Emerging adults are persistent users of information and communication technology (ICT), with young women between 18-29 being the highest users of ICT in the United States. Relatively little research has investigated how young women internalize experiences of emerging adulthood in the context of their development, and especially intimate relationships. Using qualitative interviews with young adult women, this chapter will explore how high ICT use mediates the developmental tasks of forming an adult identity and intimate relationships. Emerging adult women (18-29) who were high users of ICT (N=22) described their user habits and discussed their developmental trajectories and experiences. Findings demonstrated that identity and intimacy are still pertinent developmental tasks for emerging adults but have changed in nature allowing a fluidity that challenges the bounds of traditionally developmental theories.
INTRODUCTION

Traditional roles for women dictate that they should prioritize developing intimate relationships over other concerns; but as culture and gender roles change, women may now negotiate the tensions between identity and intimacy to suit the roles most important to their envisioned life-course. According to the developmental theory of emerging adulthood young people aged 18-29 are focused on two primary tasks: expressing their personal identity and exploring intimate relationships. Current day conceptions of this developmental period are marked by fluidity and increased experimentation, as young adults aim to explore and try out various adult social roles (Arnett, 2000). Arnett & Schwabb (2012) argued that the in-depth personal exploration and the postponing of certain social roles among today’s young adults created the need for a more clearly distinguished and entirely different psychosocial developmental stage that separates adolescence from adulthood. This chapter will explore how young adult women are impacted by the complications of these fluid relationships, shifting gender roles, and the proliferation of technology.

These tasks are not easily navigated. On their face, expressing individuality and nurturing intimate relationships may appear to be conflicting goals, and young adults are further influenced by an increasingly dynamic social landscape. Arnett’s emerging adulthood theory (2000) emphasizes the advantages and social benefits of in-depth identity exploration, but less attention is given to the impact this new phase will have for practicing intimacy. Emerging adulthood also abandoned assumptions about women found in Erikson’s original theories, specifically that women experienced intimacy before identity. Modern relationships are complicated by the changing social roles and opportunities for women and technology is another contributing factor. Drawing from Arnett’s theory, this chapter will analyze the experiences of emerging adult women and how the developmental tasks of identity exploration and intimacy have been shaped by digital technologies.

Given the onset of digital technology, particularly the internet, emerging adults are experiencing expanded and vast opportunities for social interactions that ultimately inform the adult social roles they acquire. Jensen and Arnett (2012) recognized that this increasing global connectivity affects developmental paths, allowing for exposure to more cultures and ideas. Instead of forming an identity in the context of the local environment, which is an assumption of earlier developmental theories, individuals now create a *hybrid identity* that is derived from both local and global cultures (Jensen & Arnett, 2012). A *hybrid identity* is born out of the ability to observe multiple, global societies in order to understand what fits with one’s personal identity.

The internalization of hybrid identities affects young women’s development because they have the agency to reject local social norms based on traditional values of womanhood and instead adopt global ideas of what it means to be a woman (Arnett, 2002). Additionally, because a *hybrid identity* expands the potential identities an individual can partake in, it can be assumed that the expansion applies to how individuals develop intimacy with a wider set of individuals. Emerging adults are actively discussing and developing their own personal narratives about the types of relationships they seek in relation to who they want to be, as emerging adulthood encompasses the formation of romantic relationships with greater depth than those formed in adolescence.

A study of emerging adults found that narratives of true love and true friendship were predictive of maturing and advancing to the middle adulthood stage, and these narratives are developed in conjunction with peers (Mackinnon et al., 2011). Emerging adults continue to make meaning with one another, but prioritize intimate relationships over peers. Another indicator that intimacy is fundamental to this
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