Identity and intimacy : A longitudinal qualitative study of young Australians

Laughland-Booÿ, Jacqueline, Skrbiš, Zlatko and Newcombe, Peter

Identity and Intimacy: A Longitudinal Qualitative Study of Young Australians

Jacqueline Laughland-Booÿ, Zlatko Skrbiš
Monash University, Melbourne, Australia

Peter Newcombe
The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia

Jacqueline Laughland-Booÿ is a research associate with the "Social Futures and Life Pathways of Young People in Queensland" study at Monash University, Australia. Her research interests include the life trajectories of young people living in Australia and the attitudes of young Australians toward ethnic and cultural diversity.

Zlatko Skrbiš is a professor of sociology in the School of Social Sciences and vice-provost (graduate education) at Monash University, Australia. He is also principal chief investigator on the "Social Futures and Life Pathways of Young People in Queensland" project. His research focuses on the question of identities in transition, culture, and migration.

Peter Newcombe is an associate professor in psychology at the University of Queensland, Australia. He lectures in introductory and developmental psychology. He has received awards at faculty, university, and national levels for contributions to teaching psychology internationally. His primary research interest concerns quality of life issues in young people with chronic medical conditions.

Corresponding Author:
Jacqueline Laughland-Booÿ, School of Social Sciences, Monash University, 20 Chancellors Walk, Clayton, Melbourne, VIC 3800, Australia.
Email: jacqueline.laughland-booy@monash.edu

Abstract
In many industrialized countries, the transition into adulthood has become prolonged and complex. The consequence is that the process of identity formation within various life domains is often being delayed. This study applies a qualitative longitudinal research strategy to track the experiences of 28 young Australians as they undergo the process of identity development within the domain of romantic relationship formation. We explore their experiences and the strategies they have employed to negotiate any challenges faced. This study makes two significant contributions to current literature. First, it provides qualitative insight into some challenges contemporary young Australians are facing with respect to identity formation in this life area, and how they are responding to those challenges. Second, it suggests how theoretical understandings of the processes of identity formation, both in this

domain and others, might be expanded in order to acknowledge instances when young people might choose to enter an identity development hiatus.

The role of adolescence and emerging adulthood is to prepare for the future (Erikson, 1968; Luyckx, Lens, Smits, & Goossens, 2010). According to many developmental theorists, a crucial element of this task is to establish a coherent and consistent sense of identity. This is achieved via a process of exploration and commitment in key life domains, whereby the young person develops a sense of who he or she is, and what life pathway he or she wishes to follow. They then start taking tangible steps toward independence, such as gaining employment, leaving home, finding a long-term partner, and starting a family (Erikson, 1968; Luyckx et al., 2010; Marcia, 1966). However, in many industrialized countries, the transition into adulthood has become prolonged (Arnett, 2000; Luyckx et al., 2010; Schwartz, Zamboanga, Luyckx, Meca, & Ritchie, 2013). Where once most young people would achieve these transitory milestones in a relatively short period of time and in a unidirectional manner, this process has become more complex. In some cases, these steps are being postponed or omitted. In other instances, people will achieve a milestone, only to later change direction by retracing their steps and pursuing an alternative pathway (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007).

There are a number of explanations that may account for these changes in life course patterns. For instance, it has been argued that in this era of individualization, people's lives are no longer dictated by conventional patterns, but instead are a personal planning project where there is greater flexibility of choice as to how a person will lead his or her life (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Giddens, 1991). Economic realities may also play a part. These may include factors such as the cost and availability of education both in the secondary and tertiary sector, as well as the existence employment opportunities for young people (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007). The consequence of such trends is that the process of identity formation within the life domains that have traditionally signified "adulthood" is being delayed (Arnett, 2000; Schwartz et al., 2013).

Identity development within many life domains is a complex task made more challenging by shifts in societal circumstances, norms, and expectations. For people in their twenties, romantic relationship identity formation and consolidation can be particularly important (Arnett, 2000; Erikson, 1968; Montgomery, 2005). Unless an individual can achieve a coherent sense of self within this domain, they may experience difficulty forming trusting romantic intimate attachments (Erikson, 1968; Montgomery, 2005).

We have interviewed 28 young Australians at two points in time, 6 years apart to undertake an in-depth exploration of their subjective experiences as they progress from adolescence into adulthood. In this article, we investigate the lived experiences of young people as they undergo the processes of identity formation within the domain of romantic relationship

formation. We explore the challenges they have experienced in this sphere and the strategies they have adopted in order to negotiate those challenges.

Identity and Intimacy in Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood
Considerable effort has been devoted to advancing both theoretical and empirical understandings of the roles adolescence and emerging adulthood serve within the life course as distinct from other life periods. Broadly, it is believed that this is the time of life when young people begin building the foundations upon which they will establish a life independent from their family of origin. This can include engaging in tertiary education and training, obtaining employment, and forming an intimate partnership (Arnett, 2000; Erikson, 1968; Furlong & Cartmel, 2007).

Central to contemporary understandings of adolescence was the work of developmental theorist Erik Erikson (1956, 1968), who argued that the role of adolescence was to form a cohesive sense of identity. Erikson suggested an individual achieved this by experiencing "identity crisis," whereby they undertook a process of self-reflection, experimentation, and exploration in order to discover who they were and who they wished to be. Successful resolution of this "crisis" results in the individual achieving a coherent and consistent sense of self (Erikson, 1968). Developing a method of empirically assessing a person's current identity "status" during adolescence, Marcia (1966) argued that young people might be observed demonstrating "crisis" or "commitment" within various life domains such as career and religion. Crisis, in this context, refers to a process of an individual undergoing a period of active identity exploration, whereas commitment means the person demonstrates that a firm decision had been made as to who he or she is and what path he or she chooses to follow.

Depending on the levels of exploration and commitment, Marcia (1966) argued a person might exhibit one of four distinct identity status typologies: *diffusion*, *moratorium*, *foreclosure*, or *achievement*. Diffusion is characterized by low levels of commitment and exploration whereas those in moratorium show low commitment but high levels of exploration indicating that they are in the throes of actively considering their identity options. The status of foreclosure (also known as early closure – see Meeus, van de Schoot, Keijsers, Schwartz, & Branje, 2010) describes an individual who has committed to an identity without having undertaken a period of exploration. Finally, achievement is characterized by high exploration followed by high commitment.

Marcia's model has since been expanded by various authors (e.g., Crocetti, Rubini, & Meeus, 2008; Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens, & Beyers, 2006; Meeus, 1996). For example, Luyckx and associates (2006) have suggested the explorative process involves either "exploration in breadth" or "exploration in depth." Exploration in breadth describes the consideration of various options, whereas exploration in depth involves intensive evaluation of current commitments. They also argue the concept of commitment comprises two distinct steps: "commitment making" (choosing an identity) and "identification with commitment" (integrating an identity into one's sense of self). Also, Crocetti and colleagues (2008) have proposed that identity development involves three processes – commitment (consistent with

identification with commitment), in-depth exploration, and reconsideration. Reconsideration, in this context, refers to instances when individuals have made an identity commitment but, upon reflection and revaluation, choose to explore alternative routes (Crocetti et al., 2008; Meeus et al., 2010). The suggestion is that this results in five identity status typologies – four broadly consistent with Marcia's (1966) model, and an additional status labeled *searching moratorium*, which describes high levels of commitment, exploration, and reconsideration where an individual uses the foundations established via his or her current commitments to actively revisit and revise his or her identity choices and options (Crocetti et al., 2008).

