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Breakups and Betrayals in Emerging Adulthood: A Developmental Perspective of Relationship Dissolution and Infidelity

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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Jerika C. Norona entitled "Breakups and Betrayals in Emerging Adulthood: A Developmental Perspective of Relationship Dissolution and Infidelity." 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.

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**Breakups and Betrayals in Emerging Adulthood:
A Developmental Perspective of Relationship Dissolution and Infidelity**

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

**Jerika C. Norona
August 2018**

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Manny and Cindy Norona, and my loving partner, Jonathan Flores. Thank you all for encouraging me to follow my dreams.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation includes two studies that focus on romantic experiences in emerging adulthood (ages 18-25), romantic dissolution (Study 1) and extradyadic intimacy (Study 2), and their relationship with developmental and individual factors. Each study uses two unique community samples of emerging adults who have attended college as well as those who have not attended college in the past. Importantly, both studies examine romantic dissolution and extradyadic intimacy from a developmental perspective, taking into account the salient developmental tasks of *independence* and *interdependence* faced by young people. Additionally, individual factors, including perceptions of emerging adulthood (Study 1), attachment style (Study 2), and gender (Studies 1 and 2) are examined as they relate to emerging adults' pursuit of these romantic experiences. Each study concludes with implications for relationship education for emerging adults.

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CHAPTER I

BREAKING UP IN EMERGING ADULTHOOD: A DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE OF RELATIONSHIP DISSOLUTION

The final version of Study 1 of this dissertation, presented here, is currently in press at *Emerging Adulthood* and was published by Jerika C. Norona, Spencer B. Olmstead, and Deborah P. Welsh:

Norona, J. C., Olmstead, S. B., & Welsh, D. P. (in press). Breaking up in emerging adulthood: A developmental perspective of relationship dissolution. *Emerging Adulthood*. Advance online publication: doi:10.1177/2167696816658585.

Abstract

Using a unique sample of individuals who have and have not attended college, the present mixed-methods study examined narratives of 113 (47% women) emerging adults' motivations for initiating breakups with romantic partners. Findings indicated that emerging adults' motivations for ending their romantic relationships were largely due to their relationships and/or their romantic partners not fulfilling their needs for *interdependence*. Additionally, unmet *intimacy*, *identity*, and *autonomy* needs were the most frequently reported reasons for relationship termination, indicating that emerging adults consider both their need to be close with others and their need to follow their own paths for their careers and desires for family formation. This study also demonstrated links between perceptions of developmental tasks in emerging adulthood and motivations for ending romantic relationships. Those who end romantic relationships due to unfulfilled intimacy needs tend to be more relationally focused, and those who end romantic relationships due to unfulfilled autonomy or identity needs tend to view emerging adulthood as a time of experimentation/possibilities, feeling "in between," and negativity/instability. Implications for the role of relationship dissolution in emerging adult development are discussed.

Introduction

Experiencing a breakup in emerging adulthood is a common experience. About a third of young people report breaking up with one or more romantic partners in the last two years (Rhoades, Kamp Dush, Atkins, Stanley, & Markman, 2011). In the same way that navigating romantic relationships is a salient task in emerging adulthood (Shulman & Connolly, 2013), *ending* romantic relationships also appears to be a salient task. As such, the present study examined the developmental significance of relationship dissolution during the period of emerging adulthood. Specifically, we examined how the salient needs of maintaining *interdependence* and *independence* are related to emerging adults' motivations for ending romantic relationships, as well as how these motivations differ according to gender and perceptions of this specific time in emerging adults' lives.

Relationship Dissolution in Emerging Adulthood

Although relationships tend to last longer as individuals mature (Furman & Winkles, 2012; Seiffge-Krenke, 2003), breakups remain a common relationship experience in emerging adulthood (Halpern-Meehin, Manning, Giordano, & Longmore, 2013). Relationship skills are continuously developing throughout this developmental stage (Shulman & Connolly, 2013). Because the development of romantic competence is a work in progress for young people, their relationships “can start and end repeatedly” (Shulman & Connolly, 2013, p. 28). Some emerging adults also experience “on again, off again” relationships, which involve beginning a relationship with a romantic partner, breaking up, and then re-initiating the relationship after a period of time (Halpern-Meehin et al., 2013).

Much of the research on relationship dissolution in emerging adulthood investigates the effects that experiencing breakups can have on young people's lives and the factors related to

adaptive coping after experiencing breakups. These consequences include increased substance use (Larson & Sweeten, 2012; Fleming, White, Oesterle, Haggerty, & Catalano, 2010; Salvatore, Kendler, & Dick, 2014), increased distress (Rhoades, Kamp Dush, Atkins, Stanley, & Markman, 2011), and a fluctuation of positive and negative emotions over a short period of time (Sbarra & Emery, 2005). Positive changes can also occur after experiencing a breakup; for example, growth can occur depending on the kinds of attributions that young people make for these breakups (Tashiro & Frazier, 2003).

Missing from this body of research is an examination of relationship dissolution in the context of developmental needs that are salient for emerging adults. For example, salient needs for emerging adults include balancing separation and connection from family of origin and romantic partners (Arnett, 2015). As described by Rollie and Duck (2006), the end of romantic relationships is as informative as the process of relationships themselves. Indeed, relationship dissolution involves a unique process in which individuals change, grow, and make meaning of their experiences (Rollie & Duck, 2006). Another gap in the literature is an absence of an examination of possible factors that contribute to breakups among emerging adults. Although some studies have examined antecedents to breakups (e.g., Felmlee, 1994; Fox, Osborn, & Warber, 2014; Negash, Cui, Fincham, & Pasley, 2014; Røsand, Slinning, Røysamb, & Tambs, 2014; Simpson, 1987), researchers have yet to examine developmental concepts such as independence and interdependence as they relate to romantic relationship dissolution. As described by Connolly and McIsaac (2009), examining breakups in the context of developmental needs that are salient for young people can help unearth the ways experiencing romantic dissolution contributes to individual growth. Specifically, examining these psychosocial tasks

can promote understanding as to whether *ending* romantic relationships can foster development in the same way that beginning romantic relationships can.

Developmental Systems Theory and Romantic Dissolution

Developmental Systems Theory (Lerner, Theokas, & Jellicic, 2005) considers the systemic, interactive relationship between an individual's development and the environmental context in which he or she grows. According to this theory, people "make choices and experiment with a wide variety of behaviors and experiences as they address unique developmental challenges, opportunities, and risks" (Lerner et al., 2005, p. 32). Thus, young people actively seek out a variety of experiences and make decisions to meet their developmental needs.

Connolly and McIsaac (2009) applied this theory to understand adolescents' motivations for ending romantic relationships, and this theory can also be applied to emerging adults' strivings to meet their developmental needs. Emerging adults are no longer adolescents; at age 18, most individuals in the United States move out of their parents' homes, attend college, join the military, or begin new jobs (Arnett, 2015). With greater freedom and possibilities for the future, individuals gradually separate from their parents and begin to understand themselves as distinct (Arnett, 2015; Grotevant & Cooper, 1998). According to Developmental Systems Theory, emerging adults pursue romantic relationships to fulfill their needs for closeness. However, if an emerging adult's romantic partner and/or the relationship does not coincide with his or her individual goals, the individual might actively decide to end this relationship because it is not fostering personal growth.

Similar to the development of independence, the developmental task of connecting with others involves exploring what one wants, and does not want, in a romantic partner by engaging

in different kinds of relationships, including casual dating relationships and long-term romantic relationships (Norona, Thorne, Kerrick, Farwood, & Korobov, 2013). According to Developmental Systems Theory, if a romantic partner and/or the relationship does not provide the emerging adult with the intimacy and connection that he or she desires, then the individual might actively decide to end this relationship.

These primary areas of establishing one's independence while simultaneously creating meaningful romantic relationships are two primary tasks during this developmental period (Arnett, 2015). These tasks are understood as emerging adults' needs for both *independence* and *interdependence* as they solidify their choices for love, work, and ideology (Arnett, 2015; Collins & Steinberg, 2006). In his theory of psychosocial development, Erikson (1968) proposed that an individual must successfully establish his or her identity prior to establishing committed romantic relationships. As emerging adulthood is a time of exploration and experimentation (Arnett, 2015), identity theoretically takes longer to solidify. As individuals are simultaneously navigating identity development and forming romantic relationships, it is possible that they are shifting in and out of relationships because their identity has yet to be developed. Thus, perhaps beginning and ending romantic relationships are both ways to help an individual develop his or her sense of identity.

Independence. Becoming independent and establishing who one is apart from one's family is an essential task during emerging adulthood (Collins & Steinberg, 2006; Grotevant & Cooper, 1998). Independence has been conceptualized as including two main components: *autonomy* and *identity* (e.g., Connolly & McIsaac, 2009; Grotevant & Cooper, 1998). *Autonomy* is the ability to think, decide, and emotionally react to situations without depending on one's family or important others (Collins & Steinberg, 2006; van Petegem, Vansteenkiste, & Beyers,

2013). *Identity* is the coherent concept of who one is, what one believes, and one's roles and responsibilities in society (Marcia, 1966; Morgan, 2013).

Interdependence. Emerging adults are also expected to maintain a balance of connection with important others. When adolescents' needs for intimacy and sexual expression with those whom they are romantically attracted becomes salient, they seek out romantic relationships to fulfill their interdependence needs (Connolly & Goldberg, 1999). This includes *affiliation, intimacy, and sexual reciprocity*. Young people have a need for *affiliation* and interaction with people outside of their family of origin, which involves spending time with another person that one is typically fond of and engaging in shared activities (Connolly, Craig, Goldberg, & Pepler, 2004). Establishing *intimacy* with others is an important endeavor for those who wish to have successful romantic relationships and is broadly characterized by mutual trust, self-disclosure, positive and validating interactions, support, and emotional closeness (Connolly & McIsaac, 2009). *Sexual reciprocity* occurs as young people experience physiological, biological, and hormonal changes during this time, and gradually develop romantic and sexual attractions toward others (Collins et al., 2009).

From the perspective of Developmental Systems Theory, emerging adults pursue romantic experiences, such as romantic relationships, to fulfill their needs for interdependence. In a similar way, then, when romantic partners and/or romantic relationships fail to fulfill these needs, emerging adults, as active agents in their own development, behave in ways that help them achieve their goals. In the same way that seeking romantic relationships serves to fulfill young adults' developmental needs, we propose that ending romantic relationships is another way individuals seek to fulfill their developmental needs for independence and interdependence (Connolly & McIsaac, 2009; Lerner et al., 2005)

Developmental research on older adolescents suggested that breaking up with a romantic partner is associated with desire to meet developmental needs. Connolly and McIsaac (2009) asked adolescents to describe the most important reason why they initiated a breakup with a past romantic partner. The majority reported ending a past relationship because their partner did not fulfill their needs for interdependence, specifically because the relationship lacked opportunities for the partners to affiliate, share intimacy, or fulfill needs for sexual expression. They also reported ending relationships because their partner did not fulfill their needs for independence, specifically because the relationship lacked opportunities to explore and establish one's identity or develop freedom to make autonomous decisions (Connolly & McIsaac, 2009). Because the needs for independence and interdependence remain salient during emerging adulthood, we expected that emerging adults would also initiate breakups with their romantic partners to fulfill these needs. Thus, the present study also serves to replicate Connolly and McIsaac (2009) with a sample of emerging adults. The current study addresses the following question and tests an associated hypothesis:

RQ1. How are emerging adults' motivations for breaking up with romantic partners related to their developmental needs for independence and interdependence?

