differentiation and individuation. As with others, Allison and Sabatelli have reiterated the point that adequate individuation does not necessitate a total relinquishing of family ties. Rather, they clarify that a “good enough” individuation will allow the individual to negotiate a comfortable balance between the needs for separateness and connectedness. This capacity to find the balance will theoretically first develop within the family and will then go on to serve as an adaptive template for other interpersonal relationships. Although Kroger (1995) has provided some information regarding the relationship between the tasks of separation-individuation and identity status, this line of inquiry remains relatively uncharted. The present investigation allows for an examination of Kroger’s findings (utilizing a self-report measure of identity instead of an interview format) regarding the differences among the components of identity statuses on the four subscales of the SITA that have been previously examined and an initial inquiry into the relationships between the other five subscales of the SITA and the two components of identity status.

While unresolved or incompletely resolved earlier conflicts of childhood can contribute to difficulty in the identity formation process of adolescence (Erikson, 1968), also relevant to the development of a distinct identity is the ability to negotiate an adaptive balance with earlier ties to caregivers. Developmentally more superior than its preceding process of identification, identity formation requires from the adolescent “selective repudiation and mutual assimilation of childhood identifications and their

absorption into a new configuration” (Erikson, 1968, p. 159). Because the resolution of both processes is relevant to both adolescent and adult adjustment and development, a clearer understanding of how these processes are related and can be facilitated remains an important area of investigation. By better clarifying those experiences that relate to a more successful resolution, one becomes better able to translate these findings into a primary prevention model.

### Hypothesis

In line with the above model, the following hypothesis is posed:

Greater progress in separation-individuation is associated with more progress on two components of identity achievement: exploration and commitment. High scores on the Healthy Separation subscale (reflecting separation-individuation progress) in conjunction with low scores on the remaining SITA subscales, all of which reflect difficulty in separation-individuation, therefore will predict higher exploration and commitment scores on the Ego Identity Process Questionnaire (Balistreri et al., 1995). In light of previous work that suggests the possibility of significant gender differences on specific tasks of separation-individuation (e.g. Gnaulati & Heine, 2001; Quintana & Kerr, 1993), differences among SITA subscales will also be explored.

## CHAPTER 2

### METHOD

#### Participants and Procedure

Participants were 281 undergraduate volunteers (127 men, 154 women) from psychology and management courses in a large public university in the mid-south region of the United States. The age of participants ranged from 18 to 24 years ( $M = 21.07$ ). Independent samples t-tests indicated significant differences between men and women with regard to age with the male sample being slightly older on average than the female sample [(men:  $M = 21.26$ ; women:  $M = 20.92$ );  $t(279) = 2.34, p = .02$ ]. Most participants endorsed a Euro-American heritage (87.5%), with African-American (6.4%), Asian-American (2.1%), Hispanic-American (.4%), and Native-American (.7%) ethnicities also represented. Both introductory and advanced courses were sampled in light of Kroger's (1985) suggestion that upper-level students may be more likely to be identity achievers and because their inclusion would help to enhance the distribution of scores on measures of commitment and exploration. Demographic statistics (see Table A-1) indicated that over 80 percent of the participants were advanced undergraduate students (e.g. either junior or senior status).

All participants completed an Information/Consent Form, providing their signature if they agreed to participate in the study. If participants agreed to participate, they then completed a brief demographic questionnaire, the Separation-Individuation Test of Adolescence, and the Ego Identity Process Questionnaire. These scales were completed in a group setting during a class time selected by their instructors. The presentation of the latter two questionnaires was varied to avoid a possible order effect.

## Measures

*Separation-Individuation Test of Adolescence (SITA)*. The SITA was selected as the measure of progress toward attaining separation-individuation. The SITA consists of 103 Likert-scale items for which participants indicate the extent to which each of the statements is true for them or the extent to which they agree with the statement (1 = Never True/Strongly Disagree; 2 = Hardly Ever True/Generally Disagree; 3 = Sometimes True/Slightly Agree; 4 = Usually True/Generally Agree; 5 = Always True/Strongly Agree). As described by Levine and Saintonge (1993), these items load onto nine subscales designed to reflect various nuances of the separation-individuation process: Engulfment Anxiety (e.g. "Sometimes my parents are so overprotective I feel smothered," "I can't wait for the day that I can live on my own and am free from my parents," "Most parents are overcontrolling and don't really want their children to grow up."), Practicing Mirroring (e.g. "I sometimes feel so powerful that it seems like there is no feat which is too difficult for me to conquer," "Usually when I'm doing something with my friends, I act like a leader," "Considering most of the people I know, I find myself comparatively better off."), Dependency Denial (e.g. "I don't see the point of most warm, affectionate relationships," "I do best when I'm by myself and don't have other people around to bother me," "I don't feel that love has much of a place in my life."), Separation Anxiety (e.g. "Being alone is a very scary idea for me," "Often I don't understand what people want out of a close relationship with me," "I worry about death a lot."), Teacher Enmeshment (e.g. "Sometimes I feel very sad about having to say goodbye to a teacher I really like," "The teacher's opinion of me as a person is very important to me," "With my favorite teacher, I can share some of my most personal fears



and concerns.”), Peer Enmeshment (e.g. “Although my best friend does things I do not like, I still care about him/her a great deal,” “I think about some of my friends when I’m alone because I miss them,” “One of my friends knows me so well I feel he/she can practically read my mind.”), Nurturance Seeking (“I’m quite worried about the possibility of one of my parents dying,” “Sometimes I think how nice it was to be a young child when someone else took care of my needs,” “One of my parents knows me so well they almost always know what I’m thinking.”), Healthy Separation (e.g. “I am friendly with several different types of people,” “Even when I’m very close to another person, I feel I can be myself,” “My friends and I have some common interests and some differences.”), and Rejection Expectancy (e.g. “Sometimes it seems that people really want to hurt me,” “If I told someone about the troubles I have, they would probably not understand,” “My parents seem much more concerned about their own plans than they do about mine.”). In an adolescent sample, ranging from high school to advance college age, Levine and Saintonge have reported internal consistency reliabilities for the SITA subscales, with alpha coefficients ranging from .64 (Healthy Separation) to .88 (Practicing-Mirroring) among a non-clinical population. Kroger and Green (1994) have reported similar internal consistency findings among a college sample and have also found two-year test-retest correlations to range from .33 (Healthy Separation) to .84 (Nurturance Seeking). Alpha coefficients with the current sample reflected a pattern similar to that previously reported and are reported in the Results section.

