YOUNG ADULTS’ IDENTITY EXPLORATION:
PRIVACY MANAGEMENT AND PARENT-CHILD COMMUNICATION ON TOPICS
OF CAREER, RELIGION, AND POLITICS

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Chapter 1

Introduction

As individuals prepare for and transition to adulthood they begin their search for a stable ego identity by seeking direction for their lives (Erikson, 1966; 1967; 1968; Marcia, 1964; 1966; 1967; 1980). Oftentimes, the emergence of this search for life purpose begins as young adults make college decisions, and eventually, move out of their parents’ or guardians’ homes to live on their own. The transition from living at home, under supervision, to moving out, serves as the beginning of the development of a stable ego identity, as young adults are exposed to new perspectives and explore different career paths (e.g. Cheung, Pomerantz, & Dong, 2013; Desmond, Morgan, & Kikuchi, 2010; Dietrich & Kracke, 2009). As this transition transpires through adolescence into young adulthood, individuals negotiate the parent-child privacy boundary in attempts to exude their autonomy as the search for a stable ego identity unfolds.

Research from an identity development perspective places emphasis on parents’ roles as a primary sources of socialization for their children over the lifespan (Desmond et al., 2010; Eccles, 2009). Several studies have evidenced that during the transition to young adulthood, individuals often continue turning to their parents for direction and advice (e.g. Desmond et al., 2010; Diemer, 2012; Dietrich & Kracke, 2009; Otto, 2000; Peterson, Stivers, & Peters, 1986). Conversely, privacy research accentuates young adults’ tendency to thicken parent-child privacy boundaries to exude autonomy from their parents (Petronio, 2002. They do this by avoiding certain discussions and reducing the amount and depth of disclosures to parents (e.g. Guerrero & Afifi, 1995; Petronio, 2002). Findings from these two research paradigms highlight the dialectical nature of the parent-child relationship (Desmond et al., 2010; Dietrich & Kracke, 2009; Otto, 2000).
This study employs a privacy management perspective to examine how young adults’ perceptions of parents’ behaviors influence their management of the parent-child privacy boundary and how their identity exploration and commitment in emerging adulthood may influence their privacy behaviors. Specifically, this study examines young adults’ management of the parent-child privacy boundary regarding discussions of their occupational, religious, and political identities.

**Purpose of Study**

Identity researchers, Erikson (1966; 1967; 1968; 1981) and Marcia (1964, 1966; 1968; 1980) described occupational, religious, and political identities as the three central aspects of ego identity development. Parents’ involvement, or sometimes lack thereof, plays a critical role in young adults’ career exploration (e.g. Dietrich & Kracke, 2009; Dietrich, Kracke, & Nurmi, 2011; Dietrich & Salmela-Aros, 2013; Otto, 2000; Peterson et al., 1986). Additionally, in many cases, individuals adhere to parents’ beliefs and values regarding religion and politics, and adherence to such values may protect them from conforming to peers’ deviant behaviors (Grier & Gudiel, 2011). However, according to Troll (1968; 1972), young adults are stereotypically thought to deviate from their parents’ beliefs and values. Research focusing on peer conformity to risky behaviors supports this idea of deviation (Kenney, Thadani, Ghaidaro, & LaBrie, 2013). Though friends serve as important influences during the transition to adulthood, parents often continue playing a role in young adults’ lives, as they prepare for and attend college (Dietrich & Kracke, 2009; Dietrich et al., 2011). While some young adults may retain their parents’ belief systems as their own, exposure to reality beyond the walls of the family home leads some to deviate from, and/or question, the stances on issues they have been expected to adopt. This study explores how privacy management practices regarding discussions of important components of
one’s identity (career, religion, politics) with parents may change as young adults explore their identities and form a more stable sense of self.

The goal of this study is to begin understanding how young adults’ identity exploration and commitment, and perceptions of parents’ behaviors regarding their identity exploration, may influence their management of the parent-child privacy boundary. To investigate, quantitative measures will assess young adults’ career, religious, and political identity exploration and commitment, levels of openness regarding these topics, topic avoidance motives regarding these topics, and perceptions of parents’ behaviors during discussions of these topics. Communication privacy management theory (CPM; Petronio, 2002) will guide the analyses of young adults’ privacy behaviors in relation to perceptions of their parents’ behaviors and young adults’ ego identity exploration. Two foundational lines of identity research guide the conceptualizations of ego identity exploration in the transition to adulthood. First, Erikson’s (1967; 1968; 1981) lifespan theory of identity development and conceptualizations of ego identity exploration in the transition to adulthood. Then, Marcia’s (1964; 1980) conceptualizations of young adults’ ego identity statuses, which consist of identity foreclosure, diffusion, moratorium, and achievement, will be explained in detail to examine young adults’ exploration and commitment levels across occupational, religious, and political identities.

**Significance of Study**

Parents’ play a pivotal role in socializing and guiding their children, and as children emerge into adulthood, parents may not be the sole source of this process as their children are exposed to new perspectives and begin exploring their identities independently. As individuals begin questioning their belief systems, making their own decisions, and forming new relationships and ideologies, the parent-child relationship can become burdened with less
closeness and more conflict (Sankey & Young, 1996), illustrating the fluctuation of the openness of the parent-child privacy boundary as individuals become adults. Young adults have been known to avoid discussing their romantic relationships and peer friendships with parents for a variety of reasons (Guerrero & Afifi, 1995).

Discussions may be avoided with motive to protect the parent-child relationship or self, or because young adults perceive such disclosures to be socially inappropriate or view their parents as unresponsive to the disclosures (Guerrero & Afifi, 1995). Further, some young adults may fear disappointing their parents, especially when their goals and beliefs deviate from their upbringing. For example, Chinese American youth found it very difficult to pursue the careers they were interested in because of pressure from parents to work in medicine (Okubo, Yeh, Lin, Fujita, & Shea, 2007). They often choose to withhold their career desires if they are different from their parents’ expectations (Okubo et al., 2007). However, as young adults become more comfortable and sure of the decisions they make and the ideologies they have formed, conflict seems to dissipate and open relationships can be regained (Sankey & Young, 1996).

The current study investigates the relationship between privacy behaviors and levels of identity exploration and commitment, while also taking into account young adults’ perceptions of parents’ behaviors during identity-related discussions. First, this study will contribute to the current literature on parent-child communication by further exploring parent-child discussions regarding young adults’ occupational, religious, and political identity exploration, as these aspects of identity have been considered central to the attainment of a stable ego identity (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1964; 1968). Secondly, this study will contribute to the current literature on identity develop by examining the relationship between the status of one’s ego identity
development and young adults’ privacy management in the parent-child boundary, which has not been addressed previously.

The following sections provide a detailed adumbration of CPM as a guiding framework for investigating young adults’ privacy management regarding their identity exploration and the dialectical nature of this phenomenon in the parent-child relationship. Then, a discussion of Erikson’s lifespan theory (1968) and Marcia’s (1966; 1980) ego identity statuses, will guide the understanding of identity exploration and ego identity. Research questions and hypotheses proposed will explore the relationship between young adults’ perceptions of parental behaviors and their privacy management of the parent-child boundary (i.e., openness, and topic avoidance), as well as the relationship between identity exploration and commitment regarding career, religion, and politics and privacy behaviors regarding discussions of these topics with parents.
Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Communication Privacy Management Theory

Communication privacy management theory (CPM) is a systematic framework that explains how individuals make decisions to reveal or conceal private information. Any information one feels vulnerable to disclose can be considered private information (Petronio, 2002). CPM highlights how individuals feel ownership and the need to control the co-ownership, or dissemination of, their private information, while recognizing the potential for privacy turbulence, which occurs when unintended persons learn the private information (Petronio 2002; 2013). Private information becomes co-owned through disclosing information, intentionally and unintentionally, or concealed through various communication strategies, such as topic avoidance or deception. Co-ownership illustrates a linkage or collective privacy boundary between those sharing the private information and privacy management helps coordinate these privacy boundaries across one’s relationships (Petronio 2002; 2013).

Individuals start learning privacy rules in early childhood, mostly through learning spatial privacy strategies, such as shutting the door when going to the bathroom or knocking when doors are shut (Park & Sawin, 1979). Over time, people develop privacy rules to help manage and coordinate the dissemination of their private information across multiple privacy boundaries (Petronio, 2002). Privacy rules are influenced by factors such as cultural norms, gender, context, motivations, and risk-benefit ratio analyses (Petronio, 2002; 2013). Different cultures have different social norms and, thus, have different expectations of privacy. It also seems that gender socialization influences privacy rule development, but according to Petronio (2002) more empirical evidence is needed to determine gender’s role in privacy rule development. Furthermore, as in most interactions, people have different motivations across different contexts.
for disclosing private information. Motivations may include the desire to manage conflict, protect self, avoid consequences, and regulate emotions (Child, Haridakis, & Petronio, 2012). With these disclosures, risk-benefit analyses of sharing information assess the potential outcomes or repercussions of sharing information (Petronio, 2002). For example, Guerrero and Afifi (1995) found young adults conceal information from parents most often for relational protection. In their study, relationship protection involved concealing information to avoid disappointing or angering patients, implying that the cost of potentially disappointing or angering parents would outweigh the benefits of sharing certain private information.

Privacy rules determine the amount and depth of information one will disclose in a given privacy boundary, ultimately determining the permeability of the privacy boundary (Petronio, 2002). Co-ownership of information illustrates a linkage between the discloser and the person(s) the information is shared with, and with this sharing of information, the discloser may state explicit privacy rules to the co-owner(s). For example, an older sibling may share a secret with a younger sibling, illustrating a collective privacy boundary or linkage, and explicitly tell the younger sibling to not share the secret with their parents, demonstrating linkage rules. However, sometimes such linkages are not given explicit privacy rules, the discloser of information assumes implied rules, or the new co-owner does not abide by the privacy rules given and privacy turbulence occurs.

Petronio (2013) identified privacy management as a symbolic engine regulating the conditions of private disclosures. CPM recognizes the potential for privacy turbulence, or a breakdown in the privacy management system, necessitating recalibration or adjustment of their privacy rules (Petronio, 2002). The need for recalibration often stems from privacy boundary turbulence, which can be caused by a variety of factors such as a privacy dilemma, the presence
of a “fuzzy” privacy boundary, rule violations, or differences in boundary orientations (Petronio, 2002, p. 177). When these instances occur, individuals must act in order to better manage their private information by avoiding topics or setting more explicit boundary rules.

When a person shares private information with another individual or group of people, the information becomes co-owned, demonstrating the creation of a collective privacy boundary between (Petronio, 2002). Privacy rules help coordinate privacy boundaries and determine the permeability, or the openness, of these boundaries which controls how much information is shared. Thus, more disclosures reflect a more open, permeable privacy boundary, while frequent topic avoidance or lack of disclosure reflects a more closed, less permeable privacy boundary. For example, Plander (2013) found that parents tend to erect thick privacy boundaries with their adult children regarding their financial information. Conversely, young adults tend to erect thick privacy boundaries with their parents regarding a variety of topics like dating and negative life experiences (e. g. Guerrero, 1995 & Afifi, 1995; Mazur & Hubbard, 2004; Petronio, 2002).

Privacy turbulence may also occur when individuals fall victim to privacy invasions. Parents often feel they deserve and have the right to know their children’s personal information, regardless of their age, highlighting that parents and children both see themselves as the rightful owners and controllers of children’s private information (Hawk et al., 2013; Smetana, Metzger, Gettman, & Campione-Barr, 2006). Parental invasions often lead to more concealment of information from parents (Hawk, Keijzers, Hale, & Meeus, 2009) and parent-child conflict (Hawk et al., 2013). Privacy invasions occurred more frequently when college students were visiting home, while phone invasions occurred most often overall, especially when students were away at school, further highlighting the complexities of privacy management in parent-child relationships (Ledbetter et al., 2010).
CPM within families poses interesting challenges because of the nature of involuntary family relationships, in which disclosures are expected, especially between parents and children. As young adults’ attempt to accentuate their autonomy, they may react negatively to parental privacy inquiries or invasions (Guerrero & Afifi, 1995; Mazur & Hubbard, 2004). Negative reactions include using deception, aggression, direct or indirect rejection, assertiveness, and even terminating the conversation (Mazur & Hubbard, 2004), which often leads to parent-child conflict (Hawk et al., 2013). Hawk et al. (2009) suggested that an increase in parent-child conflict illustrates young adults’ empowerment to directly negotiate parent-child privacy boundaries by withholding information and engaging in conflict when privacy invasions occur. Privacy research contends that tightening parent-child privacy boundaries occur during adolescence through the transition to adulthood (e.g. Guerrero & Afifi, 1985; Petronio, 2002), while studies guided by frameworks outside of the CPM perspective have emphasized more frequent communication and advice seeking in young adult-parent communication (Dietrich & Kracke, 2009; Peterson et al, 1986).

Family communication poses unique dialectical tensions for individuals, especially during the transition to adulthood. As individuals breach adulthood, they often face the dialectical tension of maintaining an open relationship with parents, while also desiring autonomy (Petronio, 2002). They are also faced with sometimes conflicting ideologies as they gain new information from a variety of resources and perspectives (Marcia, 1980). As young adults adopt new ideologies, diverging from their traditional upbringing, they face difficulty in telling their parents about it (Lannutti, 2013), particularly with religious conversions (Ullman, 1982) or any decision deviating from parents’ expectations (Okubo et al., 2007). However, the complex nature of sharing such information does not keep young adults from making difficult
disclosures, as they are important to one’s identity and parent-child connectedness (Lannutti, 2013; Ullman, 1982).

Family privacy socialization helps individuals understand their family privacy orientations, or their family’s tendencies for sharing information within and outside of the family (Petronio, 2002; 2013). Privacy socialization in the family often creates the inherent expectation for people to be open and honest with their parents, where children are expected to respond openly and honestly to parental inquiries. In young adulthood, parental inquiries serve as parents’ attempts to exert control over their children (Sorkhabi & Middaugh, 2014). Though young adults tend to exercise tightened privacy boundaries, they still confide in parents regarding major life decisions, and parental behaviors during those discussions indeed play a role in young adult identity exploration (Dietrich & Kracke, 2009). Narratives of young adults revealed the dialectic tensions where they desire for support and affirmation from parents and at the same time attempt to assert independent decision-making power. Tension often arises because parents may pressure or interfere with young adults’ identity exploration efforts (Dietrich & Kracke, 2009; Sankey & Young, 1996). When young adults make decisions regarding their future career paths, parental behaviors influence their identity exploration process (Dietrich & Kracke, 2009).