H1. Emerging adults will describe more unfulfilled independence needs compared to interdependence needs.

Individual Differences in Motivations for Breaking Up

It is also possible that individual characteristics and experiences might be related to emerging adults' motivations for ending romantic relationships. For example, motivations for breaking up might be related to one's identification with the various developmental tasks of

emerging adulthood, particularly because these key characteristics involve elements of independence, as described below.

Perceptions of emerging adulthood. Arnett (2015) proposed that emerging adulthood is a time of identity exploration, self-focus, experimentation with possibilities, negativity/instability, and feeling “in-between.” During *identity exploration*, emerging adults assume different identities to determine what they want to do for the rest of their adult lives in the realms of love and work. It is also a time where emerging adults might be more *self-focused* and make decisions that benefit them as individuals rather than their family of origin or future romantic partner and/or children. *Experimentation with possibilities* involves the perception that there are limitless opportunities for the future, and thus each opportunity can be tested and tried to some degree before finding the right “fit.” *Negativity/instability* reflects the feeling that things are constantly changing in emerging adulthood, including career paths, partners, and identities, but that one’s choices need not be stable until one’s 30s. Finally, *feeling “in-between”* refers to the experience of feeling responsible for oneself and the autonomy to make decisions for the future, and yet simultaneously feeling as though one is not yet an adult.

Together, the degree to which emerging adults feel that these characteristics reflect their experiences during this developmental stage might be related to their motivations for ending romantic relationships. For example, if an emerging adult feels that this time in his or her life is a time to explore his or her identity (identity exploration), experiment with several possibilities for a future romantic partner (experimentation with possibilities), move in and out of relationships (instability), and feel unprepared to make a long-term commitment at this time (feeling in-between), all to meet one’s own needs (self-focus), then it might be the case that this type of

person might be more likely to end romantic relationships for reasons related to *independence* rather than *interdependence*. Our second research question and associated hypothesis was:

RQ2. How are emerging adults' perceptions of specific developmental tasks in emerging adulthood related to their motivations for breaking up with romantic partners?

H2. Emerging adults who referenced independence needs in their reasons for ending their romantic relationship would report emerging adulthood as a time of identity exploration, self-focus, possibilities, instability, and feeling in-between to a greater degree than those who did not reference independence needs.

Gender. Additionally, differences may exist in the motivations that young women and men reference with regards to their breakups. Research on gender socialization indicated that girls and young women are socialized to be relationally focused, whereas boys and young men are socialized to be independently focused (Eagly, 2013; Gilligan, 1982). Based on gender socialization theories, it might be expected that young women are motivated to end romantic relationships when their partners are not meeting their interdependence needs, whereas young men might be motivated to end them when their partners are not meeting their independence needs. However, when examined from a developmental perspective, it appears that young people tend to become more similar than different during emerging adulthood (e.g., Norona et al., 2013; see Norona, Preddy, & Welsh, 2015 for a review). Indeed, developmental researchers have proposed that gender differences may emerge in domains that have the strongest expectations for gender differences (Norona et al., 2015), which may or may not include ending a relationship. Thus, in the present study we considered gender differences in emerging adults' explanations for ending a relationship through an exploratory approach. Given the exploratory nature of this question, no *a priori* hypotheses were proposed. Our third research question was:

RQ3. Do men and women differ in their reported motivations for breaking up?

Method

Participants

After receiving approval from the university's institutional review board, participants were recruited using Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk), a crowdsourcing system hosted by Amazon.com. Research on MTurk workers has shown that their demographic characteristics are more representative of the U.S. population compared to college samples (Ipeirotis, 2010; Ross, Zaldivar, Irani, & Tomlinson, 2009). MTurk consists of a large pool of respondents who choose to participate in surveys in exchange for money. On MTurk, the current project was advertised as a study for individuals who had reported *initiating* at least one breakup with a romantic partner in the past six months, which was defined as “ultimately [declaring] that the [relationship] was over (Hopper, 2001, p. 432). Thus, individuals who were part of a breakup but did not identify as an initiator were not recruited for this study. Participants were 113 emerging adults (47% women) who had initiated a breakup within six months prior to the study. On average, participants were 22.3 years old ($SD = 1.82$, $range = 18-25$). The majority (62.8%) identified as European American, followed by Black/African American (14.2%), Hispanic/Latino/a (10.6%), Asian/Asian American (5.3%), American Indian (0.9%), and 6.2% reported as Biracial/Multiracial. About a third (34.5%) of participants attended some college, whereas others had earned a Bachelor's degree (30.1%), high school diploma/GED equivalent (15.9%), Associate's degree (11.5%), trade/technical/vocational training (5.3%), some high school (0.9%), Master's degree (0.9%), and professional degree (0.9%). The majority (88.5%) identified as heterosexual, followed by bisexual (9.7%), gay/lesbian (0.9%), and 0.9% reported as “other.” The mean relationship length for the *dissolved* relationship was 20.84 months ($SD = 16.97$, range

= 1 – 84 months). Sixty percent of participants reported currently being in a relationship at the time of completing the study.

Procedure

A brief description of the study was provided on the “Human Intelligence Task” page on MTurk. From the MTurk respondent pool, interested individuals clicked a link that provided more information, and were routed to an informed consent form to gain additional information about the study and determine their eligibility. Participants self-selected into this study, which was anonymous. From MTurk, participants were routed to Qualtrics, an online survey system, to complete the study. After completion of the survey, participants were rerouted to MTurk and each received \$2.01 as compensation. Measures in the present study were both closed- and open-ended and assessed basic demographic information, romantic experiences, and individuals’ understandings of emerging adulthood.

Measures

Demographics. Participants completed a demographics questionnaire that surveyed basic demographic data including age, gender, race, and socioeconomic status.

Romantic experiences and dissolution. The Romantic Experiences Questionnaire was developed for use in this study. Prior to completing this primary area of the survey, participants read a short paragraph about the typicality of relationship dissolution, which was created to normalize breakups for participants and help them feel comfortable with disclosing such information. Participants were asked to respond to this open-ended question by describing, through typing out their responses, what led them to break up with their last boyfriend or girlfriend. Instructions were adapted from Moffit and Singer’s (1994) self-defining memory prompt. The prompt was as follows:

Breaking up with a boyfriend or girlfriend is something that is very common. Have you been the one to initiate a breakup within the last 6 months? In other words, have you been the one to decide to break up with your boyfriend or girlfriend in the last 6 months (this includes breakups that you would consider “mutual”)?

(If yes:) Tell us your story of the breakup. Describe what led you to break up with your last boyfriend or girlfriend. Please include enough detail to help another person understand how you thought and felt.

Understandings of emerging adulthood. Understandings of emerging adulthood was assessed using the Inventory of the Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood scale (IDEA; Reifman et al., 2007). The IDEA is a 31-item, self-report questionnaire that asks participants to think about the current period of their lives and the degree to which they feel that this period reflects a time of various qualities in their personal lives. These qualities include identity exploration (7 items; e.g., “*Is this period of your life a...time of finding out who you are?*”), possibilities (5 items; e.g., “*Is this period of your life a...time of many possibilities?*”), instability (7 items; e.g., “*Is this time of your life a...time of confusion?*”), a focus on others (3 items; e.g., “*Is this time of your life a...time of responsibility for others?*”), a focus on the self (6 items; e.g., “*Is this time of your life a...time of personal freedom?*”), and feeling “in-between” (3 items; e.g., “*Is this time of your life a...time of feeling adult in some ways but not others?*”). Response options ranged from (1) *Strongly Disagree* to (4) *Strongly Agree*. Reifman et al. (2007) reported good internal consistency for the subscales ($\alpha = .70$ to $.85$). Internal consistencies for this study were acceptable (identity exploration: $\alpha = .81$, possibilities: $\alpha = .80$, instability: $\alpha = .81$, other-focused: $\alpha = .75$, self-focus: $\alpha = .78$, in-between: $\alpha = .63$).

Because the developmental stage of emerging adulthood has been criticized as a stage only relevant to European college students (Hendry & Kloep, 2010), a Mann-Whitney *U* nonparametric *t*-test was run to compare IDEA subscale scores among individuals who attended at least some college and those who did not. Furthermore, an independent samples one-way ANOVA (Kruskal-Wallis nonparametric *H* Test) was also conducted to compare IDEA subscale scores among individuals who earned a Bachelor's degree or higher, individuals who had completed some college, and individuals who had not attended college. Comparisons were also conducted among those who completed some college or less and those who obtained a college degree or higher. These analyses revealed no differences in IDEA subscale scores among any of the tested groups (analyses not shown).

Analytic Strategy

Our first research question asked how emerging adults' motivations for breaking up with romantic partners were related to their developmental needs for independence and interdependence. We hypothesized that their explanations would describe more unfulfilled *independence* needs compared to *interdependence* needs. To address this question, we conducted a qualitative content analysis (Krippendorff, 2013). This systematic procedure involves analyzing themes that organically emerge from participants' written text. Generally, responses are reviewed by members of a coding team and common themes across responses are noted. Links across different responses are also identified. Given the length of participants' responses¹

¹ One-way ANOVAs were conducted to determine whether there were any differences in the number of words used in participants' responses and their referenced developmental need(s) in their reasons for ending romantic relationships. No significant differences were found, and thus response length was not controlled for.

($M_{words} = 128.8$, $SD_{words} = 53.38$, $range = 1-363$), this analytic strategy was chosen to capture the possibility of multiple themes in a given response, as romantic relationships can end for a variety of reasons. We utilized a deductive, top-down approach, using the definitions of each of the sub-components of independence (i.e., identity and autonomy) and interdependence (i.e., affiliation, intimacy, and sexual reciprocity) to guide our investigation. Definitions for various categories were consistent with previous theory and research on developmental tasks (Arnett, 2015; Zimmer-Gembeck, Arnold, & Connolly, 2014) and were as follows: *Independence*: Maintaining one's own identity in autonomy in a romantic relationship; *Identity*: Knowing oneself and where one is headed in life; having a core set of values that guide decisions and actions; and having a sense of purpose independent of others; *Autonomy*: Tendencies to think, make decisions, and take action based on one's own volition independent of others; *Interdependence*: Relating to one's romantic partner in a cooperative, harmonious, and mutually rewarding manner; *Affiliation*: Spending time with an engaging in shared activities with one's romantic partner; *Intimacy*: Striving for emotional closeness, mutual trust, and positive, validating interactions with one's romantic partner through self-disclosure, support, and expression of emotional affection; *Sexual Reciprocity*: Mutual sexual desires and receptiveness to sexual fantasies, desires, attitudes, and preferences.

Next, sorting material into categories involved the following process: the first author reviewed each response separately to determine the developmental need(s) that were present in the response. As the first research question was concerned with how developmental needs are related to reasons for breaking up, the presence and frequency of referenced needs were recorded. If one particular need (e.g., intimacy) was referenced more than once within the response, its presence was only recorded one time. Therefore, each response could have more

than one referenced developmental need, but up to five developmental needs if all subcategories (autonomy, identity, affiliation, intimacy, and sexual reciprocity) were referenced in the response. We were unable to categorize one response due to vagueness.