Levine et al. (1986) also demonstrated criterion-related validity for the SITA among an adolescent sample by examining relations between its subscales and scores on the Millon Adolescent Personality Inventory and finding correlations in the predicted

directions. Partial construct validation for the SITA has been indicated on measures of family functioning (McClanahan & Holmbeck, 1992) and psychological adjustment (Holmbeck & Leake, 1999; McClanahan & Holmbeck, 1992), with some subscales being more highly associated with poor family relationships (e.g. Engulfment Anxiety and Dependency Denial) and psychological maladjustment (e.g. Separation Anxiety).

*The Ego Identity Process Questionnaire (EIPQ).* The Ego Identity Process Questionnaire (EIPQ; Balistreri et al., 1995) reflects qualities of the exploration and commitment components of identity development originally described by Erikson and later popularized by Marcia. The EIPQ consists of 32 items measured on a Likert-scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Slightly Disagree, 4 = Slightly Agree, 5 = Agree, 6 = Strongly Agree) that load onto two subscales: Identity Exploration (e.g. "I have considered adopting different kinds of religious beliefs," "I have engaged in several discussions concerning behaviors involved in dating relationships," "I have evaluated many ways in which I fit into my family structure.") and Identity Commitment (e.g. "I don't expect to change my political principles and ideals," "I have definite views regarding the ways in which men and women should behave," "When I talk to people about religion, I make sure to voice my opinion."). Balistreri et al. reported very good internal consistencies for both commitment and exploration scores among a late adolescent, college sample ( $\alpha = .80$  and  $.86$ , respectively). The authors have reported a significant negative correlation between the two subscales ( $r = -.35$ ,  $p < .05$ ). They have also demonstrated concurrent validity for the EIPQ by comparing its assignment of identity statuses to those based on Marcia's interview method. Agreement between measures was significant, yielding a kappa index of  $.47$  ( $p < .01$ ). Finally, Balistreri et al.

have provided evidence of construct validity for the EIPQ based on its significant relationships with psychological variables. Results showed that individuals in achievement and foreclosure statuses had higher self-esteem than those in moratorium status. Those individuals in achievement status also evidenced more internal locus of controls and had higher masculinity scores than those in the diffusion and moratorium categories.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESULTS

#### Preliminary Analyses

##### *Gender Differences*

Because findings regarding gender differences on dimensions of separation-individuation remain inconclusive in the extant literature, independent samples t-tests were conducted on all nine SITA subscale scores and the two EIPQ subscale scores to explore potential differences in mean scores in the present sample. As the likelihood of significant findings increases with the number of comparisons being made, the Bonferroni adjustment was used for these analyses. This is a statistical technique that controls the overall error rate by dividing the acceptable alpha level by the number of comparisons being made. Because eleven comparisons were made in this case, the p-value for any individual test would need to be less than .005 to be considered significant. Based on this standard, the current analyses revealed significant differences on mean scores between genders on the Dependency Denial, Separation Anxiety, Peer Enmeshment, and Nurturance Seeking subscales (see Table A-2). The men had significantly higher scores on Dependency Denial than did the women, but significantly lower scores on the Separation Anxiety, Peer Enmeshment and Nurturance Seeking subscales than did the women. Examination of data for groups of men and women revealed no major violations of normality and the data appear robust to handle any slight departures. Because age was found to differ between genders and due to the developmental nature of the processes being investigated, the possibility of an age effect was considered. Correlational analyses showed no significant relationships between age

and either dependent variable, although age was related to both Engulfment Anxiety ( $r = -.21, p < .001$ ) and Separation Anxiety ( $r = -.21, p < .001$ ). Correlations among the SITA and EIPQ subscales can be found in Table A-3.

### *Reliability Analysis*

An examination of internal consistency among the SITA subscales was conducted separately for men and women in light of the previously described gender differences. As shown in Table A-4, alpha coefficients showed a very similar pattern to those previously reported by Levine and Saintonge (1993) and Kroger and Green (1994) for both genders, with Practicing Mirroring exhibiting the highest internal consistency (men:  $\alpha = .87$ ; women:  $\alpha = .83$ ) and Healthy Separation the lowest (men:  $\alpha = .61$ ; women:  $\alpha = .56$ ). Although Nunnally (1967) argued that reliabilities of .60 or .50 would be acceptable for measures in early stages of development, Kaplan and Saccuzzo (1997) have provided a more conservative guideline of .70 to .80 for use with this type of measure. Although the alpha levels for the Healthy Separation subscale are lower than these latter indices of acceptable internal consistency, a factor analysis of the subscale reveals several important findings that support its further use for subsequent analyses.

The Healthy Separation subscale consists of only seven items. Because internal consistency is not robust with small numbers of items, it would be rare for the alpha coefficient to be very high in this case. Factor analysis with varimax rotation revealed that this subscale consisted of three factors for the women and two factors for the men. For both men and women, the factor analysis indicated that item 5 of the Healthy Separation subscale (“I enjoy being by myself and with others approximately the same”) loaded very poorly onto the first component. When this item is compared with others that

comprise this subscale, it becomes more apparent that this item is measuring something different than the others that load strongly onto the first extracted component. Some of those items loading onto this first component include “Even when I’m very close to another person, I feel I can be myself,” “Although I’m like my close friends in some ways, we’re also different from each other in other ways,” and “While I like to get along well with my friends, if I disagree with something they’re doing, I usually feel free to say so.” These latter items not only seem to share the general quality of recognizing one’s similarities to and distinctiveness from important others, they also seem more closely in line with what theory proposes a “healthy separation” to be. Finally, when item 5 was removed from the scale and internal consistency re-evaluated, the alpha coefficients demonstrated a moderate improvement for both men and women (men:  $\alpha = .68$ ; women:  $\alpha = .63$ ). This finding supports both the improved link between the measure and the construct of interest and the value of retaining this modified, six-item, subscale in additional analyses.