**Parental Behaviors**

Emergence to adulthood marks a difficult transitional period for many individuals as they embark on new journeys, explore new identities, and move to college (Mazur & Hubbard, 2004). Before and during this transition to adulthood, individuals find themselves striving for autonomy, leading to an eruption of dialectical tension for young adults (Mazur & Hubbard, 2004) as they struggle for autonomy from and connectedness to their parents through renegotiations of how open they are to sharing information with parents (Grotevant & Cooper, 1985). However, once
individuals more fully develop their ego identity and find a comfortable sense of self, the previously exuberant parent-child tensions gradually subside or certain topics become avoided topics in parent-child discourse to protect relational harmony. Thus, apparent privacy implications for parent-child discourse regarding identity exploration emerge, especially when parents may disapprove of the identities their children form.

Young adults often turn to parents as resources regarding life decisions (e.g. Dietrich & Kracke, 2009; Peters et al., 1986; Sankey & Young, 1996) and how parents react to young adults’ disclosures can play a critical role in young adults’ identity exploration (Dietrich & Kracke, 2009) and young adults’ privacy management. Dietrich and Kracke (2009) considered three types of parental reactions to young adults’ self-disclosures regarding career their decisions: actions of support, interference, and neglect. Actions of support involved behaviors fostering young adults’ freedom to make choices and access to parental advice when desired. Parental reactions involving pressuring the individual toward something or disapproving of the individual’s decisions characterize acts of interference when responding to a young adult’s self-disclosure. Finally, parental neglect was characterized by actions conveying disinterest or low levels engagement in discourse. Neglect, or lack of engagement, may occur because of disinterest, lack of time, or even feelings of low self-efficacy in advising young adults (Dietrich & Kracke, 2009).

Mortimer, Zimmer-Gembeck, Holmes, and Shanahan (2002) suggested that reactions of parental neglect to young adults’ advice seeking about career leads to a lack of stability for the young adult. While parental neglect can be detrimental, exerting too much parental control, or interference, over young adults’ career decisions can also be detrimental, as it can stagnate young adults’ career exploration (Grotevant & Cooper, 1985). In addition, lower levels of interference,
in contingency with higher levels of lack of engagement, were negatively related to career exploration (Dietrich & Kracke, 2009). The data indicated that parental interferences served as the most significant predictors of increased difficulties for young adults in making career-related decisions (Dietrich & Kracke, 2009), evidencing the complex, dialectical nature of parent-child relationships. Perhaps interferences functioned as the strongest predictors of difficulty with career-related decisions because young adults long for affirmative parental support, so when there is pressure from parents to make different choices, it becomes more difficult for young adults to commit to a decision. Parental interferences may signal a sense of distrust of young adults’ assertion of competence and autonomy, and therefore, lead to increased self-doubt and uncertainty regarding career decisions.

Successful identity development relies heavily on parental involvement and support (e.g. Dietrich & Kracke, 2009; Mortimer et al., 2002). While interferences and parental neglect may be detrimental to occupational identity exploration, it may also be detrimental to young adults’ willingness to openly share information with their parents. Dietrich and Kracke (2009) found young adults with supportive parents continued confiding in them for advice, and exploring their career options. Supportive reactions from parents, as well as positive disclosure experiences, communicates positive acceptance of their child’s identity (Lannutti, 2013; Luhtanen, 2003) and likely enhances their child’s likelihood to be open with them.

Parental behaviors of interference and/or neglect are likely weighed into young adults’ risk-benefit ratio analysis when determining whether to discuss something with their parents based on previous parental reactions (Ullman, 1982; Petronio, 2002). For example, when anticipating a negative parental reaction to a disclosure, young adults may keep information private by exercising topic avoidant strategies. Ullman (1982) explicitly discussed how adults
consider the religiosity of their parents and the potential for relationship harm when making decisions regarding the disclosure of religious conversion. Further, anticipating a positive or supportive reaction may lead one to be more likely to disclose certain information. In other cases, young adults will still self-disclose regardless of potential harm due to the importance of the topics (Lanutti, 2013; Ullman, 1982).

While parental behaviors and young adult identity exploration are related to one another (Grotevant & Cooper, 1985; Dietrich & Kracke, 2009), parental behaviors likely influence how open young adult children are in managing the parent-child privacy boundary (Lanutti, 2013; Ullman, 1982). The apparent dialectical nature of parent-child relationships during young adulthood provides a fruitful context for the analysis of young adults’ privacy management through the CPM framework. The current study seeks to understand how parental behaviors of support, interference, and neglect may influence young adults’ willingness to be open about their identity exploration with parents. Thus, the first set of hypotheses aim to explore the relationship between perceived parental behaviors of support, interference, and neglect in relation to young adults’ openness regarding their occupational, religious, and political identities, which are central to the development of a stable ego identity.

H1: A young adult who perceives greater levels of parental support will be more open with parents in disclosures about career, religion, and political leanings.

H2: A young adult who perceives greater levels of parental interference will be less open with parents in disclosures about career, religion, and political leanings.

H3: A young adult who perceives greater levels of parental neglect will be less open with parents in disclosures about career, religion, and political leanings.
The investigation of the above hypotheses will extend the current body of research on privacy and parent-child communication during adolescence by specifically measuring young adults’ perceptions of their parents’ behaviors in relation to their openness. In order to further investigate privacy management in young adulthood, the reasons young adults may avoid discussions of career, religion, and politics with parents will also be explored.

**Topic Avoidance Motives**

Young adults communicate with parents for support and advice (e.g. Dietrich & Kracke, 2009; Dietrich et al., 2011; Dietrich & Salmela-Aros, 2013; Peterson et al., 1986) and higher levels of disclosure have been found to enhance relational closeness and satisfaction (Dailey & Palomares, 2004), while failing to disclose information can be detrimental to young adults (Cheung, Pomerantz & Dong, 2013). Cheung et al. (2013) found higher levels of disclosure to parents were positively related to academic adjustment, while young adult secrecy was positively related to young adults’ likelihood to behave in a deviant manner. In addition, parental open and support communication seemed to foster young adults’ confidence and ability to make important life decisions (e.g. Cheung et al., 2013; Dietrich et al., 2011; Dietrich & Salmela-Aros, 2013). These findings evidence the valuable role of parents during young adulthood. Young adult disclosures to parents were positively related to academic adjustment at university (Chueng et al., 2013). Despite the beneficial nature of connected, open parent-child relationships, the fear of disappointing parents or experiencing relational conflict still keeps many young adults from being open and honest (e.g. Ullman, 1982; Savin-Williams & Dube, 1998).

Dietrich and Kracke (2009), among other scholars, emphasized parents’ roles as resources to young adults as they breach adulthood (Kroger, 2007; Peterson et al., 1996). Intuitively, young adults confide in parents for help with life decisions, but research provides
much evidence of thickened privacy boundaries during adolescence (Golish & Caughlin, 2002; Guerrero & Afifi, 1985; Mazur & Hubbard; 2004). These renegotiations of privacy occur through topic avoidance strategies such as direct or indirect rejection, assertiveness, aggression, terminating conversation, providing reassurances, and expressing disinterest or discomfort when parents probe for information (Mazur & Hubbard, 2004). Golish and Caughlin (2002) found that young adults of divorced parents avoided topics most often with motives to protect themselves, their relationships, and to avoid conflict. Ultimately, topic avoidance strategies were used to avoid potentially negative experiences. Topics avoided by young adults, especially with stepparents, in Golish and Caughlin’s (2002) study included “deep conversations about personal life or beliefs” (p. 91), everyday activities, and religion, among other topics. However, young adults did not explicitly report avoiding such topics with biological parents.

Komarovsky’s (1974) findings suggested that if fathers had not served as resources for financial guidance, young adults would rarely confide in their fathers. Topics regarding finances may be avoided in childhood, but became primary topics of discussion as young adults become more financially responsible and independent (Komarovsky, 1974). This implies young adults’ motives to communicate with parents often stems from young adults’ need for advice or direction in managing life decisions, but also further highlights the complex nature of parent-child privacy regulations. Though young adults may want to exude their autonomy by enacting thickened privacy boundaries, parents still often serve as trustworthy, useful resources regarding important life topics like financial decisions. Even so, carrying open dialogue with parents can be difficult during adolescence, as individuals explore new ideas and begin to deviate from their parents’ expectations and values.
For example, Chinese-American young adults reported struggles with talking about their career aspirations with their parents, as their goals often deviated from their parents’ wishes (Okubo et al., 2007). The traditional, collectivist culture of Chinese families made this especially difficult for young Chinese-American young adults as they began to explore their identities (Okubo et al., 2007). Individuals also struggle disclosing religious conversions to their parents, especially when religion is perceived to play a central role in their parents’ lives (Ullman, 1982). Adult religious converts concealed their newfound religious identity most often to protect self and the parent-child relationship and to avoid conflict or parental influence (Ullman, 1982).

Empirical findings illustrate young adults’ topic avoidance strategies, secrecy, and negotiations of privacy in parent-child relationships (Guerrero & Afifi, 1995; Petronio, 2002). However, multiple studies have evidenced that, among all resources available during the transition to adulthood, individuals most often turn to parents to discuss major life decisions, especially those concerning career (Dietrich & Kracke, 2009; Otto, 2002; Peterson et al, 1986). Additionally, young adults’ desire for parental acceptance and support has been reported in several studies (Darling, Cumsille, Pena-Alampay & Costworth, 2009; Ullman, 1982; Savin-Williams & Dube, 1998; Tilton-Weaver et al., 2013). This poses an interesting conflict for young adults when there is a desire to share information with parents, but also an inherent fear involved with disclosing information that parents may perceive negatively.

Marcia (1966) identified occupational, religious, and political identities as three central aspects of the development of the ego identity. While research has investigated young adult disclosures regarding career and religion, little has been done to specifically address young adults’ political identity disclosures. Other aspects of identity individuals may feel are essential to their ego development, but may also be a topic young adults try to avoid is one’s sexual
It is widely accepted that dealing with “coming out,” or disclosing one’s sexual identity, especially to parents, induces much stress and anxiety. The stress and anxiety stems from the weighing of the potential risk-benefit ratio involved with making a disclosure, as much thought and planning goes into such decisions (Savin-Williams & Dube, 1998).

Disclosing identities that deviate from parents’ plans regarding young adults’ occupational, religious, and political identities, may induce similar, though likely less severe, parental reactions to young adults’ identity exploration disclosures, results in the avoidance of such information to avoid any negative disclosure experiences. Topics are typically avoided to prevent relational conflict and to protect oneself and the relationship (Guerrero & Afifi, 1995). They can also be avoided due to perceptions of partner unresponsiveness (Guerrero & Afifi, 1995), which is very similar to how parental neglect is perceived (Dietrich & Kracke, 2009), or perceived social inappropriateness (Guerrero & Afifi, 1995). Despite motives to avoid certain discussions, desire to maintain connectedness and openness with parents sometimes outweighs motives to avoid such topics (Savin-Williams & Dube, 1998).

Young adult identity exploration seems to be a major contributing factor to parent-child relational strain, especially if their decisions may not meet their parents’ expectations (Sankey & Young, 1996). This parent-child relationship strain likely stems from young adults’ conflicting desires for autonomy and connection, as well as privacy and openness. However, some parent-child relationships are characterized by parental affirmation and support, which usually reflects a closer, and more open, parent-child relationship less ridden with conflict. Thus, it is important to understand how young adults’ perceptions of parental behaviors as support, interference, or neglect related to young adults’ motivations to avoid topics regarding career, religion, and politics:
H4: Young adults’ perceptions of parental support will be negatively correlated to young adults’ self- and relational-protection topic avoidance motives.

H5: Young adults’ perceptions of parental interference or neglect will be positively correlated with young adults’ perceived partner unresponsiveness and self- and relational-protection topic avoidance motives.

The above hypotheses will allow for an investigation of how young adults’ perceptions of their parents’ behavior during discussions of their career, religious beliefs, and political leanings, relate to their topic avoidance motives regarding these topics. Topic avoidant motives considered will include avoidance for self-protection and relationship protection, as well as topic avoidance because of perceived partner unresponsiveness. Perceived social inappropriateness as a topic avoidance motive will also be assessed, as it was previously identified as a motive in Guerrero and Afifi’s (1995) study that had found young adults most commonly avoided topics to protect self and the parent-child relationship.

The current study will also examine how young adults’ privacy behaviors may be reflective of their identity exploration and development. To better understand identity exploration and development during the transition to adulthood, the following sections outline foundational literature and research findings on the importance of the development of a stable ego identity, the role of parents in young adults’ identity exploration, and how young adults’ narratives of identity exploration reflect privacy behaviors.

**Erikson’s Theory of Identity Development**

Erikson believed the development of identity occurs through psychosocial processes, which he categorized as eight stages stretching over a continuum. Each of the eight stages marked different crises or tasks individuals face (Dunkel & Sefcek, 2009). Erikson
conceptualized identity as an ongoing, multidimensional process of developing, maintaining, revising, and adapting. There are moral, cognitive, cultural, and societal factors influencing the often unconscious progression and development of identity across the lifespan, especially the transition to adulthood, where individuals begin working to attain a stable ego identity (Erikson, 1966). According to Erikson’s stage model of identity development, basic developments occur from infancy through childhood, such as building moral values and learning self-control and cultural norms. If an individual fails to reach resolution at any stage of development, especially during the first four stages of psychosocial development, which are trust versus mistrust, autonomy versus shame, initiative versus guilt, and industry versus inferiority, it will likely have negative effects on his/her abilities to reach resolution at later stages of development (e.g. Brown & Lowis, 2003; Erikson, 1963; 1967; Ginsburg, 1992).