To establish reliability and safeguard against biased coding (Saldaña, 2011), an advanced undergraduate research assistant double-coded a random subset of 20% of the total number of responses. The first author trained the research assistant about the process of coding and the five developmental needs, and provided written definitions of each of the developmental needs. Cohen's kappa was acceptable ($\kappa = .78$). Coding disagreements that arose were resolved via discussions between the first author and the research assistant to establish the final coding. After reliability was established, the first author coded the remainder of the responses following prior studies using similar procedures (e.g., Dupree, Magill, & Apodaca, 2016; Goodman, Henderson, Peterson-Badali, & Goldstein, 2015; Ravert & Gomez-Scott, 2015). Subsequently, the presence or absence of each of the two broad developmental needs and the five possible subcomponents were dummy coded (1 = *present*, 0 = *absent*) to determine frequencies. When conducting the quantitative analyses, Pearson's chi-square tests were used when the assumption of equality of variances was met. If this assumption was violated, a Mann-Whitney *U* nonparametric *t*-tests was conducted. To address RQ1 and analyze frequency differences, we conducted a series of Pearson's chi-square tests comparing interdependence vs. independence; intimacy vs. autonomy vs. sexual reciprocity; and identity vs. autonomy.

Our second research question asked how emerging adults' perceptions of specific developmental tasks in emerging adulthood were related to their motivations for breaking up with romantic partners. We hypothesized that those who referenced independence needs would report emerging adulthood as a time of identity exploration, self-focus, possibilities, instability,

and feeling in-between compared to those who did not reference independence needs. To address this question, we conducted a series of independent samples *t*-tests, entering each of the possible referenced developmental needs whose distribution of frequencies met the assumption of equality of variances (i.e., interdependence, independence, and intimacy) separately as the grouping variable. For the developmental needs whose distribution of frequencies violated the assumption of equality of variances, a series of Mann-Whitney *U* nonparametric *t*-tests were conducted, entering each of the possible referenced developmental needs separately as the grouping variable. Because participants' responses could reference more than one developmental need, the *t*-tests compared participants who referenced that particular developmental need between those who did not. Relatedly, we also investigated whether various developmental needs overlapped in emerging adults' motivations for breaking up with romantic partners. To do this, we created a variable "overlap" and dummy-coded participants' responses as follows: 0 = *neither interdependence nor independence referenced*, 1 = *only interdependence referenced*, 2 = *only independence referenced*, and 3 = *both interdependence and independence referenced*. We then calculated frequencies for each category. Further, we examined how these overlaps mapped on to profiles of the IDEA through conducting one-way ANOVAs. For these analyses, two participants did not complete the IDEA measure and thus were not included (*n* for these analyses = 111).

To address our final research question (RQ3: Do men and women differ in their reported motivations for breaking up?), we conducted a series of Pearson's chi-square tests and Mann-Whitney *U* nonparametric *t*-tests based on gender. We did not propose hypotheses for this question due to its exploratory nature.

Results

We first examined whether there were differences in motivations for initiating a breakup according to highest level of education and race to determine whether these variables needed to be controlled. *T*-tests revealed no significant differences. No differences were found for college attendance or race in any of the calculated comparisons (i.e., references to interdependence, affiliation, intimacy, sexual reciprocity, independence, identity, or autonomy; analyses not shown).

The narratives presented in the following section were selected because they exemplified several subthemes. Importantly, some of the narratives include more than one theme from both independence and interdependence. We indicate in italics the specific pieces of the narrative that reflect a particular theme. To maintain parsimony, we present only one example for each developmental need. However, additional examples are available from the first author.

Table 1 highlights the results of the qualitative content analysis (Krippendorff, 2013) as well as motivations for breaking up with romantic partners and their frequencies. We note the various types of references for intimacy, affiliation, sexual reciprocity, identity, and autonomy.

Interdependence

The following excerpt from an 18-year-old woman exemplified several intimacy themes:

I just felt that *he wasn't caring enough for me at the time and wasn't spending time with me*. Whenever I would have an important concert or presentation and wanted him to be there, he almost never was and then I find out that he was just out with his friends just partying and having fun instead of supporting me. He doesn't need to be there for every event but *I want him to support me through this instead of lying to me* and saying that

he's working when in reality he's out partying...*I need him to show me that he cares about me and loves me too.*

Eighteen participants referenced the subcategory of unmet *affiliation* needs. The following excerpt from a 24-year-old man illustrated the couple members' lack of shared interest:

I thought that if we spent enough time together we would eventually gain mutual interests...for a short time it seemed like we did. *After that we just began to fight about everything that we thought we did have in common. It was such a horrible experience to be so physically attracted to someone but not be able to get along with them.*

Finally, seven participants referenced the subcategory of unmet *sexual reciprocity* needs. The following excerpt from a 22-year-old woman described her partner's disinterest in her sexual needs:

He liked looking at porn too much. *He never spent time finding out what I liked in sex, rather than getting his own enjoyment. Never giving me a break, always trying to please himself.* It got really annoying after a while; I just couldn't take how worthless he made me feel.

Independence

This excerpt from a 21-year-old woman described the differing goals she and her ex-partner had:

I chose to break up with my boyfriend because we had been in a relationship for two years and *were going in different directions in life.* I decided if we did not have the same life goals it would be best to end the relationship sooner rather than later. *I want to have children in the future when I am finished with school and he does not. This is a huge*

decision to make and neither one of us is willing to sacrifice what we want, so even though the relationship is working for us now it most definitely wouldn't work in the future. We are both college students, have similar interests, and are good friends...I would rather cut my losses and enjoy my last part of my college experience than be stressed over a man who will not be a part of my future anyway.

Thirty-two participants referenced unmet autonomy needs. The following excerpt from a 24-year-old man described his ex-partner's invasion of his privacy:

I broke up with my last girlfriend because she was very clingy to me, and she snooped a lot. I would catch her looking through my things from time to time when I would leave the room, invading my privacy. I don't like that sort of thing, and I just knew I would grow into bigger trouble further on down the road.

Each participant's response was able to be categorized amongst the five subcategories. Although we kept open the possibility that some responses were not able to be categorized and intended to re-analyze those responses to determine whether new categories would emerge, there were no anomalies found.

Quantitative Comparisons

Contrary to our hypothesis (H1), participants more often referenced unmet *interdependence* needs (90 references) compared to unmet *independence* needs (57 references) in their explanations for breaking up with romantic partners, $\chi^2(1) = 7.41, p = .008$. In examining the subcategories of interdependence needs, unmet intimacy needs (83 references) were referenced more often than unmet affiliation (18 references) and sexual reciprocity (7 references) needs, $\chi^2(2) = 93.72, p < .001$. Similarly, in examining the subcategories of independence needs, the frequencies of references to unmet autonomy (32 references) and identity (34 references)

needs did not differ, $\chi^2(2) = .02, p = .90$. Regarding overlapping developmental needs referenced in participants' responses, about half (48.7%) of the emerging adults referenced interdependence only, 31% referenced both interdependence and independence, and 19.5% referenced independence only. Only one participant (.9%) referenced neither independence nor interdependence. These results indicate that the majority of participants ended romantic relationships for reasons related purely to interdependence. One-way ANOVAs were conducted with groups that referenced at least one developmental need, given that only one participant referenced neither independence nor interdependence. This participant was removed from ANOVA analyses. Results showed that there were differences between groups in the experimentation/possibilities subscale, $F(2, 110) = 3.912, p = .023$. A Tukey post-hoc test showed that those who only referenced interdependence scored lower on the experimentation/possibilities subscale ($M = 3.09, SD = .62$) than those who only referenced independence ($M = 3.46, SD = .47$). No differences were found between those who referenced both interdependence and independence and any other group.

Motivations for Breaking Up and Perceptions of Emerging Adulthood

T-test and Mann-Whitney *U* results for intimacy, sexual reciprocity, independence, autonomy, and identity are presented in Tables 2 and 3. There were no differences between those who referenced and did not reference *interdependence* needs on the identity exploration, experimentation/possibilities, negativity/instability, other-focused, self-focused, or feeling in-between subscales (analyses not shown). In examining the subcomponents of interdependence, compared to those who did not reference intimacy, those who referenced *intimacy* in their responses scored lower on the *self-focus* subscale, indicating less endorsement that emerging adulthood is a time of self-focus. Further, compared to those who did not reference sexual

reciprocity, those who referenced *sexual reciprocity* in their responses scored higher on the *other-focus* subscale, indicating greater endorsement that emerging adulthood is a time of focusing on responsibilities and commitments to others. Thus, hypotheses were not supported when examining interdependence needs. However, hypotheses were supported when examining intimacy and the self-focus subscale, as well as sexual reciprocity and the other-focus subscale.

Those who referenced *independence* in their responses scored higher on the experimentation/possibilities subscale than those who did not, indicating greater endorsement that emerging adulthood is a time to explore and experiment with various possibilities for the future. In examining the subcomponents of independence, compared to those who did not reference *autonomy*, those who referenced autonomy in their responses scored higher in the domains of identity exploration, experimentation/possibilities, and feeling “in between,” indicating greater endorsement that emerging adulthood as a time of identity exploration, exploring possibilities for the future, and feeling as though one is not yet an adult, yet no longer a teenager. Finally, those who referenced identity in their responses scored lower on negativity/instability than those who did not, indicating less endorsement that emerging adulthood is a time of negativity and instability. Thus, hypotheses were supported when examining independence and the experimentation/possibilities subscale. Hypotheses were also supported when examining autonomy and identity exploration, experimentation/possibilities, and feeling “in between,” as well as identity and negativity/instability.

Gender Comparisons

No gender differences were found in any of the calculated comparisons (i.e., references in interdependence, affiliation, intimacy, sexual reciprocity, independence, identity, or autonomy; analyses not shown).

Discussion

Emerging Adults' Motivations for Breaking Up

Overall, the present findings support Developmental Systems Theory (Lerner et al., 2005) and suggest that emerging adults decide to end relationships to fulfill their developmental needs for interdependence and independence. Interdependence needs were identified more frequently than independence needs. This suggests that, similar to adolescents (Connolly & McIsaac, 2009), emerging adults seek out romantic relationships to feel emotionally close, connected, and passionate with another person. When intimacy fades or is lacking, emerging adults end those relationships, as they no longer fulfill the needs that originally motivated their quest for romance. Consistent with Connolly and McIsaac (2009), it appears that unfulfilled interdependence needs can account for both adolescents' and emerging adults' motivations to end relationships. However, Connolly and McIsaac (2009) found that affiliation was referenced more often than intimacy, whereas our study found that intimacy was referenced more frequently than both affiliation and sexual reciprocity. This difference suggests that, as emerging adults are on their journeys toward long-term, committed relationships, building deep and meaningful connections is more important than either engaging in shared activities or sexual satisfaction.

A unique romantic stage. Shulman and Connolly (2013) asserted that emerging adults must coordinate various life responsibilities, including hopes for their academics, careers, and financial stability, with their potential romantic partners. In this study, unfulfilled identity and autonomy needs were the second and third most referenced motivations for ending romantic relationships. Adolescents (Connolly & McIsaac, 2009), however, did not refer to these developmental needs when describing their motivations for ending relationships. The present findings support the idea that coordinating various life tasks becomes more salient in the period

of emerging adulthood. Indeed, many emerging adults' narratives described the importance of being on the "same page" with a romantic partner in terms of their hopes and dreams for the future.

