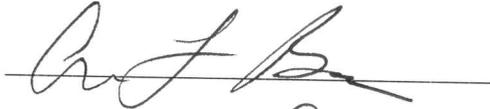


WILL YOU STILL LOVE ME TOMORROW?: HOW UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS
NAVIGATE CONTEMPORARY DATING SCRIPTS

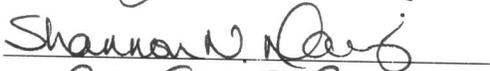
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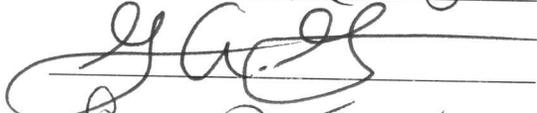
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Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow?: How Undergraduate Students Navigate
Contemporary Dating Scripts

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master
of Arts at George Mason University

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my father, who has read and offered his guidance on every academic paper I have ever written, especially this one...multiple times.

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Abstract

WILL YOU STILL LOVE ME TOMORROW?: HOW UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS NAVIGATE CONTEMPORARY DATING SCRIPTS

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George Mason University, 2011

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Today, when sexual and romantic possibilities are infinite, there seems to be a marked change in dating scripts from the past. This may be explained by the fact that dating has become indefinable – it can mean a series of literal dates or the period of time before an intimate relationship is acknowledged as “official.” The process of developing relationships is changing. This research uses themes that emerged from qualitative interviews with 19 students to help understand contemporary dating scripts. It analyzes how sex fits into the process of relationship formation, the pathway to forming relationships, the public nature of relationships (referencing how social networks such as Facebook alter dating scripts) and how college students focus to the future in terms of their intimate relationships. This research identifies patterns and underlines what factors move two people to the point of an “official” relationship. Through my qualitative research, I have developed

broad conclusions on the mechanics of relationship formation, as well as the behaviors and attitudes around it, as shown through the experiences of college-aged men and women.

The Problem

“Tonight with words unspoken, you say that I’m the only one. But will my heart be broken, when the night meets the morning sun?” (The Shirelles 2011).

The common conception has been, and still is, that successful dating by two people will evolve into a romantic relationship, one of emotional and sexual connectivity and intimacy intended for the long term. But, if you ask ten young people in serious relationships on any US college or university campus how they came to be in their relationship, you will get ten different responses – the answer rarely is that they went on a series of dates and realized they wanted to commit exclusively to each other. Today, when sexual and romantic possibilities are infinite, there seems to be a marked change in dating scripts from the past.

Dating has become indefinable – it can mean a series of literal dates or the period of time before an “official” relationship is acknowledged as “official.” The process of developing relationships is changing. Hooking up has become a widespread cultural practice that has replaced casual dating at least on college campuses, but can hooking up lead to a serious relationship? In some cases yes, in an equal number, no. Once a relationship becomes “official” (per the two people in

that relationship, signaling a commitment), it is often the case that it rapidly becomes very serious. In many situations, serious college relationships mirror near marriage. Young people on the cusp of adulthood tend to either play the field loosely or fall quickly into a serious relationship pattern. Perhaps we are witnessing an erosion of the middle ground whereby a series of casual dates gradually give way to more serious types of engagement such as “going steady” and “being pinned.” So then, how do young people get into “official” relationships? What is the progression toward a serious relationship? What are the meanings and conclusions that shape this trajectory today? Why do college-aged youth today enter relationships? Where does sexuality fit into the scheme of relationship formation? What part does hooking up play in the relationship formation process? This research project aims to understand some of the mechanics of heterosexual relationship formation on American college campuses.

Historical Background

The face of dating and intimate relationships between college-aged people has changed significantly over the greater part of the twentieth century as scripts of courtship have given way to scripts of dating as we move into the twenty-first century. New scripts for relationship formation appear to be on the horizon. Perhaps college is where these changes are most noticeable. College years are a formative period as adolescence is ending and the nature of exposure to members of the opposite sex changes. Currently, this is the time preceding a period when young people are expected to be finding a potential life mate. This contrasts with the mid-twentieth century conception of college life as terrain for mate selection.

In the early twentieth century, the practice of “calling” had a “respectable” man come to a “respectable” woman’s house to “call on” her and they would spend time there under the supervision of her family, according to historian Beth Bailey in her 1988 book *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America*. The young woman and her mother would have control over who could call and what would occur during this event (Bogle 2008). Class patterned these practices as calling was reserved for the upper and middle classes, while people of the lower economic stratum would go out together somewhere on a date, as they

did not have the resources to entertain guests in their homes. Leaving the house for dates was eventually adopted by rebellious middle and upper class unmarried youth moving into the late 1920s. This entrance of young heterosexual couples into public was also due to more women breaking out of the traditional mold of moving from the parents' home directly into a husband's home; these women entered into independent situations such as entering college and taking jobs. The consequence of going on dates, Bailey argues, was that, "it removed couples from the implied supervision of the private sphere...to the anonymity of the public sphere" (Bailey 1988: 13). Historian Paula Fass argues that the sexual behaviors of young and unmarried adults began to change during the 1920s. She believes that more women began to enter the public sphere just after World War I and reinforces Bailey's point that more women were also entering college at that time; "the young, reared in a moral standard in which all sex was taboo, redefined that standard according to their own needs and laid the basis for a change in the standard itself" (Fass 1977: 261).

The face of relationships in college was changing quickly with this move into the public sphere and into the beginning of the 1940s. Bailey argues the breakout of World War II in the 1940s led to a shortage in available men, thus women focused on dating exclusively to find a mate. Women were also finding themselves as an increasing part of the public sphere as they moved into the labor force in larger numbers. The practice of "going steady" with one partner abounded in the 1950s – a man asked a woman out on a date, a man pinned his steady, gave her his ring or

letterman jacket, for example (Bogle 2008). The 1960s were also a period of marked change; there were changes in sexual attitudes and conduct – all leading to greater sexual freedoms. The birth control pill was invented and marketed, sex before marriage was no longer illicit and the women’s movement entered into public life with a force unlike before. Women’s gains in financial independence meant men, in some sense, were less essential to life’s progression. As feminism moved into the mainstream “the idea that only men can pursue women” was challenged (Bogle 2008: 22). With these changes, men and women gained more access to each other than they had ever had before.