The first stage, which occurs during infancy, involves building a sense of trust and learning to face the world with confidence. Success during this stage depends on the stability of care during infancy. During the following stage, autonomy versus shame, the child starts depending on his/her caregiver a little less. In this second stage, the child gains a sense of will power. Optimal development in this stage requires support and encouragement from caregivers. The third stage, initiative versus guilt, marks a period of time in which children become more curious and ask more questions. In this stage, tasks are addressed with greater understanding and purpose. The last stage of development before the child breaches adolescence, industry versus inferiority, highlights a period of time in which children develop the skills necessary to participate in society (Ginsburg, 1992).

According to Cote and Levine (1987), a “critical period” marks the onset and resolution of each of Erikson’s stages of identity formation, each characterized by different psychosocial
crises. The first critical period starts with an encounter that causes discomfort or irresolution with a certain aspect of one’s identity. This discomfort often leads to identity confusion. The individual eventually resolves and overcomes the crisis, illustrating the second critical period (Cote & Levine, 1987). The second critical period symbolizes a point of time in which the individual alters behaviors or values that were present before the onset of crisis, or first critical period (Erikson, 1980).

As previously mentioned, failure to resolve in any stage of development, especially in the first four stages, leads to difficulty in reaching stable sense of self, (Cote & Levin, 1987), Successful ego identity exploration and development thrives in supportive social environments as identity is positively affirmed through fruitful interactions (Cote & Levine, 1987). To reach a stable ego identity, individuals must explore and develop their own personal career goals, religious beliefs, and political ideologies. These tasks are particularly prominent during the transition to adulthood (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1964).

As an individual approaches adulthood, the fifth stage of identity formation emerges in the crisis of identity and role confusion, or identity diffusion (Erikson, 1968). At this stage the individual must face adulthood and seek direction (Kroger & Marcia, 2011), leaving opportunity for parent-child communication to play a significant role in successful transitioning into adulthood (Dietrich & Kracke, 2009). An interesting, yet challenging, part of this transition for the parent-child relationship is that the journey towards a stable ego identity necessitates some degree of freedom to reject parents’ influences and beliefs, as suggested by Erikson (1968) and Marcia (1964; 1966). In order to attain an independently discovered self, one must explore ideologies outside of their upbringing. Without some freedom for identity exploration, one’s basis for identity has been considerably determined by how the parents raised him or her. Even
though this stage of identity development prominently occurs in young adulthood as individuals leave their childhood homes and gain exposure to new people, ideas, and belief systems, this stage is initiated whenever individuals start questioning parents’ influences and beliefs, sometimes as early as the onset of puberty (Erikson, 1968).

Another framework frequently discussed alongside Erikson’s stage theory of identity development is Marcia’s four identity statuses. Marcia’s (1980) four identity statuses, which stemmed from Erikson’s foundational identity work, will be assessed in the current study to investigate occupational, religious, and political identity exploration and commitment as it relates to young adults’ privacy behaviors in parent-child relationships.

**Marcia’s Identity Statuses**

Marcia (1980) outlined four identity statuses used to assess young adult identity exploration and commitment: *identity foreclosure, identity diffusion, identity moratorium and identity-achievement*. These statuses have been considered in investigations of young adult career exploration, though Marcia (1964) and Erikson (1968) reported religious and political identities as aspects also central to the development of a stable ego identity.

Those in the *identity foreclosure* status have predetermined direction and commitments to occupational, religious, and political identities chosen for them by their parents (Marcia, 1980). Individuals in this stage have not yet reached a critical period in which they question their beliefs or deviate from parents’ expectations. A young man going to business school because his parents chose that path for him would reflect the identity foreclosure status. Young adults who fail to deviate from parents’ religious and political ideologies by adhering to their values and mimicking their behaviors also indicate an identity foreclosure status, as they have not made efforts to explore and develop their own ideologies. On the other hand, young adults who fail to
adhere to parents’ ideologies and fail to explore alternative beliefs are indicative of the identity diffusion status (Marcia, 1980).

Individuals in the *identity diffusion* status do not seek meaningful direction in life (Kroger, 2007; Marcia, 1980). People may perceive individuals working in an occupation without room for meaningful career advancement, like positions in the service or fast food industry, often known as “dead end” jobs, as being in a state of identity diffusion. These individuals may have rejected their parents’ religious and/or political beliefs and career plans, but have failed to explore or form new beliefs. Young adults in the identity diffusion status lack any occupational or ideological direction, while those in the moratorium status strive to find meaningful direction and explore alternative ideologies and career paths to attain a stable ego identity (Marcia, 1980).

The *identity moratorium* status refers to the process of questioning and exploring different perspectives and life choices (Kroger, 2007). While in the moratorium status, one explores different options by gaining exposure to different perspectives in order to develop personal goals and ideologies. For example, undergraduate students may complete internships to develop different types of job skills. Perhaps a student interns in a human resources department, then interns in a more managerial position, and finally works in sales with several companies before committing to a particular career path, reflecting the moratorium status. Students may also intern to gain experience in different company environments like in corporate, private, and non-profit agencies before deciding which direction to take with his/her career. Individuals may do this as well to develop their political and religious beliefs by researching different opinions and ideologies to open their minds to new perspectives. Until one has committed to personally
developed goals and ideologies, the person would be characterized in the identity moratorium status as one explores alternatives.

Finally, young adults who *have* explored and developed their own personal religious and political beliefs and chosen a career path, regardless of parental involvement, reach identity achievement. Those in the *identity achievement* status have self-developed their own ideological goals and committed to them after exploring multiple career paths and ideological perspectives (Kroger, 2007; Marcia, 1980). For example, a young woman raised in a conservative family, who explored different religious and political views than what she was raised with and developed her own religious beliefs and political views would be considered identity-achieved. Additionally, if she picked her own career path, despite influence from parents’ expectations, that would also be indicative of identity achievement.

In sum, individuals may fall in any of the four previously mentioned statuses during adolescence. Those adhering to parents’ plans reflect the identity foreclosure status, while those in the diffusion status have dismissed parental plans, but continue living without meaningful life direction. Conversely, those in the moratorium status seek meaningful life direction independently, and once they find that meaningful direction and commit to their chosen identities, they illustrate the identity achievement status. Marcia (1980) explained that these statuses provide a better way to classify the challenges involved with identity formation. On the other hand, critics have expressed that Marcia’s conceptualizations may fail to fully encompass Erikson’s stages of the life span model. Despite this criticism, Marcia’s work provides a complimentary view of different configurations of identity development, which is absent in Erikson’s life span theory,
Marcia’s (1980) conceptualizations of the four ego identity statuses occurring during young adult identity formation, offer fruitful insight when exploring parent-child communication in regards to young adult identity development. However, research driven by Marcia’s (1966) conceptualizations of the four identity statuses has placed sole emphasis on parents’ roles in young adults’ occupational identity exploration. Though researchers have made strides in investigating career exploration, scholars have yet to establish findings in the context of religious and political identity exploration and development in young adulthood, despite their categorization as central aspects of a stable ego identity (Erikson, 1966; Marcia, 1964; 1980). The current study uses these conceptualizations to extend the context of research on parent-child communication’s influence on identity development to also examine their role in political and religious identity exploration. The following sections discuss the three major components of the ego: occupational, religious, and political identities.

**Ego Identity: Development of Three Major Identities**

As previously discussed, parents develop expectations for their child’s identity, especially their occupational, religious, and political identity, oftentimes leading them to pressure young adults to adopt certain ideologies and pursue particular career paths (Okubo et al. 2007) or interfere with their pursuits of identity exploration (Dietrich & Kracke, 2009). Young adults often perceive these pressures from parents in a negative light.

Negative parent-child interactions, especially those regarding identity, often to lead to conflict or future withholding of information from parental figures (Hawk et al, 2013), as well as decreased identity exploration (Dietrich & Kracke, 2009; Dietrich et al., 2011). Positive parent-child interactions regarding career decisions, on the contrary, foster young adult career exploration (Dietrich et al., 2011; Sankey & Young, 1996). Also, empirical evidence indicates
that positive interactions regarding identity foster successful development of the ego (Cote & Levine, 1987), further evidencing the need for investigating parent-child interactions regarding identity development, as young adults most often turn to their parents for life advice (Peterson et al., 1986).

Previously, identity researchers have placed much emphasis on occupational identity development, while researchers studying attachment styles have focused on young adult religiosity and religious conversion. Lastly, the literature on young adult political identity development is lacking as scholars have placed more emphasis on studying factors of political socialization, including the media and interpersonal relationships (Dostie-Goulet, 2009). The following sections adumbrate scholarly findings on young adult occupational, religious, and political identity development, while highlighting opportunities offered by the proposed study to extend the current body of research.

**Occupational Identity Development**

Dietrich and Salmela-Aro (2012) sought to explore the career-goal pursuit of young adults in relation to parental involvement. Dietrich and Salmela-Aro (2012) explained that close social relationships influence the construction and pursuit of individuals’ goals, and further, supportive parenting styles should foster goal development and pursuit. Additionally, supportive relationships aid in increasing young adults’ self-efficacy (Eccles, 2009), while a lack of parental involvement has been related to lower levels of perceived ability to pursue goals (Farkas & Grolnick, 2010). Salmela-Aro and Little (2007) explained that parents serve as a vital resource to young adults and as parental involvement decreases, young adults’ self-efficacy decreases and goal-related stress heightens.
Using a four-year longitudinal design, Dietrich and Selmela-Aro’s (2012) study investigated parents’ roles in Finnish young adults’ goal pursuit during life transitions as they relocated to new destinations for work or to attend university. Nearly 70 percent of the participants were graduating from university on track to post-graduate education, while 33 percent were on track to become practitioners of their field of study by the last data collection. In each data collection, career-related goals, perceived parental warmth, conceptualized as illustrations of affection and love, and perceived parental career-related involvement, or participants’ perceptions of support and neglect, or lack of engagement, were assessed (Dietrich & Salmela-Aro, 2012).

Notably, lower levels of parental warmth and higher levels of lack of engagement were linked to more autonomous career-related goals. Participants also indicated the pursuit of autonomous career-related goals when experiencing lower levels of parental warmth and high levels of parental involvements claimed their goal pursuit was more stressful. Conversely, participants indicating higher levels of parental warmth and involvement found goal pursuit less stressful (Dietrich & Salmela-Aro, 2012) affirming Salmela-Aro and Little’s (2007) findings, which suggested parents’ involvement serves as a crucial resource in decreasing the difficulty and stress of goal-pursuit. Dietrich and Salmela-Aro (2012) explained that participants reported more self-efficacy when they perceived higher levels of parental warmth and involvement.

**Religious Identity Development**

Just as many parents play a role in young adults’ career exploration, parents also influence young adults’ religious beliefs and behaviors (Bao et al., 1999). Bao et al. (1999) considered the importance of parents’ religiosity to their daily life. They found that young adults adopted the same religious beliefs as their parents, but their inquiries did not address the
discourse regarding religion per se, but rather addressed adopted behaviors, like church attendance. In the transition to adulthood, young adults often stray from their religious upbringings (Kimball, Cook, Boyatzis, & Leonard, 2013; Ullman, 1982). Morgan and Kikuchi (2012) explored young adults’ religiosity in relation to their parents’ religiosity, as well as to parent-child attachment, and lastly, the importance of religion to self and perceived importance of religion to parents. Findings indicated that religious socialization does indeed occur through parent-child relationships and that parents’ church attendance and attendance during adolescence was a predictor of continued attendance in adulthood. Stronger parent-child attachments were also found as predictors of continued service attendance (Morgan & Kikuchi, 2012).

Though Morgan and Kikuchi (2012) found parent-child attachments as strong predictors of continued church attendance in young and early adulthood, previously, Desmond et al. (2010), found that strong parent-child attachment styles only predicted young adults’ continued service attendance initially after moving out of parents’ homes. Interestingly, decreases in attendance, as well as decreases in the perceptions of importance of religion dropped more rapidly over time in young adults with secure parent-child attachments than those with less secure parent-child attachments (Desmond et al., 2010). This deviation from one’s traditional upbringing reflects identity exploration, as decreases in attendance and perceived importance of religion dropped. This suggests that close parent-child relationships may influence young adults to deviate from parents’ beliefs with aims to solidify their autonomy. However, whether these attempts to solidify autonomy were well received by parents was not addressed.

In attempts to identify the social and cognitive factors influencing religious identity development and commitment in adolescence, Ozorak (1989) proposed a model functioning on the notion that children’s religious ideologies are “anchored in the parents’ beliefs, and that
change is tempered by the conservatism of those beliefs and by the strength with which parents adhere to them,” (Ozorak, 1989, p. 449). Ozorak’s (1989) findings revealed that 23 percent of the sample identified themselves as an affiliate of a religion other than those in which they had been raised to believe, and “more than two-thirds considered themselves atheist, agnostic, or unaffiliated theist,” (Ozorak, 1989, p. 455) meaning they had faith in God, but did not identify with any particular organized religious group. This finding evidences young adults’ religious identity exploration, as they had not yet fully committed to a religious affiliation, or identity.

Those who reported religious change tended to become less religious and indicated that most of their concerns stemmed from existential doubt, which reflects identity exploration indicative of the moratorium identity status in which young adults question and search for alternative ideologies. Ozorak (1989) emphasized that of all the age groups surveyed, the eldest group reported past religious affiliation and family religiousness as the weakest influences on their current beliefs (Ozorak, 1989), which conflicts with other findings (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990). Empirically speaking, researchers know little about the processes involved in religious identity exploration (Bao et al., 1999), but scholars agree that religious socialization depends on parents’ beliefs and religious behaviors (e.g. Desmond et al., 2010; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990; Ozorak, 1989).

Evidence supports the centrality of religiosity to the development of a stable ego identity. Ullman (1982) found adults who placed more value on religiosity were more likely to share their religiosity or religious conversions with parents and to other significant individuals. Many adults, despite the fear of damaging their relationships with parents, choose to disclose religious conversions to their parents because their religious commitments are important to them (Ullman, 1982). Advancement toward a stable ego identity involves directly and indirectly rejecting
parental influence, which often leads to tension in parent-child relationships (Sankey & Young, 1996). Kimball et al.’s (2013) research analyzing adults’ faith narratives supported this notion as well, revealing that college graduates’ with more complex faith narratives recalled experiences of perspective changes alongside relational challenges. The more complex narrative recollections described in Kimball et al.’s (2013) study portrayed behaviors suggesting identity exploration, like perspective taking and existential questioning. Since religion was identified as an aspect central to the development of a stable ego identity (Marcia, 1964), it is imperative that the role of parent-child communication regarding religious exploration be examined as it has been in relation to young adult career exploration.

