Parental Attachment as the Predictor of Emerging Adulthood Experiences

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the predictor of parental attachment towards emerging adulthood (EA) experiences among 548 undergraduate students (202 males, 346 females, and mean age of 20.8 years) aged between 18 and 25 in East Malaysia. The Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA) was used to measure the components of parental attachment (Trust, Communication, and Alienation), and the Inventory of Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood (IDEA) was used to measure five experiences of EA (identity exploration, self-focus, feeling "in-between", possibilities, and instability). This study used variance-based structural equation modelling via partial least squares (PLS) to test the hypotheses. The results revealed that parental trust is the most significant predictor of EA experiences of identity exploration, self-focus and possibilities, whereas parental communication is the most significant predictor of EA experience feeling "in-between", and parental alienation is the most significant predictor of EA experience of instability.

Keywords: Emerging adulthood, parental attachment, college students, identity exploration, reflective measurement model

INTRODUCTION

Since the emergence of the theory of emerging adulthood (EA) by Arnett (2000), the concept has been examined intensively throughout the globe. Several researches have been conducted to interpret this new phenomenon which later became known as a new developmental stage in a life trajectory. The dimensions of emerging

adulthood could be identified by a measure developed by Reifman et al. (2007), namely the Inventory of Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood (IDEA). The use of IDEA is mainly to assess five dimensions of emerging adulthood experiences (identity exploration, possibilities, instability, other-focused, self-focused and feeling "in-between"). All five dimensions were highlighted as a distinct developmental stage of emerging adults. Reifman et al. (2007) included the sixth dimension which is the "other-focused", as a counterpoint to the "self-focus" dimension. It was hypothesised that individuals older than emerging adults would score higher on "other-focused" dimension compared with emerging adults.

Since its introduction in 2007, IDEA has been well studied in studies which have mostly focused on demographic correlates of emerging adults' views (Nelson et al., 2015). Moreover, researchers used IDEA to explore the psychometric characteristics, conceptions and perceptions of EA dimensions among countries and culture. For example, Atak and Çok (2008) evaluated IDEA among students in Turkey; Sirsch, Dreher, Mayr, and Willinger (2009) examined IDEA in Austria; Arias and Hernández (2007) examined IDEA among Mexicans and Spaniards; Hill et al. (2015) examined EA among the Dutch; Zorotovich (2014) examined EA among the Americans; Pérez, Cumsille and Martínez (2008) evaluated IDEA among Chileans; and Dutra-Thomé (2013) examined IDEA among Southern Brazilians. Although all studies reported that emerging adulthood existed in their sample, it is by no means a universal

experience. The subjective experience of emerging adults can be different based on country, culture, or socioeconomic backgrounds.

Currently, there is a growing number of research that attempts to examine the predictive factors of IDEA and several researchers have investigated the relationships of its sub-scales with other outcomes. For instance, Luyckx et al. (2011) in their research used only the sub-scale of instability to examine the link between instability, self-esteem, depressive symptoms as well as employment-associated outcomes, such as work engagement and burnout; Allem et al. (2013) examined IDEA with substance use; Allem et al. (2015) examined IDEA with e-cigarettes use; Nelson et al. (2015) evaluated and examined IDEA with adjustment and maladjustment; Huismann et al. (2012) examined IDEA with quality of life; Walker and Iverson (2015) examined IDEA with political behaviours and attitudes; Peer and McAuslan (2015) examined the relationship between EA experiences and self-doubt using IDEA, and the effect of mindfulness as the mediator; and last but not least, Negru (2012) evaluated IDEA with life satisfaction.

According to Schnyders (2012), research is lacking in identifying if and how the dimensions of emerging adulthood can be predicted by other factors that have been shown by studies to be important to the developmental process. Skulborstad and Hermann (2015) advocated for more empirical research to be conducted in order to examine the degree to which

EA experiences are uniquely linked with the stage of life and the time course of development. Schnyders (2012) was the first researcher who examined the predictors or parental and peer attachment towards emerging adulthood experiences. This study is aimed at replicating Schnyders' study in exploring the association of secure parental attachment and emerging adulthood experiences. Since the publication of Schynders's research, only a few studies have been conducted to investigate the link between the attachment theory and emerging adulthood theory. The latest research was done by Trapani (2015) who reported that identity could be influenced by parental attachment.

From a developmental perspective, Howes and Spieker (2008) mentioned that attachment theory and emerging adult theory converge as an alternate attachment bond which begins to develop in emerging adulthood. According to Ainsworth et al. (1978), attachment during infancy and childhood is observed by assessing a child separation and reunion behaviours. She studied how babies balance their needs for attachment and exploration under different levels of stress based on an experiment that later came to be known as the "strange situation". Unlike infants and children, the assessment of attachment among adults is different, whereby an individual attachment towards his or her parents is assessed by looking into the cognitive-affective dimension of attachment. Three dimensions of attachment between an adult and parents have been proposed by Armsden and Greenberg (1987), involving the degree of mutual trust, quality of communication and the degree of alienation. Adults' perceived quality of attachment has been found to influence their development and adjustment during transitional periods (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987). In addition, development tasks, such as achieving autonomy, competence of coping with conflicts that arise due to independence, and identity exploration are possibly influenced by parental trust and mutual respect aside from good parental relationships (Bloom, 1980). Though adolescents may not always acknowledge it, parents serve as "essential allies" to them as they cope with the challenges of adulthood (Weiss, 1982).