The 57 responses that referenced unmet independence needs are consistent with Shulman and Connolly's (2013) assertion that emerging adults desire compatibility among the many roles and responsibilities they juggle. If emerging adults are not able to "integrate their career paths and life plans with those of a romantic partner" (Shulman & Connolly, 2013, p. 27), this likely contributes to the desire to end these relationships and possibly search for partners whose life plans match their own.

Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood and Motivations for Breaking Up

Unmet interdependence needs. Compared to those who did not reference unmet intimacy needs, participants who reported ending their relationships due to unmet *intimacy* needs identified *less so* with the idea that this time in their lives reflected personal freedom, individual responsibility, or self-sufficiency. This finding suggests that individuals who end romantic relationships due to unfulfilled intimacy needs might be more relationally focused. Thus, it is likely that these individuals seek out romantic relationships to fulfill these relational needs, and then choose to end them if those relational needs are not met.

Unmet independence needs. Those who ended their relationships due to unmet *independence* needs also reported emerging adulthood as a time to explore with a seemingly infinite number of possibilities for the future *more so* than those who did not reference this developmental need. In exploring the subcomponents of independence, compared to those who did not reference autonomy, those who ended their relationships due to unmet autonomy needs reported emerging adulthood as a time of identity exploration and exploring possibilities for the

future. It might be the case that these individuals with higher endorsement of identity exploration and experimentation of possibilities hope that they can continue the process of exploration in terms of work and who one is as an individual. When their romantic partners' desires for the future do not allow opportunities for such exploration or pursuit of new opportunities, they decide to end these relationships. Perhaps when emerging adults believe that there are infinite possibilities for the future, they believe that their possibilities for the future become limited by their partners' desires (such as in the excerpts discussed in the previous section) and end these relationships to keep their futures open.

Gender Comparisons

Results showed no gender differences in motivations for ending romantic relationships. Consistent with Norona et al. (2015), gender differences seen in earlier developmental stages likely subside during emerging adulthood, as the psychosocial tasks during this developmental stage are theoretically applicable to all emerging adults, regardless of gender. Arnett (2015) discussed emerging adults as heterogeneous, which may indicate that a more fruitful endeavor may be to consider within-gender differences, rather than focusing on distinctions between men and women. For example, if both young women and men are navigating the end of romantic relationships in service of their developmental needs, perhaps motivations for terminating relationships are the same for both genders. We offer this suggestion tentatively, as our study did not focus on gender differences in motivations for breakups.

Strengths, Limitations, and Conclusions

The present study built on existing research in several ways. First, as discussed by Connolly and McIsaac (2009), romantic relationship dissolution can be attributed to multiple factors. Our mixed-methods approach allowed for emerging adults to share several reasons,

rather than only the most important reason, for ending their relationships. Moreover, to examine how developmentally-related motivations for relationship termination was related to perceptions of emerging adulthood, the present study included the IDEA scale. A strength of the study also involved the inclusion of current college students, those who have attended college in the past, and those who have never attended college.

Our study also included several limitations. First, the study was cross-sectional in nature, and thus the direction of influence between motivations for relationship termination and perceptions of emerging adulthood cannot be determined. Relatedly, participants' recollection of reasons for breaking up might be inaccurate as these were reported retrospectively. To address this limitation, future longitudinal research should collect data on emerging adults who are currently in romantic relationships and track perceptions of this developmental period over time, even after some couples have broken up. Second, the majority of the participants in the present study identified as European American. As different rates of relationship termination have been found with adolescents from various racial backgrounds (Connolly & McIsaac, 2009), future studies should also include a more diverse sample. Also, the majority of our sample identified as heterosexual, and future research might explore whether such developmental needs are motivational factors for breaking up among emerging adults identifying with a variety of sexual orientations.

Third, cohabitation is common among emerging adult dating couples (Litcher, Turner, & Sassler, 2010). Relatedly, the status and duration of emerging adults' romantic relationships might be associated with their reasons for ending relationships, such that someone might have different reasons for ending a casual relationship than they would a committed, cohabiting partnership. As such, researchers should investigate whether relationship type, level of

commitment, and cohabitation is related to emerging adults' salient developmental needs and reasons for ending romantic relationships. Fourth, we note the fact that participants self-selected into the present study. This self-selection might indicate relatively adaptive adjustment after the breakup, which might have affected their responses to the open-ended item and survey measures. Fifth, the majority of responses were coded by the first author, which has the potential to bias the way in which responses were coded. Although measures were taken to increase the reliability of coding (use of a second coder to calculate inter-coder reliability), future studies should replicate findings using multiple coders that code all participant responses. Sixth, the present study did not specifically examine the particular events that led to romantic dissolution (e.g., infidelity, dating aggression). Future research should consider these specific events that preceded romantic dissolution and how they might be associated with developmental needs during emerging adulthood. Finally, the present study did not examine the effects of types of breakup such as mutual breakups or "on-again, off-again" relationships because the focus was on motivations for deciding to end a relationship in general. Future research might examine whether motivations for breaking up vary for breakups that were mutual or temporary.

Taken together, the present study showed that emerging adults' motivations for ending romantic relationships were largely due to their relationships and/or their romantic partners not fulfilling their needs for *interdependence*. In examining the subcomponents of interdependence and independence, unmet *intimacy*, *identity*, and *autonomy* needs were the most frequent reasons for relationship termination, indicating that, unlike adolescents, emerging adults are considering both their need to be close with others and their need to follow their individual paths for their careers and desires for family formation. Furthermore, our findings are applicable to programs such as RelationshipU (Fincham, Stanley, & Rhoades, 2010), a relationship education program

for emerging adults. Developmental needs in emerging adulthood and their associations with motivations for ending romantic relationships align with the general goals of the program. As developmental needs might be motivating factors to end romantic relationships, young people can benefit from learning about the developmental stage of emerging adulthood and how romantic relationships may or may not foster the achievement of important psychosocial tasks. This education can help emerging adults determine whether their needs are being met in their relationships and whether they should bolster aspects of their relationships that are detrimental to their personal growth, or if such relationships should end.

In sum, these findings point to a unique developmental process that emerging adults take on their romantic journeys in combining their lives with that of their romantic partners. Furthermore, the present study demonstrated links between perceptions of developmental tasks in emerging adulthood and motivations for ending romantic relationships. Specifically, individuals who ended romantic relationships due to unfulfilled intimacy needs tended to be more relationally focused, and those who ended romantic relationships due to unfulfilled autonomy or identity needs tended to view emerging adulthood as a time of experimentation/possibilities, feeling “in between,” and negativity/instability. Additionally, the convergence between reported motivations and how emerging adults perceive this developmental period in their lives lends support to the IDEA measure as a whole.

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Appendix

Table 1

Emerging Adults' Motivations for Breaking Up with Their Romantic Partners Coded According to Developmental Needs and Subcategories (N = 113)

Developmental Need	N	Subcategory	N	Theme*	N	
Interdependence	90	Intimacy	83	Extradyadic intimacy	26	
				Lack of mutual respect, effort, care, or support	24	
				Loss of emotional connection	16	
				Poor treatment	12	
				Poor communication	12	
				Intimate partner violence	7	
				Lack of trust	4	
		Affiliation	18	18	Dissatisfaction about time spent together	11
					Boredom	4
					Lack of common interests	3
		Sexual reciprocity	7	7	Sexual dissatisfaction	4
					Loss of attraction	2
					Lack of interest in sexual needs	2
Independence	57	Identity	34	Undesirable qualities	17	
				Different life goals	16	
				Personality differences	7	
				Partner's lack of life direction	3	
		Autonomy	32	32	Partner's invasion of personal space	12
					Partner's controlling tendencies	12
					Need for space to focus on oneself	10
					Partner's financial dependence	5

Note. *Values for the developmental needs and their associated subcategories refer to the presence or absence of each need/subcategory in a response. Themes, however, could be referenced more than once in a single response; thus, values represent frequencies rather than presence or absence. Furthermore, subcategories could be mentioned multiple times by the same person within the same narrative; values across this table do not add up cumulatively.

Table 2*Independent Sample T-tests for References to Intimacy and Independence Needs (N = 113)*

	Intimacy			Independence		
	Yes	No	<i>t</i>	Yes	No	<i>t</i>
IDEA Subscales	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>		<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	
Identity Exploration	3.25 (.55)	3.35 (.48)	.91	3.39 (.49)	3.18 (.57)	-1.87 [†]
Experimentation/Possibilities	3.18 (.60)	3.37 (.55)	1.57	3.38 (.54)	3.08 (.62)	-2.74**
Negativity/Instability	2.59 (.66)	2.36 (.67)	-1.64	2.52 (.83)	2.53 (.61)	-.09
Other-Focused	2.33 (.76)	2.52 (.87)	1.12	2.42 (.83)	2.35 (.75)	-.50
Self-Focused	3.20 (.57)	3.46 (.41)	2.32*	3.35 (.53)	3.18 (.56)	-1.62
Feeling “In-Between”	3.14 (.70)	3.18 (.55)	.33	3.23 (.64)	3.08 (.68)	-1.20

[†]*p* = .10, **p* ≤ .05, ***p* ≤ .01

Note: IDEA subscales range from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 4 (*Strongly agree*).

Table 3

Nonparametric Mann-Whitney U-tests for References to Sexual Reciprocity, Autonomy, and Identity Needs (N = 113)

IDEA Subscales	Sexual Reciprocity			Autonomy			Identity		
	Yes <i>MR</i>	No <i>MR</i>	<i>U</i>	Yes <i>MR</i>	No <i>MR</i>	<i>U</i>	Yes <i>MR</i>	No <i>MR</i>	<i>U</i>
Identity Exploration	59.71	56.29	345.00	66.63	52.45	956.00*	54.31	57.46	1251.50
Experimentation/Possibilities	43.07	57.40	273.50	71.92	50.33	786.50**	59.40	55.24	1227.50
Negativity/Instability	62.57	56.10	325.00	63.28	53.79	1063.00	46.19	60.99	975.50*
Other-Focused	90.50	54.23	129.50**	53.67	57.63	1189.50	59.60	55.15	1220.50
Self-Focused	54.93	56.50	356.50	64.81	53.18	1014.00	57.06	56.26	1307.00
Feeling “In-Between”	48.07	57.06	308.50	66.92	52.33	946.50*	52.63	58.19	1194.30

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

Note: IDEA subscales range from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 4 (*Strongly agree*). MR = Mean Rank.

CHAPTER II

BETRAYALS IN EMERGING ADULthood: A DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE OF INFIDELITY

Abstract

Using a unique sample of emerging adults who have and have not attended college, the present mixed-methods study examined the written narratives of 104 (59.6% women) emerging adults' reasons for engaging in extradyadic intimacy (i.e., emotional and/or physical infidelity). Findings indicated that emerging adults' reasons for engaging in extradyadic intimacy were largely due to their primary relationships and/or their romantic partners not fulfilling their needs for *interdependence*, and thus they sought the fulfillment of these needs elsewhere. Although the majority of participants provided needs-based reasons for their extradyadic intimacy, a large portion of responses (40%) were not needs-based. These responses included the opportunity to become intimate with an extradyadic partner, the influence of alcohol, attraction to an extradyadic partner, and excitement and novelty that the extradyadic experience provided. Findings also indicated links between adult attachment styles and reasons for engaging in extradyadic intimacy. Implications for the developmental importance of extradyadic intimacy are discussed.