As discussion continues about whether emerging adulthood is a new developmental stage (see Arnett, 2000; Luyckx et al., 2010), there is consensus that identity formation within many life domains typically extends beyond a person's adolescent years (see Arnett, 2000; Luyckx et al., 2010). Previous research, however, suggests not all people progress at the same rate. With respect to identity formation in the area of romantic relationship formation, variations may be associated with gender (Choukas-Bradley, Goldberg, Widman, Reese, & Halpern, 2015; Frisén & Wängqvist, 2011), the prioritization of identity achievement within other domains (Frisén & Wängqvist, 2011), sexuality (Archer & Grey, 2009; Rosario, Schrimshaw, Hunter, & Braun, 2006), or cultural background (Choukas-Bradley et al., 2015). For instance, studies considering gender differences in identity development within the domain of intimate relationship formation suggest females might commit to their identity (with or without exploration) at a younger age than men (Frisén & Wängqvist, 2011). Lack of sexual exploration may also be an issue. This could be due to religiosity, particularly if sexual activity outside of wedlock is disapproved of (Burdette, Ellison, Hill, & Glenn, 2009). Homosexual attraction also provides challenges for some young people. One example is a study of the experiences of same-sex attracted young Australians by Dempsey, Hillier, and Harrison (2001), which suggests difficulties can not only be encountered because of societal attitudes toward homosexuality but also because there may be less opportunity for same-sex attracted young people to explore their sexual identity. It may also be that identity formation in other domains takes priority. As Mayseless and Keren (2014) have observed, despite identity development in the relationship and career domains being important, "individuals can choose to invest in one domain at the expense of the other" (p. 68).

The Australian Context
Australia is a multi-cultural country with a population of more than 24 million people. Like many other developed countries, Australia has seen a shift in normative patterns associated with social and structural expectations that might impact how, when, or whether, a young person commits to an identity with respect to romantic relationship formation. There has, for instance, been a trend toward the delaying of marriage. Cohabitation has also become more common, with many young Australians electing to live together in de facto relationships as either a precursor, or replacement, to marriage (Hewitt & Baxter, 2012). Furthermore, the number of Australians with no religion continues to increase, with 22% of Australians reporting they have no religious affiliation in the 2011 national census (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2013). Such trends point to a socio-cultural environment in Australia where young people may have greater opportunity to extend the exploratory phase of their

development within this domain, rather than rushing to make firm commitments (Kelly, Zimmer-Gembeck, & Boislard-P, 2012). It is not that young Australians do not want an intimate romantic relationship in the future. On the contrary, it remains the desire of many young Australians to eventually find a long-term partner (e.g., Crofts, Cuervo, Wyn, Smith, & Woodman, 2015; Skrbiš et al., 2012), but as the literature suggests, preparing for such a relationship is not simple and can present many hurdles. In this study, we therefore address two research questions:

Research Question 1: What challenges do young Australians experience while undergoing identity development within the domain of romantic relationship formation?
Research Question 2: How do they respond to those challenges?

These questions are addressed via a qualitative exploration of young people's accounts, which describe the processes they have undergone with regard to identity development in this sphere.

The Present Study
Our data come from the Social Futures and Life Pathways project.[1] Also known as "Our Lives," this is an infinite-life, multi-wave, multi-method, single-age cohort study of young people from Queensland Australia, and has so far been running for 10 years. Quantitative and qualitative methods have been used to explore young people's emerging identities, attitudes, and values as they transition from adolescence into adulthood. To date, five waves of quantitative data have been collected with the most recent being in 2015 when the participants were aged approximately 22 years ($N = 2,158$). Extended interviews have also been undertaken with select members of the cohort. These were intended to expand on issues impacting our participants and the society in which they live (Our Lives Project, 2016).

As part of the research methodology employed by the Our Lives project, a qualitative longitudinal research strategy (Holland, Thomson, & Henderson, 2006) has been used to follow 28 members of the cohort and qualitatively understand their experiences with respect to education, career, housing, relationships, and family formation. Our interest in this study lies in these participants' experiences of identity development in the area of romantic relationship formation. Through the prism of lived experience, we are able to construct a comprehensive account of a young person's experiences rather than just providing a static moment-in-time glimpse of his or her identity development. As such, we can offer greater insight into the challenges of identity development as young Australian emerging adults negotiate obstacles and develop the skills needed to form a cohesive sense of self within this domain.

Method
We have adopted an abductive approach in our use of extant theory on this topic (Blaikie, 2007). From this perspective, the researcher uses existing theoretical understandings to broadly inform their research, however they are open to new explanations emerging from accounts of the lived experience. The researcher is positioned between the theoretical

literature and the generated data – moving back and forth between the two. The result may be corroboration of existing theoretical understandings, the extension of those understandings, or alternatively, the proposal of alternative theoretical explanations (Blaikie, 2007).

In this instance, the accounts provided to us by our participants resonated strongly with the identity status model, and it was from this perspective we commenced our analysis. This approach proved useful, because it not only anchored the data to a well-established framework of understanding but also enabled us to isolate accounts that did not fit within those understandings.

Our approach to data collection and analysis was also informed by the principles of narrative identity theory (McAdams, 2001, 2011). Narratives are essentially stories of self, autobiographical accounts of the experiences, and memories that write a person's own unique life-story. Life narratives play an important role in identity construction during adolescence and emerging adulthood (McAdams, 2001, 2011). A narrative approach has been shown to be an effective qualitative method for exploring the processes of identity formation in individuals (Carlsson, Wängqvist, & Frisén, 2015; McAdams, 2001, 2011). The benefit of adopting this approach is that it enables better appreciation of the "*how, when* and, *why*" (Carlsson et al., 2015, p. 355) behind a young person's journey of identity development within various life domains – allowing the exploration of the motivations and subjective meanings behind the processes of identity formation (Archer & Grey, 2009). For that reason, an analysis of the narratives of young people speaking of their experiences within the domain of romantic relationship identity formation is useful in understanding of the challenges they face and how they have responded to those challenges.

Participants and Procedure
Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with participants at two time intervals approximately 6 years apart. Interviews lasted between 1 and 2 hours. They were audio recorded, then later transcribed. At both times, participants were given a gift voucher in consideration of their time.

In 2009 and 2010, face-to-face interviews were undertaken with 50 members of the Our Lives cohort who at that time were aged between 15 and 17 years. The participants were purposively selected from members of the Our Lives cohort living in southeast Queensland.[2] The sample was balanced for gender. In order to ensure a representation of young people from varying socio-economic positions, we controlled for school type (state or independent) and parental occupation.[3] Interviews were conducted at the participant's home or at a café, and topics included future study and career goals, financial issues, relationships, and family.