Seidman and French (2004) argued that transitions can be either discrete or clear-cut, as in the transition from one state or place to another (e.g.: college enrolment), or slow and gradual, as in development or evolution from one form or stage to another (developmental phase between childhood and adulthood). From this perspective, they concluded that transition in life could be identified by two meanings - the ecological transition and the individual developmental transition. These transitions serve as challenges to emerging adults. According to Arnett (2006b), emerging adulthood is a period of unsettledness, exploration, and instability. Individuals in this particular age group would experience changes in cognition, biology, emotions, identity, perspective, affiliation, achievement, roles, responsibilities, and context (Musante, 2010). Therefore, from a developmental perspective, the life transitions in emerging adulthood is often perceived as unstable,

exciting and liberating. As majority of emerging adults is attending college or university (Arnett, 2004), higher education is perhaps the most suitable example of any institutional structure that can provide developmentally appropriate challenges and opportunities for emerging adults (Rarick, 2011). Furthermore, Arnett (2004) asserted that college is a "social island" set off from the rest of society, a "temporary safe haven" where emerging adults can explore possibilities in love, work, and worldviews. Transition to college is an example of ecological transition which emerging adults need to encounter in adapting and taking on new roles ahead.

Arnett (2000) argued that the features of emerging adults are different from one culture to another. However, in some cultures there could be similarities. The EA experience in the Malaysian context is expected to be similar with China (see Nelson et al., 2004) and India (see Seiter & Nelson, 2010). Non-Western countries such as Malaysia, China and India holds strong a collectivistic value in the criteria of adulthood, in which adulthood is marked by responsibility towards others and the society. As research on the concept of EA is still lacking, and the concept is originally developed and mostly studied in industrialised and individualistic cultures, the question arises whether or not the concept can be applied to emerging adults in Malaysia who are collective in nature (Baptist et al., 2012). Perceived as a non-western, traditional and collectivistic culture like China, EA in Malaysia emphasises solidarity, concern for others, and integration with other people (Nelson & Chen, 2007); family relationship thus, plays a major role in the social and cultural life of Malaysians. Although generally a family relationship changes during adulthood, the relationship between parents and adults continues to be profoundly significant. The shifts that occur in the relationship between parents and their emerging adult children may impact their emerging adulthood experience (Tanner et al., 2009).

Past studies have argued that the experience of entering a university is a stressful transition among first year students due to the changing social networks, separation from parents, building new acquaintances and adjusting in a new community (Berdadi et al., 2012). In addition, identity development is the main challenge for emerging adults in the university (Madigan, 2008; Arnett, 2014). As stated by Arnett (2014), identity exploration is the main characteristic in the emerging adulthood experience because it comprises all dimensions. Thus, the transition to university and the emerging adulthood experiences can be perceived as two alternate processes. Although the issues of attachment and identity have been widely discussed in the literature (see Mattanah et al., 2011; Trapani, 2015), the more recent literature did not consider identity exploration as a separate construct that comprises different categories which consist of positive and negative meanings. Schynders's (2012) study investigated specifically the dimensions in the parental attachment

(trust, communication, alienation) effect on the emerging adulthood experience which consists of the positive dimensions (identity exploration, possibilities, and self-focused) and negative dimensions (feeling "in-between" and instability).

Therefore, this study aims to replicate Schynders's (2012) study. The main objective of this research is to examine the effect of parental attachment towards emerging adulthood experiences among first year undergraduates. Specifically, the research objective is to identify which sub-scales of parental attachment (trust, communication, alienation) are the predictors of five dimensions of emerging adulthood experiences (identity exploration, instability, possibilities, feeling "in-between", self-focused).

RESEARCH CONTEXT AND RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

The current theoretical framework of attachment theory emphasises the influence of parental attachment towards EA experiences among first year undergraduate students in Malaysia.

EA Experiences

According to Arnett (2006b), EA experiences are characterised by five main experiences. The first dimension is identity exploration. Although the exploration of identity is believed to mainly begin during adolescence as proposed by Erikson's psychosocial theory, Arnett (2014) argued that the degree of identity exploration is even deeper during the EA. During this period of time, emerging adults are actively seeking ways to resolve their identity conflicts by finding out their true selves by making enduring choices in love, work and ideology; thus, making identity exploration the most focal feature of EA. But some researchers did not seem to agree with the statement. Nelson and Chen (2007) for example, argued that cultural values may limit the opportunities for young people in exploring their identities. Specific social and cultural practices could be a hindrance for emerging adults to engage in identity exploration. For instance, Malaysian culture perceives cohabiting as an immoral practice, and parents prefer their emerging adult children to stay with them until they are married or have a stable career.

Another dimension of EA experiences is instability. Due to active engagement in identity exploration, the life of an emerging adult is frequently changing. Changes may distress relationships, educational pursuits, living situations and job or career choices (Tanner et al., 2009), which makes life unstable. Once emerging adults have clarified his or her identity, the instability will likely to be resolved (Arnett, 2014). The third dimension of EA experiences is self-focused. Emerging adults during this period of time have the opportunity to shape their own life by making decisions independently (Arnett, 2004). Furthermore, this dimension explains that emerging adults during this period of time have less obligation towards their family and friends. Nevertheless, in a traditional and non-western country, filial piety is considered as one of the characteristic of maturity.

