



A Study of Relationship between Neuroticism, Ambiguity Intolerance, Identity Commitment and Meaning in Life among Emerging Adults

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Abstract: Emerging Adulthood is characterized by diverse life choices, instability and exploration. During adulthood, individuals deeply invest in love, work and worldviews, gradually developing a sense of purpose by making lasting commitments about life. The current study aims to investigate role of Neuroticism, Ambiguity Intolerance, Identity commitment on Meaning in life among emerging adults. The study was conducted on 106 participants enrolled as a students. Participants completed Neo FFI Scale - (Neuroticism), Intolerance of Uncertainty Scale -Short version (IUS-12), Ego Identity Process Questionnaire (EIPQ) and Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ). Pearson's product-moment correlation revealed insignificant relationship between Neuroticism and Meaning in Life. The result was also insignificant for Ambiguity Intolerance and Meaning in life. The correlation analysis was found to be significant for Identity Commitment and Meaning in life. Further, regression analysis revealed that meaning in life significantly predicted Identity commitment ($p < .001$). Welch's t-test revealed insignificant gender differences. These results will aid in understanding factors influencing meaning in life. Psychologists and other working professionals can use these findings to understand factors influencing and obstructing meaning in life. As meaning in life is related to resilience, better psychological health and more adaptive coping skills especially during the challenging developmental stage like emerging adulthood.

Keywords: *Emerging Adults, Neuroticism, Identity Commitment, Sense of Purpose, Meaning in Life, Ambiguity Intolerance*

1. Introduction

The concept of Emerging Adults was defined by 'Jeffrey Jensen Arnett.' It is termed as a distinct developmental stage, between the age range of 18 to 25. During this phase in life, many Emerging Adults obtain the level of educational training that provides the strong basis for earnings and achievements for their future work (Chisholm & Hurrelmann, 1995). It is characterised as a time of frequent change with various variations in love, work, and worldviews (Rindfuss, 1991). In this phase of life, multiple options are available in different directions, future decisions seem to be uncertain, when the scope of independent exploration of life's possibilities is greater for most people than it will be at any other period of the life. The years of emerging adulthood are characterized by a greater degree of demographic diversity and instability, focusing on change and exploration. The concept of Identity formation begins in adolescence but takes place mainly in emerging adulthood with regard to love, work, and worldviews. Identity formation means trying out various life opportunities and gradually moving toward making enduring decisions (commitment).

Identity commitment becomes crucial for optimal psychosocial functioning (Erikson, 1950). The problem with identity formation tends to be related with internalizing problems (Crocetti et al., 2008). It is assumed that Neuroticism trait is related to internalizing connotation (i.e. Anxiety, Depression, Self-consciousness and Vulnerability) especially to identity aspects. It becomes significant for societies to invest in their youth, as they are very vulnerable to face complex problems, with this, sense of meaning also develop parallelly.

Another age range that is between 18 to 30 is closely linked to Emerging Adulthood, known as "quarter-life crisis", it is often used to refer to existential concerns becoming prominent in early adulthood. During this phase, for the first time serious questions about the meaning of life and one's role or position in the life are formulated, these questions have a significant practical impact to one's future. This thought process helps to select paths in life, related to careers and relationship. There is significant evidence stating that meaning to one's life is an important for psychological well-being and general health, and a sense of meaninglessness leaves one at risk for psychopathology (Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

Most of the researches highlight the interaction between identity commitment, Neuroticism, Meaning in life, Uncertainty and psychological well-being. A study demonstrated that meaning- making was significantly related to Identity commitment (De Moor, 2023). Studies have also demonstrated that stronger educational identity predicted lower neuroticism (Klimstra et al., 2012). Multiple studies highlighted neuroticism as a negative predictor of meaning in life (Addad, 1986). High level of Neuroticism is linked to avoiding uncertain

situations and meta worry acting as partial mediators (Lommen et al., 2010). Neuroticism and Intolerance of uncertainty weakens the presence of meaning and increases psychological distress, whereas Identity commitment, Meaning in life and Perceived control act as protective factors.

Neuroticism

Neuroticism is the trait disposition to experience negative affect, including anger, anxiety, self-consciousness, irritability, emotional instability, and depression (Costa & McCrae, 1980). Eysenck (1950) defined Neuroticism as “a personality trait characterized by emotional instability, moodiness, anxiety, and a tendency to experience negative emotions such as fear, worry, and sadness.”

Identity commitment

Identity Commitment refers to strong and stable decisions individuals make with regards to various life choices, and helps to develop sense of understanding and clarity from those choices and decisions (Meeus et al., 2012).

Ambiguity Intolerance

Ambiguity Intolerance is defined as “tendency to interpret uncertain situations and experiences as medium of threat”, tolerance of ambiguity as “tendency to perceive certain situations as desirable” (Budner, 1962). Intolerance of ambiguity is referred as personality variable characterized by a individuals ability to perceive uncertain situations as sources of discomfort, further influences person’s cognitive style, belief and attitude, interpersonal, social functioning and perceptual ability (Frenkel-Brunswik, 1949, 1951).