In 2015, 39 of the 50 completed the Wave 5 survey. They were contacted via email or mobile text and asked whether they would be available to participate in a follow-up interview. Twenty-eight individuals (14 female, 14 male) responded to this request. At this stage, they were aged 22 to 23 years. Although we enlisted no further strategies to control the demographic variables within this second sample, there was diversity in terms of the

participants' levels of religiosity, whether their parents were born in Australia or overseas, sexuality, as well as past relationship experiences (see Appendix Table A1 for an overview of participant demographics). The interviews were either face-to-face or by telephone. The topics discussed related to past experiences, current circumstances, and future expectations relating to education and career, housing, intimate relationships, and parenthood. The procedure for constructing the second interview schedule involved two stages. We first designed a generic interview plan, which broadly covered the topics we wished to cover. Prior to each interview, we tailored the line of questioning to the individual participant based on information he or she had previously provided.

Analysis of Data

All interview data (28 participants, two time intervals, 56 interview transcripts) were coded using qualitative research software NVivo 10. Using theory relating to the processes that relate to romantic relationship identity formation,[4] the analysis was guided by the examples for a semi-structured interview set out by Marcia and Archer (1993), although our initial coding was brought more in line with the processes of identity development described by Luyckx et al. (2006) and Crocetti et al. (2008), that is, *commitment*, *exploration*, and *reconsideration*. To evaluate an individual's commitment to his or her identity within the domain of romantic relationship identity formation, we considered the degree to which the individual expressed conviction and certainty with respect to his or her description of self and sexuality, his or her desires and confidence about wanting to be in a committed romantic relationship, the qualities of the person he or she would like to have as a romantic partner, and his or her preparedness to contribute in a partnership. Those who had undergone a period of identity exploration described having taken steps toward gaining knowledge and experiences within this life domain, considering alternative identities, and weighing up the consequences of adopting those identities (Crocetti, Sica, Schwartz, Serafini, & Meeus, 2013; Marcia & Archer, 1993). Reconsideration of commitment was deemed to have occurred if the individual had previously made identity commitments in this domain, but had later re-examined his or her choices. As we progressed with data analysis, it was also necessary to include the process of *postponement* in our coding to capture instances when participants were not engaging in the other three processes. We also categorized our participants' identity formation activity into "past" and "current." "Past" refers to activity reported in the first interview or retrospectively in the second interview (e.g., "When I was 20, I …"). "Current" means the participant's circumstances as of the second interview undertaken in 2015. Appendix Table A2 summarizes this coding exercise. Here, we simply show the presence ("Yes"), or absence ("–"), of activity in each process category. A cross-check of the data coding was undertaken by the first and third authors in order to assess reliability (Cresswell, 2014).

Below, we present our findings. Although each life journey was unique, some broad patterns have been identified. We provide a summary of data collected from all 28 interviewees and present interview extracts. This will demonstrate some lived experiences of young people undergoing the processes of identity formation in this life domain and explain the challenges they have faced. All names used are pseudonyms.

Findings

Being Committed

At the time of second interview conducted in 2015, 13 of the 28 interviewees appeared to have committed to their identity with regard to romantic relationship formation. Consistent with past studies (e.g., Frisén & Wängqvist, 2011), more young women had made commitments to their identity in this domain than young men (nine females, four males). All expressed confidence regarding what they wanted from a romantic partner and their ability to contribute to such a relationship. In considering the extent to which these young people had previously undergone identity exploration, seven interviewees appeared to have committed to their identity without having undergone exploration in this area (foreclosure). Six other interviewees who identified strongly with their commitments described having undertaken a process of exploration prior. Although being in a relationship (or indeed cohabitating) is not a prerequisite for identity commitment (Mayseless & Keren, 2014), the six who committed to an identity after exploration (achievement) all reported having been in relationships in the past and having learnt lessons from those experiences.

Amy. Amy was a young woman, who over the years has shown high commitment to her identity in this domain without seeing a need for exploration. A child of immigrant parents, Amy was raised as a Roman Catholic. When she was aged 16, she had been adamant about wanting to get married and become a mother as soon as possible because "women are supposed to be at home with the kids" and that is what her mother had done. Six years later, she was of the same view. Her challenge, however, was to find a partner who respected her and her family's expectations regarding religion, pre-marital sexual abstinence, and marriage. As she explained, the choice of potential partners who shared the same religious ideals was limited. Amy was, however, optimistic that she would eventually find a Catholic partner who met these strict requirements. She believed God would help her find this person:

> So it's learning to just trust that God will find you someone who is of the same faith as you. Because part of being Catholic is if you get married and you marry another Catholic, you have a sacramental marriage …

At age 22, there was a person in her life who shared her faith and with whom she had spoken about "what the future could hold." When asked whether she would like the relationship to progress in the near future, she explained that there was little point at this stage because she was yet to finish university, and she did not see herself as needing to go any further than beyond platonic dating before getting married. Because she believed they had the same goals, there was no need to undergo any exploration, which she felt, kept things rather simple and straightforward:

> I find him attractive. It's more his personality and the fact that we connect on similar things. We enjoy similar things. I think it's the faith connection that is the strongest bond for both of us … being Catholic, both of us – it's important that we go to church and follow the teachings of the Catholic Church. We are not interested in living together before we get married, we're

not interested in sex before marriage or anything like that. So it makes it a lot less complicated.

Amy's story shows how life choices made very early might remain ingrained in a person's psyche and dominate their thoughts and actions. As Archer and Grey (2009) point out, foreclosure of sexual identity can occur at a young age in order to alleviate pressures brought on from external forces such as parents or religion. As Amy explained, there had always been very clear expectations that she would live her life in a prescribed manner. Her choice was to adhere to these expectations and commit to the identity (both sexual and in terms of what it means to be in an intimate relationship) prescribed by her family and her church. Instead of feeling constrained by these requirements, however, her view was that these had simply made her life path straightforward because exploration was simply unnecessary.

The next case we present is the story of Maddie, whose background was in many respects similar to Amy's, in that when she was younger, she had foreclosed on her romantic relationship identity. The point of difference however, is that she reconsidered that commitment and had undergone an explorative phase before recommitting to a new identity. This process of reconsideration and exploration, however, was not a straightforward process.

Maddie. Maddie also came from a deeply religious family. At the age of 16, she too had spoken of the importance of finding a partner who shared her religious convictions, she had spoken of the familial expectation that she wait until marriage before commencing a sexual relationship and find a partner who was also a virgin – but at that stage, she also commented that "Catholic boys are slim pickings" and was not sure about finding a partner who would meet these criteria. At our second interview with Maddie in 2016, she explained how she had discovered it was difficult for her to find someone who shared the same religious convictions and views toward pre-marital sexual abstinence. Furthermore, she had found attending university "was not a bubble like in high school" and had been exposed to a broader range of people and outlooks, which had made her reconsider her prior identity commitments:

> I think what I had pictured was just so narrow and that that person didn't actually exist or I couldn't find him. But like I said, even guys in my youth group, not one of them were still virgins by the time they graduated school … So, yeah, I think it was like, when I was at uni and then just started getting to know all these different people …

Maddie decided it was important for her to start exploring her beliefs about what it meant to be in an intimate relationship. She described engaging in what has been labeled by Crocetti and colleagues (2008) as searching moratorium and having learnt some "life lessons" in that sphere. At 22, Maddie was cohabitating with her boyfriend. As she reflected the cost of identity reconsideration of her previously foreclosed identity had been dealing with her parents' displeasure and taking the risk that the relationship with her mother and father would break down,

> Well, I was really nervous to tell my parents. We had decided to move in and I didn't tell them straightaway because I was really scared … I told my mum. I was just like "I've got to tell her, I've got to tell her," and I told her and she wasn't very happy at all. She was devastated. She was very embarrassed that I'm living with my boyfriend.