Introduction

In the United States, it is not uncommon for romantic partners to participate in extradyadic relationships (i.e., emotional and/or physical infidelity; Allen & Baucom 2006; McNulty & Brineman 2007). One of the earliest empirical investigations of young people's infidelity reported that two-thirds of a sample of older adolescents/emerging adults had experienced infidelity, either by their partner's participation in infidelity, their own participation in infidelity, or both (Feldman & Cauffman, 1999a). In a recent study on college attending dating couples, more than half of participants reported having an emotional connection or being physically intimate with someone other than their romantic dating partner in the past two years (Allen & Baucom, 2006). Further, in another college attending dating sample, about a third of participants reported cheating on their romantic partner physically and/or emotionally (Hall & Fincham 2009).

Because of associations between infidelity and individual well-being (Allen et al., 2005; Feldman & Cauffman, 1999a; Furr & Welsh, 2006; McNulty & Brineman, 2007; Welsh, Harper, & Grello, 2003), the prevalence of, correlates of, motivations for, and reactions to infidelity have been explored extensively among adolescents and emerging adults (McNulty & McNulty, 2012). However, research has yet to examine infidelity from a developmental perspective. Indeed, developmental researchers have long hypothesized that young people's strivings to accomplish developmental tasks are associated with participation in infidelity. As stated by Feldman and Cauffman (1999a),

“...betrayal...may result from the complexities of balancing growing levels of intimacy (with its need for commitment and fidelity) with the establishment of a strong sense of identity (with its need for experimentation and exploration of alternatives)” (p. 252).

Despite the posited importance of developmental tasks, to our knowledge, researchers have yet to study infidelity among emerging adults through a developmental lens. Given the potential association between the negotiation of psychosocial tasks and participation in infidelity, further research can unveil the significance of infidelity in emerging adulthood and how it might contribute to development.

Developmental Systems Theory and Romantic Experiences in Emerging Adulthood

Developmental systems theory (Lerner, Theokas, & Jellicic, 2005) focuses on the dynamic interplay between one's development and the environmental context in which development occurs. This theory contends that individuals, particularly young people, intentionally act in ways that help them meet their developmental needs. This involves actively seeking a variety of experiences and making choices that are consistent with corresponding psychosocial tasks. In other words, young people are active agents in their own development and deliberately pursue opportunities that will help them grow as individuals (Lerner et al., 2005).

Emerging adults' strivings to meet their developmental needs can be understood through the lens of developmental systems theory. During emerging adulthood, young people begin developing their identities and understanding themselves as separate from their parents (Arnett, 2015; Grotevant & Cooper, 1998). At the same time, emerging adults continue to establish romantic relationships (Collins et al., 2009; Grotevant & Cooper, 1998). Establishing independence (apart from one's family of origin) while also fostering intimate relationships are tasks that are unique to emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2015). Together, these tasks are conceptualized as emerging adults' needs for *independence* and *interdependence* as they explore possibilities for love and work (Arnett, 2015; Collins & Steinberg, 2006).

Independence. Developing a coherent and independent sense of self is a central task for emerging adults (Collins & Steinberg, 2006; Grotevant & Cooper, 1998). Independence is comprised of two components: *autonomy* and *identity* (Connolly & McIsaac, 2009; Grotevant & Cooper, 1998).

Autonomy. Autonomy consists of emotional and behavioral autonomy. Emotional autonomy involves thinking, deciding, and emotionally reacting without relying on family members, friends, or romantic partners (Collins & Steinberg, 2006; van Petegem, Vansteenkiste, & Beyers, 2013). Behavioral autonomy involves taking action according to one's own volition, rather than acting based on others' beliefs (Collins & Steinberg, 2006; van Petegem et al., 2013). With their matured cognitive and behavioral capacities, adolescents begin to feel different and separate from their parents. As they express their independent views and beliefs, family members learn to see adolescents as more mature. Parents gradually give adolescents more freedom, which helps adolescents understand that they are distinct individuals from their families of origin and can develop their own opinions and make independent decisions (Collins & Steinberg, 2006).

Autonomy is often discussed in the context of family relationships; however, as adolescents gradually separate from family members, they negotiate separateness and connectedness in friendships and romantic relationships (Collins & Steinberg, 2006). Throughout adolescence and into emerging adulthood, establishing autonomy becomes a work in progress in multiple relationships. As they gain more experience in romantic relationships, the need for emotional and behavioral autonomy becomes more salient. The development of autonomy continues until young people establish a coherent sense of self (Collins & Steinberg, 2006).

Identity. In emerging adulthood, a major focus involves establishing one's identity (Collins & Steinberg, 2006). Identity is understood as a clear idea of who one is, what one

believes, and one's roles and responsibilities (Marcia, 1966; Morgan, 2013). Answering these questions is often difficult. Individuals arrive at these answers through exploration and experimentation with numerous options for the kind of people they hope to be in the future and the kinds of identities to which they want to commit (Marcia, 1966). Emerging adults aim to solidify their identities across several domains (see Schwartz, Zamboanga, Luyckx, Meca, & Ritchie, 2013). That is, they try on various labels and behaviors that reflect these identities. Successful development of an identity generally results in a coherent sense of self that is independent from others (Collins & Steinberg, 2006).

Interdependence. In addition to establishing independence, emerging adults are expected to connect closely with romantic partners. When the need for intimacy and sexual expression become salient, adolescents and emerging adults seek out romantic relationships to fulfill their interdependence needs (Connolly & Goldberg, 1999). This need is comprised of *affiliation, intimacy, and sexual reciprocity*.

Affiliation. Affiliation involves spending time with another person and engaging in mutually enjoyable and shared activities (Connolly, Craig, Goldberg, & Pepler, 2004). Beginning in adolescence, young people develop a need for affiliation and gradually interact with peers. The need for affiliation can be fulfilled by any type of social relationship (e.g., family relationships, friendships, romantic relationships), as affiliative interactions are more characteristic of platonic companionships, rather than being sexual or romantic in nature (Connolly & McIsaac, 2009; Connolly et al., 2004). This need for meaningful, social interactions is present throughout the lifespan, including emerging adulthood.

Intimacy. Being intimate and connected with others is particularly important for those seeking meaningful romantic relationships. Intimacy involves mutual trust and support, self-

disclosure, and positive and validating interactions (Connolly & McIsaac, 2009). Intimacy first develops within one's family of origin and continues to grow in friendships and romantic relationships. In same-gender peer groups during adolescence, young people have opportunities to practice and become comfortable with sharing emotional vulnerabilities and engaging in mutually validating and rewarding interactions. This need for intimacy remains important for emerging adults, who increasingly strive to develop intimacy with romantic partners.

Sexual reciprocity. As young people experience physiological, biological, and hormonal changes during adolescence at the onset of puberty, they gradually develop romantic and sexual attractions (Collins et al., 2009). In emerging adulthood, sexual expression often manifests in the context of dating relationships, and casual sexual and romantic experiences with friends and acquaintances (Claxton & van Dulmen, 2013; Grello, Welsh, & Harper, 2006). Emerging adults commonly report engaging in casual sexual relationships, rather than pursuing committed relationships, to fulfill their sexual desires (Lehmiller, VanderDrift, & Kelly, 2010).

Emerging Adult Development and Infidelity

Connolly and McIsaac (2009) first applied developmental systems theory to the experience of romantic relationship dissolution and found that interdependence and independence needs were associated with adolescents' motivations for ending romantic relationships. In an effort to extend their work, we examined whether this lens helps to explain the experience of extradyadic intimacy (physical and/or emotional) among emerging adults (a common reason for romantic relationship dissolution; Blow & Hartnett, 2005).

From the perspective of developmental systems theory (Lerner et al., 2005), it is possible that emerging adults participate in infidelity and seek out extradyadic experiences for developmental purposes. Perhaps emerging adults' extradyadic intimacy reflects their unmet

developmental needs in their primary romantic relationship. Indeed, Feldman and Cauffman (1999b) stated, “sexual betrayal may be a symptom of the difficulty with which adolescents juggle the competing demands of two age-relevant developmental tasks” (p. 228). Ambivalence about what the relationship does and does not provide may motivate emerging adults to seek out other kinds of relationships and partners who they believe can help them meet these developmental needs. In other words, participating in infidelity may be another way that emerging adults attempt to meet their needs for independence and interdependence. As emerging adulthood can be a trying and daunting time for young people (Arnett, 2015), the decision to engage in extradyadic behaviors is likely a form of relationship exploration and experimentation.

Extant research supports the notion that the need to achieve independence and interdependence is related to emerging adults’ motivations for engaging in various romantic experiences. For example, emerging adults have been found to end romantic relationships because their romantic partners did not fulfill their needs for independence or interdependence, particularly intimacy, autonomy, and identity (Norona, Olmstead, & Welsh, in press). Although it is unknown whether this need fulfillment applies to infidelity, empirical evidence suggests that salient developmental needs guide emerging adults’ decisions to pursue various romantic experiences.

Attachment Styles and Reasons for Extradyadic Intimacy

From an adult attachment perspective, Allen and Baucom (2004) examined the relationship between adult attachment styles and reasons for engaging in extradyadic intimacy. Using community and undergraduate samples, they found that avoidantly attached individuals were more likely than securely and anxiously attached individuals to engage in extradyadic intimacy for reasons related to *autonomy*, such as wanting freedom from their relationship.

Anxiously attached individuals were more likely than securely and avoidantly attached individuals to engage in extradyadic intimacy for reasons related to *intimacy*, such as gaining closeness to another individual. Unfortunately, the research on attachment styles and infidelity among emerging adult populations is scarce and is limited to the prevalence of infidelity across different attachment styles (see Blow & Hartnett, 2005; McNulty & McNulty, 2012).

Although these attachment styles overlap with the developmental needs of emerging adults, research has yet to examine whether attachment styles are associated with emerging adults' reasons for engaging in extradyadic intimacy as they relate to relevant psychosocial tasks.

Gender and Reasons for Extradyadic Intimacy

In addition to reasons for engaging in extradyadic intimacy and related attachment styles, infidelity is often explored in the context of gender differences and similarities. Findings on the rates of infidelity are mixed, as studies often include different definitions of the construct (Blow & Hartnett, 2005; McNulty & McNulty, 2012). From a developmental perspective, theoretical and empirical work on gender socialization indicates that girls and young women are socialized to be relationally focused, whereas boys and young men are socialized to be independently focused (Eagly, 2013; Gilligan, 1982). These gendered patterns of romantic engagement suggest that there may be gendered patterns of extradyadic engagement as well. However, developmental research has suggested that young people become more similar than different during the period of emerging adulthood (e.g., Norona, Thorne, Kerrick, Farwood, & Korobov, 2013; see Norona, Preddy, & Welsh, 2015 for a review). As proposed by Norona et al., (2015), gender differences may emerge in domains that have the strongest expectations for gender differences, such as parenting. Whether engaging in extradyadic intimacy yields such gender differences has yet to be

investigated. Thus, in the present study we considered gender differences in emerging adults' explanations for engaging in extradyadic intimacy.