Other than the Healthy Separation subscale, only one other SITA subscale yielded an unsatisfactory level of reliability. On Nurturance Seeking, a scale that consists of eight items, internal consistency reached only .62 for women and .64 for men. Again, the number of items could have easily contributed to the low alpha levels. Upon closer inspection via factor analysis, however, some interesting trends emerged. For the women, the two items with the lowest loadings were items 55 and 82. In contrast to other items that make up this subscale (e.g. “Sometimes I think how nice it was to be a young child when someone else took care of my needs,” “I feel lonely when I’m away from my parents for any extended period of time,” “I’m quite worried about the possibility of one

of my parents dying”), items 55 and 82 make a direct reference to God and His capacity to care for or guide an individual. For the women, this is apparently a distinctly separate form of nurturance and one that diluted the internal cohesiveness of the subscale among this sample. Among men, however, factor analysis showed that unlike for the women, items that made reference to God loaded strongly onto the first component. In contrast to the case for women, for the group of men it was the three items provided as examples above that loaded most poorly. In addition to those items referencing the care and guidance by God, items such as “One of my parents knows me so well they almost always know what I’m thinking” and “I preferred the younger years of life when I could rely more on my parents for guidance to get along” also had strong loadings. In terms of the Nurturance Seeking subscale, then, modifications to improve the reliability do not seem feasible or appropriate as the items to be removed differ depending on one’s gender group. Therefore, rather than making changes to the scale, the original form was retained for all remaining analyses. The factor analyses, however, suggest that interpretation of any significant findings should take this gender difference into account. Intercorrelations among SITA subscales also reflect some differences between genders (see Table A-5), revealing that the relationships between certain separation-individuation variables may differ in strength (e.g. Engulfment Anxiety and Dependency Denial) and/or direction (e.g. Peer Enmeshment and Engulfment Anxiety) depending on whether males or females are being considered.

### Regression Analyses

To test the hypothesis that more progress in separation-individuation is associated with more progress in identity achievement, a stepwise multiple regression analysis was

conducted. This statistical technique identifies the combination of variables from a set of independent variables that best predicts the variance in the outcome or dependent variable. To determine the best combination of independent variables, the stepwise multiple regression technique first selects the independent variable that explains the most variance in the outcome variable. Subsequent variables are then selected based on the strength of their semi-partial correlation (a measure of the relationship between the independent and dependent variable, controlling for any other variables already in the model) with the outcome variable. Because gender differences in the pattern of relations between separation-individuation variables and identity components were not the focus of the current study, the effects of gender were statistically controlled for by including the gender term in the regression analyses. This procedure removes the potential influence of gender from the dependent variable, thereby increasing sensitivity to the effects of the independent variables. After controlling for gender, the independent variables used to predict identity exploration in the current study were the nine SITA subscales previously described. The same independent variables were entered as predictors in the stepwise multiple regression analysis on identity commitment.

*Identity Exploration.* For prediction of exploration, the stepwise multiple regression analysis identified the combination of Separation Anxiety, Healthy Separation, Nurturance Seeking, and Peer Enmeshment as significant predictor variables, accounting for approximately 20 percent of the exploration scale variance ( $R^2 = .198$ ). The Beta weights associated with these variables (Separation Anxiety: .37; Healthy Separation: .21; Nurturance Seeking: -.22; Peer Enmeshment: .17) indicate that higher levels of Separation Anxiety, Healthy Separation, and Peer Enmeshment and lower levels of



Nurturance Seeking are associated with a greater degree of exploration. The prediction that high Healthy Separation scores combined with low scores on the remaining SITA subscales would be associated with greater identity exploration was, then, partially supported. Unexpected were the findings that greater Separation Anxiety and Peer Enmeshment were also significant predictors of identity exploration when the effects of Healthy Separation and Nurturance Seeking were taken into account. As shown in Table A-6, the t statistics and p-values for the individual independent variables suggest that each is highly significant in predicting one's exploration and should be retained in the final model.

*Identity Commitment.* For prediction of commitment, the stepwise multiple regression analysis identified the combination of Practicing Mirroring, Nurturance Seeking, Separation Anxiety, and Dependency Denial as significant predictor variables, accounting for approximately 20 percent of the exploration scale variance ( $R^2 = .199$ ). The Beta weights associated with these variables (Practicing Mirroring: .17; Nurturance Seeking: .27; Separation Anxiety: -.28; Dependency Denial: -.16) indicate that higher levels of Practicing Mirroring and Nurturance seeking, in combination with lower levels of Separation Anxiety and Dependency Denial were associated with greater degree of commitment. The prediction that low scores on SITA subscales, with the exception on Healthy Separation, would be associated with greater identity commitment was, then, partially supported. Unexpected were the findings that greater Practicing Mirroring and Nurturance Seeking were also significant predictors of identity commitment when the effects of Separation Anxiety and Dependency Denial were taken into account. As shown in Table A-7, the t statistics and p-values for the individual independent variables suggest

that each is highly significant in predicting one's commitment and should be retained in the final model.

In summary, high levels of Healthy Separation and low Nurturance Seeking were associated with more identity exploration, as hypothesized. Unexpectedly, high Separation Anxiety and Peer Enmeshment were also associated with greater identity exploration. Low Separation Anxiety and Dependency Denial were associated with greater identity commitment as originally hypothesized. The high levels of Practicing Mirroring and Nurturance Seeking that also predicted commitment, however, were unanticipated. Notable are the differences in results obtained from zero-order correlational analyses (see Table A-3) and those results from the regression analyses. All SITA subscales that significantly correlated with the identity components did not go on to collaboratively predict identity exploration once the shared variance due to gender was controlled for.