Emerging adults are considered to be mature if they are capable of supporting their family financially and physically. Next, the fourth dimension of EA experience is the age of possibilities. Emerging adults embrace the freedom that they attain by making choices in life without feeling burdened by the heavy responsibilities adulthood can offer. Although the road seems obscure, they are optimistic about their future and believe that things will eventually get better compared with their parents (Arnett & Schwab, 2012).

The fifth experience is perceived as the least complex of the five pillars of EA experience (Syed & Mitchell, 2013) which is the feeling of "in-between". Arnett (2004) explained that during the EA period, emerging adults no longer feel they are adolescents nor adults; rather, they are in transition to attain adulthood. When asked the question, "Do you feel that you have reached adulthood?" majority of the emerging adults in Western countries answered "in some respect yes, in some respect no" (see Nelson & Barry, 2005; Facio et al., 2007; Nelson et al., 2007; Sirsch et al., 2009). Cross-cultural studies have reported that in some cultures, emerging adults perceived they have already reached adulthood. Badger et al. (2006) reported that students in China had less feeling of "in-between" compared with American students. Seiter and Nelson (2010) also reported that the majority of the students and nonstudents in India did not feel "in-between". On the contrary, a preliminary study by Wider et al. (2015) showed that majority of university students in Malaysia

experienced "in-between" feeling regarding their adult status. Although Malaysia shares the same collectivist culture with China, India and other Asian countries, there are still differences in terms of importance of extended family, shame and face-saving reactions, pressure of academic achievement as well as authoritarian and patriarchal family structures (Manery, 2000). According to Dutra-Thome (2013), EA is best understood when contemplating the characteristics of cultures rather than countries. In the same vein, Arnett (2000) proposed that investigation of the EA should be made by comparing groups of the minorities and majorities, low and high SES, urban or rural areas and traditional cultures or post-industrialised cultures. For a culturally diversified country like Malaysia, criteria for an adult status may not be easily or straightforwardly explained by Arnett's EA theory. Therefore, a research on this issue in such country is warranted.

As suggested by Arnett, emerging adulthood is culturally constructed and not all cultures support this theory. Emerging adulthood is most likely found in industrialised countries as well as post-industrial (Arnett, 2000). The period of emerging adulthood cannot be regarded as universal in human development. It is a stage that occurs in a particular situation that happened recently and only in some cultures (Arnett, 2004). Thus, Arnett welcomes research across the country, particularly in a different culture, to enhance the diversity of data in this theory that he proposed. One of the most exciting horizons of emerging

adulthood research in the decades to come will be to explore the cultural diversity of experiences, both across and within countries (Arnett, 2014).

Therefore, this paper examines EA experiences in a sample of youngsters in Malaysia by using Arnett's key dimensions of Emerging Adulthood (Identity Exploration, Instability, Self-Focus, Other-Focus, Possibilities and Feeling "In-between") and provides a useful addition and contribution to the existing theory of Emerging Adulthood.

Parental Attachment

According to Bowlby (1969), attachment is conceptualised as an enduring affectional bond of an individual to an attachment figure that provides comfort and protection to that individual. The presence of the attachment figures will determine the attachment behaviour of a child. A secure attachment relationship is achieved when the attachment figure provides safety and serves as a secure base (Bolwby, 1969). The term "secure base" is the main concern in the present study in explaining EA experiences. Bowlby (1988) postulated that the secure base of attachment could encourage children to explore their environment, engage in relationships with the significant others, and have decreased psychological distress in the future. Attachment pattern for a person may change when he or she enters adulthood due to the increased autonomy from parents. Emerging adulthood is considered a prolonged period of dependency on parents; thus, parents still serve as important

attachment figures for them (Umemura et al., 2014; Selby, 2000). As pointed out by Marcia (1983), just like children, feelings of security must be felt by emerging adults in order to perform the tasks of exploring identity and making identity commitments. Syed and Mitchell (2013) reported that there are four pillars of EA experiences underlying identity development process which are, instability, possibilities, self-focus, and feeling "in-between". Thus, during the process of transitioning to university, emerging adults may need a secure parental attachment in order to explore the new university environment.

In the present study, the attachment model measured by the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA) by Armsden and Greenberg (1987) is used in examining attachment behaviours among emerging adults. In this model, attachment styles is divided into high and low security by characterising a person into three categories, namely Trust, Communication and Alienation. A person is highly secured if his or her relationship with parents is characterised by respect (trust) and involvement (communication), with minimal anger or detachment (alienation). According to Trinke and Barholomew (1997), emerging adults rely on their parents because of their ability to provide a secure base. Thus, a desire for security (trust and communication) forms the rationale as to why emerging adults maintain their attachment relationship with their parents. Secure attachment is important for emerging adults because it provides them with a sense

of safety that could enhance their freedom in exploring their identity, and engage them with the outside world (Schnyders, 2012). Moreover, a secure parental attachment has the effect on the overall sense of well-being and adjustment in life of emerging adults (see Rice & Whaley, 1994)

Given that only one study, to the best of the authors' knowledge, that has been done on the association between parental attachment and EA experiences (see Schnyders, 2012), a solid conclusion of directional effects of the variables are difficult. Before the construction of the hypothesis, it is important to recognise that both IPPA and IDEA consist of positive and negative components. The IPPA consists of positive components of trust and communication, whereby alienation is the negative component. Meanwhile, the EA experiences measured by IDEA consists of positive components of identity exploration, possibilities, self-focus and other focus, whereby the negative components are the feeling in-between and instability. The construction of hypothesis is based on these qualities of positive and negative components in both measures. Hence, it is hypothesised that:

H1 Parental Trust has a direct positive effect on identity exploration.