**Political Identity Development**

Research on political identity exploration has received little attention, despite its role as an aspect central to the attainment a stable ego identity (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1966). Less research on political identity development may be due to a lack of political socialization during adolescence, or an overall lack of political engagement during young adulthood (Boys, 2010). Pasek, Kenski, and Romer (2006) alluded to mass media’s role in young adult political engagement, finding a positive relationship between media use and civic engagement. Before the rise of the mass media in the 2000s, and the use of social networking sites to discuss and retrieve political information (Pasek et al., 2006; Torney-Purta & Amadeo, 2003), young adults were not as politically aware or involved (Boys, 2010). Young adult political socialization has often been attributed to the rise of the media, as it has been found to play a role in young adult political engagement, awareness, and sometimes, cynicism (Boys, 2010; Bridges, Appel, & Grossklags, 2012; Towner & Dulio, 2011).
However, scholars have found interpersonal communication with parents as a mediating factor in media effects on young adults’ political attitudes and participation (Boyd et al., 2011; McDevitt, 2005). McDevitt (2005) found that child-initiated political discussions with parents and “the resulting feedback predicted an increase in the likelihood that a young adult would adopt a political identity,” (p. 67). This affirms parents’ role in young adult political identity development. From these discussions initiated by the media, young adults learned from their parents, gaining information they could use as a “basis for contrast, reflection, and debate,” (McDevitt, 2005, p. 67), which fosters identity exploration and development as it provides contrast against alternative viewpoints they may seek out or explore. Though researchers have yet to specifically address political identity exploration, research on young adult political socialization (Boyd et al., 2011; Torney-Purta & Amadeo, 2003) offers insight on young adults’ political identity exploration and development.

Dostie-Goulet’s (2009) findings indicated parents’ discussions of politics with children were positively related to young adult political interest and engagement, though it was emphasized that other factors of socialization should not be ignored. Young adults’ social networks, whether interpersonal (Boshier & Thom, 1973; Dostie-Goulet, 2009; Tedin, 1980) or mediated (Boys, 2010; Bridges et al., 2012; Towner & Dulio, 2011), and education (Kahne, Crow & Lee, 2013) also influences their political interest and engagement (Dostie-Goulet, 2009). Tedin’s (1980) study also indicate parental and peer influences on young adults’ political ideological development. Similar to children’s career aspirations and religious beliefs, parents often expect their offspring to adopt their political views (Boshier & Thom, 1973).

Kahne et al. (2013) found that open discussions of political topics among students in high school settings promoted civic engagement, suggesting the influential role of education in
political socialization, though whether students’ interests deviated from their parents was not assessed. Valentino and Sears’ (1998) findings also illustrated that individual political socialization benefitted from discussions of event-driven dissemination of political information, like campaigns. Notably, the biggest political socialization gains were made by individuals who were exposed to higher levels of political communication through both mediated and interpersonal communication channels (Valentino & Sears, 1998).

Diemer (2012) analyzed secondary data from a longitudinal study to explore the role of parental political socialization in racially marginalized youth from the tenth to twelfth grade levels. Parental political socialization through parent-child discussions was found to be a predictor of young adult political participation (Diemer, 2012). However, the details of the discourse were not assessed. The data did not assess if the parent-young adult political values were in agreement or the exploration levels of the participants. Though political disagreements prevail in many parent-child relationships (Nelson & Tallman, 1969), Troll (1972) found young adults and parents to be very likely to share the same political values. Further, Troll (1972) suggested that political rebellion, or deviation from parents’ ideologies, occurs most often in individuals who value education and critical thinking.

Similar to Troll (1960; 1972), Boshier and Thom’s (1973) findings illustrated young adults’ adoption of parents’ political ideologies. Data indicated that conservative parents’ children tended to have conservative political ideologies, while, similarly, more liberal parents’ children tended to share their parents’ more liberal political beliefs. Conversely, many parent-child relationships experience conflict due to political value differences (Nelson & Tallman, 1969). However, these differences in opinion have yet to be assessed in relation to young adults’ political identity exploration. There are mixed findings on parent-child political socialization.
While some young adults willingly adopt parents’ beliefs without conflict or negotiation, others may not (Troll, 1960; 1972).

The aforementioned findings on young adult political socialization were inconclusive and were not led by either Erikson’s or Marcia’s frameworks to assess identity exploration and commitment. However, the findings imply that political identity exploration may depend on young adults’ media consumption, parent-child discourse, and parents’ political engagement, as parents serve as the key resources utilized by young adults for political information. Parent-child discussions of political content and information mediated the effects of media on young adult political views (Boyd et al., 2011; McDevitt, 2005), evidencing the crucial role of parents in young adult political identity exploration and development.

Notably, discussions of topics like religion and politics may be considered taboo for many families (Vangelisti, 1994), suggesting privacy implications influencing young adult-parent discourse. Additionally, privacy implications may emerge as young adults develop potentially opposing viewpoints and ideologies regarding their career paths, religious beliefs, and political opinions. As evidenced by Ullman (1982), people were most likely to renegotiate their privacy behaviors regarding their religious beliefs when their beliefs differed from their parents’ traditional values. Therefore, similar privacy negotiations may occur when young adults career choices or political opinions deviate from parents’ expectations. The following section discusses how privacy behaviors may be indicative of identity exploration, while parental behaviors may influence identity exploration.

**Identity Exploration: Privacy and Parental Behaviors**

Qualitative analysis of young adults’ narratives, along with quantitative assessments of their identity status, illustrated reoccurring themes in the responses of the individuals categorized
in the identity moratorium and achieved statuses (Sankey & Young, 1996). These individuals recalled finding personal direction for their lives despite the influence of parents and openly expressed experiences of relational strain, especially with parents, during their identity exploration. Interferences and lack of support from parents made them feel as though they were perceived as incompetent or untrustworthy to make important life decisions (Sankey & Young, 1996), which may have inhibited young adults’ likelihood to confide in their parents. All participants categorized as identity achieved spoke of parent-child conflicts regarding their identities as events of past, as most of them explained mutual acceptance of parent-child value differences and less conflict (Sankey & Young, 1996), which may enhance young adults’ likelihood to confide in parents.

Analysis of these narratives produced distinguished, reemerging themes of young adult privacy behaviors at different ego identity statuses (diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, identity-achieved). Though recollections expressed in the young adults’ narratives discussed the tension experienced after making identity disclosures regarding their identity exploration, Sankey and Young (1996) did not mention, nor did they seek to explicitly assess or analyze the young adults,’ privacy behaviors. However, the characteristics of parent-child discourse recounted in the young adults’ narratives indirectly reflect privacy negotiations and patterns.

For example, one of the participants in the moratorium status explained that his mom kept pushing him to finish school and figure out what he wants to do with life. Her attempts at exerting power over him eventually led him to threaten to move out of the house if she would not drop the topic (Sankey & Young, 1996), illustrating his attempts to tighten boundaries due to his mother’s attempts at controlling his life decisions. Identity diffused participants did not recall any strain in their parent-child relationships, implying more open privacy boundaries, as these
participants had yet to deviate from their parents’ plans for them, they had likely also yet to start renegotiating their parent-child privacy boundaries. Finally, individuals in the identity-achieved status, who perceived interactions regarding career decisions with their parents as positive, also reflected more open privacy boundaries. One identity-achieved participant expressed how she always reaches out to her mom when she needs support and encouragement, as her mother always provided support and positive advice for her identity exploration (Sankey & Young, 1996).

Notably, there were identity-achieved individuals who perceived parent-child interactions regarding career choice as negative and expressed experiences of relational strain with their parents. However, these individuals explained that parent-child tolerance of value differences developed over time through topic avoidance, allowing the parent-child conflict and relational strain to dissipate (Sankey & Young, 1996). An identity-achieved individual expressed how her mother was unsupportive of her choices, but they both grew to accept those differences by no longer discussing them (Sankey & Young, 1996). Most identity-achieved individuals explained having gained support from their parents over time (Sankey & Young, 1996), suggesting changes in young adult privacy management and parents’ inquiries and invasions. Sankey and Young (1996) discussed that this may indicate a re-establishment of closeness in parent-young adult relationships once identity-achievement is reached. This further implies the privacy implications of identity exploration and discussions regarding identity exploration with parents, as parental interferences, or attempts to control, seemed to distance parents from young adults, while parental support enhanced closeness. Additionally, parents’ interferences with young adult identity exploration, which was illustrated through pressures and expectations communicated to their children, contributed to the tension young adults faced when making disclosures to their
parents (Sankey & Young, 1996). This would likely be very similar in regards to young adult-parent discourse regarding religious and political thoughts and decisions.

Ultimately, Sankey and Young’s (1996) findings help navigate the indications of privacy management in relation to young adult identity exploration, as young adult narratives illustrated recollections of the discursive characteristics of young adult privacy management regarding identity exploration. Additionally, the narratives reported in Sankey and Young’s (1996) study illustrated parental behaviors influencing young adults’ willingness to discuss their identity exploration with parents, as young adults disclosed less to parents who were less accepting and more to parents who provided support. To explore whether privacy behaviors are indicative of identity exploration and commitment, the following research question is proposed:

RQ1: Will young adults’ privacy behaviors (openness and topic avoidance motives) when discussing career choices, religion and political beliefs differ across their identity exploration statuses?

The narratives explored in Sankey and Young’s (1996) study exuded the privacy changes as young adults explore and commit to different identities. The above research question aims to investigate how privacy behaviors may differ based on an individual’s level of identity commitment and exploration, or ego identity status.

In sum, the current study investigated the following research question and hypotheses by assessing young adults’ levels of openness, topic avoidance motives, perceptions of parental behavior, and level of identity career, religious, and political exploration and commitment:

H1: A young adult who perceives greater levels of parental support will be more open with parents in disclosures about career, religion, and political leanings.
H2: A young adult who perceives greater levels of parental interference will be less open with parents in disclosures about career, religion, and political leanings.

H3: A young adult who perceives greater levels of parental neglect will be less open with parents in disclosures about career, religion, and political leanings.

H4: Young adults’ perceptions of parental support will be negatively correlated to young adults’ self- and relational-protection topic avoidance motives.

H5: Young adults’ perceptions of parental interference or neglect will be positively correlated with young adults’ perceived partner unresponsiveness and self- and relational-protection topic avoidance motives.

RQ1: Will young adults’ privacy behaviors (openness and topic avoidance motives) when discussing career choices, religion and political beliefs differ across their identity exploration statuses?

The proceeding sections detail the methodological procedures and present the results, following a discussion of contributions, limitations of the current study, and future research directions.
Chapter 3

Method

This study assessed cross-sectional data consisting of online survey responses from college students between the ages of 18 and 24, who were enrolled in an introductory communication course at a mid-sized Midwestern university. Students recruited from an introductory communication course received course credit for doing so; alternative assignment options were available to those who did not wish to participate. Also, college students between the ages of 18 and 24 were recruited via the author’s personal Facebook account and participated on a voluntary basis without compensation. All surveys were completed online via Qualtrics.

The age cut-off for participants in this sample ended at age 24 because the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center reports illustrate that the majority of college students are between ages 18 and 24 (Newbaker, 2012). The college student population served as an appropriate population sample because attending university offers further emergence into young adulthood and marks a time in which newfound freedoms from parents are experienced, exposure to new ideologies and perspectives are gained, and negotiations of privacy in the parent-child relationship occur.

Participants and Procedures

After removing incomplete surveys and surveys completed in significantly less time than the survey required, the sample consisted of 436 responses ($M = 19.49$, $SD = 1.98$). Two participants identified as gender-fluid, while 283 respondents identified as female (64.8%), with 152 respondents identifying as male (34.8%). Within this sample, 49.7% ($n = 217$) were freshman, 20 percent ($n = 88$) were sophomores, 17.6 percent ($n = 77$) were juniors, 10.5 percent ($n = 46$) were seniors, and 2.1 percent ($n = 9$) were fifth year seniors. Though 73.2 percent of the
sample identified as Caucasian, 10.3 (n = 45) percent identified as African American, 8 percent identified as Hispanic or Latino (n = 35), 3.9 (n = 17) percent identified as Asian, 2.7 percent (n = 12) identified as two or more races, while 1.8 percent (n = 8) preferred not to answer.

Measures

After replying to demographic questions, participants were prompted to answer the remaining survey questions with one parent or guardian of their choice in mind. The survey aimed to capture the perceptions of respondents’ selected parental figures behaviors as well as the respondents’ communication behaviors when interacting with the selected parental figure about career, religion and politics. Below, each of the measures are discussed in detail and internal consistencies are reported with Chronbach’s alpha.

**Openness.** A 10-item scale was created by Jeffrey Child, a faculty member of the author’s thesis committee who is also specialized in the development of measurement and the theory of communication and privacy management, to assess young adults’ openness in the parent-child privacy boundary. Participants responded to items on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The items were modified to make three new measures, one for each topic addressed in the study: career, religion, and politics (Appendix A, B, C). Items included statements like “I am comfortable sharing in-depth information about my (career, religious beliefs, political opinions) with my (previously selected parental figure);” “I often discuss my feelings about my (career, religious beliefs, political opinions) with my (previously selected parental figure).” Other items were reverse coded such as “I don’t talk with my (previously selected parental figure) about my own thoughts about my (career, religious beliefs, political opinions),” and “When I do discuss my thoughts about my (career, religious beliefs, political opinions) with my (previously selected parent), I only share brief amounts of
information.” Thus, a higher number suggests a perceived more openness in the parent-child boundary when it comes to career, religion and political opinions, respectively. Each measure produced satisfactory reliability: career openness ($M = 5.1$, $SD = 1.19$, $\alpha = .89$), religious openness ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 1.32$, $\alpha = .90$); political openness ($M = 4.34$, $SD = 1.20$, $\alpha = .89$).