And as the twentieth century has turned into the twenty-first, college students are getting married an average of “eight years later than their mothers and fathers,” notes sociologist Michael Kimmel (Kimmel 2008: 214). In general, this delay has allowed for dating, relationships, and sexual interactions to evolve in new channels. Hooking up, as a form of sexual intimacy, has become a widespread cultural practice in American colleges and universities. In her 2008 book, *Hooking Up*, Kathleen Bogle points to ambiguities in the term hooking up but narrowly defines it as, “when a girl and a guy get together for a physical encounter and don’t necessarily expect anything further” (Bogle 2008: 2). Hooking up has also become a road to developing relationships, in some instances the only road. Hooking up can be viewed as a cultural expectation. In examining the formation of present day relationships in colleges, it is crucial to look back over the past century’s

transformation as social norms have become more relaxed and the obstacles that keep men and women apart have weakened and are falling to the side.

Literature Review

Research on dating, relationships and the importance of sex to relationship formation is expansive. However, the relationship field as a field of scholarly inquiry began to develop in the US only as recently as the 1970s, as the divorce rate steadily and rapidly rose (Harvey 1999). The research in this field has focused on methods used to identify the ideal partner, developing an understanding of the role that sex plays in the identifying process, hooking up and the relationship stages, all of which contribute to an understanding of the mechanics behind relationship formation on present-day college campuses. The common conception of an “official” relationship held by many young men and women is typically defined as being both physically and emotionally exclusive, and deemed as such by both parties. By understanding first what hooking up is and how it affects relationship building; second, what people look for in partners with relationship potential; then, where and how sex fits into the development of a relationship; and finally, how a relationship develops overall, we can understand what elements are important in a relationship becoming “official” today. Though the term “official” is resonant today, it is a new word approximating what used to be termed as “steady.” By examining research in the

American relationship field, we can better situate the social organization of relationship building in its current form.

Demographic identifiers such as race and economic strata are not explored in this research. To date, the research on intimate relationships in college has not focused on these themes. Therefore, it would have been premature for my research to examine these variables. However, these identifiers, of course, are important.

Hooking Up

Arguably, research on relationships in the last decade has focused chiefly on hooking up. Hooking up, a cultural practice, has both expressed and contributed to the changing face of the role of sex in relationships as well as young men's and women's attitudes and behaviors towards sex. In the past two decades, there has been a suspension in traditional dating scripts as they become superseded by a loosening in sexual scripts. For the first time in modern history, men and women in the western world have access to have all the sex that they want with far fewer restrictions than in past decades. Mary Eberstadt (2009) explores the phenomenon in a recently published article "Is Food the New Sex?" arguing that during the last 50 years,

cultural artifacts and forces in the form of articles, books, movies, and ideas aimed at deregulating what is now quaintly called "nonmarital sex" have abounded and prospered; while the cultural artifacts and forces aimed at regulating or seeking to re-regulate sex outside of marriage have largely declined (Eberstadt 2009).

Sex, Eberstadt argues, has become morally and gender neutral (Eberstadt 2009). In other words, sex is no longer morally taboo, but it is not without moral meaning. Yet

as much as a sexual smorgasbord may exist, sexual scripts do as well, scripts that dictate how to deal with the vastness of sexual availability. As it did decades ago, gender patterns sexual mores.

The practice of hooking up, the casual, often brief encounter, which results in sexual contact without an emotional context assumed seems an exemplar of Eberstadt's characterization of new morally neutral sexual standards. Yet, hooking up is not necessarily hinged on expectations of casual, morally neutral sexual behavior as one might suppose. Research suggests gender, often but not always, plays a critical role in expectations. Bogle's *Hooking Up* (2008) explores the contemporary dating and sex scene, in college with an emphasis on hooking up. Through a series of interviews with undergraduates at two American universities, she finds that there is a vast difference in male perspectives of the women who hook up and the ones who are deemed worthy of relationships. She finds that college men categorize women into these two groups (hook up-able versus girlfriend material) and the groups are almost always mutually exclusive. Of course, this distinction was noted by feminists forty years ago as the Madonna/Whore complex. Kimmel, in his tour-de-force, *Guyland* (2008), also notes this complex and some other iterations, such as "girls to bed/girls to wed." Kimmel comments that "women are welcome to act upon their sexual desires, but guys run the scene" (Kimmel 2008: 192). One of the biggest disadvantages to dating for both sexes is the potential of emotional vulnerability and hooking up negates this potential. In a recent study of James Madison University students, "both genders said the potential for a broken heart is

one of the biggest drawbacks to traditional dating” (McCarthy 2010). This fact, as well as the fact that most hook ups are fueled by alcohol consumption and the pursuit of immediate gratification, makes hooking up as prolific as it is (McCarthy 2010).

However, the young women interviewed by Bogle seemed to have alternate motives for these hook ups with men than just a one-time tryst. They spoke with Bogle about meeting potential marriage partners in college, and hoping that a more meaningful connection might materialize with a hook up partner (Bogle 2008). Most of the women indicated the desire to be married by age 25 while men said they did not want to be married until their late 20s or early 30s (Bogle 2008). Bogle concludes that women hook up to find more meaningful connections but hook up more sparingly than men because sexual promiscuity can harm their reputations. As one male interviewee of Bogle put it, “A girl sleeps with a lot of guys she’s a slut. A guy sleeps with a lot of girls he’s a stud,” a point heard over and over again (Bogle 2008: 104). Women are far likelier to be ostracized from social spheres for being more casual about hooking up than men are.

In *Guyland*, Kimmel states that,

Dating, at least in college, seems to be gone for good. Instead, the sexual marketplace is organized around groups of same-sex friends who go out together to meet appropriate sexual partners in a casual setting like a bar or party. Two people run into each other, seemingly at random, and after a few drinks they decide to go back to one or the other’s room or apartment, where some sexual interaction occurs. There is no expectation of a further relationship (Kimmel 2008: 190-191).

The reason hooking up is such a popular term, Kimmel explains, among college-aged young adults is that it can encompass any sort of sexual contact from kissing to sexual intercourse. This ambiguity allows a woman to claim she hooked up, but by not confirming the extent of the sexual interaction, she protects her reputation. It is also advantageous for men by enhancing their reputations as studs through the vagueness of the term (Kimmel 2008). Both Kimmel's and Bogle's interviewees recognize the absence of dating and relationships in the wake of the widespread practice of hooking up.