H2 Parental Trust has a direct positive effect on self-focus.

H3 Parental Trust has a direct positive effect on the possibilities.

H4 Parental Trust has a direct negative effect on feeling "in-between".

H5 Parental Trust has a direct negative effect of instability.

H6 Parental Communication has a direct positive effect on identity exploration,

H7 Parental Communication has a direct positive effect on self-focus.

H8 Parental Communication has a direct positive effect on possibilities.

H9 Parental Communication has a direct negative effect on feeling "in-between".

H10 Parental Communication has a direct negative effect on instability.

H11 Parental Alienation has a direct negative effect on identity exploration.

H12 Parental Alienation has a direct negative effect on self-focus.

H13 Parental Alienation has a direct negative effect on possibilities.

H14 Parental Alienation has a direct positive effect on feeling "in-between".

H15 Parental Alienation has a direct positive effect on instability.

Based on the review of relevant literatures, the formulation of the research framework for examining the relationship between parental attachment (trust, communication, and alienation) and EA experiences (identity exploration, self-focus, possibilities, feeling "in-between", and instability) is supported. Thus, the research framework is demonstrated in Figure 1.
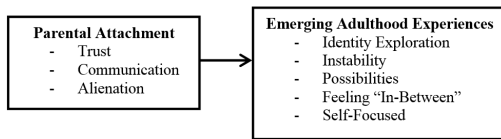
Figure 1. Research framework

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The present study employs a quantitative research approach. The population of the study comprises first year undergraduates aged between 18 and 25 years old, currently studying on a full-time basis. Table 1 shows the demographic profile of the respondents. The majority of the respondents were female (63.1%), with majority obtaining Malaysian Higher School Certificate (STPM) (66.4%) and were successful in being admitted to undergraduate degree studies. Most of them were 21 years old (54.4%) with the mean age of 20.8 (SD = 0.87), of Malay ethnic background (23.7%), living in the dorm/hostel (86.5%) and from the Humanities and Social Science (66.7%) courses.

Procedure

A total of 700 set of questionnaire were distributed to first year students through purposive sampling technique. Specifically, there were two stages of sampling (Batagglia, 2008). In the first stage, the key dimensions of the sample were identified, which in the context of this study were students currently in their first year, in full-time study mode and aged between 18 to 25 years old. After the particular group was identified, the researcher distributed the questionnaire randomly. The two stage sampling is appropriate because it could reduce the sampling bias by using multiple sampling method. A total of 548 (36.9% males, 63.1% females) students were selected to participate in the final study but 103 sets of questionnaire were not returned while 49 of the questionnaires were rejected due to errors in completing the questionnaire; thus, giving a high response rate of 79.3 percent.

Measure

A questionnaire booklet that comprised measurement for each variable was used in this study. The independent variables which are the parental attachment was measured by using the Inventory of Parent and Peers Attachment (IPPA) by Armsden and Greenberg (1987) using five-point Likert type of scale. The IPPA seeks to examine the current relationship of parent-adolescent and peers-adolescent by using three scales comprising trust, communication and alienation. For the purpose of this research, only the revised 25 items of parental attachment were used. Meanwhile, the dependent variable of the emerging adulthood experiences was measured using the Inventory of Dimension of Emerging Adulthood (IDEA) by Reifman et al. (2007) using four-point Likert type of scale. The IDEA has a total of 28 items which comprises five dimensions of emerging adulthood experiences, namely feeling in between, identity exploration, self-focus, instability, and possibilities. The

sixth dimension, other-focus, which served as the counterpart of self-focus dimension was excluded from this study.

Statistical Analysis

The current research considered using IBM SPSS version 21.0 and SmartPLS M3 2.0 (Ringle, Wende & Will, 2005) as tools of analysis. SmartPLS involved two different assessments which are the measurement model, followed by the structural model. The first step in the measurement model will determine whether the constructs are represented by the measures by assessing the confirmation of reliability and validity. If it is adequate, then the assessment of structural model estimates will be carried out.

Assessment of Measurement Model

The measurement model is evaluated by conducting the convergent validity analysis, reliability analysis, and discriminant validity test. The first step of assessing the measurement model is by determining the validity and reliability of the scales.