**Topic avoidance motives.** To explore young adults’ motivations for topic avoidance of discussions regarding career, religion, and politics, participants responded to Guerrero and Afifi’s (1995) scale assessing topic avoidance motives for the following reasons, *self-protection, relationship protection, partner unresponsiveness,* and *social inappropriateness* three times (career, religious beliefs, political opinions; see Appendix D, E, F). Each subscale was responded to on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

**Topic avoidance motive: Social inappropriateness.** Guerrero and Afifi’s (1995) topic avoidance motive measure only included one item in the subscale measuring avoidance due to perceived social inappropriateness. Thus, two additional items were created in this study to measure this motive: “It would be too awkward to discuss this topic,” and “I would feel uncomfortable disclosing about this topic.” This subscale showed reliability for all three topics avoided due to social inappropriateness (career: $M = 2.78$, $SD = 1.68$, $\alpha = .91$; religion: $M = 2.97$, $SD = 1.76$, $\alpha = .91$; political opinions: $M = 2.61$, $SD = 1.69$, $\alpha = .94$). Higher scores reflect a tendency of being motivated to avoid a topic based on perceived social inappropriateness.

Overall, the mean scores for participants’ avoidance due to perceived social inappropriateness were low for discussion of each of the topics addressed (career, religion, politics).

**Topic avoidance motive: Self-protection.** The four-item subscale measuring self-protection motives included “It would leave me too vulnerable” and “This person may judge me” for instance, and also had satisfactory reliability (career: $M = 3.16$, $SD = 1.66$, $\alpha = .88$; religion:
\( M = 1.53, SD = .59, \alpha = .84; \) political opinions: \( M = 2.58, SD = 1.60, \alpha = .91 \). Again, a lower score illustrates less of a tendency toward avoiding topics for motivation to self-protect. Overall, participants did not feel the need to avoid discussions of career, religion, or political opinions with parents for self-protection.

**Topic avoidance motive: Relationship protection.** The three item scale measuring relationship protection motives included statements like “It might ruin our relationship,” and also had satisfactory reliability across the three topics used to prompt responses (career: \( M = 3.26, SD = 1.83, \alpha = .91 \); religion: \( M = 3.05, SD = 1.86, \alpha = .94 \); political opinions: \( M = 2.58, SD = 1.74, \alpha = .92 \)). A lower score shows less of a tendency toward avoiding topics for motivation to protect the parent-child relationship. Though the means produced still show that, on average, participants did not avoid these topics for relationship protection, the sizes of the standard deviations show that some were more neutral.

**Topic avoidance motive: Partner unresponsiveness.** The four-item scale measuring partner unresponsiveness included statements such as “This person lacks knowledge relevant to my problem” and “This person will probably be unresponsive,” which also produced strong reliability across the three prompted topics (career: \( M = 2.85, SD = 1.55, \alpha = .90 \); religion: \( M = 2.81, SD = 1.61, \alpha = .91 \); political opinions: \( M = 2.74, SD = 1.69, \alpha = .94 \)). Lower scores show less of a tendency toward avoiding topics due to a parent’s unresponsiveness to discussion of the topic. The means suggest that, on average, participants did not avoid these topics due to partner unresponsiveness.

**Career: Perceived parental support, interference, and neglect.** To assess young adults’ perceptions of parental behaviors as support, interference, and neglect, the Parental Career-related Behaviors (PCB) measure was utilized (Dietrich & Kracke, 2009; Appendix G.
The original measure includes three 5-item subscales to capture young adults’ perceptions of their parents’ behaviors as support, interference, or neglect during discussions about career choices. Items assessing perceptions of support include statements such as, “My parents talk to me about my career interests and abilities” and “My parents encourage me to seek information about careers I am interested in.” Items in the interference subscale included statements like, “My parents try to push their ideas of my future career on me” and “My parents try to push me in a certain direction regarding my future career” while items in the lack of engagement, or neglect, subscale included statements such as “My parents are not really interested in my career.” The items were responded to on a scale of 1 (does not apply) to 4 (fully applies). The data collected from the PCB measure in the current study produced good reliability levels (parental support: $M = 3.2$, $SD = .71$, $\alpha = .83$; interference: $M = 2.04$, $SD = .92$, $\alpha = .89$; neglect: $M = 1.38$, $SD = .59$, $\alpha = .85$).

**Religious beliefs: Perceived parental support, interference, and neglect.**

The items used in the PCB measure were modified in order to assess perceptions of parental support, interference, and neglect regarding young adults’ religious beliefs (Appendix H) on a scale of 1 (does not apply) to 4 (fully applies). Modifications involved replacing career or future career with “religious beliefs” in the items in the PCB measure. Items assessing perceptions of support included statements such as, “My parents talk to me about my religious interests and abilities” and “My parents encourage me to seek information about religions I am interested in.” Items in the interference subscale included statements like, “My parents try to push their ideas of religion on me” and “My parents try to push me in a certain direction regarding my future religious beliefs,” while items in the lack of engagement, or neglect, subscale included statements such as “My parents are not really interested in my religious beliefs).” The modified
scale also produced good reliability: parental support ($M = 2.27$, $SD = .83$, $\alpha = .82$), interference ($M = 2.03$, $SD = .98$, $\alpha = .90$), neglect ($M = 1.52$, $SD = .68$, $\alpha = .86$).

**Political opinions: Perceived parental support, interference, and neglect.**

The PCB measure items were also modified to assess perceptions of parental support, interference, and neglect regarding young adults’ (Appendix I) on a scale of 1 (does not apply) to 4 (fully applies). Modifications involved replacing career or future career with “political opinions” in the items in the PCB measure. Again, the modified scale produced strong reliability: parental support ($M = 2.58$, $SD = .90$, $\alpha = .90$), interference ($M = 1.79$, $SD = .86$, $\alpha = .93$), neglect ($M = 1.58$, $SD = .69$, $\alpha = .87$). Items assessing perceptions of support included statements such as, “My parents talk to me about my political interests and abilities” and “My parents encourage me to seek information about political opinions I am interested in.” Items in the interference subscale included statements like, “My parents try to push me in a certain direction regarding my (future career, religion, political opinions)” while items in the lack of engagement, or neglect, subscale included statements such as “My parents are not really interested in my political beliefs.”

**Career, religious, and political identity exploration.** Ballisteri et al. (1995) created the Ego Identity Process Questionnaire (EIPQ), based off of conceptualizations of identity by Marcia and Erikson, to assess participants’ identity status, or levels of exploration and commitment to their identities, across eight dimensions of identity: occupation, religion, politics, values, family, friendships, dating, and sex roles. The EIPQ was created to measure one’s ego identity status as a whole, but the current study aimed to capture identity exploration and commitment across only three of the dimensions assessed in the EIPQ: occupation, religion, and politics. Therefore, the three 4-item subscales, one assessing career, one assessing religious, and one assessing political
identity exploration and commitment were taken from the EIPQ, used for the current study. Participants responded these items on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Three categories were created to represent identity exploration and commitment: 1. Explored and achieved, 2. Commitment without exploration, and finally, 3. Non-distinctive. From the original subscales taken from the EIPQ, two items represented Category 1 and two items represented Category 2. The responses to the respective two items were summed and averaged to obtain mean scores. If the respondents had a mean score above 4.5 in Category 1, they were placed in Category 1. If the respondents had a mean score higher than 4.5 in Category 2, they were placed in Category 2. Finally, if the mean scores for the items for Categories 1 and 2 were both above 4.5, both below 3.5, or the higher mean score fell into “neutral” territory (3.5 – 4.5) then they were placed in Category 3. Items used for respective categories are listed below with the categories created for each topic.

**Career identity**

**Category 1: Career identity exploration and achievement.** The items representing this category include: “I have definitely decided on the occupation I want to pursue,” and “I have tried to learn about different occupational fields to find the best one.” Participants in this category scored a mean score higher than 4.5 when responding to these two items and less than 3.5 when responding to the items representing career identity commitment without exploration (i.e., Category 2). Of the sample, 42.4 percent of the participants (n = 185) were assigned to this category.

**Category 2: Career identity commitment without exploration.** The items representing this category included: “I have never questioned my occupational aspirations,” and
“I am unlikely to alter my vocational goals.” Participants in this category scored a mean score higher than 4.5 when responding to these two items when their subsequent mean scores on the career identity exploration and achievement items were less than 3.5. Of the sample, only 11 participants (2.5%) were assigned to this group.

Category 3: Indistinct career identity. Participants were assigned to this category if their mean scores for both of the previous scales were above 4.5 or were both below 3.5 or both fell between 3.5 and 4.5. These participants did not distinctively fall into an explored and achieved career identity or a committed without exploration career identity. The majority of the sample (n = 240, 55%) was assigned to this category, reflecting participants’ uncertainty about their occupational identities.

Religious identity

Category 1: Religious identity exploration and achievement. The items representing this category included: “I have considered adopting different kinds of religious beliefs,” and “Regarding religion, my beliefs are likely to change in the near future.” Participants in this category scored a mean score of 5.5 or higher when responding to these two items and 3.5 or less when responding to the items representing religious identity commitment without exploration. Within the sample, 17 participants (3.9%) were assigned to this category.

Category 2: Religious identity commitment without exploration. The items representing this category included: “When I talk to people about religion, I make sure to voice my opinion,” and “I have discussed religious matters with a number of people who believe differently than I do.” Participants in this category scored a mean score of 5.5 or high when responding to these two items when their subsequent mean scores on the religious identity
exploration and achievement items were 3.5 or less. Of the sample, 174 participants (39.9%) were assigned to this category.

**Category 3: Indistinct religious identity.** Participants were assigned to this category if their mean scores for both of the previous scales were above 4.5 or were both below 3.5 or both fell between 3.5 and 4.5. These participants did not distinctly fall into an explored and achieved religious identity or a committed without exploration religious identity. A total of 245 participants (56.2%) of the sample were assigned to this category.

**Political identity**

**Category 1: Political identity exploration and achievement.** The items representing this category included: “I don’t expect to change my political principles and ideals,” Participants in this category scored a mean score of 5.5 or higher when responding to these two items and 3.5 or less when responding to the items representing political identity commitment without exploration. Within the sample, 157 participants (36%) were assigned to this category.

**Category 2: Political identity commitment without exploration.** The items representing this category included: “I have never questioned my political beliefs,” and “I will always vote for the same political party.” Participants in this category scored a mean score of 5.5 or high when responding to these two items when their subsequent mean scores on the political identity exploration and achievement items were 3.5 or less. Of the sample, 33 participants (7.6%) were assigned to this category.

**Category 3: Indistinct political identity.** Participants were assigned to this category if their mean scores for both of the previous political identity scales were above 4.5 or were both below 3.5 or both fell between 3.5 and 4.5. These participants did not distinctly fall into an explored
and achieved religious identity or a committed without exploration religious identity. A total of 246 participants (56.4%) of the sample were assigned to this category.
Chapter 4

Results

Participants chose one parental figure to consider when responding to the survey items. Of the 436 responses analyzed, 332 (76.2%) selected their mothers, 98 (22.4%) selected their fathers, while two respondents identified their step-father (.5%), and the four remaining participants (0.9%) identified their grandmother ($n = 2$) and grandfather ($n = 1$). To answer the hypotheses and research questions proposed in this study, Pearson correlation tests, Regression Analyses, and Analyses of Variance (ANOVA) were performed. In the following subsections, findings will be reported regarding each topic addressed in the study: career, religion, and politics.

Career

Hypotheses predicted that college students’ perceptions of parental support would predict a more open parent-child privacy boundary (H1) with less topic avoidance motives (H4). Conversely, it was hypothesized that their perceptions of parental interference and neglect would predict less openness (H2, H3) and more topic avoidance motives (H5). Below, Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for each variable and Table 2 presents findings on correlations among variables.
Table 1

*Variables Referencing Career: Descriptive Statistics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
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<td>Relationship-Prot. TA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Partner Unresp. TA</td>
<td>2.84</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Inap. TA</td>
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<td>1.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Openness</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental Support</td>
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<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental Interference</td>
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<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental Neglect</td>
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<td>.59</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Notes. (N = 436); TA = Topic Avoidance*

Table 2

*Variables Referencing Career: Correlations*

<table>
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<td>.247**</td>
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<td>.322**</td>
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<td>-.297**</td>
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<td>-.132*</td>
<td>.250**</td>
<td>.263**</td>
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<td>-.227**</td>
<td>-.132*</td>
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<td>.192**</td>
<td>.250**</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
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</table>

*Notes. (N = 436). Self refers to self-protection, relationship refers to relationship-protection, Unr. refers to partner unresponsiveness, Inap. refers to social inappropriateness, Supp. refers to perceived parental support, Int. refers to perceived parental interference, and Neglect refers to perceived parental neglect. * p < .05. ** p < .001.*
As reported above, when discussing career choices the results showed that there was a positive correlation between college students’ perceived supportive parental behaviors and their openness about their career with their selected parent \((r = .48, p < .001)\), which was significant and in support of H1. Additionally, results also supported H2 and H3 as participants’ perceived parental interference \((r = -.27, p < .001)\) and neglect \((r = -.36, p < .001)\) were significantly and negatively correlated with openness. H4 predicted that perceptions of parental support would be correlated to less topic avoidance, and this was also supported as the table above shows (self-protection: \(r = -.100, p = < .001\); relationship protection: \(r = -.082, p = < .001\); partner unresponsiveness: \(r = -.227, p = < .001\); social inappropriateness: \(r = -.132, p = < .001\)).

In support of H5, interference was significantly and positively correlated to each topic avoidance motive (self-protection: \(r = .298, p = < .001\); relationship protection: \(r = .322, p = < .001\); partner unresponsiveness: \(r = .192, p = < .001\); social inappropriateness: \(r = .250, p = < .001\)). Similarly, H5 was supported as neglect was also significantly and positively correlated to each of the topic avoidance motives explored (self-protection: \(r = .247, p = < .001\); relationship protection: \(r = .223, p = < .001\); partner unresponsiveness: \(r = .361, p = < .001\); social inappropriateness: \(r = .263, p = < .001\)).