In the recently published article, "Is Hooking Bad For Young Women," (2010) sociologists Elizabeth A. Armstrong, Laura Hamilton and Paula England explore the hooking up phenomenon but come to slightly different conclusions than Kimmel and Bogle. England surveyed more than 14,000 American college students and offered her findings to this article. She finds that they do not hook up as much as is assumed. In fact, Armstrong et al. argue that college-aged people today are no more sexually active than previous generations (up to the baby boomers, born after 1942). What is striking is that sex now is more casual than it has been in the past. Armstrong et al. find that hook ups are not advantageous to women and proliferate the aforementioned double standard. Women who hook up seem less interested in their own pleasure and more interested in appearing hot to men (Armstrong et al. 2010). Armstrong et al. also argue that relationships are not necessarily filled with gender equality and that they have a tendency to be

emotionally draining. “For most women, the costs of bad hookups tended to be less than costs of bad relationships” (Armstrong et al. 2010).

These evolving sexual scripts for college-aged people mirror the changing face of dating and sexuality in modern, urbanizing regions of China. James Farrer explores this evolution in Shanghai in his 2002 book, *Opening Up*. Farrer notes a marked change in sexual practices in Shanghai during the 1990s and finds parallels in China with practices in American society. The population of single women in their 20s was becoming more open to sexual behavior in Shanghai. The strengthening of market forces granted greater freedom to women as they became economic actors. Their open sexual behavior was not entirely acceptable in society across the board, although Shanghai was becoming a global city and was distinctly urban. Farrer cites several examples of how Chinese women hooked up. They had boyfriends that perceived them as virgins but many also had men on the side, usually foreigners, with whom they engaged in sexual activity (Farrer 2002). Farrer argues, “Most Shanghaiese agree that sexual norms have changed greatly since the political and economic reforms began in the late 1970s” (Farrer 2002: 25). Deng Xiaoping took office as Chairman of the Communist Party in 1978 and these changes began to emerge – the common conception among Shanghaiese was that Chinese society was opening up then. Under Deng, China’s increasingly warmer relations with the US may have accelerated the development of these changes in Chinese society. By that time, the modern Shanghai woman was coming to be thought of as financially independent, sexually active and unmarried. With societal norms shifting and

attitudes becoming more liberal, sexual attitudes and behaviors naturally followed suit. As Farrer notes, the modern Shanghai woman of his research had come to have many of the same characteristics of the modern American college woman.

The “Ideal” Partner

Given the ambiguity of relationship formation, what are people looking for? What is attractive in a mate? When in college, people tend to have sexual and dating interactions with a number of people in an attempt to find an ideal person. Naturally, people’s tastes in partners vary, but studies have found that many people look for the same things. For example, heterosexual men, researchers have found, allot more importance to a woman’s appearance, while women place more importance on higher resource potential (e.g., a stable job and income) (Cramer, Schaefer and Reid 2003). Arguably, these two separate priorities in mate-finding are traditional and persistent. As such, they became accommodated into the modern process of relationship building.

Sociological research on this topic has explored those socially bound qualities that women desire in mates and their link to relationship creation. An example is an investigation of the adage, “nice guys finish last.” Edward S. Herold and Robin R. Milhausen (1999) surveyed 165 female undergraduates. Herold and Milhausen (1999) found that what differentiates “nice guys” from the coveted “bad boys” is sexual experience. Nice guys are shy and have little sexual experience, and 54% of women said that they would prefer to date a nice guy (Herold and Milhausen 1999). Twenty-eight percent of women said that sexual experience did not matter

and 18% would prefer to date the bad boy. The characteristics that bad boys possess are sexual success, confidence and assertiveness, which are not necessarily good qualities of a long-term partner but do attract college-aged women (Herold and Milhausen 1999). Three distinct traits distinguish nice guys from bad boys – personality characteristics, interaction with women and the type of relationship they seek with women (Herold and Milhausen 1999). Women agreed that bad boys were more alluring in the first two categories, but it was the third, which was the type of relationship that is sought, that remains the most important. Bad boys know how to talk to and manipulate women to achieve the sexual satisfaction they desire. Nice guys, while possibly less attractive, are more willing to want and value serious, committed relationships (Herold and Milhausen 1999). Through collected data, it appears that most women recognize this, and accordingly, nice guys do not always finish last as 54% of women surveyed preferred a nice guy with no sexual experience (Herold and Milhausen 1999). This article can help us hone in on what women find important when looking for a partner with whom to begin an intimate relationship. The relevance of this research is that identification of a potential partner and the qualities possessed by this potential partner are the first steps of relationship formation.

As Robert Cramer, Jeffrey T. Schaefer and Suzanne Reid (2003) point out, in their study on American partner matching, men look for attractive partners while women look for partners with high resource potential, both as an indication of increased status. Herold and Milhausen (1999) have investigated whether nice guys

finish last. Certainly, many women are not looking for the quintessential “bad boy,” defined as the man who sleeps around and does not care about women’s feelings, when it comes to a relationship; the majority does prefer a relationship with a “nice guy,” the man who is not as sexually experienced but who does care about women’s feelings. People sift through potential mates through dating and hooking up often with the aim (whether consciously or subconsciously) to find the ideal person with whom to commit.

The Role Sex Plays

Sexual attitudes and behaviors play a part in all types of relationships – from casual one-night stands through to engaged relationships. A study by H. Ball (2007) has demonstrated that sex has become solely recreational for some college-aged people. Some students develop “friends with benefits” situations, in which students have consistent sexual experiences with the same person. Even though these participants might never be in a romantic relationship with each other, sex has become casual (Armstrong et al. 2010). Yet, people also report in relationship building that sex brings them emotionally closer to their partners (Ball 2007). It is not uncommon for two people to begin a sexual relationship before having established exclusivity and an official relationship. Participants interviewed on this topic find that any and all sexual behaviors are more permissible in more committed relationships (Sprecher and McKinney 1993). The Premarital Permissiveness Scale, derived by Susan Sprecher and Kathleen McKinney (1993), measures the degrees of the relationship between sexual and emotional involvement – how sexual intimacy

facilitates emotional intimacy and vice versa. Somewhere through hooking up and what dating has become, sexual and emotional intimacies collide to become an official relationship.

Yet, as Sprecher and McKinney document, through the Premarital Permissiveness Scale, men have higher levels of permissiveness than do women. Lucia O'Sullivan and E. Sandra Byers also note that "According to traditional sexual script, men are the initiators and women the restrictors of sexual activities" (O'Sullivan and Byers 1992: 435). A woman as the sexual initiator becomes more acceptable to society the more she has sexual encounters with the same man (O'Sullivan and Byers 1992). O'Sullivan and Byers (1992) report that these repeated sexual encounters have the ability to become exclusive and an official relationship.