Table 1
Demographic Profile

Variables	Category	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	202	36.9
	Female	346	63.1
Highest Education	Malaysian Higher School Certificate (STPM)	364	66.4
	Diploma	31	5.7
	Matriculation	149	27.2
	Foundation in Science	4	0.7
Age (in years)	18	1	0.2
	19	23	4.2
	20	159	29.0
	21	301	54.9
	22	36	6.6
	23	23	4.2
	24	4	0.7
	25	1	0.2
Race	Malay	130	23.7
	Chinese	99	18.1
	Indian	10	1.8
	Indigenous of Sabah	263	48.0
	Indigenous of Sarawak	23	4.2
	Non-Citizens	23	4.2
Current residence	Living in parent's house	51	9.3
	Living in dorm/hostel	474	86.5
	Living in a rented house	21	3.8
	Others (village house)	2	0.4
Field of study	Humanities and social sciences	358	66.7
	Sciences	179	33.3

Convergent Validity

The convergent validity test was conducted to test the degree to which multiple items measuring the same concept are in agreement. In order to assess the convergent validity, factor loadings, composite reliability and the average variance extracted are used. Table 2 shows the results of measurement model. By following the suggestion of Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson (2010), we used the factor loadings, composite reliability and the average variance extracted (AVE) to assess convergent validity. The item loadings should exceed the threshold value of 0.5 and loaded appropriately on their constructs. Note that all of the items

Table 2
Results of Measurement Model

Model Construct	Measurement item	Loading	CR[a]	AVE
PT (Trust)	PA_TRUST1	0.836	0.906	0.616
	PA_TRUST2	0.832		
	PA_TRUST4	0.786		
	PA_TRUST6	0.706		
	PA_TRUST7	0.764		
	PA_TRUST10	0.779		
PC (Communication)	PA_COMM1	0.799	0.876	0.638
	PA_COMM3	0.799		
	PA_COMM8	0.815		
	PA_COMM9	0.782		
PA (Alienation)	PA_ALI4	0.862	0.852	0.742
	PA_ALI5	0.861		
FIB (Feeling in between)	FIB1	0.877	0.884	0.792
	FIB2	0.902		
INS (Instability)	INSTA1	0.719	0.850	0.586
	INSTA3	0.770		
	INSTA4	0.761		
	INSTA5	0.810		
IDE (Identity exploration)	IE4	0.848	0.884	0.657
	IE5	0.758		
	IE6	0.840		
	IE7	0.793		
SF (Self-focus)	SF2	0.787	0.849	0.586
	SF4	0.816		
	SF5	0.725		
	SF6	0.730		
POS (Possibilities)	POSS1	0.828	0.865	0.681
	POSS2	0.847		
	POSS3	0.799		

loadings have ranged from 0.706 to 0.902, referring to Table 3, and all the items loaded highly on their own constructs than on other constructs. Meanwhile, the composite reliability values depict the degree to which the construct indicators indicate the latent, construct ranged from 0.829 to 0.906 which has exceeded the recommended value of 0.7. The AVE value should be at least 0.50, present study of AVE value reported in the range of 0.555 and 0.6541 which exceeded the threshold value.

Discriminant Validity

Next, we tested the discriminant validity of the measure by examining correlations between measures to confirm whether there is a potential overlapping constructs. Table 3 shows the square root of the AVE represented by the bolded figures (diagonals) that demonstrate higher values than the equival row and column values. Thus, showing that all constructs were distinct with each other. The overall measurement model showed adequate convergent validity and discriminant validity.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

Table 4 shows the final items used in this study after undergoing the CFA. Thirteen items was removed from the IPPA; four items were removed from the trust construct, five items from the communication construct, and four items from the alienation construct. For IDEA, 12 items were removed with three items removed from the identity exploration construct, one item in the feeling in between construct, two items in the self-focused construct, three items in the instabilities construct, two items in the possibilities construct and one item in the other-focused construct. To determine inter-item consistency of the entire measurement items, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated.

Table 3
Discriminant Validity of Constructs

	FIB	IDE	INS	PA	PC	POS	PT	SF
FIB	**0.890**							
IDE	0.646	**0.811**						
INS	0.220	0.179	**0.766**					
PA	-0.160	-0.200	0.164	**0.861**				
PC	0.271	0.283	0.042	-0.390	**0.799**			
POS	0.419	0.516	0.404	0.010	0.239	**0.766**		
PT	0.271	0.298	0.008	-0.434	0.698	0.275	**0.785**	
SF	0.575	0.697	0.198	-0.204	0.297	0.568	0.349	**0.825**

Note: Diagonals (in bold) are the AVE while the off-diagonals are correlations among constructs.
PA=Parental Alienation; PC=Parental Communication; PT=Parental Trust; IDE=Identity Exploration; SF=Self-Focused; INS=Instability; FIB=Feeling "In-Between"; POS=Possibilities

Table 4
Final Items Numbers

Constructs	Measurement items	Statement	Cronbach's α	Number of items
PT (Trust)	PA_TRUST1	My parents respect my feeling.	0.875	6 (10)
	PA_TRUST2	I feel my parents do a good job as a father and a mother.		
	PA_TRUST4	My parents accept me as I am.		
	PA_TRUST6	When we discuss things, my parents care about my point of view.		
	PA_TRUST7	My parents trust my judgement.		
	PA_TRUST10	I trust my parents.		
PC (Communication)	PA_COMM1	I like to get my parents point of view on things I'm concerned about.	0.812	5 (9)
	PA_COMM3	My parents can tell when I'm upset about something.		
	PA_COMM8	I can count on my parents when I need to get something of my chest.		
	PA_COMM9	If my parents know something is bothering me, they ask me about it.		
PA (alienation)	PA_ALI4	I feel angry with my parents.	0.652	2 (6)
	PA_ALI5	I don't get much attention from my parents.		
IDE (Identity Exploration)	IE4	Time of planning for the future?	0.828	4 (7)
	IE5	Time of seeking a sense of meaning?		
	IE6	Time of deciding on your own beliefs and values?		
	IE7	Time of learning to think for yourself?		
FIB (Feeling "in-between")	FIB1	Time of feeling adult in some ways but not others?	0.738	2(3)
	FIB2	Time of gradually becoming an adult?		
SF (Self-focus)	SF2	Time of responsibility of yourself?	0.766	4 (6)
	SF4	Time of independence?		
	SF5	Time of self-sufficiency?		
	SF6	Time of focusing on yourself?		
INS (Instability)	INSTA1	Time of confusion?	0.767	4 (7)
	INSTA3	Time of feeling stressed out?		
	INSTA4	Time of instability?		
	INSTA5	Time of high pressure?		
POS (Possibilities)	POSS1	Time of many possibilities?	0.765	3 (5)
	POSS2	Time of exploration?		
	POSS3	Time of experimentation?		