To further investigate the hypotheses, the perceived openness of parent-child boundary regarding discussions of young adults’ career was entered as the dependent variable in a regression analysis, with perceived parental support, parental interference, and parental neglect entered as predictor variables. In support of the first hypothesis (H1) linear regression analysis revealed that perceptions of parental support were a significant and positive predictor of young adults’ openness regarding career-related topics \(F(3, 433) = 68.56, p < .001, r^2 = .317, \beta = .440\). The linear regression analysis also revealed support for H2 and H3. Both perceived
parental interference \( (F(3, 433) = 68.56, p < .001, r^2 = .317, \beta = -.240) \) and perceived parental neglect \( (F(3, 433) = 68.56, p < .001, r^2 = .317, \beta = -.127) \) were significant and negative predictors of young adults’ openness with their parents regarding political opinions.

**Religion**

Hypotheses predicted that college students’ perceptions of parental support would predict a more open parent-child privacy boundary with less topic avoidance (H1, H4), while their perceptions of parental interference and neglect would predict less openness and more topic avoidance motives regarding discussions of religion (H2, H3, H5). Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics for each variable and Table 4 presents the correlational findings.

**Table 3**
*Variables Referencing Religion: Descriptive Statistics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-Protection TA</td>
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<td>.59</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relationship-Prot. TA</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>1.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner Unresp. TA</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>1.61</td>
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<td>Social Inap. TA</td>
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<td>1.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion Openness</td>
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<td>Parental Support</td>
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<td>Parental Interference</td>
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<td>.99</td>
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<td>Parental Neglect</td>
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<td>.68</td>
</tr>
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</table>

*Notes. \( N = 437 \); TA = Topic Avoidance*
Table 4

Variables Referencing Religion: Correlations

<table>
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<tbody>
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<td>.651**</td>
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<td>-.080</td>
<td>.323**</td>
<td>.244**</td>
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<td>.728**</td>
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<td>-.139*</td>
<td>.370**</td>
<td>.237**</td>
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<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>

Notes. (N = 437). Self refers to self-protection, relationship refers to relationship-protection, Unr. refers to partner unresponsiveness, Inap. refers to social inappropriateness, Supp. refers to perceived parental support, Int. refers to perceived parental interference, and Neglect refers to perceived parental neglect. * p < .05. ** p < .001.

There was a significant, positive correlation between college students’ perceived supportive parental behaviors of their religious beliefs and their openness when discussing religion (r = .570, p < .001 in support of H1. Additionally, as Table 4 illustrates, each of the topic avoidance motives for college students’ discussions regarding religion when parents’ behaviors were perceived as supportive, illustrated a significant, negative correlation with each motive (self-protection: r = -.080, p = < .001; relationship protection: r = -.139, p = < .001; partner unresponsiveness: r = -.194, p = < .001; social inappropriateness: r = -.167, p = < .001) providing support for H4. In support of H2 and H5, there was significant, negative correlation between perceived parental interference and openness (r = -.076, p < .001) and a significant, positive correlation with each of the topic avoidance motives (self-protection: r = .323, p = < .001; relationship protection: r = .370, p = < .001; partner unresponsiveness: r = .260, p = < .001;
social inappropriateness: $r = .294, p = .001$). In support of H3 and H5 neglect was positively correlated to topic avoidance motives (self-protection: $r = .244, p = .001$; relationship protection: $r = .237, p = .001$; partner unresponsiveness: $r = .381, p = .001$; social inappropriateness: $r = .302, p = .001$). It is negatively correlated with young adults’ openness regarding discussions of religion ($r = -.395, p < .001$), in support of H3 and H5.

The openness of young adults’ parent-child boundary regarding discussions of religion was entered as the dependent variable in a linear regression analysis, with perceived parental behaviors (i.e., parental support, parental interference, and parental neglect) entered as predictor variables. In support of H1, perceived parental support was a significant, positive predictor of young adults’ openness regarding religion-related topics ($F(3, 433) = 92.55, p < .001, r^2 = .386, \beta = .519$). Analyses also illustrated support for H2 and H3, as both perceived parental interference ($F(3, 433) = 92.55, p < .001, r^2 = .386, \beta = -.134$) and perceived parental neglect ($F(3, 433) = 92.55, p < .001, r^2 = .386, \beta = -.214$) were significantly, negatively related to young adults’ openness regarding discussion pertaining to religions.

**Politics**

Hypotheses predicted that college students’ perceptions of parental support would predict a more open parent-child privacy boundary with less motivation for topic avoidance of discussions regarding political opinions (H1, H4), while their perceptions of parental neglect would predict less openness and more topic avoidance motives regarding discussions about politics (H2, H3, H5). Table 5 presents the descriptive statistics for each variable and Table 6 presents the correlational findings.
Table 5
**Variables Referencing Politics: Descriptive Statistics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Mean</th>
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<td>Parental Support</td>
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<td>Parental Interference</td>
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Notes. (N = 436); TA = Topic Avoidance

Table 6
**Variables Referencing Politics: Correlations**

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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. (N = 436). Self refers to self-protection, relationship refers to relationship-protection, Unr. refers to partner unresponsiveness, Inap. refers to social inappropriateness, Supp. refers to perceived parental support, Int. refers to perceived parental interference, and Neglect refers to perceived parental neglect. * p < .05. ** p < .001.

The table above shows that each of the topic avoidance motives for college students’ discussions about political leanings with parents were negatively correlated with perceived parental support,
illustrating a significant correlation with each motive in support of H4 (self-protection: $r = -.156$, $p = < .001$; relationship protection: $r = -.148$, $p = < .001$; partner unresponsiveness: $r = -.210$, $p = < .001$; social inappropriateness: $r = -.177$, $p = < .001$). There was a significant and positive correlation between college students’ perceived supportive parental behaviors of their political opinions and their openness when discussing politics ($r = .577$, $p < .001$) in support of H1. In support of H2, perceived parental interference was positively correlated to each of the topic avoidance motives (self-protection: $r = .389$, $p = < .001$; relationship protection: $r = .373$, $p = < .001$; partner unresponsiveness: $r = .152$, $p = < .001$; social inappropriateness: $r = .306$, $p = < .001$) and negatively correlated to young adults’ openness regarding discussions of politics ($r = .130$, $p < .001$). In support of H3, perceived parental neglect was positively correlated to each of the topic avoidance motives (self-protection: $r = .254$, $p = < .001$; relationship protection: $r = .220$, $p = < .001$; partner unresponsiveness: $r = .416$, $p = < .001$; social inappropriateness: $r = .266$, $p = < .001$) and negatively correlated to young adults’ openness regarding discussions of politics ($r = .270$, $p < .001$).

The openness of young adults’ parent-child boundary regarding discussions of their political leanings, political openness was entered as the dependent variable in the regression analysis, with perceived parental support, interference, and neglect entered as predictors. In support of H1, regression analysis results showed that perceived parental support was a significant and positive predictor of young adults’ openness regarding political opinions, ($F(3, 433) = 90.29$, $p < .001$, $r^2 = .381$, $\beta = .585$). H2 and H5 were also supported as the results showed that both perceived parental interference ($F(3, 433) = 90.29$, $p < .001$, $r^2 = 90.29$, $\beta = -.197$) and perceived parental neglect ($F(3, 433) = 90.29$, $p < .005$, $r^2 = .381$, $\beta = -.081$) were significantly and negatively related to young adults’ openness regarding political opinions.
Identity as a Predictor of Privacy

The following sections explore RQ1, which asks whether young adults’ privacy behaviors (openness and topic avoidance motives) will differ across identity exploration phases. The results of the investigation of RQ1 are presented by each topic addressed: career, religion, and politics.

Career

First, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted with the respondents’ career identity exploration phases entered as the independent variable (three levels; 1 = Career identity exploration and achievement, 2 = Career identity commitment without exploration, and 3 = Indistinct career identity category) and career openness as the dependent variable. The result showed significant differences between groups ($F(2, 433) = 3.06, p = .048$). A post-hoc Tukey analysis revealed significant differences in openness levels between Category 1 ($M = 5.25, SD = 1.20$) and Category 3 ($M = 4.97, SD = 1.17$). That is, individuals who have explored and/or achieved career identity exploration tended to have a more open privacy boundary with their parents regarding career discussion. In addition, ANOVA testing was used with the identity exploration variable entered as independent variable and each of the topic avoidance motives entered as dependent variables (self-protection, relationship protection, partner unresponsiveness, social inappropriateness). Young adults’ topic avoidance motives did not significantly differ across the identity categories (Table 7).
Table 7 Univariate Analysis of Variance of Career Identity Categories on Privacy Behaviors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity Category</th>
<th>F(df)</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>EC’d</th>
<th>Comm.</th>
<th>Unclear</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>(2, 433) = 8.58</td>
<td>.048</td>
<td>5.26(1.20)abc</td>
<td>5.15(1.17)ab</td>
<td>4.97(1.69)b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SelfTA.</td>
<td>(2, 433) = 4.98</td>
<td>.405</td>
<td>3.06(1.67)</td>
<td>2.89(1.63)</td>
<td>3.25(1.65)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RelTA</td>
<td>(2, 433) = 2.24</td>
<td>.717</td>
<td>3.19(1.84)</td>
<td>3.52(1.90)</td>
<td>3.31(1.83)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PartUnrTA</td>
<td>(2, 433) = 3.05</td>
<td>.532</td>
<td>2.75(1.51)</td>
<td>3.00(1.21)</td>
<td>2.92(1.60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SocInapTA</td>
<td>(2, 433) = 3.36</td>
<td>.554</td>
<td>2.69(1.73)</td>
<td>3.03(1.79)</td>
<td>2.85(1.65)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Religion

In investigation of RQ1, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted with the respondents’ religious identity category entered as the independent variable (three levels: 1 = Religious identity exploration and achievement, 2 = Religious identity commitment without exploration, and 3 = Indistinct religious identity category) and religious openness as the dependent variable. Findings showed that there were significant differences between groups (F(2, 433) = 13.203, p < .001). A post-hoc Tukey test revealed significant differences between the respondents in Category 2 (M = 4.69, SD = 1.25), those who were committed to their religious identity without exploration, and Category 3 (M = 3.98, SD = 1.23), those who did not distinctly fall into either of the other identity categories. The test also revealed a significant difference between those in Category 1 (M = 3.61, SD = 1.25), which represented those who had explored and committed to their religious identity, and Category 2, (M = 4.69, SD = 1.25), which represented those who had committed to their religious identity without having explored it.
Taken together, participants who have committed their religious identity without much exploration had a more open boundary with their parents regarding discussion on religion than those in the explored and/or achieved phase or those who felt uncertain about their religious identity.

ANOVA was used to explore the identity exploration (three levels: 1 = Religious identity exploration and achievement, 2 = Religious identity commitment without exploration, and 3 = Indistinct religious identity category) as the independent variable and each topic avoidance motive as the dependent variable for each analysis (self-protection, relationship protection, partner unresponsiveness, social inappropriateness). The results did not show significant differences between young adults’ religious identity exploration category and avoidance motives due to partner unresponsiveness or protect self or relationship protection (Table 8). The only significant differences were found for the motive of perceived social inappropriateness ($F(2, 433) = 5.29, p < .05$). Post-hoc Tukey analysis further revealed significant differences between Category 2 ($M = 2.66, SD = 1.77$) and Category 3 ($M = 3.15, SD = 1.72$), and between Category 1 ($M = 3.61, SD = 1.92$), and Category 2 ($M = 2.66, SD = 1.77$). That is, young adults who had committed to their religious identity without exploration were less likely to avoid discussing such a topic with their parents for social inappropriateness reasons than those who had achieved or those who felt uncertain about their religious identity.
Table 8 Univariate Analysis of Variance of Religious Identity Categories on Privacy Behaviors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity Category</th>
<th>F(df)</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>EC’d</th>
<th>Comm.</th>
<th>Unclear</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>(2, 433) = 13.20</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>3.61(1.25)&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>4.59(1.36)&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>3.98(1.23)&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SelfTA.</td>
<td>(2, 429) = 2.61</td>
<td>.022</td>
<td>1.91(.62)&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1.52(.66)&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1.51(.56)&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RelTA</td>
<td>(2, 433) = 15.36</td>
<td>.108</td>
<td>3.88(1.88)</td>
<td>2.92(1.88)</td>
<td>3.09(1.83)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PartUnrTA</td>
<td>(2, 433) = 18.87</td>
<td>.026</td>
<td>3.50(1.74)</td>
<td>2.60(1.61)</td>
<td>2.92(1.59)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SocInapTA</td>
<td>(2, 433) = 32.31</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>3.61(1.92)&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>2.66(1.77)&lt;sup&gt;ab&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>3.15(1.72)&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Politics

One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted with the respondents’ political beliefs, which was entered as the independent variable (1 = Political identity exploration and achievement, 2 = Political identity commitment without exploration, and 3 = Indistinct political identity category) and political openness as the dependent variable. The results suggested significant differences across these categories ($F(2, 436) = 3.81, p < .05, p = .009$).

Furthermore, post-hoc Tukey tests showed significant differences between Category 1 ($M = 4.52, SD = 1.27$), those who had explored and committed to their political identities, and Category 3 ($M = 4.20, SD = 1.40$), which represented those who did not distinctly fall into the first two categories. That is, young adults who had explored and/or achieved political identity were more open to discussing politics with their parents than those who were uncertain about it.

Then, ANOVAs were used again with the identity exploration category entered as the independent variable and each topic avoidance motive (self-protection, relationship protection,
partner unresponsiveness, social inappropriateness) entered as the dependent variable for each analysis. However, no significant differences were found between the categories for each topic avoidance motive for discussing politics with parents.