#### Univariate Analyses for Comparisons with Earlier Findings

A secondary goal of this study was to examine the congruence between current findings and those from earlier research utilizing an alternative measure of identity development, and including all SITA subscales. In their early validation studies of the EIPQ, Balistreri et al. (1995) employed a median split of the continuous exploration and commitment scores to permit comparisons with categorical measures of identity status. Because Kroger (1995) used Marcia's Identity Status Interview, which categorizes participants into one of the four identity statuses, the same procedure was utilized to make comparisons in the current study. An examination of central tendencies yielded the median scores for the exploration and commitment scales ( $Mdn = 62$  and  $63$ ,

respectively). Those participants in the current study with an exploration score 62 or greater were placed in the High Exploration group; scores 61 and below were placed in the Low Exploration Group. For identity commitment, scores of 63 or higher were considered High Commitment; scores 62 and below were considered Low Commitment. By concurrently classifying each participant on these two dimensions, four groups reflecting Marcia's (1966) identity statuses were created (Low Exploration/Low Commitment = Diffusion; Low Exploration/High Commitment = Foreclosure; High Exploration/Low Commitment = Moratorium; High Exploration/High Commitment = Achievement). The frequencies of cases found in these groups were: Diffusion,  $N = 65$ ; Foreclosure,  $N = 86$ ; Moratorium,  $N = 81$ ; and Achievement,  $N = 49$ . More than half of the current sample fell in the foreclosure or moratorium groups.

A one-way Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was conducted to compare the four identity groups on the nine SITA subscales and revealed that there were significant differences between groups [ $F(27, 786.26) = 4.1, p < .001$ ]. Significant findings at this global level permitted individual analyses of variance (ANOVAs) on specific SITA subscales. As indicated in Table A-8, these analyses found significant differences between groups on seven of the nine SITA subscales: Practicing Mirroring, Dependency Denial, Separation Anxiety, Peer Enmeshment, Nurturance Seeking, Healthy Separation, and Rejection Expectancy. To further clarify the pattern of these group differences, Tukey post-hoc comparisons were conducted on the mean subscale scores (see Table A-9).

Multiple comparisons indicated that the achievement and foreclosure groups reported significantly more practicing mirroring, peer enmeshment and healthy separation

than the diffusion group. Additionally, the achievement group had significantly greater peer enmeshment and healthy separation than the moratorium group. Both achievement and foreclosure groups had significantly higher scores than the moratorium group on the Nurturance Seeking subscale. The achievement group also endorsed significantly more nurturance seeking than the diffusion group. On the Dependency Denial subscale, both achievement and foreclosure groups had significantly lower scores than the diffusion group. The average score for the achievement group was also significantly lower than that of the moratorium group on this dimension. Comparisons on the Rejection Expectancy subscale revealed two significant differences between groups. The achievement group had significantly lower scores than the moratorium group, and the foreclosure group had significantly lower scores than the diffusion group. Finally, on the Separation Anxiety subscale, the moratorium group had significantly greater scores than the remaining three groups.

In summary, the presence of several significant differences among the identity statuses with regard to progress in the tasks of separation-individuation stands in contrast to those findings previously reported by Kroger (1995). In this study, individuals classified as identity achieved had lower scores on Dependency Denial, Separation Anxiety and Rejection Expectancy, and had the highest scores on Healthy Separation. This group also had the highest levels of Practicing Mirroring, Peer Enmeshment, and Nurturance Seeking of the four identity statuses. Although Kroger only utilized four of the SITA subscales in her study (Separation Anxiety, Engulfment Anxiety, Nurturance Seeking, and Healthy Separation), she did find significant differences between groups on Nurturance Seeking. Her findings with this particular scale, however, also differ from

those of the present study, as in her sample it was the “firm” foreclosure group that had the highest Nurturance Seeking scores and not the identity achievement group.

## CHAPTER 4

### DISCUSSION

As suggested by the identity literature, an adequate balance of one's connection to and distinctiveness from others allows for the capacity to establish an integrated and unique sense of self. Current findings show an association between separation-individuation and two key aspects of identity: exploration and commitment. With regard to the Nurturance Seeking subscale, there appear to be gender differences in the nature or meaning of this dimension. Some dimensions of separation-individuation vary in their relations to identity development depending on the specific task (e.g. exploration vs. commitment) in question, suggesting that what may be facilitative at one point in the process can be contraindicated at another. Differences between the current findings and those from previous research also suggest that cultural factors should be considered to fully understand the psychosocial task of identity formation. Finally, these findings were derived from a late adolescent, college population, the pertinence of which will be specifically discussed.

Results supported the hypothesis that certain aspects of the separation-individuation process in late adolescents are associated with greater progress in the identity development process, as suggested by both Allison and Sabatelli (1988) and Harter (1990). The nature of these associations, however, suggests that the optimal pattern for these components may not be low scores on all dimensions usually regarded as indices of poor separation-individuation. In fact, it was the combination of less nurturance seeking, but more healthy separation, separation anxiety, and peer enmeshment that were included as predictors in the final model for identity exploration.

Both separation anxiety and peer enmeshment have been traditionally regarded as indices of limited progress in separation-individuation. The unanticipated positive associations between practicing mirroring and nurturance seeking and progress in identity commitment again might speak to the potential adaptive influence of what have previously been considered impediments to successful separation-individuation.

Because significant gender differences did emerge on some of the specific components, including Dependency Denial, Separation Anxiety, and Nurturance Seeking, and among SITA subscale intercorrelations, it may be possible that subtle differences exist between the pattern of associations between separation-individuation and identity exploration and commitment. Erikson himself (1982), in his later work, began to consider the possibility of gender differences in the identity development process. Gender was controlled for in the current regression analyses and these differences were not specifically explored; however, future research should examine whether the predictive power of the SITA subscales differ by gender. Likewise, future comparative research on the separation-individuation process should also include an examination of the combination of all factors. If only a select number of components are considered, one group may erroneously appear behind on the overall process.

Gender differences on individual subscales might be due, in part, to the use of a slightly older sample. By virtue of being slightly older than samples used in previous research, the present sample has had more opportunities to differentiate, perhaps allowing gender differences to emerge on specific tasks of separation-individuation. Whereas gender differences may remain somewhat masked in younger samples, increased age allows for increasingly divergent experiences that may allow the two genders to become

more distinct from one another. Gender differentiation in identity formation also might be more relevant in some cultures than in others. These possibilities provide a reasonable explanation for the inconsistent gender differences in the extant literature; however, future research will be necessary to better establish the presence and/or nature of gender differences in the separation-individuation process.