Relationship Education and Interventions in Emerging Adulthood

Together, the possible associations among developmental needs, reasons for engaging in extradyadic intimacy, attachment style, and gender have the potential to contribute to relationship education for emerging adults through either formal programs or dyadically in therapy. Currently, RelationshipU (Fincham, Stanley, & Rhoades, 2010), which has been implemented with emerging adults, educates young people about their expectations of relationships, individual factors that can contribute to couple dynamics, and how to make decisions about relational experiences rather than “sliding” into such experiences (i.e., sliding vs. deciding, Stanley, Rhoades, & Markman, 2006). Developmental needs in emerging adulthood and their association with reasons for engaging in various romantic experiences and individual characteristics overlap with these general goals. Thus, gaining a deeper understanding about these variables may help guide relationship education programs, specifically by helping emerging adults become aware of the salient developmental tasks of this life stage and how their relational choices might be guided by the need to achieve those tasks.

Current Study

The present study extends the existing literature by examining reasons for extradyadic intimacy in emerging adulthood from a developmental perspective, underscoring the psychosocial tasks associated with this period. Using developmental systems theory (Lerner et al., 2005), we aimed to understand emerging adults' explanations for engaging in extradyadic intimacy as they relate to interdependence and independence needs. To do so, we qualitatively analyzed open-ended narratives about reasons to engage in extradyadic intimacy. Second, we

examined associations across adult attachment styles and reasons for engaging in extradyadic intimacy as they related to emerging adults' relevant psychosocial tasks. Third, we examined potential gender differences in participants' reasons for engaging in extradyadic intimacy to determine whether there are gendered patterns in extradyadic involvement using a developmental perspective. Informed by developmental systems and attachment theory and the extant literature on extradyadic intimacy among emerging adults, we developed three research questions to guide our study and tested two hypotheses:

RQ1. How do emerging adults' reasons for engaging in extradyadic intimacy coincide with their developmental needs for independence and interdependence?

H1. We hypothesized that emerging adults' reasons for infidelity would describe more unfulfilled independence needs and interdependence needs compared to reasons that are not needs-based.

RQ2. Are there associations among adult attachment style and reasons for engaging in extradyadic intimacy?

H2. Given previous findings on the association between anxious attachment and intimacy motivations and the relationship between avoidant attachment and autonomy motivations (Allen & Baucom, 2004), we hypothesized that anxious attachment would be related to unmet interdependence needs and avoidant attachment would be related to unmet independence needs.

RQ3. Do men and women differ in their reported reasons for engaging in extradyadic intimacy? Given its exploratory nature, no *a priori* hypotheses were proposed for this research question.

Method

Participants were 104 emerging adults (59.6% women) who reported engaging in emotional and/or physical intimacy with an extradyadic partner within the six months prior to the study. On average, participants were 22.1 years old ($SD = 2.12$, $range = 18-25$). The majority (74.0%) identified as White/Caucasian, followed by Black/African American (10.6%), Asian/Asian American (7.7%), Hispanic/Latino/a (1.9%), Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (1.0%), and 2.9% reported as Biracial/Multiracial. About half (48.1%) of participants reported that they had attended some college (and not received a degree), whereas others had earned a Bachelor's degree (28.8%), high school diploma/GED equivalent (7.7%), Associate's degree (4.8%), trade/technical/vocational training (4.8%), Master's degree (3.8%), some high school (1.0%), and a professional degree (1.0%). The majority (81.7%) identified as heterosexual, followed by bisexual (16.3%), gay/lesbian (1.0%), and 1.0% reported as "other."

Procedure

After receiving approval from the university's institutional review board, participants were recruited using Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk), a crowdsourcing system hosted by Amazon.com. Research on MTurk workers has shown that their demographic characteristics are more representative of the U.S. population compared to college samples (Ipeirotis, 2010; Ross, Zaldivar, Irani, & Tomlinson, 2009).

A brief description of the study was provided on the "Human Intelligence Task" page on MTurk. Interested individuals clicked a link that provided more information, and were routed to an informed consent form to gain additional information about the study and determine their eligibility. Participants self-selected into this study, which was anonymous. From MTurk,

participants were routed to Qualtrics, an online survey system, to complete the study. After completing the survey, participants were rerouted to MTurk and each received \$2.01 as compensation. Measures in the present study assessed basic demographic information, romantic experiences, and adult attachment style.

Measures

Demographics. Participants completed a demographics questionnaire that surveyed basic demographic data including age, gender, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

Romantic experiences and extradyadic intimacy. The Romantic Experiences Questionnaire was developed for use in this study. This questionnaire asked about participants' relationship history, current relationship status, and relationship length for those in romantic relationships.

The Romantic Experiences Questionnaire included items that inquired about infidelity experiences specifically. Prior to completing this primary area of the survey, participants read a short paragraph about the typicality of extradyadic intimacy, which was created to normalize extradyadic intimacy for participants and help them feel comfortable with disclosing such information. Instructions were adapted from Moffit and Singer's (1994) self-defining memory prompt. A textbox was provided for participants' responses. The prompt read:

Think back to the time you were in a relationship and were emotionally and/or physically intimate with someone other than your primary boyfriend or girlfriend in the last 6 months.

Imagine you are telling a very good friend about the story of this intimacy. In the course of the conversation, you describe *why you were intimate with someone other than your*

boyfriend or girlfriend. Describe the circumstances with enough detail to help your friend see and feel as you did.

Although your account will be anonymous and will only be identified by code name, please do not reveal information that is so painful as to make you feel uncomfortable describing the circumstances.

Attachment style. Attachment style was assessed using the Experiences in Close Relationships Scale (ECRS; Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998). The ECRS is a 36-item, self-report questionnaire used to assess attachment styles in romantic relationships. Items include brief descriptions of attachment styles with romantic partners and ask participants to rate the degree to which they utilize that style in their relationships. Sample items include, “I’m afraid that I will lose my partner’s love,” and “I often worry that my partner will not want to stay with me.” Response options are measured on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly agree*). Brennan and colleagues (1998) reported high internal consistency for avoidance and anxiety scales ($\alpha = .94$ and $\alpha = .91$, respectively). Internal consistencies for the present study were high (avoidance: $\alpha = .93$, anxiety: $\alpha = .94$).

Analytic Strategy

To address the first research question and analyze participants’ open-ended responses, we conducted a qualitative content analysis (Krippendorff, 2013). Given the length of participants’ responses, which were several sentences long, this analytic strategy was chosen to capture the possibility of multiple themes in a given response, as romantic relationships can end for a variety of reasons. We utilized a deductive, top-down approach, using the definitions of each of the sub-components of independence (i.e., identity and autonomy) and interdependence (i.e., affiliation, intimacy, and sexual reciprocity) to guide our investigation. Definitions for various categories

were consistent with previous developmental theory and research on developmental tasks (Arnett, 2015; Zimmer-Gembeck, Arnold, & Connolly, 2014). For these definitions, please contact the first author.

Next, sorting material into categories involved the following process: The first author reviewed each response separately to determine the developmental need(s) that were present in the response. The presence, rather than the frequency, of referenced needs were recorded. Thus, if one particular need (e.g., intimacy) was referenced twice throughout the response, its presence was only recorded one time. Therefore, each response could have more than one referenced developmental need, but up to five developmental needs if all subcategories (autonomy, identity, affiliation, intimacy, and sexual reciprocity) were referenced in the response. Responses that included words, sentences, or phrases that could not be categorized into any of the five subcategories were separated for future analysis.

To establish reliability and safeguard against biased coding (Saldaña, 2013), an advanced undergraduate research assistant double-coded a random subset of 20% of the total number of responses. The first author trained the research assistant about the process of coding and the five developmental needs, and provided written definitions of each of the developmental needs. Cohen's kappa was acceptable ($\kappa = .807$). Coding disagreements that arose were resolved via discussions between the first author and the research assistant to establish the final coding. After reliability was established, the first author coded the remainder of the responses. Subsequently, the presence or absence of each of the seven possible developmental needs were dummy coded (0 = *absent*, 1 = *present*) to determine frequencies. When conducting the quantitative analyses, Pearson's chi-square tests were used when the assumption of equality of variances was met. If this assumption was violated a Mann-Whitney nonparametric *t*-tests was conducted. To address

RQ1 and analyze frequency differences, we conducted a series of Pearson's chi-square tests comparing interdependence vs. independence; intimacy vs. autonomy vs. sexual reciprocity; and identity vs. autonomy.

To address RQ2, we conducted a series of independent samples *t*-tests, entering each of the possible referenced developmental needs whose distribution of frequencies met the assumption of equality of variances (i.e., interdependence, independence, and intimacy) separately as the grouping variable. For the developmental needs whose distribution of frequencies violated the assumption of equality of variances, a series of Mann-Whitney nonparametric *t*-tests were conducted, entering each of the possible referenced developmental needs separately as the grouping variable. Because participants' responses could reference more than one developmental need, the *t*-tests compared participants who referenced that particular developmental need between those who did not. To address RQ 2 and 3, we conducted a series of Pearson's chi-square tests and Mann-Whitney nonparametric *t*-tests based on group variables consistent with each research question.

Results

Here we report the frequencies of referenced reasons for engaging in extradyadic intimacy, followed by qualitative illustrations of the various developmental needs. To maintain parsimony, we present only one example for each developmental need. However, additional examples are available from the first author. For frequencies see Table 6.

Interdependence

Results of the qualitative content analysis (Krippendorff, 2013) showed that, of the 104 participants, 76 referenced unmet *interdependence* needs when explaining their reasons for engaging in extradyadic intimacy. Specifically, within these responses, 58 participants

referenced the subcategory of unmet *intimacy* needs. These references to intimacy included: (a) one's primary partner's lack of care, understanding, attention, or trust within the relationship, (b) poor communication and/or frequent arguments between oneself and one's primary partner, (c) one's primary partner displaying poor treatment, (d) one's primary partner's experience of extradyadic intimacy, (e) experiencing a "rough patch" with the primary partner, (f) lack of spark or excitement in the primary relationship, and (g) feeling unloved by one's primary partner. The following excerpt from a 24-year-old man exemplified several of these intimacy themes:

At the time that I became intimate with another person aside from my significant other, I felt neglected emotionally by my partner. She was distant and cold at a time when I needed the most support. She would tell me that she did not know if she was in love with me or not. She would tell me that she still had feelings for her ex-boyfriend. She would also regularly talk to him while we were dating and even went as far as to see him at one point. At the same time that this was going on I was going through a tough time with the death of a family member and it seemed as if my partner was not there for me. During that time an old friend of mine starting showing increased interest in me and would always make herself available to talk even if it was inconvenient for her. Over the course of a few weeks that relationship of "talking" had progress into something where I would blow off my girlfriend to hang out with this friend because she made me feel appreciated. It was like she genuinely cared about my feelings and well-being.

Second, 23 participants referenced the subcategory of unmet *affiliation* needs. These references to affiliation included: (a) loneliness, (b) dissatisfaction about the amount of time spent with one's primary partner, (c) boredom in the primary relationship, and (d) lack of shared

interests between oneself and one's primary partner. The following excerpt from a 24-year-old man illustrated his lack of common interests with his primary partner:

This new girl...liked video games and so did I. She liked to sing, and I play guitar, which makes a perfect combo for a great time to get together and have fun, and really share true feelings with her. My primary girlfriend did not relate to me in this way; she did not like video games, and wasn't really interested in me playing the guitar or singing, which was actually really disappointing for me....This often proved difficult for me, because I was constantly searching for ways that we could have fun together, without her getting bored quickly of what we were doing.