Note: [a] final items numbers (initial numbers)

RESULT

Path analysis was performed to test the 15 hypotheses generated. Table 5 presents results of the hypotheses testing. Because the hypotheses are stated in a directional form, one-tail test was used.

Parental Attachment and Possibilities

The R^2 value for POS is 0.104 suggesting that 10.4% of the variance in possibilities can be explained by trust, communication and alienation. For that, only trust (β = 0.265, p < 0.01), and alienation (β = 0.172, p < 0.01) was positively related to possibilities, whereas communication was not a significant predictor of possibilities. Thus, H3 was supported, while H8 and H13 were not supported. For H13, alienation was hypothesised to negatively relate to possibilities in this study, but the results showed the opposite.

Parental Attachment and Identity Exploration

The R^2 value for IDE is 0.104 suggesting that 10.4% of the variance in identity exploration can be explained by trust, communication and alienation. Further analysis showed that trust (β = 0.173, p < 0.05) and communication (β = 0.135, p < 0.05) were positively related to identity exploration, whereas alienation was not a significant predictor of identity exploration. Thus, H1 and H6 was supported, whereas H11 was not supported in this study.

Parental Attachment and Instabilities

Next, the R^2 value for INS is 0.040 suggesting that 4.0% of the variance in instability can be explained by trust, communication and alienation. Further analysis shows that only alienation (β = 0.218, p < 0.01) was positively related with instability, whereas trust and communication is not a significant predictor of instability. Thus, H6 and H12 were not supported, whereas H18 was supported.

Parental Attachment and Feeling "In-Between"

The R^2 value for FIB is 0.087 suggesting that 8.7% of the variance in feeling "in-between" can be explained by trust, communication and alienation. Further analyses show that trust (β = 0.148, p < 0.05) and communication (β = 0.153, p < 0.05) were positively related with feeling "in-between", whereas alienation was not a significant predictor of feeling "in-between". Thus, H5 and H9 was not supported because trust and communication was hypothesised to negatively relate to feeling "in-between" and H17 was also not supported.

Parental Attachment and Self-Focused

Last but not least, the R^2 value for SF is 0.129 suggesting that 12.9% of the variance in self-focus can be explained by trust, communication and alienation. Further analysis shows that only trust (β = 0.258, p < 0.01) was positively related to self-focus, whereas communication and alienation was not a significant predictor of self-focus.

Table 5
Path Coefficient and Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	Coefficient	Supported
H1	PT → IDE	0.173**	YES
H2	PT → SF	0.258**	YES
H3	PT → POS	0.265**	YES
H4	PT → FIB	0.148*	YES
H5	PT → INS	0.027	NO
H6	PC → IDE	0.135*	YES
H7	PC → SF	0.095	NO
H8	PC → POS	0.121	NO
H9	PC → FIB	0.153**	YES
H10	PC → INS	0.108	NO
H11	PA → IDE	-0.072	NO
H12	PA → SF	-0.054	NO
H13	PA → POS	0.172**	YES
H14	PA → FIB	-0.036	NO
H15	PA → INS	0.218**	YES

Note: *95% significance *t* value = 1.64; **99% significance *t* value = 1.96
PA=Parental Alienation; PC=Parental Communication; PT=Parental Trust; IDE=Identity Exploration;
SF=Self-Focused; INS=Instability; FIB=Feeling "In-Between";POS=Possibilities

Thus, the H2 was supported, whereas H7 and H12 were not supported in this study.

In this study, it was found that trust was the most significant predictor of identity exploration, self-focus, and possibilities. Communication was the most significant predictor of feeling "in-between". Meanwhile, alienation was the most significant predictor of instability.

DISCUSSION

Through the testing of hypothesis by using partial least square (PLS) technique, the present study supports the dynamic relationship that exists between parental attachment and EA experiences. The measures employed in this study has been examined through the validity and reliability procedure, the presented analysis results have confirmed the discriminant validity and convergent validity is sufficient. Meanwhile, the Cronbach alpha and composite reliability showed an adequate range of values. Through the assessment of the goodness of measure, it is confirmed that the model was reliable to be used for further analyses.