Nurturance seeking was associated with both identity exploration and commitment for men and women in the undergraduate population sampled here. However, the nature of this dimension appeared to differ for the two genders. For both men and women, those items on the Nurturance Seeking subscale that reflected instrumental parental guidance related to the overarching construct well. For women, nurturance seeking seemed to also include an intense emotional component, as items describing emotional guidance or support also had strong factor loadings. For men, however, those items suggesting emotional needs decreased the internal consistency of the Nurturance Seeking subscale. An examination of these specific items yields what might be considered a theme of vulnerability. Phrases such as “. . . when someone else *took care* of my needs. . .,” “I feel *lonely*. . .,” and “I’m quite *worried*. . .” (italics added) perhaps reflect an attitude toward relationships that distinguishes between closeness and vulnerability/emotional dependency. Lower levels of nurturance seeking predicted greater progress in identity exploration for both men and women. An independent problem-solving or decision-making stance, therefore, appears important in predicting progress during this stage of identity development. With women, there may be an additional benefit of achieving some emotional autonomy. If excessive nurturance seeking impairs the task of identity exploration among late adolescents, then those who



continue to struggle with this component of separation-individuation may be more prone to prematurely commit to those ideals or values endorsed by significant others. It was precisely this “incomplete” resolution to the identity crisis – commitment without sufficient exploration – that Marcia (1966) termed foreclosure.

Although less nurturance seeking was associated with more progress in identity exploration, greater nurturance seeking was associated with more progress in identity commitment. For women, this association might imply that more emotional closeness with and/or practical guidance from caretakers is required or sought when attempting to pick and commit to one of many possible identities. Among men, the nature of this support seems to be more purely instrumental, perhaps requesting from a significant other financial backing for a creative venture or an objective/more practical view of the “bigger picture.” Findings such as these further illuminate that the goal of separation-individuation in adolescence is not the extreme distancing from others, especially parents, as earlier theorists might have implied. Rather, it seems that the ongoing relationship to parents and significant others is a critical component in the adolescent’s eventual success in identity achievement.

Findings indicate that the nature of relations between certain dimensions of separation-individuation and identity development varies depending on the identity component in question. Nurturance seeking has been described above, but consider also the variations in the relation between separation anxiety and identity development. Higher levels of separation anxiety were predictive of greater identity exploration – suggesting perhaps a certain propelling of the adolescent toward seeking out a unique sense of self. With regard to the commitment phase of identity formation, however, it

appears that high levels of separation anxiety can be deleterious. Due to the unanticipated and seemingly counterintuitive nature of the former finding, several statistical and procedural checks were conducted to re-verify this peculiar finding. In addition to hand scoring five randomly selected protocols, all of the recoding for the EIPQ subscales was reviewed and the subscale scores were recalculated. In addition, the data was re-examined for possible outliers. Although one possible outlier was identified, its removal did not affect the correlation or regression analyses. Additionally, both exploration and commitment subscales of the EIPQ reflected good score variability. The Separation Anxiety subscale of the SITA also demonstrated good variability, although most scores fell around the mean. In light of this last finding, it is likely that the separation “anxiety” reported by the current sample is not *clinically* significant, but rather more characteristic of nervousness or normal worry.

In the absence of replication data, some tentative explanations might be offered to conceptualize the adaptive value of separation anxiety in the identity exploration process. The original description of the Separation Anxiety subscale as described by Levine et al. (1986) included fears of abandonment or a loss of connection with significant others. Most respondents in the current sample were not endorsing extreme levels of separation anxiety, but tended toward the mean. Perhaps then, when a moderate degree of separation anxiety is combined with an adequate amount of healthy separation during the exploration phase this fear functions as a type of developmental impetus. That is to say, if the adolescent experiences an identity only in relation to another person or group of people, the possibility of losing that person may elicit a related fear of losing any cohesive sense of self. In this context, separation anxiety may compel the adolescent to

invest energy in locating an individualized social, occupational, and/or ideological niche and establishing a unique sense of self that can withstand changes in his or her social network.

As the adolescent begins to delineate more clearly this sense of self and relate to others in ways consistent with this more integrated identity, however, the possibility of abandonment may take on new meaning. The loss of significant others during the period of identity commitment, then, could signal a direct rejection of the self one is striving to be. If this consequence is feared via implicit or explicit ultimatums, the adolescent may defer from committing to any cohesive identity – remaining in what Erikson referred to as a psychological moratorium, later classified by Marcia (1966) as the moratorium status. These component-specific associations between dimensions of separation-individuation and aspects of identity development again reflect the dynamic and rapidly changing nature of this lifestage.

The positive associations of both healthy separation and separation anxiety with identity exploration remain a curious, and perhaps seemingly contradictory, finding. An important consideration is that these scales were not intended to reflect opposite resolutions to the separation-individuation process. While the Healthy Separation subscale was designed to identify those individuals who had made considerable progress toward negotiating a balance between closeness and separateness in interpersonal relationships, the Separation Anxiety subscale reflects a more global fear of loss or abandonment. Examination of the individual subscale items support these differences and also reveal an additional nuance between the components measured by each – whereas items on the Healthy Separation specifically, and almost exclusively, refer to “friends,”

items on the Separation Anxiety subscale are more general and either do not refer to a specific other or tend to reference those in charge, or caretakers. In light of these differences, then, it is quite possible that an individual could be well on the way toward healthy separation *from friends* and still endorse more existential or general concerns about abandonment or aloneness.

A review of developmental theories also provides some means by which one can conceptualize these findings. In the studies of attachment by Ainsworth and her colleagues (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978), they have described negative separation reactions that occurred in both securely and insecurely (ambivalently) attached infants when the mother left the room. While both groups of infants cried and protested at their mothers' departures, exhibiting what might be considered separation anxiety, what distinguished them from one another were their behaviors in her absence and upon her return. The insecurely attached infants were more likely to remain distressed throughout the mother's absence, engage in little exploration of the playroom, and express some degree of anger toward the mother upon her return. In contrast, securely attached infants were distressed when their mothers left, but were more likely to engage in exploration of the playroom and greeted their mothers happily upon their return.