Her strategy in this regard was to be firm in her resolve, and although her parents were not particularly pleased, they had accepted her decision.

> My mum was like, "Oh, I'm going to lose my … daughter," whereas I'm like, "I'm only going 20 minutes away, you're not losing me, but if you make it very difficult for me moving out of home you will lose me." I was like, "This can be a smooth transition or it can be bumpy." … She was initially shocked but then a couple of days later she was really good about it and she'd help me go get bubble wrap and stuff to pack up my room.

Maddie was also faced with the rather significant challenge of reconciling her romantic relationship identity with her religious identity, which up to that point in her life had been so closely linked. Although Maddie did not want to completely leave her religion at this point in time, she felt that because her choice of domestic arrangements her only option was to put her religious identity on the "back-burner" and put off making any decisions about that aspect of who she was:

> Maddie: I haven't been to church for a while now, just because I don't feel like it's right. Even when I went to church on Christmas Day I didn't receive communion because I'm living out of home with my boyfriend. I feel like it would be hypocritical …
> Interviewer: Okay, so … what do you think you might do about [your] religion?
> Maddie: I don't know. I'm not sure. Probably, at the moment, probably nothing. I'm not really sure about that one.

Still Exploring

At the time of second interview, five participants were actively exploring their identities within the domain of romantic relationship identity formation. Those with an identity status of moratorium are in the throes of identity exploration and have yet to commit to an identity (Crocetti et al., 2008; Marcia, 1966). At the second interview, four participants met these criteria. Two had been undergoing exploration for some time and the others had only recently commenced this process, although none of these individuals appeared particularly concerned about their lack of identity commitment here. One other had made previous identity recommitments, but at the time of second interview, was reconsidering those commitments.

Nathan. At age 22, Nathan had been in some brief relationships in the past, and described having learnt about who he was and what he wanted in a relationship. However, when asked, he said he was still unsure of the qualities he wanted in a future partner.

> I don't know. Somebody who's – it's a hard question I suppose. I wouldn't say I know what I want in a partner until I'm – I don't know. I feel like I still have to meet them to click.

He described himself as be "an old-fashioned romantic" and wanting to be "loyal to one person for the rest of my life." He also felt it was time to "look a little bit longer term" in his next relationship, in order to explore what such a relationship was like.

Raised a Hare Krishna, Nathan had some firm ideas about how he wished to lead his life, but remained open, and to some extent unsure, about how being in a romantic relationship would fit in with that. For instance, being a vegetarian and wanting his future children raised as vegetarian, he did not rule out the possibility of being in a partnership with a non-vegetarian, however it seemed he would not support that dietary preference. The challenge for Nathan was simply that he felt he needed more opportunity to explore and discover who he was and what his priorities were in this domain. As yet, however, he was not too concerned about when that might happen. By contrast, Greg, who we introduce below, had been committed in the past, had reconsidered those commitments and in response was in the throes of identity exploration (searching moratorium). As his explorative phase became more prolonged, he was becoming increasingly uncertain of what he wanted.

Greg. At age 17, Greg presented as self-assured, describing himself as being hardworking and disciplined. Although not expecting to be married soon, he wanted a wife and to be starting a family by the age of 27. He was also quite adamant about the qualities he required in a future partner – both in terms of physical attributes and disposition. Catching up with Greg in 2015, he explained that when he was 18, he entered a long-term relationship with a girl he had known from school. The relationship lasted a few years, and for a time Greg believed this was the person he would marry. Reflecting on why this relationship had ultimately ended, he said that at that time, he simply "didn't know anything about lifelong partners and life-long love" and needed to reconsider what being in this type of relationship meant to him. As he explained,

> I'd only ever had one other person in my life to compare against and I felt the need to get out and experience a little bit more … I thought we were going to get married. I didn't know. I didn't know anything about lifelong partners and lifelong love and what a soul mate might mean.

It also seemed that Greg had regretted having decided on his identity at such a young age without experiencing more – particularly with regard to sexual encounters and, as he put it, doing "those silly things" when "you're meant to." As he explained,

> The last thing I wanted to do was to get back to my deathbed and look back and regret not having done the things that I'd wanted to do or that I'd heard other guys talking about. It sounds silly to say I missed out on having this sort of a relationship with a girl when it is so trivial and superficial, but it's just something that you have to get out of your system. Otherwise it would come back to haunt you later.

His response was to embark on what he referred to as an "adventure":

Interviewer: What do you call an adventure?
Greg: Everything from "one night stands" to "friends with benefits." It
was mostly based around sexual adventures. But I also learnt a lot
about relationships in general.
Interviewer: How did the adventure go?
Greg: Really good actually … Really good. It was exactly what I needed.

At 22, Greg was uncertain of what next to do. He explained that due to some unsuccessful relationships, he was still unsure about what he wanted, or the type of individual who might suit him. He was also weighing up having more superficial relationships so he could "go out and have the luxuries and the fun and the freedom … and do all those things that a stupid young man does" or attempt another longer term relationship. Although it was very evident that he had put considerable thought into some of the options available to him, he had not reached any conclusions regarding what he wanted or, in fact, what he could offer in a romantic relationship. It was also evident that this uncertainty was concerning him.

During adolescence and emerging adulthood, young people work on establishing a coherent sense of self in the sphere of intimate relationship formation. Without this solid foundation, maintaining relationships with others can prove difficult (Erikson, 1968). Exploration facilitates this development of self, but some young people may engage in what Luyckx et al. (2008) call "ruminative exploration" (p. 58) – a process of extended exploration, which may prove maladaptive for the individual as it might lead to confusion and distress (Archer & Grey, 2009; Luyckx et al., 2008). Higher levels of ruminative exploration and identity confusion have previously been observed among individuals who have reconsidered previous identity commitments and entered an exploratory phase (Schwartz et al., 2011). Schwartz and colleagues (2011) use the metaphor of a "double-edged sword" in describing the experience of searching moratorium (p. 853). An individual in this status has generally undergone an intensive period of self-reflection. However, individuals in this state also register higher levels of uncertainty and concern. As Greg's exploration and experience increased, so too did his indecision. At this point in time, he was unsure of how this uncertainty might be eventually resolved and what his next step might be.