Though this research is older, I argue that its findings remain relevant to the present day as the findings continue to ring true as college students have been navigating evolving sexual mores for the past 100 years. Susan Sprecher, Kathleen McKinney and Terri Orbuch theorize (1991) that "an individual who has engaged in a high level of premarital sexual activity may be desired less as a mate than an individual who is less permissive because of what it may say about the individual's likelihood of staying committed to one sexual relationship" (Sprecher et al. 1991: 391). Again, though, this quote speaks more to women than men as it aligns with the age-old double standard. Women tend to have a higher personal investment in each sexual encounter since they will be the ones bearing responsibility should they become pregnant and their reputations will be harmed with higher sexual

permissiveness. High sexual allowance in a woman makes her less desirable for marriage; therefore, highly sexually indulgent women are less desirable mates in an official relationship Mary Beth Oliver and Constantine Sedikides (1992) argue.

Sex is used in many ways, but plays a large role in a couple's gaining understanding of mutual compatibility, and degrees of intimacy. Today on college campuses, sexual relationships often emerge before relationships become emotionally intimate (Armstrong et al. 2010). Yet, many young people will not consider an official relationship with someone who is highly sexually liberal – that is someone who has had many sexual encounters with a number of different people (Sprecher et al. 1991). Negotiating the link between sexual scripts and dating scripts of college-aged youths is troublesome because of the wide variance of their sexual attitudes. Previous sexual indulgences affect the outcome for potential official relationships. This is more the case for women than men, as often men will not consider being emotionally intimate with a woman who has a reputation for being sexually intimate with many people (Oliver and Sedikides 1992). Though young people generally are more sexually open now than in the past decades, their past sexual behaviors may have repercussions in terms of future relationships.

The Relationship Process: From Casual to Serious

Dating scripts have been modified significantly over the decades, beginning as early as the 1920s (Bailey 1988). Relationship building starts with a first interaction – a first date, a first sexual interaction. In older, but not entirely outdated research, undergraduate students interviewed claimed that the most common first

date would entail eating out somewhere or going to a party (Knox and Wilson 1981). Jan Stets refers to stages of relationship development of people in their 20s in her article "Control in Dating Relationships" (1993). According to Stets, the first interaction, be it a date or a sexual encounter, sometimes leads to the initial stage in relationship formation, casual dating. Casual dating is defined as "individuals seeing each other intermittently, sharing superficial information, feeling tentative and uncertain about the relationship, and assessing whether interactions with each other are rewarding" (Stets 1993:675). This stage of a relationship involves little conflict, as individuals tend to be on their best behavior before their relationship is defined as serious. A sense of loss at the termination of the relationship at this stage is minimal, as the individuals involved typically have not invested too much emotionally. The second stage is termed the "somewhat serious stage" (Stets 1993: 676). In this stage, interaction and affection increase, as does the potential for conflict. Also, compromise and interdependence increases. More emotion has been invested once a relationship has reached this stage. Once a relationship reaches the serious stage, the third stage, levels of trust, love and interdependence are heightened (Blumstein and Kollock 1988). The potential for conflict is present, but there is also a vastly increased level of compromise and conflict resolution. The bond is strengthened by the extent to which the personal goals of either person in the relationship correspond, and interdependence becomes mutual (Blumstein and Kollock 1988). It is through this process that the relationship is made official,

although, depending upon the players, a relationship can be made official in any of the three relationship stages.

As masculine and feminine roles in society have been changing in recent decades, so has dating. As a result, dating relationships are thought to have become more equalized. "Attitudes, beliefs and values on dating and mate selection are different for each individual" (Hansen 1977: 137). However, equity defined as "rewards, investments and alternatives" also plays a role as the relationship progresses (Sprecher 2001: 599). These two points, though written many years ago, remain constants in the present day. Perceptions of equity vary over the course of a relationship (Sprecher 2001). Equity has high importance in the beginning phases, but studies show that the salience of equity dissipates as the relationship grows closer to the serious stage, the stage that mostly acts as a precursor to marriage (Sprecher 2001). This may explain why women are willing to participate in hook ups over serious relationships, to retain equity. Once a relationship moves to the serious stage, physical fidelity becomes paramount in most situations. Levels of commitment typically rise. Commitment is a decision that the couple makes based on levels of fulfillment with each other. "Based on this framework, we use sexual exclusivity – a behavioral, instead of attitudinal, measure – as an indicator of commitment," argue Renata Forste and Koray Tanfer (Forste and Tanfer 1996: 33). This sexual exclusivity brings a relationship closer to becoming official, although there is still the question of whether a relationship is official without a verbal commitment between the two people involved.

The staying power of any relationship has to do with continued satisfaction. Relationship well-being can be tied to the merge between personal scripts entailing various personality traits and relational ones (Holmberg and MacKenzie 2002). Once in the official phase of the relationship (determined by the couple, not necessarily by any of Stets' (1993) stages), long-term satisfaction can actually be determined by the process of the relationship. The two types of processes are relationship-driven and event-driven (Surra and Hughes 1997). A relationship-driven commitment is based upon growing feelings over time, and the decision to become official is the natural progression (Surra and Hughes 1997). High satisfaction is a result of this commitment. By contrast, event-driven commitments (when a relationship is not given the time to progress, but is based upon a single event both parties deem significant such as pregnancy) result in low satisfaction, and changes in commitment are quite dramatic (Surra and Hughes 1997).

Satisfaction in relationships has also been measured by the Ideals Standards Model (Fletcher and Simpson 2000). This model prioritizes emotional qualities, physical qualities, and then external qualities (Fletcher and Simpson 2000). "Greater consistency between ideals and perceptions of the current partner or relationship...predicted increases in relationship satisfaction over time" (Fletcher and Simpson 2000: 104). Close relationships make people happy and healthy (Harvey and Pauwels 1999).

Dating scripts have clearly changed since David Knox and Kenneth Wilson's 1981 research. But the process still takes the same road – stages of relationship

formation, sometimes resulting in permanent partnership. As relationship formation progresses, satisfaction and commitment become increasingly important. The objective of satisfaction and commitment calls for relationship goals to be aligned and the growth of a relationship must occur as a natural progression fueled by mutual respect.