Although these studies were conducted on infants and deal most directly with infant attachment, attachment theory asserts that these attachment styles can remain fairly stable over time (Bowlby, 1969). In light of this possibility, and in consideration of the current findings in a late adolescent sample, perhaps the levels of separation anxiety reflect the normal distress in response to the actual or potential absence or loss of a significant other. Because these individuals have been able to establish healthy and

balanced attachments with others (high Healthy Separation), the potential loss of this relationship may evoke an appropriate anxiety reaction. Similar to the response of a securely attached infant, they are able to continue exploration even while experiencing some degree of separation anxiety. In addition, there are several possibilities of why the potential for loss may be salient for this particular sample. Because this study utilized a college sample, many participants may be away from caregivers for the first extended period of time. Although this allows for increased independence, there is also a decrease in the security of a proximate relationship. For those advanced students (the majority of the current sample), there is also the challenge of struggling concurrently with both the task of separation-individuation and their impending departure from college and close friends. Perhaps the higher levels of separation anxiety are markers of this transitional period. While these individuals may have made significant gains toward healthy separation, challenges specific to college transitions may have re-evoked more general fears of isolation and loss, eliciting concurrent high scores on the Separation Anxiety subscale.

Differences between the current findings and those reported by Kroger (1995) also warrant consideration. Although the Separation Anxiety, Engulfment Anxiety, Nurturance Seeking, and Healthy Separation subscales were each included in her study, only Nurturance Seeking yielded significant differences between identity status groups. The general finding of significant group differences on the Nurturance Seeking subscale is replicated in the current investigation; however, the pattern of these differences is not. Kroger found that individuals classified as “firm” foreclosure scored significantly higher than individuals in the “developmental” foreclosure, moratorium, and achieved groups. In

contrast, the present results showed that the foreclosed and achieved groups did not significantly differ, but that both had significantly higher scores than the moratorium group. In this study, the similarity between foreclosed and achieved groups held on all of the remaining SITA subscales, suggesting that processes other than separation-individuation may better distinguish between the two. Also notable are the unprecedented, significant findings that emerged in the present study with regard to group differences on Separation Anxiety and Healthy Separation.

In considering these discrepancies with previous research, several important areas deserve mention, including differences in samples, methodology, and timing of data collection. With regard to sample differences, both age and culture offer potential explanations for inconsistent findings. Kroger (1995) reported a mean age of approximately 19 years for her sample, while the current study was about two years older. If many psychosocial processes originally attributed to earlier adolescence have been delayed until the period Arnett (2000) has distinguished as “emerging adulthood” (ages 18 to 25), then significant differences may fail to emerge in younger samples, as this process may only be just beginning. Clearly, longitudinal research will be necessary to more clearly identify and/or support this trend. The possibility suggests, however, that researchers should begin to more carefully consider the age of their sample, as very small numerical differences may actually reflect large developmental leaps. In addition to the importance of age in the onset of identity development, the life experiences of a late adolescent, college student may also have relevance to the nuances of this process. As Erikson (1968) has implied, each culture establishes a form of moratorium for its developing adolescents through which they can experiment and delay adult

responsibilities. If the college setting reflects the American culture's attempt to institutionalize a moratorium, then one would anticipate an increased likelihood that this population would be in the process of identity development when compared to a non-college sample. Extending the present research to examine identity development among non-college groups will allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the social and environmental influences in this process.

The present sample and that of Kroger (1995) also differed with regard to cultural background. Whereas Kroger's sample was taken from students enrolled at a New Zealand university, the participants from this study were primarily Euro-American students enrolled in a large, public, university in the mid-southern United States. Although some recent research (Gnaulati & Heine, 2001) suggests the possibility of ethnic differences on certain dimensions of separation-individuation, this question was not specifically addressed in the current investigation. This is clearly an area that warrants additional exploration, however, as the influences on any given individual extend beyond interpersonal and familial relationships to the broader societal and cultural context. In *Childhood and Society*, Erikson (1963) acknowledged the impact of societal influences in identifying areas for research and intervention and in establishing criteria for developmental progress. More recently, Bronfenbrenner (1995) has proposed the *bioecological paradigm* in which development is conceptualized as occurring through reciprocal interactions between the individual and elements in the individual's immediate environment (e.g. parents). He has gone beyond the immediate, nuclear family, however, by recognizing the impact of the broader cultural influence on these more micro-level interactions. Because there is approximately a ten-year difference in time of data

collection between Kroger's and the current study, differences in cultural or societal influences cannot be discounted. Potential cultural differences and, perhaps a cohort effect, therefore, pose additional possibilities for discrepancies in the findings.

A final difference between the present study and Kroger's (1995) earlier investigation concerns the methodology. On the broadest level, two different measurement techniques for identity status were employed. Whereas this investigation utilized a self-report identity scale, Kroger utilized Marcia's Ego Identity Status interview to classify participants into identity statuses and distinguished between "firm" and "developmental" foreclosure statuses. Without subdividing the foreclosure status in this study, it is not possible to anticipate how this modification might affect the differences among identity groups. In terms of different methods of data collection, however, Berzonsky and Adams (1999) have emphasized that a lack of correlation between self-report and interview methods does not necessarily suggest the inferiority of either. Rather, among several explanations, one reason for the limited correspondence might be that different measures are assessing different components of the identity process. Another possibility is that whereas self-report measures collect the participant's report, interview methods also incorporate the interviewer's *interpretation* of that report.

Related to the issue of data collection is the manner of data analysis. Whereas Kroger (1995) utilized analyses of variance (ANOVAs) to compare identity groups on the components of separation individuation, the current study employed a multiple regression technique to examine the relationships between identity and separation-individuation variables (ANOVAs were also conducted, but primarily for purposes of comparison to Kroger's findings). By controlling for gender differences in the regression analyses, the



unique relationships between the independent and dependent variables were better able to emerge. Discrepancies in findings could, therefore, be partially influenced by the form of data analyses used. If gender is not controlled for, then it may cloud the underlying relationships between variables. When gender is statistically controlled for at the data level, the relationship between these variables can become “purified,” in a sense. Because this control is not possible at the “real-world” level however, these relationships may not be apparent by observation. This is an important point for researchers and clinicians alike, as both are attempting to understand underlying relationships in very different settings.