Parental Attachment and Possibilities

Current findings show a corroboration with some findings from Schnyders (2012). Both Schnyders's and present findings reported that parental trust, parental communication and parental alienation are positively related to EA experience of possibilities. The emerging adult life is perceived as full of possibilities yet they remained optimistic

about their future. According to Moreira and Telzer (2015), relationship with a parent during transition to university may bolster optimism and subsequently influence their mental health. Interestingly, it was also found that parental alienation was positively related with possibilities. EA is a period of full of stressful and struggles for some emerging adults. Although their current condition (e.g. family cohesion) is somehow unpromising, they remain optimistic about everything will be fine in a long run (Arnett, 2014). The present findings are important to corroborate with important key dimensions of possibilities which, according to Arnett (2006b), is a crucial period of emerging adults who experience difficulties in the family as an opportunity to change their ways for a betterment. Moreover, parental trust showed the most significant predictor of EA experience of possibilities, this can be assumed that when emerging adults trust their parents to be understandable and respect their needs and desires, they will eventually become more optimistic towards the future.

Parental Attachment and Identity Exploration

Although Schnyders (2012) did not report any significant relationship between parental attachment components towards EA experience of identity exploration, present findings found that, parental trust and communication is positively related to identity exploration. Kenny and Rice (1995) postulated that the transition to university is a concept of the "strange situation" among emerging adults, which convey a new environmental experience to explore and master. This makes sense as students must have a secure relationship with their parents to be able to engage in the alternative exploration during the ecological and developmental transitions. Parents not only served as a "secure base" by providing support and comforts, but the contribution of the internal working models of self and other may influence. As stated by Bowlby (1973), internal working models are mental representations of the self and other that the child develops through early experiences with attachment figures. The availability of the attachment figures will determine the internal model of self and others of a particular child. If the attachment figure is available, the child will develop and maintain an internal model of self as good, worthy and lovable, whereas for others as trustworthy and responsive. This internal working model, although constructed with early caregivers, could impact through ongoing interpersonal relationship, as such, it will influence future psychological well-being of an individual. As one's internal working model has been developed, it will become persistent throughout life, and it is hard to be altered (Sager, 2015). According to Sheng (2014), a positive internal model of self and others refers to a secure parent attachment that have been found to be related to exploring different alternatives and eventually commit to an identity, whereas insecure parental attachment did not have the secure base to explore freely. The current findings are an important corroboration of

the "strange situation" experiment which like infants, emerging adults also need to have a secure parental attachment in order to engage in exploring. Given that parental trust is the most significant predictor of EA experience of identity exploration, this can be assumed that mutual understanding and respects are important in the relationship of parent-emerging adult towards a healthy and positive identity exploration.

There are several reasons why the current findings are different than Schnyders (2012). In this study, several measurement items in the parental attachment and emerging adulthood experience constructs were deleted due to low factor loadings. Whereas, Schnyders (2012) used the full scale for both parental attachment and emerging adulthood experience constructs. In addition, the current findings corroborated Nelson et al. (2004) study, which emerging adults in Malaysia are similar to emerging adults in China emphasized on the collectivist goals and express a greater commitment towards other people. In a similar way to the other Asian countries, emerging adults in Malaysia is perceived to possess several main characteristics such as interdependence and obedience to the parents authority (Ishak, 2000; Song et al., 2009). Schynders's (2012) study was conducted in the US, where the culture emphasises individualistic values. Because of that, on the basis of strong family ties and cultural aspect among emerging adults in Malaysia, parents are expected to have a large impact on the EA experience in the current study.

Parental Attachment and Instability

Other key findings in this study are the positive relationship between parental alienation and EA experience of instability. Although Schnyders (2012) showed a non-significant positive relationship between alienation and instability, she reported that parental trust and communication are negatively correlated with instability. By looking at the effect direction of parental attachment as a whole towards instability, it can be concluded that the higher the parental attachment is, the lower the instability among emerging adults is. As mentioned earlier, when emerging adults are engaged in identity exploration such as love, career and worldview actively, their lives become unstable. Sager (2015) reported that identity exploration could also be perceived as a negative process which can actually bring about psychological instability due to insecure parental attachment. In view of the fact that parental alienation is the most significant predictor of instability, emerging adults who experience the feelings of isolation, anger and detachment in the attachment with parents are vulnerable and potentially psychologically unstable.

As postulated by Zulkefly and Wilkinson (2014), "the understanding of attachment concept among youth in Malaysia is somehow different. The nature of attachment in Asian culture is generally emphasized on greater interdependence, socialization, and in-group harmony in which causing youth to suppress their personal feelings and thoughts, thus acting upon their behaviour based on thinking,

attitude, feeling, and action towards others. In addition, Asian culture promotes the interdependence towards parents as the main attachment figure. Unlike the youth in the Western culture, the nature of attachment context is more independent, they could easily expressed their feelings without fear of rejection or left by their primary attachment figure" (p. 18). Based on the above argument, the alienation towards parents among emerging adults in the current study can be assumed by the refusal of sharing their personal feelings towards parents because of fear and concerned upon the future reaction by their parents; this in turn will influence their psychological stability.

Parental Attachment and Feeling "In-Between"

Current findings also reported that parent trust and parent communication are both positively related to feeling "in-between", although the relationship were hypothesised to be in contrast. Due to a dearth of studies in this area, the author constructed the hypothesis based on the negative and positive quality of the constructs. Arnett (2014) relates the sense of feeling "in-between" with self-sufficiency. He postulated that the sense of being in between occurs when emerging adults continue to rely on their parents in some way so that their attainment of self-sufficiency is incomplete. Although emerging adults achieved autonomy with less supervision from their parents, they somehow still depend on their parents on certain things and constantly seek their

advice. This is in line with the current findings of parent communication being the most significant predictor of EA experience of feeling "in-between". When parents are sensitive and responsive towards emerging adult's emotional state by involving verbal communication it will influence their sense of self-sufficiency. Nevertheless, once emerging adults attain a full range of adulthood in the sense of independence, autonomy and freedom, the attainment of self-sufficiency is complete (Arnett, 2014).