Closing

Through the literature documented above, a progression in sexual attitudes and behaviors is clear; both are becoming more liberal and ambiguous. Unfortunately, research on the topic is not current with most publications having been published in the 1990s. The problem is that there is no concrete answer as to when and at what point a relationship becomes official. The decision is made by two people, but patterns can be identified. My research can show us what factors tend to move two people to that point.

Changes in sexual attitudes and behaviors continue. Current research has important gaps. Dating and relationship development are always-evolving phenomena and the research in the field has a hard time keeping pace with its changes. Prospective partners continue to have more access to each other than ever before, in person and in other ways. These are questions worth answering to draw a more complete picture of the relationship field as we enter the second decade of this new century, to determine whether new trends are developing, as well as to answer the question of how relationships become official. Current research is insufficient as a basis for answering the question of how relationships become official in

contemporary American life. Research must analyze the contemporary nuances of this topic by exploring the impact of social networks and changing sexual attitudes on modern relationships. However, the practice of hooking up, the ideal partner, the role of sex and the relationship process do help in understanding the mechanics of relationship formation, but there is still so much upon which to expand.

Methods

The purpose of this specific research is to better understand the perceptions and experiences of young adults in college today with respect to how they identify themselves in dating and dating interactions, how these interactions relate to student life, and what differentiates non-serious and serious relationships. To understand relationship development of college students is to chase after a moving target. It can be assumed that both men and women in college are goal-oriented in where they want their lives to go and perhaps, relationships are on the back burner. Through my interviews and focus groups, I hope to have lessened the ambiguity in understanding the role that dating plays in student life, how hooking up proliferates and how relationships become official.

To answer my research questions: What is the progression of a dating relationship? Why do college age youth today enter relationships? How do relationships become “official?” I conducted in-depth interviews with 19 undergraduate students who were enrolled at George Mason University during 2008 and 2009. I conducted 16 one-on-one interviews with one supplementary focus group interview consisting of three students. The interviews and focus group I

conducted lasted between one half hour and one hour each and were semi-structured, using eight questions from my interview protocol.

Interviewees were recruited through a mix of snowball and convenience sampling. As George Mason University is known for being ethnically diverse, I had hoped to interview students from a wide variety of ethnicities and was successful. My interview pool was comprised of eight white students, five Asian students, four black students, one Hispanic student, and one mixed race student. While many of my respondents used ethnicity as an identifying marker for their romantic preferences, they expressed their preferences only tentatively and never in absolute terms.

In October 2008, I met Theo, a 22 year-old senior, through a friend and conducted my first interview with him. After Theo, I interviewed Corey (a 20 year-old junior) and Agnes (a 22 year-old sophomore) at our work. I also conducted my focus group with Lauren, 21, Evan, 20, and Monica, 21, whom I approached on campus and spoke with on the spot. All three were juniors. The following spring, I interviewed Katrina (a 21 year-old junior), Valeria (a 21 year-old junior), Tyrone (a 25 year-old sophomore), Javier (a 23 year-old senior) and Ali (a 22 year-old senior), all of whom I knew from work. I also interviewed June, Frank (18 year-old freshmen) and Bruce (a 19 year-old sophomore), whom I attained through snowball sampling through one of the university's fraternities. I interviewed Brock (a senior, age 21), an undergraduate in a class of mine and Nicole (a senior, age 22), from my recruitment flier that was distributed to her undergraduate class. Brock was the only respondent who identified himself as gay, and as such, unfortunately, upon

coding his interview, I realized the data would be of little relevance within my analysis. While eye-opening, his interview did not fit into any of the patterns that emerged from my other interviews, therefore I decided to focus on heterosexual relationship formation. A study of gay relationship formation would be an interesting direction for future research. The following summer, I interviewed Raphael (a junior, age 22) and Steve (a 21 year-old senior) from work and then in December 2009, I interviewed Mickey (a 22 year-old sophomore), also found through snowball sampling through the fraternity. All of my interviewees agreed to speak with me knowing what my topic was ahead of time and without coercion. They each signed my informed consent form and picked their own pseudonyms, which I have used throughout my research and analysis. In analyzing my interviews, I was unable to identify any racial or ethnic factors influencing their answers. This may be due to the size of my interview pool.

One-on-one interviews have been the best method of research because they incite follow up questions that I would not have been able to ask through a survey instrument. Through asking open-ended questions, I have been able to draw a rich understanding of a complicated set of practices and thoughts and come to some tentative conclusions.

As with any interview process in which the respondent is discussing self-perceptions, the possibility of some less than accurate responses is inevitable. Since the interviews unfolded as social encounters between my respondents and me, the respondent may have made socially desirable responses. This idea of how people

wish themselves to be perceived by others is in line with Erving Goffman's findings in his 1959 book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Goffman states, "The performer can be fully taken in by his own act; he can be sincerely convinced that the impression of reality which he stages is the real reality" (Goffman 1959: 17). To extend this thought, I believe that my respondents did not mean to mislead me in any of their responses, but might have done so because they believe that their perception of reality is actually reality. Gender seemed to be at work in some of these interviews. It was most noticeable in my interviews with men whose answers may have been influenced by my being a woman. I did my best to be mindful of this fact.

I used my interview protocol of open-ended questions. Questions related to previous relationships and dating perspectives. Participants were asked about their social lives, going out, drinking, relationships and their perspectives on other people in these situations. Some of the questions asked were: how does a relationship go from casually dating to a serious relationship? What makes a relationship "official?" How do you typically meet people you date? How does physical intimacy play into your dating life? My interviews and focus group were digitally recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions have been coded for emerging themes in line with Anselm Strauss and Barney Glaser's Grounded Theory and analysis has proceeded inductively. Keeping in line with the literature, I hope to extend and refine Kathleen Bogle's findings. These emerging themes have been used in my analysis.

Analysis

Introduction

While coding my interviews, four main themes emerged. These became the sections of analysis. I organized the analysis of my data in the order of how a relationship blossoms. First, I write about how through my research I discovered sex fits into current dating scripts as both a pathway to a relationship and not. Second, I pinpoint in my data the lead up to a romantic relationship and its actualization. My third section focuses on the public nature of relationships on college campuses and how official relationships are navigated. Last, I use my research to explore how students steer the practical aspects of being in a relationship through their personal goals and future plans.