Although several causal relationships have been alluded to in the current investigation, it must be acknowledged that these are merely theoretical as they go beyond the cross-sectional nature of this study. Likewise, the use of a convenience sample in this study raises the question of generalizability due to limited socio-economic and ethnic diversity. These findings might not successfully generalize to a broader, pan-cultural, population. They may, however, have some generalizability across American college campuses, as this sample remains fairly similar to those convenience samples that have been used in earlier investigations (e.g. Holmbeck & Leake, 1999; McClanahan & Holmbeck, 1992; Quintana & Kerr, 1993). Ideally, future longitudinal work that specifically investigates broader cultural influences will be undertaken through which a more comprehensive, developmental sequence of the interrelated processes of separation-individuation and identity development can be better clarified.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

Results from the current study suggest a delicate balance that an adolescent must achieve between the competing needs for connectedness and autonomy in the process of identity development. One of the clearest examples of this dialectic is demonstrated by the co-contribution of healthy separation *and* separation anxiety to identity exploration. Future research should continue to examine the nature of each of these components of separation-individuation and their relation to related developmental processes. With regard to specific components of separation-individuation, gender differences did emerge on the Dependency Denial, Separation Anxiety, Peer Enmeshment, and Nurturance Seeking subscales. Of particular interest is the dimension of nurturance seeking, as findings suggest that it can be important in both the exploration and commitment processes but that its meaning can be quite different for the two genders, possibly because of cultural factors. Finally, the shifting influence of the separation-individuation variables remains an intriguing phenomenon. As the current findings suggest that a variable may predict progress at one point in time during the identity development process but be contraindicated at another, future research should further examine the nature of these variations in an effort to better synchronize the developmental needs of adolescents and their available interpersonal and environmental experiences.

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## List of References

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## Appendix

Table A-1.

*Descriptive statistics*

Demographic Characteristics	Frequency	Percent
Gender ( $N = 281$ )		
Female	154	54.8%
Male	127	45.2%
Race ( $N = 281$ )		
African-American	18	6.4%
Asian-American	6	2.1%
Euro-American	246	87.5%
Hispanic-American	1	0.4%
Native-American	2	0.7%
Year in College ( $N = 281$ )		
Freshman	4	1.4%
Sophomore	44	15.7%
Junior	118	42.0%
Senior	114	40.6%
Graduate Student	1	.4%
Marital Status ( $N = 281$ )		
Single/Never Married	273	97.2%
Divorced/Single	3	1.1%
Married	5	1.8%

Table A-2.

*Gender differences on SITA and EIPQ subscales*

	Male ( <i>N</i> = 127)		Female ( <i>N</i> = 154)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Engulfment Anxiety	2.5	.74	2.5	.68
Practicing Mirroring	3.1	.57	3.0	.45
Dependency Denial**	2.0	.43	1.7	.40
Separation Anxiety*	2.5	.51	2.6	.45
Teacher Enmeshment	2.2	.63	2.3	.58
Peer Enmeshment*	3.6	.60	3.8	.55
Nurturance Seeking**	2.9	.60	3.2	.56
Healthy Separation	4.0	.48	4.1	.43
Rejection Expectancy	1.9	.57	1.9	.49
Identity Exploration	3.8	.60	3.9	.51
Identity Commitment	3.9	.61	4.0	.55

*Note:* Means reflect average rating per item by calculating the sum of items divided by the total number of items. To convert to the scoring procedure outlined by the respective authors, multiply the SITA subscale means by 10 and the EIPQ subscales by 16.

\*  $p < .005$ . \*\*  $p < .001$

Table A-3.

*Correlations among SITA and EIPQ subscales*

	EX	COM	EA	PM	DD	SA	TE	PE	NS	HS	RE
Exploration (EX)	--	-.30**	.06	.07	-.11	.28**	.19**	.25**	.003	.26**	.12*
Commitment (COM)		--	-.12*	.25**	-.25**	-.19**	.01	.23**	.23**	.16**	-.29**
Engulfment Anxiety (EA)			--	.04	.17**	.28**	.15*	.04	-.02	-.02	.39**
Practicing Mirroring (PM)				--	-.04	-.03	.30**	.39**	.21**	.26**	-.18**
Dependency Denial (DD)					--	.08	-.05	-.46**	-.21**	-.33*	.55**
Separation Anxiety (SA)						--	.46**	.08	.41**	-.09	.37**
Teacher Enmeshment (TE)							--	.17**	.19**	.03	.08
Peer Enmeshment (PE)								--	.30**	.58**	-.31**
Nurturance Seeking (NS)									--	.08	-.14**
Healthy Separation (HS)										--	-.22**
Rejection Expectancy (RE)											--

Note.  $N = 281$ \*  $p \leq .05$ . \*\*  $p \leq .01$



Table A-4.

*Cronbach's coefficient alpha for SITA subscales with male (N = 127) and female (N = 154) samples*

SITA Subscale	Male	Female
Engulfment Anxiety	.79	.79
Practicing Mirroring	.87	.83
Dependency Denial	.71	.74
Separation Anxiety	.75	.68
Teacher Enmeshment	.77	.74
Peer Enmeshment	.75	.74
Nurturance Seeking	.64	.62
Healthy Separation	.61 (.68)	.56 (.63)
Rejection Expectancy	.82	.80

*Note:* The values in parentheses for Healthy Separation reflect the alpha values for the modified, six-item scale.

Table A-5.