It Is Not the Right Time
While coding the data, we found it necessary to acknowledge a process of postponement was in play for many individuals, meaning they were not actively engaged in developing an identity in the area of romantic relationships. Our assessment of the 2015 interviews showed 10 of our participants were postponing their romantic relationship identity development at that time. Individuals who are neither committed nor exploring their identity (generally, or within a particular life domain) are typically categorized as being diffused (Crocetti et al., 2008; Marcia, 1966). Four of the postponement participants had never undergone exploration or commitment in the romantic relationship domain (diffusion), and although the challenge might have been uncertainty or insecurity (Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens, Beyers, & Vansteenkiste, 2005), they did not construct their situation as such. On the contrary, they explained there was a significant advantage to their situation. By not spending time and focus

in this sphere, they were better able to (re) direct their energies on identity development pursuits within other domains such as education, religion, and career.

Lily. Both times we spoke to Lily, there was little indication that she thought it was important to be in a relationship. Although she thought she might eventually marry, it was not a priority in her life at this time point. As she said at age 16,

> By 30 I'd like to be married I suppose. I can't really predict any of that stuff. Not that I don't think it's important, but I just don't know where it's going to go so I don't really know … Yeah, it's not that important to me now I guess.

At 22, she still did not think a current relationship was particularly important. Instead, her focus was on her parents and siblings and on completing medical school. She thought that by age 40 "it would be nice to have children by then," but at the moment, romantic relationships were not a priority.

The status of diffusion has been subject to theoretical interrogation, with past studies suggesting this status comprises two distinctive types, commensurate with the degree of psychological distress the diffused individual is experiencing (Carlsson, Wängqvist, & Frisén, 2016; Luyckx et al., 2005). "Carefree diffusion" describes a state where the individual who is unconcerned by their lack of developmental progress, whereas "diffused diffusion" is characterized by psychological insecurities (Luyckx et al., 2005). Lily's outlook appeared more in line with the definition of "carefree diffusion," in that she presented as simply not wanting to commit or explore in this domain, and appeared unconcerned by her situation. She was aware of her lack of experience with romantic relationships, but felt exploration or commitment in this area need not be hurried:

> I just don't think it's that important I think. Well how can you say that if you don't really know? I'm not a very informed person to say that but I'm happy. I'm happy with myself. I know people always say that, you've got to be content with your own life and whatever before you can think about something else. I think to a degree that's true. I'm happy as I am.

The six others who were postponing their identity development in this domain at the time of second interview explained they had previously been engaged in identity development activity, but had subsequently chosen to stop. They described how due to their current circumstances, they believed neither further exploration nor commitment were a viable option. They, therefore, thought their best option was to wait for the course of time to change their situation, so they might continue their identity exploration or make a commitment in this identity domain at a later time. In order to differentiate this latter group from diffused individuals, we have labeled them as being in "*hiatus.*"

Matthew. Matthew's family were also immigrants to Australia. When interviewed at age 16, he explained that although in the short term he wanted to focus on his education and career, he eventually wanted to be married with children. At 22, Matthew was still living with his

parents and studying at university. He was also managing anxiety. When asked about his mental health, he explained that it was in part due to his sexuality and his inability to discuss this with his family.

> I think a large part of that stems funnily enough due to my sexuality. I'm bi, bisexual and my parents are old school … So it's effectively like I have to keep half of myself hidden away at all times.

With regard to experiences of exploration, Matthew had one past relationship with a male when he was much younger. Matthew had never had a relationship with a woman although he had "come close a couple of times." He admitted he was slightly apprehensive about women, because he "had no experience" and had "less of an idea of what to do." However, at the present time, he was not actively looking to explore this aspect of his self. He explained that speaking to his family about his sexuality would seriously jeopardize their relationship and he would "effectively just be a faggot." If they were to find out about his sexuality, it would effectively "nuke" the relationship with his parents and this was not something he was yet ready to do. He had, therefore, made an active decision to put any further exploration in this domain on hold until he was not so dependent on his parents or their opinion.

The process of identity development in the domain of romantic relationship formation includes developing confidence and self-assuredness with regard to one's sexuality. As Archer and Grey (2009) explain, this process is "enhanced by an increasingly positive self-concept regarding one's sexuality such as positive self-esteem, comfort with one's expression of sexuality, and healthy motivations and assertiveness" (p. 34). They also suggest that the adoption of "adaptive decision-making/coping styles" (Archer & Grey, 2009, p. 34) will facilitate identity exploration and commitment in stressful circumstances. Forming a sexual identity that is either homosexual or bisexual can be particularly challenging – especially if an individual's parents and family are not supportive (Bregman, Malik, Page, Makynen, & Lindahl, 2013). By Matthew's account, he was neither confident nor assertive about his sexuality and, although he wanted to investigate his sexual identity further, his current circumstances restricted such exploration. His response to this impasse was to suspend the process.

Jack. Jack had also reached an impasse in his identity development in the domain of intimate relationship formation. After the first interview, he had commenced the process of exploration, and at the time of second interview, he was in a relationship with a woman and was talking about the possibility of moving in with her. Neither he nor his girlfriend, however, expected the relationship to last and were both being "very realistic" about their long-term prospects.

> So we discussed it and it's basically – it's a first relationship. We know that it's probably not going to be the one that lasts forever or far into the future. But I guess just enjoy it now while you've got it and see where it goes.

From his perspective, this was a first relationship for both of them; therefore, neither had explored their options fully to be truly sure of who they were and what they wanted, but he was happy to be in the relationship for the time being. Although he felt further exploration was needed before committing to an identity in this domain, what Jack was very sure about was his desire to eventually become a parent. His girlfriend, however, was adamant that this was something she did not want. Because it was very important to Jack that he be a father, he believed this would ultimately be the relationship deal breaker. At this point in time, however, he did not want to break up with his girlfriend. Like Matthew, Jack expected to continue on with the process of exploration in the future, but he wanted to avoid the change and distress that any continued exploration would cause, and so his response to this dilemma was to also do nothing and wait.

Discussion

A longitudinal qualitative strategy has offered us privileged insight into the experiences of 28 young Australians as they have transitioned from adolescence into adulthood. In this study, we have analyzed the narratives of young Australians to understand the processes they have undertaken to address the task of identity formation within the domain of romantic relationship formation. To achieve this, we have used a narrative approach to focus on how they have built an understanding of self and sexuality, the factors that inform their beliefs about being in a committed intimate relationship, and the degree to which they feel they are prepared to invest in such a partnership. We believe our study makes two significant contributions. First, it describes the challenges some contemporary young Australians are facing with respect to identity formation in this life area and how they respond to those challenges. Second, it suggests how theoretical understandings of the processes of identity formation, both in this domain and others, might be expanded.

Guided by theory related to the processes of identity formation (Crocetti et al., 2008; Marcia, 1966), we identified instances across time when our participants were (or were not) engaging in romantic relationship identity development activities. Consistent with past research, we found they were not all "progressing" in this area at the same rate, or in the same manner. The participants also offered accounts of what was influencing their progression in this area and, for some, the hurdles they had faced. As our findings show, identity formation in this life domain is not undertaken in isolation, and a range of factors can influence this. This not only includes individuals' own preferences and priorities, but also the context in which they live, the people who are important to them, the opportunities available to them, and broader societal expectations. Any of these variables, isolated or combined, might help or hinder a young person's identity development.