“Relations, not Relationship”– How Sex Fits In

It is no secret that sexual encounters play a large part in the relationships between undergraduates in American universities. As I will examine, sex is a dominant part of a relationship both before and after it has been formed. In her article, Eberstadt identifies a laissez-faire attitude about sex emerging in current society as opposed to a more traditional view of sex where it has been a hidden part of society (Eberstadt 2009). This attitude is in evidence on George Mason’s campus as well.

The laissez-faire attitude is that people have their own reasons and motives for their actions and it is no one else's concern. Valeria's viewpoint went even farther:

That's the ideal right now. That vixen type... there's a lot of women who are comfortable with that, 'cause I have friends who are like that, who've had a lot of partners, who have sex when they go out, who are really comfortable with their sexuality and their body and just, you know, just they're comfortable to have sex for having sex for how it feels.

Corey's perspective was similar to Valeria's:

I don't think girls are sluts. I think if you really think about it, guys are more slutty than girls. Because a guy will sleep with pretty much any girl that offers herself up. I think that's a lot more slutty than when a girl is just trying to have a good time. I think girls that sleep with multiple people aren't, it's not like for the most part...I think a girl is only a slut if she is sleeping with someone only just for the pure joy of sex. Not because she has, you know like interest in the other person.

Valeria and Corey's viewpoints assume that perhaps the stigma of the promiscuous girl is softening. Eberstadt found that "The consumption of sex in various forms appears to have become the opposite for a great many people: i.e., progressively more indiscriminate and unthinking" (Eberstadt 2009). Society seems to have become more accepting of sexual freedom. This progression to sexual freedom connects back to the male inclination to play the field; however, my female respondents know that it is not entirely socially acceptable for them to play the field in the same way. Some women's motives seem more complicated than just the enjoyment of sex. June said, "I guess self-esteem is probably one thing, at least it was for me when I was younger, and you kind of think, look, I can get boys, there's something that's attractive this whole inverted thinking [sic]." Through physical intimacy, my women interviewees generally do wish to achieve emotional

connections, as well. Most are in favor of this freedom and wish to eradicate the double standard; however, they will play into the current dating scripts that are a prevalent part of George Mason's culture because this is George Mason's current sexual script.

As seen in Armstrong et al.'s 2010 article, the cultural practice of hooking up is still geared to the masculine pleasure. In a purely physical aspect, women enjoy relationship sex more than hook-up-sex, while for men, in terms of their pleasure, sex is sex (Armstrong et al. 2010). Why then do women let themselves be part of a cultural practice that seems to be run by men with (as we have seen time and again) little benefit for the women? Current sexual scripts allow for a "dispassionate, shallow attitude... [fostered] toward sex" (Thompson 2010).

The sexual aspect of life is something that undergraduates spend much time negotiating. Many of the women interviewed talked of using sex as a tool to control and better understand the motives of interested men. Some women talked about withholding sex from a man to see if he really embraced the emotional aspect of their relationship as opposed to just having no-strings-attached sex. These women are trying to keep in control. In 2006 hit single *Promiscuous*, Nelly Furtado sang, "You expect me to just let you hit it, but will you still respect me if you get it?" (Furtado 2011). Also recognized in pop culture, the question of respect leaves women wondering when it is the appropriate time to have sex with someone; men do not have to negotiate sex in the same way. In the interview with Agnes, she

explained the difference of sex with whatever man and sex with a man who might potentially become her boyfriend. Agnes said,

I used to not [care], it was just like, ah man, but now it's kind of, I'm older, and I got that out of my system and if I think a guy has long term potential, I think I wanna make him wait, not like a game but I don't know. I guess, I wait so I see if, just because the first or second date is great, doesn't mean it's going to work, so give it a little more time and we'll see. But yeah, that's it with the boyfriend. But if it's a different thing, I'm just like, there's no limits. Whatever, I don't care...

Agnes identified the vulnerability that comes with emotional and physical intimacy together – that, by sleeping with someone she has feelings for, she becomes more attached, thus more vulnerable. Therefore, there is a shift in the meaning of sex and how she thinks about physical encounters as leading to emotional intimacy. By waiting to sleep with someone she has feelings for, she takes the physical aspect out of the relationship equation to protect herself emotionally.

For some of the women in this study, they only want to give one type of intimacy (either emotional *or* physical) to men to decrease the potential of being rejected on two counts (emotional *and* physical). In this regard, the act of sex seems to have two meanings – physical and emotional. These changing definitions are difficult for college-aged adults to navigate because sex is a physical act but people, mostly women, attach emotional significance to it. Sex has a tendency to make people feel vulnerable, because although the act is physical, it involves opening up in many other ways to someone else. People equate emotionally opening up to someone with the physical act of sex.

Twenty-one year old Monica, in the focus group, reiterated how women use sex as an emotional indicator, shifting the meaning of the physical act to an emotional act. Monica said,

For guys first comes sex then comes feelings, for girls first comes feelings then comes sex. And so, girls would use sex to try and capture a guy's feelings and guys will use feelings to try and capture the girl's sex. So the logic is pretty much like, for girls, we're starting to have feelings, we want to hold out on sex as much as possible 'cause we wanna make sure those feelings is true, those feelings is real.

Both Agnes and Monica's interview excerpts suggest that there is a growing gap between sexual and emotional intimacy – whereas people have been taught in the past, first comes love then comes sex, that seems to be a greatly waning ideal. As this ideal becomes further removed from dating and sexual scripts, love and sex move further from each other.

Within the contours of male-female relations and the often-assumed new sexual freedoms that college life provides students, there are certain thresholds of frowned-upon (if not taboo) conduct that woman may trip over. The most common label for such conduct is the “slut,” a term that is vaguely defined, but, once applied, it becomes a telling brand. I asked my respondents how they defined this label.

Some answers are as follows:

Javier: what people do in their own time is not my business.

June: I think the word 'slut' is overused, I think it's overused because I know that there are women that go out and every weekend look for a random hook up, the same way that there are guys that do the same thing but I also know that under some circumstances, say a girl hooks up with two different guys in one frat, and a guy does the same thing, the guy gets absolutely no attention when the girl is a slut because she slept with two guys....

Conventionally, however, the term “slut” is marked by a double standard, branding women while men are immunized. Although as noted previously, the stigma of a sexually active woman enjoying sex is softening, though not eradicated. Nicole seems to hold the most common definition of a “slut.” She claimed she was not friends with women considered promiscuous, the types of women she described as “someone who sleeps, not even sleeps around, but is very promiscuous with guys without any reservations.” Katrina reiterated the idea, saying, “My perception of a ‘slut’ is a girl that, that like sleeps around,” as did Mickey, “A ‘slut’ ...is just not classy about having a lot of sex.”