Table 9 Univariate Analysis of Variance of Political Identity Categories on Privacy Behaviors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity Category</th>
<th>$F$(df)</th>
<th>$p$</th>
<th>EC’d</th>
<th>Comm.</th>
<th>Unclear</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>(2, 433) = 10.93</td>
<td>.024</td>
<td>4.52(1.27)$^a$</td>
<td>4.51(1.40)$^{ab}$</td>
<td>4.20(1.12)$^b$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SelfTA.</td>
<td>(2, 432) = 2.61</td>
<td>.602</td>
<td>2.61(.55)</td>
<td>2.31(1.77)</td>
<td>2.60(1.62)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RelTA</td>
<td>(2, 433) = 12.24</td>
<td>.133</td>
<td>3.08(1.73)</td>
<td>2.57(1.75)</td>
<td>2.78(1.74)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PartUnrTA</td>
<td>(2, 433) = 1.30</td>
<td>.778</td>
<td>2.82(1.59)</td>
<td>2.69(1.69)</td>
<td>2.70(1.61)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SocInapTA</td>
<td>(2, 433) = 2.56</td>
<td>.641</td>
<td>2.60(1.70)</td>
<td>2.36(1.59)</td>
<td>2.66(1.71)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chapter 5

Discussion

This section aims to extrapolate meaning from the results of the current study by to guide scholars’ understanding of the ever-changing parent-child relationship during the transition to adulthood from a CPM perspective. This discussion begins with the contributions this study offers to the privacy management perspective on parent-child relationships followed by a discussion of the important intersections of privacy and identity. An explanation of limitations is given and directions for future research on identity work and privacy management are proposed.

Privacy in Young Adulthood

As individuals emerge as young adults in the university setting, moving out of their childhood homes for the first time, they experience newfound freedom from the restrictions of living with parents. In this major transition, individuals start making decisions for themselves, gain exposure to new ideas and career paths, and experience life in a new setting. Privacy research has emphasized the tightening of parent-child boundaries through adolescence and early adulthood as a strategy used to exude autonomy from parents (Petronio, 2002; 2013). While evidence has shown that young adults typically avoid talking about dating and negative life experiences (Guerrero & Afifi, 1995), little is known about the privacy dynamics of young adults’ discussions with parents about life decisions central to one’s identity, such as chosen career paths, religious beliefs, and political leanings (Marcia, 1980).

When managing privacy, individuals consider past and/or anticipated experiences before making disclosures, which reflects the risk-benefit ratio-analysis factor of CPM (Petronio, 2002; 2013). Results showed that perceptions of parental behaviors as support, interference, or neglect, were strongly related to young adults’ privacy behaviors regarding discussions on career,
religion, and politics. Perceived support from parents during discussions of career, religion, and politics were positively related to young adults’ openness with parents when discussing these topics. Since participants had viewed their parents as supportive in previous conversations of these topics, they perceived less risk in discussing them, and thus, less motivated to avoid such discussions. Conversely, perceived parental interference, or pressure to act or think a certain way, especially when discussing religion, as well as politics, was strongly correlated to topic avoidance motives to protect self and the parent-child relationship. Further, perceptions of neglect, or lack of parental engagement, were most strongly correlated with topic avoidance due to perceived partner unresponsiveness. Perceptions of neglect were also significantly correlated to avoidance to protect self and the parent-child relationship.

Though topic avoidance motives were most prevalent in discussions of religion and politics, perceptions of parental interference were strongly correlated to all of the topic avoidance motives for each topic addressed. Young adults perceive likely view parental interference as the riskiest behaviors to experience during discussions about their life choices and beliefs. Parental interferences work as hindrances to the autonomy that young adults desire to exude as they mature and live outside of the family home. Though perceived parental neglect was significantly correlated to young adults’ topic avoidance motives, the correlations were not as large in comparison to the correlation between perceived parental interference and all of the topic avoidance motives assessed. This further highlights that young adults feel that it is the most risky to deal with parents trying to pressure them to think or behave in a particular way. Intuitively, individuals do not want to replay negative experiences by revisiting discussions that had previously caused tension or distress. Perceived parental interference was most strongly correlated to topic avoidance motives for self-protection (career: $r = .298, p < .001$; religion: $r = \ldots$
.323, p < .001; politics: \( r = .389, p < .001 \) and relationship-protection (career: \( r = .322, p < .001 \); religion: \( r = .370, p < .001 \); politics: \( r = .373, p < .001 \)), supporting the notion that young adults’ perceptions of parental interference as a trigger for less openness and more motivation to avoid some topics. Interference from parents likely hinders young adults’ growing sense of autonomy.

When comparing findings across the three topics, the correlations between perceived parental interference and young adults’ topic avoidance motives were the strongest when discussing religion and politics with parents, highlighting that these may be viewed as more vulnerable topics to discuss with parents in comparison to career. Career discussions are likely seen as less risky, even if they were to disagree with their child’s decisions, because it is somewhat expected of young adults to use college to explore their own career paths. However, parents likely have innate expectations for their children to continue adhering to the religious and political values they were raised with, as studies have evidenced parents’ roles in individuals’ religious (e.g. Kim-Spoon, Longo, & McCullough, 2012) and political ideology socialization (e.g. Ozorak, 1989; Boshier & Thom, 1973; Diemer; 2012; Lee, Shah, & McLeod, 2012), often highlighting individuals’ adherence to parents’ values in most cases. Parents may have stronger convictions about their children’s political and religious ideologies in comparison to their children’s career goals, making discussions regarding religion and politics more vulnerable for young adults to address, especially if parental interference is expected. In further support of this notion, openness levels were the highest in discussions of career \( (M = 5.10) \) in comparison to religion \( (M = 4.21) \) and politics \( (M = 4.34) \).

As expected, perceived parental support was significantly and positively correlated to openness across all three topics, and significantly and negatively correlated to topic avoidance motives across all three topics. Participants’ perceptions of support could reflect an overall sense
of support from parents in their endeavors, making discussions of important topics like career, religion, and politics less risky to address. Topics where young adults do not anticipate parents to be combative, defensive, or try exude control over them would be considered safer, less vulnerable topics of discussion. However, even sensitive topics of discussion, like religion and politics, can be discussed openly when parents are perceived as supportive and affirming of opinions on these topics. When parents are viewed as supportive, their behaviors likely give young adults an affirming sense of self and autonomy, making them more willing to be open.

This study contributed to measurement development in privacy research through creation of a privacy openness scale and the addition of two items in the sub-scale measuring topic avoidance motives due to partner unresponsiveness, which was previously only represented by one survey item (Guerrero & Afifi, 1995). Communication privacy management theory (CPM) has developed and progressed rapidly over the last decade as it has been applied to a variety of contexts including family communication, social media privacy, and health communication. The communication openness scale produced strong reliability with the modifications made to address each topic (career, religion, politics) and served as a useful tool in assessing interpersonal openness.

Previous literature has relied on the assessment of interior and exterior privacy orientations to determine openness (Serewicz & Morrison, 2007), but this new measure will allow for analysis of the relationships between individual privacy orientations and openness levels regarding specifics topics or contexts. Future research can use this openness scale to test the predictive value of family privacy orientations in driving privacy management behaviors. Additionally, future researchers can continue assessing the relationship between openness and topic avoidance motives to accentuate the dialectical nature of interpersonal relationships, where
the need for autonomy and connectedness is frequently negotiated. The goal of this study was not only to better understand the privacy behaviors of young adults regarding topics important to one’s identity, but it was also to understand how using CPM helps inform our understandings of how young adults talk about their identity exploration.

**Intersections of Privacy and Identity**

Narratives of college students in Sankey and Young’s (1996) study showed distinct patterns of parent-child communication behaviors based on the identity status of the participants. For example, those in the moratorium and identity achieved statuses all reported having conflict with their parents when discussing certain aspects of their lives. Conversely, those in the foreclosure status, or those who had not explored their identities, but had remained committed to the identities their parents predisposed them to, did not report parent-child conflict. The moratorium status illustrated identity exploration, while the achieved status illustrated identity commitment post independent identity exploration, which necessitates the questioning of or deviation from parents’ values to a degree. Those in the identity moratorium status discussed parent-child conflict over their career decisions and avoiding these discussions with their parents to avoid conflict, illustrating distinct privacy behaviors in comparison to those who were categorized as achieved. Identity achieved individuals explained that, over time, the parent-child relationship grew closer after conflict over their decisions dissipated (Sankey & Young, 1996), illustrating that perhaps, parents stopped interfering with their decisions and began supporting them or ignoring parent-child differences in opinion in order to better maintain the relationship.

Though Sankey and Young (1996) were not examining college students’ narratives from a privacy management perspective, distinct privacy behaviors were evident in their reports and unique group differences were also found in this study. Regarding career, those who had
explored and committed to an occupational identity were significantly more open with their parents when discussing career than those who were categorized in the third category. This finding illustrates a trajectory of privacy management, where young adults become more open about aspects of their identities as they become more sure of or committed to these aspects of identity. Perhaps, the more certain one is of their identity, the more likely they may be to disclose and discuss the identity, which is what is found among sexual minorities when disclosing a lesbian, gay, or bisexual identity (Savin-Williams & Diamond, 2000).

The results also showed that motives to avoid discussions of career did not differ significantly based on participants’ identity category. As previously discussed, career is likely considered a less vulnerable topic of discussion in comparison to religious and political discussions, where parents seem to have innate expectations of their children. However, it is notable that those who were the most committed to their career identities after exploration were the most open in their discussions of career, further illustrating a distinct privacy trajectory, where individuals become more open as they become more sure of themselves.

In regards to discussions of religious beliefs with parents, there were significant differences in participants’ openness levels as well. Participants’ who were categorized as committed to their religious beliefs without exploration were significantly more open with parents in discussions about religion than those categorized in the group who had committed to a religious identity after exploration and those categorized in the third category. This third category of participants reflected individuals who did not distinctly fall into the explored and achieved category or the commitment without exploration category. The third category, for each topic addressed, likely reflects individuals who are very unsure of their identity or who are not actively questioning or exploring that aspect of identity.
Notably, participants in the third category and the explored and achieved category for religion had significantly higher levels of topic avoidance due to perceived social inappropriateness. This could reflect family privacy orientations where topics regarding religion may be viewed as taboo, or perhaps this could reflect that participants in these categories were not in agreement with their parents on religion and thus, perceived it inappropriate to discuss it. Those in the explored and committed category had the highest mean scores for topic avoidance of religious discussions due to perceived social inappropriateness. From these findings, it seems that participants viewed religion as the most vulnerable topic, specifically if they were categorized as individuals who had explored and achieved their religious identities or had indistinct religious identity exploration and commitment. Heightened levels of commitment to an identity may lead to more openness, but only when the topic is perceived as appropriate or when the benefits to openly discussing such an identity outweigh potential risks. For example, adults feared disclosing religious conversions to their parents, but some felt it was such an important part of their identity that they told their parents despite expectations of negative reactions (Kimball et al., 2013).

Lastly, significant differences regarding participants’ openness about political opinions with parents were also found. Those who had explored and committed to their political identities as significantly more open than those categorized in the third indistinct identity category. This may be because those who have explored and committed to their political identity may have more to say about politics due to increased political information efficacy (Kaid, McKinney, & Tedesco, 2007). Higher levels of political information efficacy reflect one’s confidence in understanding and discussing politics (Kaid et al., 2007). Assuming political identity exploration and commitment levels would be correlated with increased levels of political information
efficacy, individuals more confident of their political identities were more willing to openly discuss politics. It is important to note that those who had explored and committed to their occupational and political identities were the most open about these topics, showing that self-assured confidence in one’s identity, specifically for career and political identities after exploration, may make one more willing to discuss information related to those identities.

However, for a potentially more vulnerable topic like religious identity discussions, those who had explored and committed to their religious identities were the least open and most likely to avoid discussing this topic due to perceived social inappropriateness. Religious discussions were also avoided to protect self and the parent-child relationship. This suggests that those who had explored and committed to their religious identities may have deviated from their parents’ expectations regarding religious beliefs, leading to less openness and more motivation to avoid religious discussions as parents may react negatively to such disclosures. Overall, the findings show there are indeed relationships between identity exploration and commitment and young adults’ willingness to openly discuss topics related to such with parents. It seems that as young adults become more sure of their identities, they are willing to be more open about discussing them, as long as the discussions are not perceived as vulnerable topics of conversation.

However, there are limitations to the measurement of identity exploration and commitment used in this study.

Limitations and Future Directions

Several studies exploring college students’ identity exploration have found all participants to have some level of commitment or exploration to their identities, as none of the findings reflected students falling into a diffusion-like status where they have no commitments or goals to explore and/or pursue (e.g. Dietrich & Kracke, 2009; Dietrich et al., 2011; Sankey &
Young, 1996). Perhaps college students never perceive themselves to be in a state of diffusion, but rather have fluctuating levels of exploration and commitment over time across different aspects of their identity. It is possible that the nature of being away from home for the first time and gaining exposure to new people, perspectives, and ways of life, may make it feel as though the journey for life meaning and a sense of self may never subside completely during this stage of life as individuals gain so much new exposure at a rapid pace in university settings. This may be why previous research has yet to find college research participants categorized in the identity diffused status.

In this study, identity exploration and commitment was assessed in a way it never has been before. Segments of the Ego Identity Process Questionnaire (Ballisteri et al., 1995) were used to assess the identity status of the participants’ occupational, religious, and political identities. Taking this approach resulted in creating a new way to conceptualize the stages of identity exploration. Mean scores from the items used to assess exploration and commitment across the three realms explored (occupational, religious, political), were used to categorize participants into three identity statuses or categories, rather than the four statuses previously conceptualized by Marcia (1980; Kroger & Marcia, 2011). The three categories were used to signify that participants had 1. Committed to their identities after exploration, 2. Committed to their identities without exploration, or 3. Indistinct identity exploration and commitment. Those falling in the third category did not distinctly fall into the group who had committed after exploring or the group that committed without exploring.

It is difficult to assume what this third group represents as far as their levels of identity exploration and commitment because of this new assessment of the measure, but this third category may represent a group of people who are slowly exploring and adjusting their
commitment levels to a given identity at any time. This third category could also represent a
group of individuals who are unsure of their commitment to their identities, but not actively
exploring these aspects of identity at the moment. Interestingly, the third category represented a
large amount of people, as over 50 percent of participants fell into it in each identity aspect
assessed (career, religion, politics). It is important to note that it is not believed that this group of
people was not exploring their identities, rather, they were taking more time to explore and
question their identities as they were unsure of their identities at this point in time. Despite
uncertainty about what this third group represents, distinct differences in privacy behaviors were
observed between the three categories of identity exploration and commitment. Though the
findings contribute to a better understanding of the dialectical nature of the parent-child
relationship and young adults’ privacy management, as well as highlighted the intersections of
privacy management and identity development, the study certainly had its limitations.