Although adolescence and emerging adulthood mark the stage where young people are transitioning away from parental influence (Arnett, 2000), at the age of 22, many of our participants spoke of how their parents continued to maintain a strong influence in their lives (either positive or negative). The influence of parents on a young person's identity formation has been noted elsewhere, and it depends on parenting style, cultural background, the presence of conflict in the household, and the degree to which the individual feels attached to

his or her parents (e.g., Koepke & Denissen, 2012; Mullis, Graf, & Mullis, 2009). What we have provided here are qualitative illustrations of where identity formation during emerging adulthood conflicts with parental expectations and some subjective descriptions of what might happen in this situation. One young person, for instance, described her capacity to deviate from her parents' wishes in order to achieve her own sense of self – a response considered developmentally optimal (Koepke & Denissen, 2012). However, another explained his concerns about jeopardizing his relationship with his family, should he explore his sexuality. For that reason, he had made the conscious choice to postpone identity development activity.

Religion was also a very strong influence for some of our participants and shaped their choices regarding whom they might fall in love with and how a romantic relationship might transpire. Although religion may be declining in Australia, the majority of Australians still identify with a religious denomination and its influence should not be discounted. Most recent Australian census figures suggest 22% of Australians state they have no religion (ABS, 2013), but 61% claim an affiliation to a Christian denomination and another 7% to a non-Christian religion (Hughes, 2012). Young people may be growing up in an individualized world where there is greater choice and opportunity to make one's own life choices rather than adhering to structural expectations, but because of the influence of others or through their own individualized volition, some young people form romantic relationship identities that are consistent with their religious beliefs. As we have also seen here, others may have been raised in a religious environment, and although they might decide to explore in ways that are contrary to the religious teachings of their childhood, this can form tensions both within the individual as they try to reconcile conflicting identities or as they deal with the possible disapproval of their family, friends, or community.

The identity status framework has proved useful in positioning our findings within a larger body of research knowledge, but it was not our primary intent to go into the field to quantify or assess our participants' identity status within this domain. However, by using this conceptual lens, we believe we have provided interesting and some novel qualitative insights about the experiences of undergoing this journey of identity formation. We also believe our observations compliment and expand current understandings of the dimensions of identity formation and the resulting identity status typologies.

Importantly, we believe postponement must be better acknowledged as a process of identity exploration alongside commitment, exploration, and reconsideration. By adding this as a dimension of identity formation, greater consideration may be paid to varying qualitative manifestations of identity formation postponement both in this and other life domains. At this point, the diffusion the identity status has characterized a lack of exploration or commitment in an individual's identity development profile. Furthermore, diffusion has been recognized as having some qualitative distinctions – carefree diffusion and diffused diffusion, which are typified by the individual's reaction to their current state (Luyckx et al., 2005). Our investigations, however, noted some individuals who had postponed their identity development journey were qualitatively different to their "diffused" counterparts. Instead of

never engaging in identity development activities, they had commenced identity exploration but then stopped.

Deferment of identity development has been previously noted. O'Connell (1976), for instance, suggested some mothers engage in "a partial hiatus in identity synthesis" (p. 675), voluntarily suspending their own developmental progress in favor of their children's needs. Also, from an identity status perspective, Waterman (1993) notes the possibility of an individual changing from a status that has involved either exploration or commitment, to one where there is no such activity. He believes such a shift is developmentally regressive describing how a move from achievement or foreclosure to diffusion might mean a person who has given up on previous commitments yet has made no effort to replace them, whereas an individual in moratorium might "become an Identity Diffusion by giving up on efforts to find something worthwhile to which to become committed" (Waterman, 1993, p. 43). Even though such patterns have been acknowledged, we believe deferment of identity development after commencement requires greater empirical attention. For the purpose of distinguishing this pattern from the diffusion status, we have labeled this suggested identity status hiatus, which encompasses the processes of exploration followed by postponement.

There may be a number of explanations as to why some young people would postpone the identity development process after commencement rather than continuing. Perhaps self-enforced deferment identity development is an adaptive strategy. If reaching a point where one can commit to another person in an intimate relationship without experiencing ego loss is a key function of adolescence and emerging adulthood (Erikson, 1968), hiatus would be a way of dealing with external pressures without succumbing to them. By stopping identity development, the prerogative to choose is retained, but immediate external pressures are also contained.

Contemporary social conditions could also be providing an environment where hiatus becomes a more viable and perhaps sensible option than foreclosure. Given the extension of transitions to adulthood, perhaps young people experience less social pressure to make hasty decisions, and instead feel they have scope to play the "long game" and for their circumstances to improve before recommencing the exploration process. Greater individualization of life pathways might also play a part. If individuals are indeed expected to make their own life choices and take responsibility for those choices (e.g., Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002), hiatus may be a reflexive and adaptive response if the young person believes that current circumstances are hindering their ability to appropriately consider all the options available to them. Further research is needed to investigate and validate this proposed status. For instance, there would need to be quantitative research using a larger sample and an investigation of correlates. It may also be that hiatus occurs more frequently in some life domains than in others. This possibility also requires greater exploration.

Maladaptive consequences of hiatus would also require exploration. Vleioras and Bosma (2005) make the case that identity commitments are a state of "equilibrium between internal standards and environmental data" (p. 38), and are coupled with positive emotion.

Conversely, negative emotions might trigger reconsideration of those commitments. Emotion also serves as an agent for commencement, continuation, and cessation of explorative actions (Vleioras & Bosma, 2005). If individuals encounter conflict between their exploratory process and their environment, they might attempt to avoid emotional discomfort by interrupting that process. As Giddens (1991) has argued, people who become apprehensive when faced with a threat to their selfhood may become "paralysed in terms of practical action" (p. 53). The long-term impact of this strategy would, therefore, need to be carefully considered.

This study has undertaken a longitudinal qualitative investigation of the experiences of young Australians within the realm of romantic relationship identity formation. It discusses the challenges young people are encountering in this domain and how they are reacting to those challenges. In addition, we have proposed the expansion of identity status theory in order that we may acknowledge and explore instances when individuals might choose to enter an identity development hiatus. Our next step is to investigate our participants' identity development experiences in the realm of career. This will allow us to further our understanding of the qualitative aspects of the identity formation experience. Moreover, we can then build a more comprehensive picture of how different life areas complement or perhaps compete against each other as a young person makes his or her transitory journey toward adulthood.

Appendix

Table A1. Participant Information.