The category of “slut” is defined by a perception and the common perception is a woman with little self-respect. Theo defined “sluts” as “relations, not relationship” girls; by this he meant that “relations girls” are girls only for sexual relations and are mutually exclusive from “relationship girls.” Theo mentioned several times that men go after sex and women become “relations” girls if they oblige too soon. When I asked him if he would still try to sleep with a woman on the first date even if she did not come off as particularly slutty, he answered, “Well, I’m still going to have to try. What kind of guy would I be if I didn’t?” In saying this, Theo reaffirms his status as a man. In Theo’s mind, this is part of the game by which the man has to always try to have sex as soon as possible and the woman is supposed to keep him at bay for a sufficiently appropriate period of time, lest she be perceived as a “slut.” Two difficulties of these schemes arise. There is no consensus on parameter of this period of time and men bear no brunt of a similar stigma, which is the double

standard. Theo went on to say that he encourages casual sex, but that a casual sex girl never becomes a relationship girl. Theo's views were similar to those of the men that Bogle interviewed with their two mutually exclusive categories of women.

Steven's views echoed those of Theo. Steven said,

*If a girl's ready to just drop everything and get f*cked, she's not the dating type. She's the girl that you're just supposed to have a one night stand with, she's the girl you really don't have much in common with, she just wants to f*ck you. And she's the girl you just want to have sex with.*

Steven recognized this as the differentiating factor between hook up-able women and dateable women, but he was still willing to sleep with either.

Agnes echoed Steven's quintessential definition of a "slut" and spoke of how she used to perceive herself in the same way.

It's someone who sleeps around a lot, doesn't have high standards. They get what they can get, you know? I mean, some people call me a slut because I've slept with a lot of people, but I know who they are...it wasn't just because I wanted sex, I mean, it was, but I'm still friends with most of them.

Agnes uses this rationale by defining herself against the "slut"; the "slut" is the girl against which to define her own behavior as morally right.

Obviously, the common perception is that being termed a "slut" is very negative which is why Agnes felt the need to qualify her sexual choices. Evan basically provided me with the same definition but also inserted the term "jumpoff." "I think a 'slut' is a girl who basically, she's like one of those girls who gets passed around by a group of friends or by, let's say, a fraternity...the quote unquote, the jumpoff." Despite trying, none of my interviewees could provide a more concrete idea of a "slut." Theo could not say how long a woman would have to wait after

meeting a man to start sleeping with him before being considered a relationship woman. Agnes defined a “slut” as a woman who sleeps with many people, but she did not provide a number. These hazy definitions suggest that the idea of “slut” is largely perceptual. It can be argued that men have set the boundaries of the hook-up culture, with women subsequently latching on. It is telling that men’s reputations are not harmed by sleeping with many women, notably in the eyes of other men but to some women, as well. As Vassar College Sophomore Juan Thompson wrote in an editorial in his school’s newspaper, “Male students, though, can be selfish and assume...they can do whatever they wish. The female students nevertheless are willing to go along. The hook-up also says something else about us as college students and the sexual inequality that exists” (Thompson 2010). Frank pointed out to me that, “A girl is more, not as like available to have sex than like a guy is.” It seems that way because women have the capacity to be choosier in finding partners. This is the case because women are known to be the keepers of chastity as, biologically, men are supposed to spread their seed. When women are seen as not being selective, others (men and women) perceive them as slutty, changing their reputations for the worse. This unequal sexual playing field was apparent in several of my interviews. These situations, quite frequently, open up the matter of this ongoing double standard.

Unfortunately, under this double standard, men are defined much differently. “Guys can be man-whores, but it’s not seen the same. It’s just oh, he got game,” said Monica, from the focus group. When the topic of men as “sluts” came up with Agnes,

she laughed about it and said, “They’re sluts too, but they’re man sluts!” These definitions are absent moral judgments. Raphael did not dismiss the label of “slut” but he assigned it to both men and women and anyone deserving of this title had to have had sexual relations with exorbitantly large numbers of people. “[My roommate has] hooked up with at least 65 girls,” he said.

Mickey slept with his girlfriend within four hours of their first meeting. Then he told me that their relationship ended because she later slept with his roommate. During our interview, Mickey chastised himself for thinking he could date a woman who would sleep with a man so quickly. This suggests that hook ups are tied to emotional distancing; a woman who will open herself up so quickly physically must not be looking for an emotional connection. There seems to be a need to keep women in concrete categories. These indications suggest Theo’s point of “relations” versus “relationship girls” – clearly Mickey thought himself foolish for attempting a relationship with a “relations” woman.

It is clear that the stakes change when personal sexual indiscretions are involved. For Frank, joining his fraternity opened doors for him in terms of supplying parties, alcohol and avenues for meeting women. In his first semester, he told me that he had hooked up in varying degrees with five or six women and all of these encounters occurred at parties where both he and the women were inebriated. “Sometimes I don’t even remember, which is not good,” he admitted. “I feel like every guy’s a slut.” Frank also spoke about the woman that immediately came to mind when I mentioned the word “slut” during our interview. She would

frequently come to parties at his fraternity and sleep with a brother. By the time of our interview, she had slept with eight of his fraternity brothers, including him. As soon as he identified her as a “slut,” he recognized that he himself might be one as well. Tyrone looked at me with the same sheepish look when he admitted, “One night it would be black, one night it would be Spanish and one night it would be white and not to say it wasn’t fun but after a while it was like, I just wanna meet somebody, as lame as it sounds...” He too sought to break down the differences between men and women when it came to rampant sexual appetite; he thought that while men and women were similar in their desires and actions, society calls for women to be more reserved and those who are less reserved are often identified as “sluts” by society. He thought it was an inaccurate distinction.

Traditionally, as a moral code, labeling a woman as a “slut” has been seen as a highly charged assault on her character; this is apparent in some of my interviews. However, in others, the label tends to become less gender specific and has a shortened shelf life. Not only is there a softening of the stigma, but also, at times, a lessons learned element when it comes to self-identification. When I brought up the word “slut” in my interviews, they tended to reevaluate themselves and their behaviors. This goes in accord with Barry Schwartz’s 2004 findings that once something is analyzed, it is recognized. Many of the people that I spoke with recognized that being a “slut” is indeed grounded in the perception of others. There was some self-reflection that maybe they filled their own definitions of a “slut.” For those that I spoke with, the self-reflection came as an afterthought, but there was a

moment of clarity when they understood where they fit within the social label. They realized that in their everyday lives, they apparently are quick to impress the label on others; the self-reflection may come later, if at all.