Meaning in life

Meaning in life is characterized by stable resources, also referred as presence of meaning consisting of our cognitive understanding of ourselves and our lives, our sense of purpose, and the feeling that our lives matter (Martela & Steger, 2016).

1.1 Purpose

The proposed study attempts to explore the relationship between Neuroticism, Ambiguity Intolerance, Identity commitment and Meaning in life among Emerging Adults.

1.2 Hypotheses

H1. There will be a significant negative relationship between Neuroticism and Meaning in Life among emerging adults.

H2. There will be a significant negative relationship between Ambiguity Intolerance and Meaning in life among emerging adults.

H3. There will be a significant positive relationship between Identity Commitment and Meaning in life among emerging adults.

H4. Neuroticism will be a significant predictor of Meaning in Life among emerging adults.

H5. Ambiguity Intolerance will be a significant predictor of Meaning in Life among emerging adults.

H6. Identity Commitment will be a significant predictor of Meaning in Life among emerging adults.

2. Methods

2.1 Sample

The sample consisted of 106 participants (64 females and 42 males). The sample age range was between 18 to 25 years. ($M = 21.21$, $S.D = 1.79$).

2.2 Measures

NEO - FFI (Costa and McCrae, 1992): It consists of 5 domains namely Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to experience, Conscientiousness and Agreeableness. The Inventory consists of 60 items, 12 items each measuring 5 personality domains. The internal consistency range from 0.68 to 0.86 (R.R, 1992).

Intolerance of uncertainty – 12 (Carleton et al., 2007): It consists of 12 items. The two subscales are (i) 'Prospective IU' and (ii) 'Inhibitory IU'. Items are scored on a 5-point scale. It has good internal reliability (.85), factor structure, and convergent validity with other measures of IU (Simos et al, 2023).

Ego Identity Process Questionnaire (Balistreri et al., 1995): This scale measures Identity Commitment. The Subscales include Identity Exploration and Identity Commitment. The separate scoring is provided for each subscale. It has strong psychometric properties, with high face validity, moderate to high internal consistency and test-retest reliability estimates (Balistreri et al, 1995).

Meaning in Life Questionnaire (Steger et al., 2006): It is a 10-item self-report inventory designed to measure meaning in life. It is a 7 point likert scale, 2 subscales include - Presence of Meaning and Search for Meaning. The MLQ has good internal consistency, with coefficient alpha of .80s for the Presence subscale and .80s to .90s for the Search subscale (Steger et al., 2006).

2.3 Procedure

Convenience sampling technique was used and with the help of google forms data was collected. Before giving the scales, Informed consent was taken from each participant. Once the scales was administered the participants were debriefed regarding the study and variables used in the study. Results were shared with the participants only on request. On the completion of survey, scoring and statistical analysis was computed. Throughout the research, all the ethical considerations were employed.

3. Results

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the variables (N= 106)

	Neuroticism	Ambiguity Intolerance	Identity Commitment	Meaning in Life
Mean	35.821	30.849	56.896	47.566
SD	6.291	8.321	9.026	9.269
Range	39	39	56	56

Table 2. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient between the variable (N=106)

	Neuroticism	Ambiguity Intolerance	Identity Commitment	Meaning in Life
Neuroticism				
Ambiguity Intolerance	0.473***			
Identity Commitment	0.129	0.425***		
Meaning in Life	-0.065	-0.090	-0.683***	

Note: Pearson's Correlation is significant at the * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$ and *** $p < .001$.

Table 3.1 Model Summary table for Identity commitment predicting Meaning in life (N=106)

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	RMSE	R ² Change	F Change	df1	df2	p
H₀	0	0	0	9.269	0	-	0	105	-
H₁	0.236	0.056	0.047	9.050	0.056	6.142	1	104	0.015

Note: Dependent Variable: Meaning in life ; Predictor: Identity commitment

Table 3.2 ANOVA Table for Identity commitment predicting Meaning in life (N=106)

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
H ₁	Regression	502.979	1	502.979	6.142	0.015
	Residual	8517.058	104	81.895		
	Total	9020.038	105			

Note: Dependent Variable: Meaning in life ; Predictor: Identity commitment

Table 3.3 Coefficients Table for Identity commitment predicting meaning in life

Model	Unstandardized	Standard Error	Standardized β	t	p
H ₀ (Intercept)	47.566	0.900		52.837	<.001
H ₁ (Intercept)	33.769	5.636		5.992	<.001
IC	0.242	0.098	0.236	2.478	0.015

Note: Dependent Variable: Meaning in life ; Predictor: Identity commitment

Table 4.1 Model Summary table for Identity Commitment predicting Meaning in Life

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	RMSE	R ² Change	F Change	df1	df2	p
H ₀	0	0	0	9.269	0	-	0	105	-
H ₁	0.236	0.056	0.047	9.050	0.056	6.142	1	104	0.015