Pseudonym	Sex	Parents born overseas	Religiosity	Sexuality	2015 total sex partners	2015 total relationships
April	F	2	1	Heterosexual	2-4	2-4
Phil	M	1	1	Heterosexual	1	1
Greg	M	0	1	Heterosexual	10-20	2-4
Martin	M	0	1	Gay	1	1
Jane	F	0	1	Heterosexual	0-1	1
Lily	F	0	8	Heterosexual	0	0
Patrick	M	1	1	Heterosexual	5-9	2-4
Amy	F	2	10	Heterosexual	0	0-1
Robert	M	0	1	Heterosexual	10-20	0
Teagan[a]	F	0	8	Heterosexual	1	1
Grace	F	0	1	Heterosexual	10-20	2-4
Maddie	F	0	4	Heterosexual	2-4	2-4
Bec	F	1	1	Bisexual	2-4	1
Michelle	F	1	4	Heterosexual	10-20	2-4
Sawyer	M	2	9	Prefer not to say	0	0
Nathan	M	0	9	Heterosexual	2-4	1
Rhett	M	0	1	Heterosexual	2-4	2-4
Jack	M	0	1	Heterosexual	1	1
Matthew	M	2	1	Bisexual	2-4	0
Deirdre	F	0	1	Heterosexual	1	1
Bronwyn	F	0	10	Heterosexual	5-9	1
Eamonn	M	0	2	Bisexual	1	2
Theo	M	1	2	Heterosexual	5-9	1
Stacey	F	0	1	Heterosexual	10-20	2-4
Renee	F	0	5	Heterosexual	1	1
Thomas[b]	M	1	1	Heterosexual	2-4	2-4
John[b]	M	0	10	Heterosexual	2-4	2-4
Regina	F	1	10	Heterosexual	1	1

Source. Information obtained from interviews and participant responses to 2015 Wave 5 Survey.

Note. Religiosity: On a scale of 1 to 10, how important is religion in your life? (1 = *not at all*, 10 = *most important thing in my life*).

[a]Married.

[b]Child

Table A2. Summary of Data Analysis in Relation to Participant Identity Formation Within the Domain of Romantic Relationships.

	Past exploration	Past commitment	Past reconsideration	Past postponement	Past identity status[a]	Current exploration	Current commitment	Current reconsideration	Current postponement	Current identity status[a]
April	Yes	—	—	—	M	Yes	—	—	—	M
Phil	—	—	—	Yes	D	—	Yes	—	—	F
Greg	Yes	Yes	Yes	—	A, SM	Yes	—	Yes	—	SM
Martin	Yes	—	—	—	M	—	—	—	Yes	H
Jane	—	—	—	Yes	D	Yes	—	—	—	M
Lily	—	—	—	Yes	D	—	—	—	Yes	D
Patrick	Yes	—	—	—	M	—	—	—	Yes	H
Amy	—	Yes	—	—	F	—	Yes	—	—	F
Robert	—	—	—	Yes	D	—	—	—	Yes	D
Teagan	—	Yes	—	—	F	—	Yes	—	—	F
Grace	Yes	—	—	—	M	—	—	—	Yes	H
Maddie	—	Yes	Yes	—	F, SM	—	Yes	—	—	A
Bec	—	Yes	—	—	F	—	Yes	—	—	F
Michelle	Yes	—	—	—	M	Yes	—	—	—	M
Sawyer	—	—	—	Yes	D	—	—	—	Yes	D
Nathan	Yes	—	—	—	M	Yes	—	—	—	M
Rhett	Yes	—	—	—	M	—	Yes	—	—	A
Jack	Yes	—	—	—	M	—	—	—	Yes	H
Matthew	Yes	—	—	—	M	—	—	—	Yes	H
Deirdre	—	Yes	—	—	F	—	Yes	—	—	F
Bronwyn	Yes	Yes	—	—	A	—	Yes	—	—	A
Eamonn	—	—	—	Yes	D	—	—	—	Yes	D
Theo	Yes	—	—	—	M	—	—	—	Yes	H
Stacey	Yes	—	—	—	M	—	Yes	—	—	A
Renee	—	Yes	—	—	F	—	Yes	—	—	F
Thomas	Yes	—	—	—	M	—	Yes	—	—	A
John	Yes	—	—	—	M	—	Yes	—	—	A
Regina	—	—	—	Yes	D	—	Yes	—	—	F

[a]A = achievement; D = diffusion; F = foreclosure; H = hiatus; M = moratorium; SM = searching moratorium.

Notes

1. For more information, go to http://artsonline.monash.edu.au/ourlives/

2. This area accounts for approximately two thirds of Queensland's population and has a mix of metropolitan, semi-rural, and rural areas.

3. Using the Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations 2006. Go to www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/1220.0Main+Features12006

4. Hereafter, references to identity development activity refer to identity development in the domain of intimate relationship formation unless otherwise specified.

References

Archer, S. L., & Grey, J. A. (2009). The sexual domain of identity: Sexual statuses of identity in relation to psychosocial sexual health. *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research*, *9*, 33-62. doi:10.1080/15283480802579409

Arnett, J. J. (2000). Emerging adulthood: A theory of development from the late teens through the twenties. *American Psychologist*, *55*, 469-480. doi:10.1037/0003-066X.55.5.469

Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2013). *Losing my religion?* Retrieved from http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4102.0Main+Features30Nov+2013

Beck, U., & Beck-Gernsheim, E. (2002). *Individualization: Institutionalized individualism and its social and political consequences*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Blaikie, N. (2007). *Approaches to social enquiry* (2nd ed.). Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Bregman, H. R., Malik, N. M., Page, M. J., Makynen, E., & Lindahl, K. M. (2013). Identity profiles in lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth: The role of family influences. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *42*, 417-430. doi:10.1007/s10964-012-9798-z

Burdette, A. M., Ellison, C. G., Hill, T. D., & Glenn, N. D. (2009). "Hooking up" at college: Does religion make a difference? *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, *48*, 535-551.

Carlsson, J., Wängqvist, M., & Frisén, A. (2015). Identity development in the late twenties: A never ending story. *Developmental Psychology*, *51*, 334-345.

Carlsson, J., Wängqvist, M., & Frisén, A. (2016). Life on hold: Staying in identity diffusion in the late twenties. *Journal of Adolescence*, *47*, 220-229. doi:10.1016/j.adolescence.2015.10.023

Choukas-Bradley, S., Goldberg, S. K., Widman, L., Reese, B. M., & Halpern, C. T. (2015). Demographic and developmental differences in the content and sequence of adolescents' ideal romantic relationship behaviors. *Journal of Adolescence*, *45*, 112-126. doi:10.1016/j.adolescence.2015.08.019

Cresswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.

Crocetti, E., Rubini, M., & Meeus, W. (2008). Capturing the dynamics of identity formation in various ethnic groups: Development and validation of a three- dimensional model. *Journal of Adolescence*, *31*, 207-222. doi:10.1016/j.adolescence.2007.09.002

Crocetti, E., Sica, L. S., Schwartz, S. J., Serafini, T., & Meeus, W. (2013). Identity styles, dimensions, statuses, and functions: Making connections among identity conceptualizations. *Revue Européenne de Psychologie Appliquée/European Review of Applied Psychology*, *63*, 1-13. doi:10.1016/j.erap.2012.09.001

Crofts, J., Cuervo, H., Wyn, J., Smith, G., & Woodman, D. (2015). *Life patterns: Ten years following generation Y*. Youth Research Centre, The University of Melbourne. Retrieved from http://education.unimelb.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_ file/0005/1624532/LifePatterns_10YearFollowingGenY_FINAL_webversion. pdf

Dempsey, D., Hillier, L., & Harrison, L. (2001). Gendered (s)explorations among same-sex attracted young people in Australia. *Journal of Adolescence*, *24*, 67-81. doi:10.1006/jado.2000.0363

Erikson, E. H. (1956). The problem of ego identity. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, *4*, 56-121. doi: 10.1177/000306515600400104

Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity, youth and crisis*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton.