First, participants were asked to respond to survey items with one parent in mind, but the
instructions for the measures listed “parental figures” throughout, so participants could have
been reflecting on their relationships with their parents overall instead of just the one they had
selected. However, each item referencing parents did list “your previously selected parental
figure” throughout the survey. Secondly, the new assessment of participants’ identity exploration
and commitment serves as a limitation, but also serves as an opportunity to continue evolving the
way researchers conceptualize and operationalize ego identity exploration and commitment. If
this study were to be replicated, it would be beneficial to create more items to reflect each of the
categories created for this study and test reliability through confirmatory factor analyses. It is
possible that the three identity categories created for this study may better reflect the different
statuses of ego identity development, as studies have not found college participants to reflect a
diffusion-like category, as previously discussed. Future studies would also benefit from more deeply assessing the role of exploration in reaching identity commitment or achievement, as some may require less exploring than others to develop a strong sense of self.

Future research in this area should also address the importance or value of each realm of identity addressed. For example, some may have formed their own political opinions after exploring a variety of political stances, but they may not care or be that interested in politics, making it a less salient component of their identity, and thus, less important to talk about. Identity salience refers to how important this component of one’s identity is to their idea of self. Religion is another aspect of identity that some may not value as much as others, making religious identities less salient, and potential less important to those individuals to explore. The salience of these components of identity may moderate individuals’ levels of openness and motives to avoid topics, even when parental interference is expected. For example, research on individuals coming out, or disclosing a minority sexual identity to their parents, explains that as individuals become more committed to and comfortable with their sexual minority identity, and their sexual minority identity becomes more difficult to conceal, it becomes more important to them to be able to be open with this minority identity even if they expect their parents to receive it negatively (Savin-Williams & Diamond, 2000; Savin-Williams & Dube, 1998)

It would also be beneficial to capture the degree to which participants feel their parents agree with their occupational, religious, and political identity choices, as this may be a significant indicator of young adults’ willingness to be open with parents about these discussions. Though the findings revealed that perceived parental interferences, or parental pressure to make different decisions or adhere to different beliefs, was significantly and negatively correlated to openness and significantly and positively correlated to topic avoidance
motives across the different topics addressed, young adults’ perceptions of parental agreement may moderate or better predict the permeability of parent-child privacy boundaries. Disclosures feel less risky when to receiver of the message is expected to receive it positively and with agreement, so young adults expect their parents to agree with their decisions and viewpoints, they may be more likely to make the disclosure. However, salience of the identity of discussion may moderate the importance of parental agreement for identities that are more salient, or important to one’s conception of self, meaning, if the aspect of identity is important enough to the person, s/he will make the disclosure even if the message receiver is thought to disagree or receive the disclosure negatively. Lastly, it would be beneficial to assess parent-child attachment styles, as more secure attachments may be correlated with less identity exploration or deviation from parents’ expectations and beliefs. Previous research has addressed the relationship between religious conversions and parent-child attachments styles (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990) and could be beneficial to assess in relation to parent-child privacy dynamics.

Overall, this study offers new perspectives and insights on the role of identity exploration and commitment as it relates to young adults’ management of the parent-child privacy boundary despite its limitations. It seems that individuals’ levels of exploration and commitment to different components of their ego identities does influence how open individuals are in discussing those aspects of their identity. Future research should definitely consider how valuable or salient these realms of identity are to individuals. Previous research has emphasized that when one feels something is important to their identity, they feel a greater need to share it (Savin-Williams & Diamond, 2000). For example, adults who make religious conversions often feel that their conversion is very central to who they are as a person, making them more motivated to disclose their conversion to their parents, even if it may upset them (Kirkpatrick &
Shaver, 1990; Kimball et al., 2013). Similarly, adolescents and young adults have consistently reported disclosing non-heteronormative sexual and gender identities to their parents, despite the inherent foreseen risk in making such disclosures (Luhtanen, 2003; Savin-Williams & Dube, 1998). Future research examining identity exploration and commitment should also investigate the privacy behaviors related to sexual and gender identities, as scholars work toward understanding the unique dialectical tensions experienced by sexual minorities.

This study provides a unique contribution to communication scholarship, as it brings to light the intersections of two distinct perspectives used to explore communication: privacy and identity. Results revealed that identity exploration and commitment levels inform the development of individuals’ privacy trajectories, or privacy rules and behaviors over time during young adulthood. There were distinct and significant relationships between these variables. Further and deeper exploration of the intersections of these concepts will inform scholarly understanding of the role of privacy in managing the communication of our identities.
Appendix A
Openness Assessment: Career

Consider how you manage private information that you might share with your parents about your career goals. Below are several statements that may describe how you share information about your choices with your parental figures. Indicate the degree to which each statement reflects how you interact with the parent previously chosen about your career on a 7-point Likert Scale (Strongly Disagree = 1; Strongly Agree = 7):

1. I don’t really talk with my (previously selected parental figure) about my own thoughts about my career choices. (R)
2. I am slow to talk to my (previously selected parental figure) in any depth about my career choices. (R)
3. When I do discuss my thoughts about my career choices with my (previously selected parental figure), I only share brief amounts of information. (R)
4. I am comfortable sharing in-depth information about my career choices with my (previously selected parental figure).
5. Conversations with my (previously selected parental figure) about my career choices are usually brief. (R)
6. I often discuss my feelings about my career choices with my (previously selected parental figure).
7. I am cautious in expressing my beliefs and opinions about my career choices with my (previously selected parental figure). (R)
8. I often disclose intimate, personal things about my career without hesitation to my (previously selected parental figure).
9. I feel that I sometimes do not control how much I disclose about my career choices to my (previously selected parental figure). (R)
10. I often share what I worry about when thinking about my career choices with my (previously selected parental figure).
Appendix B
Openness Assessment: Religion

Consider how you manage private information that you might share with your parents about your religious beliefs. Below are several statements that may describe how you share information about your religious beliefs with your parental figures. Indicate the degree to which each statement reflects how you interact with the parent previously chosen about your religious beliefs on a 7-point Likert Scale (Strongly Disagree = 1; Strongly Agree = 7).

1. I don’t really talk with my (previously selected parental figure) about my own thoughts about my religious beliefs. (R)
2. I am slow to talk to my (previously selected parental figure) in any depth about my religious beliefs. (R)
3. When I do discuss my thoughts about my religious beliefs with my (previously selected parental figure), I only share brief amounts of information. (R)
4. I am comfortable sharing in-depth information about my religious beliefs with my (previously selected parental figure).
5. Conversations with my (previously selected parental figure) about my religious beliefs are usually brief. (R)
6. I often discuss my feelings about my religious beliefs with my (previously selected parental figure).
7. I am cautious in expressing my beliefs and opinions about my religious beliefs with my (previously selected parental figure). (R)
8. I often disclose intimate, personal things about my religious beliefs without hesitation to my (previously selected parental figure).
9. I feel that I sometimes do not control how much I disclose about my religious beliefs to my (previously selected parental figure).
10. I often share what I worry about when thinking about my religious beliefs with my (previously selected parental figure).
Appendix C
Openness Assessment: Politics

Now consider how you manage private information that you might share with your parents about your political opinions. Below are several statements that may describe how you share information about your political opinions with your parental figures. Indicate the degree to which each statement reflects how you interact with the parent previously chosen about your political opinions on a 7-point Likert Scale (Strongly Disagree = 1; Strongly Agree = 7).

1. I don’t really talk with my (previously selected parental figure) about my own thoughts about my political opinions. (R)
2. I am slow to talk to my (previously selected parental figure) in any depth about my political opinions. (R)
3. When I do discuss my thoughts about my political opinions with my (previously selected parental figure), I only share brief amounts of information. (R)
4. I am comfortable sharing in-depth information about my political opinions with my (previously selected parental figure).
5. Conversations with my (previously selected parental figure) about my political opinions are usually brief. (R)
6. I often discuss my feelings about my political opinions with my (previously selected parental figure).
7. I am cautious in expressing my beliefs and opinions about my political opinions with my (previously selected parental figure). (R)
8. I often disclose intimate, personal things about my political opinions without hesitation to my (previously selected parental figure).
9. I feel that I sometimes do not control how much I disclose about my political opinions to my (previously selected parental figure). (R)
10. I often share what I worry about when thinking about my political opinions with my (previously selected parental figure).
Appendix D
Topic Avoidance Motives: Career

Instructions: Here are several reasons why people may avoid talking to about something. For each statement, please identify the number that best expresses your reasons for avoiding talking to your mom/dad about your career using a 7-point interval scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree).

**Self-protection**
1. It would leave me too vulnerable.
2. I would be embarrassed to disclose.
3. This person may judge me.
4. I prefer not to replay negative experiences.

**Relationship Protection**
1. Disclosure could lead to conflict.
2. It might ruin our relationship.
3. It might make this person angry.

**Partner Unresponsiveness**
1. This person will probably be unresponsive.
2. This person lacks knowledge relevant to my problem.
3. This person would view the issue as trivial.
4. It would be futile to talk about it with this person.

**Social Inappropriateness**
1. It would be social inappropriate to discuss this topic.
Appendix E
Topic Avoidance Motives: Religion

Instructions: Here are several reasons why people may avoid talking to about something. For each statement, please identify the number that best expresses your reasons for avoiding talking to your mom/dad about your religious beliefs using a 7-point interval scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree).

Self-protection
5. It would leave me too vulnerable.
6. I would be embarrassed to disclose.
7. This person may judge me.
8. I prefer not to replay negative experiences.

Relationship Protection
4. Disclosure could lead to conflict.
5. It might ruin our relationship.
6. It might make this person angry.

Partner Unresponsiveness
5. This person will probably be unresponsive.
6. This person lacks knowledge relevant to my problem.
7. This person would view the issue as trivial.
8. It would be futile to talk about it with this person.

Social Inappropriateness
2. It would be social inappropriate to discuss this topic.
Appendix F
Topic Avoidance Motives: Politics

Instructions: Here are several reasons why people may avoid talking to about something. For each statement, please identify the number that best expresses your reasons for avoiding talking to your mom/dad about your political beliefs using a 7-point interval scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree).

Self-protection
9. It would leave me too vulnerable.
10. I would be embarrassed to disclose.
11. This person may judge me.
12. I prefer not to replay negative experiences.

Relationship Protection
7. Disclosure could lead to conflict.
8. It might ruin our relationship.
9. It might make this person angry.

Partner Unresponsiveness
9. This person will probably be unresponsive.
10. This person lacks knowledge relevant to my problem.
11. This person would view the issue as trivial.
12. It would be futile to talk about it with this person.

Social Inappropriateness
3. It would be social inappropriate to discuss this topic.
Appendix G
Young adults’ Perceptions of Parental Behaviors Regarding Career

Instructions: Respond to the items on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = does not apply; 4 = fully applies) in regards to your perceptions of your parents’ behaviors when discussing your career with you.

Support
1. My parents talk to me about my vocational interests and abilities.
2. My parents encourage me to seek information about vocations I am interested in.
3. My parents support me in getting an apprenticeship.
4. My parents give advice on the choice of careers available.
5. My parents talk to me about apprenticeship opportunities in various careers.

Interference
1. My parents have their own ideas about my future vocation and try to influence me accordingly.
3. My parents try to put through their ideas of my future vocation.
4. My parents would talk me out of a vocation they don’t like.
5. My parents try to push me in a certain direction regarding my future vocation.

Lack of engagement
1. My parents are not really interested in my future vocation.
2. My parents don’t really care about my vocational preparation.
3. My parents cannot support my vocational preparation because they know too little about different vocations.
4. My parents cannot support my vocational preparation because they are too busy.
5. My parents cannot support my vocational preparation as they face difficulties at work themselves.
Appendix H
Young adults’ Perceptions of Parental Behaviors Regarding Religion

Instructions: Respond to the items on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = does not apply; 4 = fully applies) in regards to your perceptions of your parents’ behaviors when discussing religion with you.

Support
6. My parents talk to me about my religious interests and abilities.
7. My parents encourage me to seek information about religions I am interested in.
8. My parents support me in my religious beliefs.
9. My parents give advice on the choice of religions available.
10. My parents talk to me about religious opportunities in various religions.

Interference
6. My parents have their own ideas about my religious beliefs and try to influence me accordingly.
7. My parents interfere too much with my religious beliefs.
8. My parents try to push their religious beliefs on me.
9. My parents would talk me out of a religion they don’t like.
10. My parents try to push me in a certain direction regarding my religious beliefs.

Lack of engagement
6. My parents are not really interested in my religious beliefs.
7. My parents don’t really care about my religious beliefs.
8. My parents cannot support my religious beliefs because they know too little about different religious beliefs.
9. My parents cannot support my religious beliefs because they are too busy.
10. My parents cannot support my religious beliefs as they face difficulties with religion themselves.
Appendix I
Young adults’ Perceptions of Parental Behaviors Regarding Politics

Instructions: Respond to the items on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = does not apply; 4 = fully applies) in regards to your perceptions of your parents’ behaviors when discussing politics with you.

Support
11. My parents talk to me about my political interests and abilities.
12. My parents encourage me to seek information about policies I am interested in.
13. My parents support me in my political beliefs.
14. My parents give advice on the choice of political beliefs available.
15. My parents talk to me about political opportunities in various political issues.

Interference
11. My parents have their own ideas about my political beliefs and try to influence me accordingly.
12. My parents interfere too much with my political beliefs.
13. My parents try to push their political beliefs on me.
14. My parents would talk me out of a political belief they don’t like.
15. My parents try to push me in a certain direction regarding my political beliefs.

Lack of engagement
11. My parents are not really interested in my political beliefs.
12. My parents don’t really care about my political beliefs.
13. My parents cannot support my political beliefs because they know too little about different political beliefs.
14. My parents cannot support my political beliefs because they are too busy.
15. My parents cannot support my political beliefs as they face difficulties with politics themselves.
References


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