Finally, 22 participants referenced the subcategory of unmet *sexual reciprocity* needs. These references included: (a) sexual dissatisfaction in one's primary relationship and (b) lack of sex or sexual contact in one's primary relationship. The following excerpt from a 23-year-old woman illustrated her desire for a sexual connection:

I had never had a strong sexual connection with my boyfriend, and it was the first real sexual relationship so I thought it was me and my fault. I wanted to sleep with other people and know what it was like. I knew that sex is an important part of a relationship, and the love was gone for the boyfriend so there was nothing holding me there.

Independence

Regarding independence, 21 participants referenced unmet *independence* needs when explaining their reasons for engaging in extradyadic intimacy. Within this category, seven participants referenced unmet *identity* needs, which included: (a) one's primary partner holding undesirable characteristics/qualities, (b) not feeling accepted by one's primary partner, and (c)

personality differences between oneself and one's primary partner. The following excerpt from a 20-year-old man described feeling unaccepted by his primary girlfriend:

[My girlfriend] didn't have any problems accepting the fact that I am bisexual, but two months into our relationship, I was burning with desire for intimacy with a male. This is when the trouble began and it has only escalated since then....She got angry at me, became insecure, jealous, and tried to control me. *She refuses to accept me for who I am, who I told her the first time we met that I am...* I am not in love with her but I am happy, well, content, being with her *with the exception of her trying to control me, trying to "change" me, trying to "fix" me when there is nothing wrong with me. I am not broken and I am not in need of repair or in need of being "fixed."*

Further, 14 participants referenced unmet *autonomy* needs, which included: (a) desiring freedom from one's primary relationship and (b) one's primary partner's financial dependence. The following excerpt from a 19-year-old man described his desire for freedom from his primary relationship:

I became intimate with a girl because I was unhappy in my current relationship. *I was tired of being consumed by one single person and having no freedom to be with other people and have no restrictions on my actions. It didn't help that my partner was extremely jealous, which meant that I could not look at another woman for more than a second without causing an argument and feelings to be hurt.*

Emergent Categories

A total of 65 responses included reasons for engaging in extradyadic intimacy that did not fall under either interdependence or independence needs. Within these 65 responses, three frequently referenced themes emerged: (a) opportunity to engage in extradyadic behavior along

with the influence of alcohol (28 references), (b) excitement, novelty, and attention from extradyadic partner and/or the relationship (14 references), and (c) desirable qualities in the extradyadic partner (17 references). The remaining references appeared in fewer than 10 responses and were thus not considered emergent themes.

Opportunity and alcohol. Narratives that included the emergent theme of opportunity and alcohol described the availability of an extradyadic partner as well as lowered inhibitions due to alcohol consumption. The following excerpt from an 18-year-old woman illustrates this theme:

I never really intended to cheat on him, it just kind of happened. *I was out with my friends on frat row and got a little bit more tipsy than I anticipated. We went out to a party and I danced with a guy. It started off pretty innocently until I got even more wasted. I wound up hooking up with him that night.*

Excitement, novelty, and attention. Narratives that included the emergent theme of excitement, novelty, and attention described the thrill of being intimate with a new person. For example, the following excerpt from a 23-year-old woman illustrated this excitement:

...this attractive European and I danced. We kissed, left the club, walked around the city, holding hands and kissing, and making it all seem like a very romantic summer evening. Eventually we returned to his apartment. *I enjoyed feeling adventurous, and that was probably the main reason I did what I did. I was hesitant about my actions, but it also felt thrilling to do something I wasn't supposed to, since I've always followed the rules...I was not ready to be tied down, but rather craved something more thrilling and adventuresome. The comfort and consistency of a regular boyfriend was not for me. It was more exciting to be intimate with someone in that moment overseas.*

Desirable qualities in the extradyadic partner. Narratives that included the emergent theme of desirable qualities in the extradyadic partner described the appeal of the extradyadic partner as opposed to what a primary partner might have been lacking. For example, a 21-year-old man said:

It was an attraction to her personality insofar as she can always make me laugh and feel good after spending time with her. Her personality is just so bubbly at times that I'm drawn to it.

Quantitative Comparisons

Contrary to our hypothesis (H1), participants more often referenced unmet *interdependence* needs (76 references) compared to unmet *independence* needs (21 references) in their explanations for engaging in extradyadic intimacy, $\chi^2(1) = 31.19, p < .001$. In examining the subcategories of interdependence needs, unmet intimacy needs (58 references) were referenced more often than unmet affiliation (23 references) and sexual reciprocity (22 references) needs, $\chi^2(2) = 24.49, p < .001$. In examining the subcategories of independence needs, the frequencies of references to unmet autonomy (14 references) and identity (7 references) needs did not differ, $\chi^2(1) = 2.33, p = .19$. Importantly, needs-based references (a total of 97 references) occurred more often than non-needs-based references (65 references), $\chi^2(1) = 6.32, p = .02$. These findings are consistent with our first hypothesis.

Reasons for Extradyadic Intimacy and Attachment Styles

Mann-Whitney U results for all developmental needs are presented in Table 4. Although our second hypothesis was not supported, results revealed significant differences in attachment style and reasons for engaging in infidelity in different directions than were predicted. Compared to those who did not reference unmet interdependence needs, participants who reported engaging

in extradyadic relationships due to unmet *interdependence* needs scored *higher* on the avoidant attachment subscale. In examining the subcomponents of interdependence, compared to those who did not reference intimacy, those who referenced *intimacy* in their responses scored *higher* on the avoidant attachment subscale. No other significant differences were found.

There were no differences in attachment scores between those who did and did not reference *independence* in their responses. In examining the subcomponents of independence, compared to those who did not reference autonomy, those who referenced *autonomy* needs scored *higher* on the *anxious* attachment subscale. No other significant differences were found.

Gender Comparisons

No differences in gender were found in any of the calculated comparisons (i.e., references to interdependence, affiliation, intimacy, sexual reciprocity, independence, identity, or autonomy; analyses not shown).

Discussion

Emerging Adults' Reasons for Engaging in Extradyadic Intimacy

Overall, the present findings partially support developmental systems theory (Lerner et al., 2005) and suggest that some emerging adults engage in extradyadic intimacy to fulfill their developmental needs for interdependence and independence. The majority of participants in our study reported engaging in extradyadic intimacy because their primary partners failed to meet their needs for *interdependence*. *Intimacy* was the primary developmental need that was not met in their primary relationships, followed by *affiliation* and *sexual reciprocity*. About a quarter of participants also reported engaging in extradyadic intimacy because their primary partners failed to meet their needs for *independence*, with *autonomy* reasons appearing more often than *identity* reasons. Relatively speaking, intimacy needs were referenced with the greatest frequency.

Importantly, there were 65 occurrences of reasons for extradyadic intimacy that could not be categorized according to developmental needs. This suggests that although extradyadic intimacy might be motivated in part by seeking to fulfill one's needs, other factors are also at play. The most frequently occurring theme involved being under the influence of alcohol while confronted with the opportunity to engage in extradyadic intimacy (i.e., a person to whom they were attracted present in the social context). Because of alcohol's reduction of inhibitions (Tapert, Caldwell, & Burke, 2004; 2005) and the increase in drinking from adolescence to emerging adulthood (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2013), alcohol might be a catalyst to infidelity in a situation in which the opportunity is present. Thus, it is important to consider environmental factors in the occurrence of infidelity in addition to one's individual needs. Indeed, the consideration of external factors has been discussed in the marital literature (e.g., Baucom, Snyder, & Gordon, 2009), and present findings suggest that environmental factors with opportunity and alcohol should be included in emerging adults' experiences of extradyadic intimacy.

The need for excitement, novelty, and attention, as well as desirable qualities in extradyadic partners, were also identified as reasons for engaging in extradyadic intimacy. In such responses, participants seemed to have met potential extradyadic partners, became attracted to them or the excitement of being with someone new, and engaged in infidelity. Unlike the needs-based responses, these "other" responses did not seem premeditated or planned. In other words, whereas individuals who referenced needs-based responses discussed how their primary romantic partners were not helping them fulfill their developmental needs, individuals who referenced "other" responses focused on the opportunity to engage in extradyadic intimacy and specific qualities about the extradyadic partner that were attractive.

Infidelity as a Process

As mentioned previously, developmental systems theory only partially explains emerging adults' reasons for engaging in extradyadic intimacy. To further explain this phenomenon, particularly the non-needs based responses found in this study, Allen et al.'s (2005) process model for conceptualizing infidelity is especially relevant. Allen et al. (2005) discuss infidelity as a process, whereby extradyadic involvement occurs through an interplay of predisposing factors, approach factors, and precipitating factors. Furthermore, these factors are related to the partner participating in infidelity, the injured partner, their relationship, and the larger context in which the relationship grows. The present study's developmental lens and unfulfilled interdependence and independence needs appear to map on to *predisposing factors*. Specifically, considering the specific age of participating partners can shed light on the developmental tasks that are salient. Young people who are still figuring out what they want in terms of love and work might be particularly vulnerable to participating in infidelity if they believe their needs are not being met in their primary relationship. Furthermore, the non-needs based responses map on to the *contextual factors* that contribute to infidelity, such that the availability of a romantic alternative and/or the use of substances make extradyadic intimacy more likely. In sum, it is important to consider the proximal and distal factors that can contribute to extradyadic intimacy. A sizeable portion of participants seemingly engaged in extradyadic intimacy without prior motivations, yet the contextual opportunity for infidelity led to a "slide" rather than a "decide" into involvement with an extradyadic partner (Stanley et al., 2006). This sliding seems to be relevant when predisposing factors and contextual factors align for emerging adults.

Adult Attachment and Reasons for Extradynamic Intimacy

Compared to those who did not reference unmet interdependence needs, participants who reported engaging in extradynamic intimacy due to unmet interdependence needs, and intimacy needs in particular, tended to be more avoidantly attached. This finding suggests that individuals who generally avoid closeness and find it threatening tend to perceive their primary partner as not meeting their needs for interdependence, particularly intimacy. Additionally, those who reported engaging in extradynamic intimacy due to unmet independence needs tended to be more anxiously attached. This finding suggests that those who are overly concerned about losing intimacy in their primary relationship tend to perceive their primary partner as not meeting their needs for autonomy.

Based on research by Allen and Baucom (2004), these findings were unexpected. Allen and Baucom (2004) found that avoidantly attached individuals were more likely than securely and anxiously attached individuals to engage in extradynamic intimacy for reasons related to *autonomy*, such as wanting freedom from their relationship. Further, anxiously attached individuals were more likely than securely and avoidantly attached individuals to engage in extradynamic intimacy for reasons related to *intimacy*, such as gaining closeness to another individual (Allen & Baucom, 2004). It is possible that our findings differed from Allen and Baucom's (2004) for several reasons. First, our study was conceptualized from a developmental perspective, taking into account the independence and interdependence needs of emerging adults. Allen and Baucom (2004) utilized a deductive approach to categorizing reasons, whereby they provided possible motivations for participants. We used open-ended questions for this study which allowed participants to share a number of reasons for their extradynamic intimacy that were coded inductively. Relatedly, we examined a wider range of emerging adults than did Allen and

Baucom (2004). Thus, cohort effects may also play a role in the different findings, as the samples were collected more than 10 years apart.