Parental Attachment and Self-Focused

Among the three components of parental attachment, only trust correlated significantly with EA experience of self-focus. Arnett (2007) postulated that the period of emerging adulthood is less structured compared with adolescence and adulthood. For adolescent, although they are too engaged in an active exploration of identity, they are highly structured by parents or school teachers. For those who have already attained adult roles, such as parent or full-time employee, they are highly structured by obligation towards the other. On the other hand, emerging adults during this time have less obligations towards others and only focus on their self-development and achieve self-sufficiency (Arnett, 2006). Furthermore, Labouvie-Vief (2006) mentioned that emerging adulthood is a period where young people could develop their own identity without being influenced by their parents. However, the theory of emerging adulthood is culturally constructed (Arnett, 2000) and the interpretation of it needs to be done cautiously. In Asia, family

obligation is a part of cultural tradition that focuses on the filial bond and the authority of the family (Syed & Mitchell, 2013). Through the current findings of the positive relationship between parental trust and self-focus, it could be assumed that the period of EA among Malaysian emerging adults are not entirely a "self-focus" but rather a period of negotiating or renegotiating delicate family relationships and social responsibility (Katsiaficas et al., 2014). Thus, instead of being less committed and having lack of autonomy in their lives, emerging adulthood is a period where they assume responsibility for themselves and others. A mutual understanding must be achieved so that parents could understand and respect emerging adults' decisions to run their own lives without having too much responsibilities towards the others and at the same time maintaining their obligation towards the family.

CONCLUSION

This study is an attempt to explore the association between Bolwby's attachment theory and Arnett's emerging adulthood theory. By adopting three factors of attachment proposed by Armsden and Greenberg (1987) and Reifman et. Al's (2007) five dimensions of EA, this study has shown that the theoretical framework is partially supported. The results of the present study revealed that parental trust is the most significant predictor of EA experiences in the sense of identity exploration, self-focus, and possibilities, whereas parental communication is the most significant

predictor of EA experience of feeling "in-between". Meanwhile, parental alienation is the most significant predictor of EA experience of instability.

Current findings have important implications on university counsellors and academicians particularly. Life in the university offers a great deal of both developmental transitions and ecological transitions that could affect emerging adult's personal development. Since the results of this study reported that secure parental attachment promotes a positive experience of EA, it demonstrates that parents continuously serve as an important entity in an emerging adult's life in the university. As such, trust between parents and emerging adults is the central issue in this study. As pointed out by Armsden and Greenberg (1987), trust is a "felt security" which perceived by emerging adults as provided by their attachment figures. Failure to have a mutual response will lead to a failure of self-disclosure which is a fundamental element in relationship building. As such, emerging adults need to receive a sense of respect and understanding from their parents in order to perform necessary developmental tasks at the university. As a counsellor seeks to understand the problems faced by the clients, it may be helpful to explore the quality of trust between the clients and their attachment figures.

Other key findings in the study are the predictors of parental communication towards an EA experience of feeling "in-between". Munsey (2006) referred Emerging adulthood as the ''in-between age'' which is

full of special risks and opportunities towards achieving self-sufficiency of adulthood that lasts until late 20s. Current findings suggest that good verbal and non-verbal communications between emerging adults and parents is essential in the experience of "in-betweeness". In the process of attaining self-sufficiency, emerging adults entail a great amount of symbolic communications from their parents. This symbolic form can be delivered through instant messaging, telephone calls or emails. The majority of the university students are not staying with their parents. Therefore, a direct contact communication is lacking and parents could not monitor their emerging adult children all the time. To maintain a good attachment towards parents, university students must maintain a symbolic communication. This is an important information to the university counsellor who work with emerging adult clients, especially those who are using a developmentally-informed framework in their clinical practices.

A crucial evidence of the EA experiences shift as a function of parental attachment provides a new and important valuable addition towards the theory of emerging adulthood. This study is an attempt to bridge the gap to identify how the dimensions of EA could be predicted by other developmental factors especially attachment towards parents. Past researchers have only explored the impacts of attachment towards specific aspects of well-being among university students. Thus, more research is needed to identify the relationship between attachment and emerging adulthood. This study has used SEM-PLS to empirically examine the interrelationships among study variables which is also a significant contribution to knowledge in this area. The use of SEM-PLS (second-generation method) as the statistical method could overcome the weakness of first-generation method such as regression-based approach (multiple regression) (Hair et al., 2014). Among the limitations of the first generation technique is it assumes all variables that being measured are free from errors (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2004). Moreover, it only analyses one relationship at a time between the independent and dependent constructs that could increase the possibility of measurement error when considering all relationships. Meanwhile, PLS could estimate the relationships among multiple independent and dependent constructs and the measurement errors (Chin & Newsted, 1999). Hence, it is recommended that future studies should consider the use of PLS as a statistical tool. Another important recommendation is to explore the relationship of each of the parental attachment styles, namely "secure", "avoidant", and "ambivalent" with EA experiences among students as well as non-students.

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