*SITA subscale intercorrelations by gender*

	Gender	EA	PM	DD	SA	TE	PE	NS	HS	RE
Engulfment Anxiety (EA)	Male	--	.09	.11	.26**	.18*	.27**	.05	.17	.37**
	Female	--	-.02	.23**	.31**	.13	-.18*	-.08	-.21**	.40**
Practicing Mirroring (PM)	Male		--	-.07	-.01	.31**	.53**	.30**	.29**	-.23**
	Female		--	-.11	-.01	.30**	.31**	.20*	.24**	-.14
Dependency Denial (DD)	Male			--	.12	.03	-.42**	-.10	-.28**	.43**
	Female			--	.15	-.11	-.44**	-.21**	-.40**	.68**
Separation Anxiety (SA)	Male				--	.52**	.08	.43**	-.07	.38**
	Female				--	.39**	.01	.35**	-.12	.39**
Teacher Enmeshment (TE)	Male					--	.20*	.25**	-.03	.14
	Female					--	.12	.11	.07	.02
Peer Enmeshment (PE)	Male						--	.32**	.58**	-.27**
	Female						--	.23**	.58**	-.33*

Note. Male  $N = 127$ ; Female  $N = 154$ .

\*  $p \leq .05$ . \*\*  $p \leq .01$

Table A-5. Continued

	Gender	EA	PM	DD	SA	TE	PE	NS	HS	RE
Nurturance Seeking (NS)	Male							--	.03	-.05
	Female							--	.11	-.20*
Healthy Separation (HS)	Male								--	-.10
	Female								--	-.34**
Rejection Expectancy (RE)	Male									--
	Female									--

Note. Male  $N = 127$ ; Female  $N = 154$ .

\*  $p \leq .05$ . \*\*  $p \leq .01$

Table A-6.

*Regression of identity exploration by SITA subscales*

Variable	$\beta$	$t$	$p$	Partial Correlation
Separation Anxiety	.37	6.19	<.001	.35
Healthy Separation	.21	3.12	.002	.18
Nurturance Seeking	-.22	-3.49	.001	-.21
Peer Enmeshment	.17	2.45	.015	.15

Note.  $R^2 = .198$  ( $N = 281, p < .001$ )

Table A-7.

*Regression of identity commitment by SITA subscales*

Variable	$\beta$	$t$	$p$	Partial Correlation
Practicing Mirroring	.17	3.11	.002	.18
Nurturance Seeking	.27	4.32	<.001	.25
Separation Anxiety	-.28	-4.68	<.001	-.27
Dependency Denial	-.16	-2.86	.005	-.17

*Note.*  $R^2 = .199$  ( $N = 281, p < .001$ )

Table A-8.

*Univariate analyses of variance on SITA subscales by identity group*

SITA Subscale	<i>F</i> (3, 277)	<i>p</i>
Engulfment Anxiety	2.03	.110
Practicing Mirroring	4.68	.003
Dependency Denial	7.72	<.001
Separation Anxiety	5.73	.001
Teacher Enmeshment	2.06	.106
Peer Enmeshment	12.72	<.001
Nurturance Seeking	6.61	<.001
Healthy Separation	9.27	<.001
Rejection Expectancy	6.63	<.001

Table A-9.

*Post-hoc comparisons of identity group differences on SITA subscales*

SITA Subscale	Identity group means (SDs in parentheses)			
	Achievement ( <i>N</i> = 49)	Foreclosure ( <i>N</i> = 86)	Diffusion ( <i>N</i> = 65)	Moratorium ( <i>N</i> = 81)
Engulfment Anxiety	2.4 (.65) <sub>a</sub>	2.4 (.67) <sub>b</sub>	2.6 (.80) <sub>c</sub>	2.6 (.67) <sub>d</sub>
Practicing Mirroring	3.2 (.55) <sub>a</sub>	3.1 (.50) <sub>b</sub>	2.9 (.49) <sub>a,b</sub>	3.0 (.48) <sub>c</sub>
Dependency Denial	1.7 (.36) <sub>a</sub>	1.8 (.44) <sub>b</sub>	2.0 (.45) <sub>a,b</sub>	1.9 (.40) <sub>a</sub>
Separation Anxiety	2.5 (.48) <sub>a</sub>	2.5 (.44) <sub>b</sub>	2.5 (.50) <sub>c</sub>	2.7 (.48) <sub>a,b,c</sub>
Teacher Enmeshment	2.3 (.61) <sub>a</sub>	2.3 (.66) <sub>b</sub>	2.1 (.55) <sub>c</sub>	2.3 (.57) <sub>d</sub>
Peer Enmeshment	4.0 (.47) <sub>a</sub>	3.8 (.52) <sub>b</sub>	3.4 (.68) <sub>a,b</sub>	3.7 (.50) <sub>a</sub>
Nurturance Seeking	3.3 (.54) <sub>a</sub>	3.2 (.53) <sub>b</sub>	2.9 (.56) <sub>a</sub>	2.9 (.65) <sub>a,b</sub>
Healthy Separation	4.3 (.35) <sub>a</sub>	4.1 (.47) <sub>b</sub>	3.8 (.48) <sub>a,b</sub>	4.1 (.41) <sub>a</sub>
Rejection Expectancy	1.8 (.49) <sub>a</sub>	1.7 (.42) <sub>b,d</sub>	2.0 (.52) <sub>b,c</sub>	2.1 (.60) <sub>a,d</sub>

*Note.* Means in each row with the same subscript are significantly different at the .05 level.

## Vita

Jennifer N. Engler was born on September 17, 1974. She was raised in Atlanta, GA where she attended grade school at Rowland Elementary and middle school at Immaculate Heart of Mary. She graduated from St. Pius X High School in 1993. Jennifer graduated summa cum laude from James Madison University in 1996, receiving a B.A. in psychology with a minor in French. In 1999, she received her M.S. in Counseling Psychology from Loyola College in Maryland. Following a one-year, predoctoral internship at Baylor College of Medicine, Jennifer will receive her Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology in August 2004 from The University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

Jennifer has primary clinical and research interests in the area of adolescent identity development and its implications for psychological well-being. Additional areas of interest include environmental, familial, and social resiliency factors, schema-based approaches to personality disorders, psychotherapy process and outcome, and the treatment of childhood behavioral disorders. In addition to her clinical and research work, Jennifer is also interested in continuing a career in college teaching.