Our findings suggest that emerging adults' attachment styles affect perceptions of their primary romantic partners and relationships. Further, this might also suggest that individuals who are anxiously and avoidantly attached are creating certain patterns in their relationship to protect themselves from either abandonment or enmeshment (Epstein & Baucom, 2002; Greenberg & Johnson, 1988). For example, a young woman who is anxiously attached and afraid of losing intimacy with her romantic partner might behave in ways that she believes will bring her partner closer. As a result, the increase in closeness in an effort to protect oneself from abandonment might lead to a decreased sense of autonomy. Thus, this young woman might venture outside of her relationship to meet her autonomy needs while her intimacy needs are met within her primary relationship. Similarly, in another example, a young man who is avoidantly attached and afraid of intimacy might behave in ways that create distance within the relationship. With this created distance, the young man might then feel that his intimacy needs are not being met within the relationship. Thus, the young man might venture outside of the relationship to meet his intimacy needs. Because emerging adulthood is thought to be a time of exploration and experimentation, it is possible that extradyadic relationships are a path through which individuals seek to meet their developmental needs and promote their individual development.

Strengths and Limitations

The present study builds on existing research in several ways. To our knowledge, this is the first study to examine extradyadic intimacy from a developmental lens, taking into account the unique psychosocial tasks encountered by emerging adults. Our mixed-methods approach allowed participants to share several reasons they perceived may have contributed to their

extradyadic intimacy as well. A strength of the study was the inclusion of a diverse sample of emerging adults including current college students, those who have attended college in the past, and those who have never attended college.

Our study also included several limitations. First, the study was retrospective in nature, asking individuals to provide reasons for their extradyadic intimacy after the fact. Because there are negative attitudes about infidelity in American culture (see McNulty & McNulty, 2012), it is possible that participants attempted to justify their behaviors in particular ways to be viewed in a more favorable light (i.e., social desirability bias). However, in an effort to reduce the likelihood of impression management, we phrased the main prompt in such a way that normalized extradyadic emotional and physical behaviors. Future prospective, longitudinal research should collect data on emerging adults in newly established romantic relationships and track the fulfillment of developmental needs over time. Second, the majority of participants in the present study identified as White/Caucasian, as well as heterosexual. Future research should include a more diverse sample to examine reasons for engaging in extradyadic intimacy to determine whether the present findings generalize to a broader range of emerging adults. Cross-cultural research would be particularly helpful in shedding light on whether emerging adults from other cultures engage in infidelity for similar reasons as those in this American sample. Because the meaning of extradyadic intimacy is context-dependent and can vary across cultures (Blow & Hartnett, 2005), reasons for engaging in infidelity might vary as well.

Third, the first author coded the majority of the responses. Although this process was conducted following studies using similar methods (e.g., Dupree, Magill, & Apodaca, 2016; Goodman, Henderson, Peterson-Badali, & Goldstein, 2015; Ravert & Gomez-Scott, 2015), there

is the potential of bias in the ways responses were coded. It will be important for future studies to replicate findings using multiple coders for all responses.

Finally, the main prompt of the study relied on participants' self-report of their reasons for engaging in extradyadic intimacy. Observational data and/or partner data might be helpful in illuminating relational dynamics and whether developmental needs were being met in primary relationships, particularly as it relates to the speculation that insecurely attached individuals create relational dynamics that make it difficult for romantic partners to meet their developmental needs. For example, understanding a partner's perception of whether he or she was meeting a partner's needs might help us clarify a target participant's perceptions about their romantic interactions. Relatedly, it is possible that there are reasons for engaging in infidelity of which an individual is not fully aware. This is relevant to the 40% of responses that were not categorized as either interdependence or independence. It is possible that unfulfilled needs underlie these behaviors, which self-report methods are limited in their ability to address.

To examine the relationship between adult attachment and reasons for engaging in extradyadic intimacy, it would be beneficial for future studies to further elucidate the reasons for the discrepancy between the present findings and that of Allen and Baucom (2004). Additionally, future studies might examine the possibility that insecurely attached individuals overcompensate in their relationships to promote closeness (and avoid abandonment) or maintain distance (and avoid enmeshment), and if other developmental needs are sacrificed as a result. Such studies might illuminate the counterintuitive effect that attempts to protect oneself and the relationship might have.

Importantly, the present study was conducted with a non-clinical sample of emerging adults. It is possible that associations among attachment style and reasons for engaging in

extradyadic intimacy might look differently, particularly for those who experience depressive symptoms. For example, individuals who are sensitive to rejection tend to also experience depressive symptoms (Harper, Dickson, & Welsh, 2006) and perceive neural interactions with their romantic partners as hostile and rejecting (Norona, Salvatore, Welsh, & Darling, 2014). As such, depressed individuals or those with heightened sensitivity to rejection might experience their partners' abilities to meet their needs in a different way than those from normative samples.

Implications and Conclusions

Findings can be incorporated into current relationship education programs for emerging adults. As the achievement of developmental needs might be a motivating factor to engage in extradyadic intimacy, it would be beneficial for emerging adults to learn about this specific developmental stage, the various tasks that they are expected to accomplish, and how becoming involved in romantic relationships may, or at times, may not foster the achievement of these tasks. Educating emerging adults about their needs for independence and interdependence can increase their awareness of how these needs might manifest in relational decision-making. The awareness of these needs might help emerging adults evaluate whether their behaviors align with their personal growth prior to sliding into action.

Further, professionals who work with emerging adult dating couples can apply a developmental lens when treating those who have experienced infidelity in their relationships. For example, highlighting the specific needs of independence and interdependence that emerging adults seek to fulfill can help guide couples' understandings about why the infidelity might have occurred. Additionally, awareness about the needs lacking in the primary relationship can help couple members begin a discussion about how to fulfill that particular need within the primary relationship, rather than having it met with an extradyadic partner.

Recently, Davila and Lashman (2016) developed a relationship education program that targets emerging adults, regardless of current relationship status. This program includes an in-depth examination of general needs that romantic relationships can fulfill. The awareness of these needs prior to entering a romantic relationship theoretically guides individuals as they search for a romantic partner. To extend this program, it would be useful to discuss how infidelity might be a temptation when a primary romantic relationship is not fulfilling one's developmental needs. Covering this topic might help illuminate the importance of addressing one's needs on the front end to avoid experiencing betrayal in romantic relationships, which can be a painful experience for both couple members.

Taken together, the present study showed that emerging adults' reasons for engaging in extradyadic intimacy were largely due to their primary relationships and/or their romantic partners not fulfilling their needs for *interdependence*, and to a lesser extent, needs for *independence*. In these situations, extradyadic intimacy could be viewed as a motivated act. Importantly, however, many emerging adults discussed reasons that were not needs-based, suggesting that at times, extradyadic intimacy is not a motivated behavior and can occur in a context that lends itself to extradyadic attraction and reduced inhibitions. The present study also drew connections between attachment styles in adulthood and their relationships to developmental tasks in reason for engaging in extradyadic intimacy.

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Appendix

Table 4

Emerging Adults' Reasons for Engaging in Extradynamic Intimacy Coded According to Developmental Needs and Subcategories (N = 104)

Developmental Need	N	Subcategory	N	Theme*	N
Interdependence	76	Intimacy	58	Lack of mutual care, understanding, attention, or trust	37
				Fighting/poor communication	15
				Primary partner's extradynamic intimacy	6
				Poor treatment from primary partner	6
				Lack of spark or excitement in primary relationship	3
				"Rough patch" with primary partner	3
				Feeling unloved by primary partner	1
		Affiliation	23	Loneliness	11
				Dissatisfaction about time spent with primary partner	9
				Boredom	8
		Sexual reciprocity	27	Lacking shared interests with primary partner	1
				Sexual dissatisfaction in primary relationship	17
				Lack of sex or sexual contact in primary relationship	10
Independence	21	Identity	7	Undesirable qualities in primary partner	5
				Not accepted by primary partner	2
				Personality changes or differences in primary partner	1
		Autonomy	14	Desiring freedom from primary relationship	12
				Having to care financially for primary partner	3
Other	65			Opportunity and alcohol	28
				Desirable qualities in extradynamic partner	17
				Excitement, novelty, and attention	14
				Polyamorous or open relationship	6
				Idiosyncratic (occurred fewer than 5 times) or vague responses	16

Note. *Values for the developmental needs and their associated subcategories refer to the presence or absence of each need/subcategory in a response. Themes, however, could be referenced more than once in a single response; thus, values represent frequencies rather than presence or absence. Furthermore, subcategories could be mentioned multiple times by the same person; values across this table do not add up cumulatively.

Table 5*Nonparametric Mann-Whitney U-Tests for References to Interdependence Needs (N = 104)*

	Interdependence			Intimacy			Affiliation			Sexual Reciprocity		
	Yes	No		Yes	No		Yes	No		Yes	No	
ECRS Subscales	<u>MR</u>	<u>MR</u>	<u>U</u>	<u>MR</u>	<u>MR</u>	<u>U</u>	<u>MR</u>	<u>MR</u>	<u>U</u>	<u>MR</u>	<u>MR</u>	<u>U</u>
Anxious Attachment	52.53	50.52	986.00	50.64	53.76	1226.00	53.59	51.54	883.50	61.11	49.52	690.50
Avoidant Attachment	56.66	38.89	672.00**	57.85	44.46	965.50*	52.65	51.81	905.00	50.58	57.23	776.00

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

Note: ECRS subscales range from 1-7. MR = Mean Rank.

Table 6*Nonparametric Mann-Whitney U-Tests for References to Independence Needs (N = 104)*

	Independence			Autonomy			Identity		
	Yes	No	<u>U</u>	Yes	No	<u>U</u>	Yes	No	<u>U</u>
ECRS Subscales	<u>MR</u>	<u>MR</u>	<u>U</u>	<u>MR</u>	<u>MR</u>	<u>U</u>	<u>MR</u>	<u>MR</u>	<u>U</u>
Anxious Attachment	60.70	49.90	656.00	67.77	49.72	380.00*	47.57	52.32	305.00
Avoidant Attachment	47.00	53.20	730.00	51.54	52.07	579.00	38.57	52.98	242.00

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

Note: ECRS subscales range from 1-7. MR = Mean Rank.

CONCLUSION

Taken together, the findings from this dissertation highlight the importance of considering the salient developmental tasks faced by emerging adults. In addition to romantic relationships, developmental systems theory appears to be relevant to other types of romantic experiences, including romantic dissolution and extradyadic intimacy. In particular, the need for intimacy seems to motivate young people to either end their romantic relationship or seek out an extradyadic partner who can fulfill that intimacy need. Importantly, however, for extradyadic intimacy, there might be other contextual factors at play in addition to the individual and developmental variables explored here. It might be beneficial for relationship education programs that target emerging adults to provide psychoeducation on the developmental stage of emerging adulthood, the various needs, roles, and responsibilities that young people typically search for during this stage, and how romantic relationships can both help and hinder individuals from fulfilling their developmental needs.

VITA

Jerika C. Norona was born and raised in San Francisco, California. She earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology at the University of California, Santa Cruz. In 2012, she began her doctoral training in Clinical Psychology at the University of Tennessee. Her research focuses on romantic experiences in adolescence and emerging adulthood and their links with identity development. She is the first person in her family to pursue a doctoral degree.