Frisén, A., & Wängqvist, M. (2011). Emerging adults in Sweden: Identity formation in the light of love, work, and family. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, *26*, 200- 221. doi:10.1177/0743558410376829

Furlong, A., & Cartmel, F. (2007). *Young people and social change: New perspectives* (2nd ed.). Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press.

Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and self-identity: Self and society in the late modern age*. Oxford, UK: Polity Press.

Hewitt, B., & Baxter, J. (2012). Who gets married in Australia? The characteristics associated with a transition into first marriage 2001–6. *Journal of Sociology*, *48*, 43-61. doi:10.1177/1440783311411957

Holland, J., Thomson, R., & Henderson, S. (2006). *Qualitative longitudinal research: A discussion paper*. London, England: London South Bank University.

Hughes, P. (2012). The persistence of religion: What the census tells us. *Pointers: Bulletin of the Christian Research Association*, *22*(3), 1-5.

Kelly, M., Zimmer-Gembeck, M. J., & Boislard-P, M. A. (2012). Identity, intimacy, status and sex dating goals as correlates of goal-consistent behavior and satisfaction in Australian youth. *Journal of Adolescence*, *35*, 1441-1454. doi:10.1016/j.adolescence.2012.03.002

Koepke, S., & Denissen, J. J. (2012). Dynamics of identity development and separation–individuation in parent-child relationships during adolescence and emerging adulthood: A conceptual integration. *Developmental Review*, *32*, 67-88. doi:10.1016/j.dr.2012.01.001

Luyckx, K., Goossens, L., Soenens, B., & Beyers, W. (2006). Unpacking commitment and exploration: Preliminary validation of an integrative model of late adolescent identity formation. *Journal of Adolescence*, *29*, 361-378. doi:10.1016/j. adolescence.2005.03.008

Luyckx, K., Goossens, L., Soenens, B., Beyers, W., & Vansteenkiste, M. (2005). Identity statuses based on 4 rather than 2 identity dimensions: Extending and refining Marcia's paradigm. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *34*, 605-618. doi:10.1007/s10964-005-8949-x

Luyckx, K., Lens, W., Smits, I., & Goossens, L. (2010). Time perspective and identity formation: Short-term longitudinal dynamics in college students. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, *34*, 238-247. doi:10.1177/0165025409350957

Luyckx, K., Schwartz, S. J., Berzonsky, M. D., Soenens, B., Vansteenkiste, M., Smits, I., & Goossens, L. (2008). Capturing ruminative exploration: Extending the four-dimensional model of identity formation in late adolescence. *Journal of Research in Personality*, *42*, 58-82. doi:10.1016/j.jrp.2007.04.004

Marcia, J. E. (1966). Development and validation of ego identity status. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *3*, 551-558.

Marcia, J. E., & Archer, S. L. (1993). Identity status in late adolescents. In J. E. Marcia, A. S. Waterman, D. R. Matteson, S. L. Archer, & J. L. Orlofsky (Eds.), *Ego identity: A handbook for psychosocial research* (pp. 205-240). New York, NY: Springer-Verlag.

Mayseless, O., & Keren, E. (2014). Finding a meaningful life as a developmental task in emerging adulthood: The domains of love and work across cultures. *Emerging Adulthood*, *2*, 63-73. doi:10.1177/2167696813515446

McAdams, D. P. (2001). The psychology of life stories. *Review of General Psychology*, *5*, 100-122. doi:10.1037/1089-2680.5.2.100

McAdams, D. P. (2011). Narrative identity. In S. J. Schwartz, K. Luyckx, & V. L. Vignoles (Eds.), *Handbook of identity theory and research* (pp. 99-116). New York, NY: Springer.

Meeus, W. (1996). Studies on identity development in adolescence: An overview of research and some new data. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *25*, 569-598. doi:10.1007/BF01537355

Meeus, W., van de Schoot, R., Keijsers, L., Schwartz, S. J., & Branje, S. (2010). On the progression and stability of adolescent identity formation. A five-wave longitudinal study in early-to-middle and middle-to-late adolescence. *Child Development*, *81*, 1565-1581. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01492.x

Montgomery, M. J. (2005). Psychosocial intimacy and identity: From early adolescence to emerging adulthood. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, *20*, 346-374. doi:10.1177/0743558404273118

Mullis, R. L., Graf, S. C., & Mullis, A. K. (2009). Parental relationships, autonomy, and identity processes of high school students. *The Journal of Genetic Psychology*, *170*, 326-338. doi:10.1080/00221320903218356

O'Connell, A. N. (1976). The relationship between life style and identity synthesis and resynthesis in traditional, neotraditional, and non-traditional women. *Journal of Personality, 44*, 675-688. doi:10.1111/j.1467-6494.1976.tb00145.x

Our Lives Project. (2016). *Welcome to the Our Lives Project*, Monash University. Retrieved from http://artsonline.monash.edu.au/ourlives/

Rosario, M., Schrimshaw, E. W., Hunter, J., & Braun, L. (2006). Sexual identity development among lesbian, gay, and bisexual youths: Consistency and change over time. *Journal of Sex Research*, *43*, 46-58. doi:10.1080/00224490609552298

Schwartz, S. J., Beyers, W., Luyckx, K., Soenens, B., Zamboanga, B. L., Forthun, L. F., & Whitbourne, S. K. (2011). Examining the light and dark sides of emerging adults' identity: A study of identity status differences in positive and negative psychosocial functioning. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *40*, 839-859. doi:10.1007/s10964-010-9606-6

Schwartz, S. J., Zamboanga, B. L., Luyckx, K., Meca, A., & Ritchie, R. A. (2013). Identity in emerging adulthood reviewing the field and looking forward. *Emerging Adulthood*, *1*, 96-113. doi:10.1177/2167696813479781

Skrbiš, Z., Western, M., Tranter, B., Hogan, D., Coates, R., Smith, J., … Mayall, M. (2012). Expecting the unexpected: Young people's expectations about marriage and family. *Journal of Sociology*, *48*, 63-83. doi:10.1177/1440783311408968

Vleioras, G., & Bosma, H. A. (2005). Predicting change in relational identity commitments: Exploration and emotions. *Identity*, *5*, 35-56. doi:10.1207/ s1532706xid0501_3

Waterman, A. S. (1993). Developmental perspectives on identity formation: From adolescence to adulthood. In J. E. Marcia, A. S. Waterman, D. R. Matteson, S. L. Archer, & J. L. Orlofsky (Eds.), *Ego identity: A handbook for psychosocial research* (pp. 42-68). New York, NY: Springer-Verlag.