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Note: Dependent Variable: Meaning in life ; Predictor: Identity commitment (IC)

Table 5.1 *Welch t-test comparing neuroticism and meaning in life across gender (Females and Males)*

Variables	t	df	p
Neuroticism	0.406	97.595	0.685
Meaning in life	0.616	78.033	0.540

Note: Welch's t -test , N = 106

4. Discussion of Results

The aim of the current study is to investigate the relationship between Neuroticism, Ambiguity Intolerance , Identity Commitment and Meaning in life among emerging adults. Descriptive statistics was computed for all the four variables. Inferential statistics used were Pearson's Product-Moment correlation for all the four variables. Additionally, Simple Linear Regression analysis was computed between the two variables (Identity Commitment and Meaning in Life) and Welch's t-test was used to compare males and females across Neuroticism and Meaning in Life. The linearity and normality of data were assessed using, skewness and kurtosis respectively.

The results obtained with regards to first hypothesis shows insignificant low negative correlation. Self-determination theory, a motivational theory can be used to explain the finding. This theory suggests, individuals posits three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence and relatedness. The theory characterize that individuals seek meaning and fulfilment in life once basic needs are satisfied. In the research papers examining the interplay between the personality traits and satisfaction of basic psychological needs. Hence, meaning in life is not thoroughly influenced by neuroticism rather it can be influenced by fulfilment of basic psychological needs. Therefore, Neuroticism explains small variance of Meaning in life

and not show significant correlation. The findings were consistent with the research conducted by Schnell et al, where it was hypothesized that personality factors predict meaning in life, the findings revealed that only 16% of meaning in life is predicted through personality factors (Schnell et al., 2006).

The findings for second hypothesis were statistically insignificant. This may be attributed to emerging adulthood concept (ages 18-25), characterized by exploration, identity formation, and ambiguity intolerance. In this phase, the tolerance towards ambiguity tends to be lower, this possibly explains the absence of connection between ambiguity intolerance and meaning in life. The study by Steger et al., found that individuals with meaning in life tend to continue searching for more meaning, this suggest meaning serve as a buffer against uncertainties. While ambiguity intolerance impact how individuals respond to uncertainties, it can be attributed that meaning doesn't necessarily impact ability to find meaning - some may still explore meaning despite experiencing discomfort (Steger et al., 2005).

The results were in line with the third hypothesis. Correlational analysis suggests statistically significant low positive relationship between identity commitment and Meaning in life. The result of simple linear regression indicated that Identity commitment is a significant predictor of Meaning in life ($F = 6.142$; $p 0.015$). The findings were consistent with the research conducted by Czyzowska, examined relationship between identity processing styles and meaning in life, identity commitment played a mediating role. The result showed positive significant relationship (Czyzowska, 2022). Another perspective is social cognitive theory, suggests commitment plays an essential role in the functioning of the individual by setting clear goals, personal norms and beliefs. Commitment gives a sense of purpose and direction in life, it's a reference point for monitoring, evaluating and regulating one's own behaviour. Thus, meaning and identity commitment are clearly associated with one other. Lastly, regression analysis was not computed for ambiguity intolerance and Identity Commitment as predictors of meaning in life due to insignificant correlation.

In ancillary analysis, Welch's t-test was computed to gauge the differences between females and males among the two variables (Neuroticism and Identity Commitment), t -test revealed no significant gender differences across these two variables (Neuroticism and Identity Commitment). Pertaining to the study, absence of gender differences can be attributed to social role theory, suggests gender differences in personality traits are results of societal roles and expectations. In urban societies, mostly males and females experience similar stressors and emotional challenges, thus gender differences related to neuroticism was not so prominent. Additionally research conducted by Gerstel and Gallagher found that females tend to

experience higher sense of purpose and meaning in life as compared to males, this result was attributed to Job profession (Gerstel & Gallagher, 1994).

5. Conclusion

The primary aim of this study was to examine whether there exists a relationship between Neuroticism, Ambiguity Intolerance, Identity Commitment and Meaning in Life among emerging adults. An insignificant negative correlation was found between Ambiguity Intolerance and Meaning in Life and a significant low positive correlation was found between Identity commitment and Meaning in Life. It was seen that Identity commitment predicted Meaning in Life among emerging adults. Welch's t-test revealed absence of gender differences across neuroticism and Meaning in Life. Some limitations include objective and quantitative method of data collection, Self report questionnaires, restrictive to the literate population, online circulation, also sparse literature examining the gender differences. Further studies can include a broader sample and equivalent number of Males and Females in the study. Further studies can also collect data to compare trends from third-year psychology students, master's students, and professionals with varied years of experience, also examine how the sense of meaning varies between students and those students who work part time.

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