Pathways to a Relationship

“For most women, the costs of bad hookups tended to be less than costs of bad relationships” (Armstrong et al. 2010). In this statement, Armstrong et al. touch on the prevalence of hooking up in their 2010 article, “Is Hooking up Bad for Young Women?” illustrating a shift in dating scripts over the last half century.

Furthermore, not only is hooking up prevalent, they argue that the benefits of a hook up are less than the benefits of a relationship, but so are the costs. Therefore, hooking up seems to be the easier option. The traditional sense of coupling up for college-aged adults is clearly no longer as engrained. Very rarely do a man and a woman go out on dates and form a relationship based on mutual interests and hobbies with sex on the back burner. This referenced relationship is one in which emotional capital is invested leading to a mutual romantic relationship. Much of the current research indicates that engaging in romantic relationships while in college has been fraught with anxieties and fear for the last half of the 20th century.

Emotional relationships make people vulnerable, while hooking up (devoid of the emotional minefield) may appear the safer option. The beauty of a hook up is that it is a one-time instance with little emotional repercussions while a relationship engenders emotional intensity and a commitment that makes it more difficult to move on once the relationship has ended. Perhaps this is why many college students

shy away from this type of vulnerability and appear to enter emotional relationships with some amount of trepidation. Given the reframing of relationships as emotional, how exactly do emotional relationships, specifically the ones that progress to the boyfriend/girlfriend label, then develop?

While women are less likely to engage emotionally in relationships without clear returns, it seems as though they have become accustomed to separating the physical and emotional aspects of dating easily when necessary, especially in the case of the hook up. Sprecher and McKinney (1993) found that in many cases the sexual encounter becomes multiple encounters and can morph into an established, exclusive relationship.

Indeed this was the formula for relationship progression for all the women that I interviewed. All (with the exception of Nicole) were in relationships at the time we spoke and all admitted that they had engaged in physical intimacy with their boyfriends before entering official relationships. This is contrary to Bogle's two mutually exclusive categories of "hook up-able" versus "dateable" women (Bogle 2008). Measured solely by the likelihood of orgasm, Armstrong et al. (2010) found that the sexual encounters that occur during hook ups are more beneficial to the man. Further, there is greater likelihood that a man will receive and not give oral sex. The chances of a woman having an orgasm during a hook up are far lower than the chances that a man will. For women, sex is better in relationships on these terms. Furthermore, men are more likely to care about their partner's pleasure when in a relationship. It is apparent from my interviews that these two categories

("hook up-able" and "dateable") persist, but there is an in-between where most of my respondents belong. Most of my respondents reported to have hooked up when the circumstance arose but that, in general, a relationship would trump hooking up. I also found in my observations that many people hook up with the same person repeatedly and sometimes this morphs into a relationship. Contrary to Ellen McCarthy's (2010) definition of a hook up ("a sexual encounter, usually lasting only one night, between people who are strangers or brief acquaintances"), Armstrong et al. (2010) discovered that, "Often there is friendship or socializing both before and after the hookup."

My research suggests that hook ups can work as a pathway to relationship formation. Valeria told me that she had hooked up twice with her boyfriend, but that they had not had sex, and then they started dating. They knew each other before they hooked up as they worked at the same restaurant. Katrina hooked up (she did not indicate whether the hook ups included intercourse) with her boyfriend before they started dating as well, "Actually we hooked up first before we were officially girlfriend and boyfriend, so like we were friends but it was weird like our...circumstances..." In this excerpt, Katrina attempts to explain her hooking up with her boyfriend before they had determined emotional and physical exclusivity citing their circumstances – that they were friends before they began hooking up. She fits in perfectly with Armstrong et al.'s (2010) "friends with benefits" situation, as even though they were friends first, their sexual relationship began as just casual. The continuing of the friendship and sexual relationship brought them emotionally

closer similar to Ball's (2007) argument. Katrina's evolving approach to their intimacy and the resulting circumstances are not extraordinary at all. Physical intimacy was not what made her relationship with her boyfriend official though it did affirm to Katrina that she had romantic feelings for him. The goal of relationships is both physical and emotional compatibility, as defined by all of the people I interviewed and past literature on the topic. After realizing their physical compatibility, Katrina wondered if emotional compatibility existed as well. When he expressed a solid interest in being her boyfriend and she agreed, their relationship became official, thus exclusive. She waited for him to set the tone of the direction their relationship.

June admitted to me that she spent the night with her boyfriend after their first date, "but I wouldn't let him do anything, because I told him not on a first date and I said that's just my rule." (Her "anything" refers to intercourse.) However, she did admit to me that they engaged in foreplay on their first date. While June and her boyfriend did experience their first sexual encounter after a date, the pervasiveness of sexual intimacy existed and they clearly were intimate well before they entered an official relationship.

Men control and benefit more from the hook up scene, though women are still expected to (and obviously do) participate, according to Kimmel's *Guyland* (2008). As McCarthy (2010) argued, "Trying to actually date seems too risky – put yourself out there, and you might get hurt." The women I interviewed echoed the sentiments that physical intimacy requires less vulnerability when compared with

getting hurt or rejected emotionally. It is understandable that they have become hesitant about emotional involvement but not as much about physical intimacy. Evan told me of his friend, "This girl, and he's like, he's like, he's telling me that she like slept with a bunch of his friends and it's backwards logic but she was saying that because she cares about him she won't sleep with him til later." This woman that Evan is referring to seems to have accepted her feelings for Evan's friend, and knows the cost that goes along with emotionally feelings; therefore, she does not want to have to pay for physically intimate fallout as well.

The men I spoke with in relationships saw their relationships begin in similar ways as the women. Javier was in a relationship that began with a one-night stand. He was at a bar one night and met a woman through a mutual friend. She came home with him and they slept together. She pursued him and continued to call him. At first he avoided her because he was not interested, but then he finally answered her call and they began to hang out with each other and continued to sleep together for two months until at her persistence he agreed that they were officially a couple. Javier had been equivocating claiming that he just did not feel strongly enough about her in a romantic way until at last he decided he should give her a chance. As with in Katrina's circumstance, Javier (the man) set the tone for the direction of the relationship. Mickey's most recent relationship inception was similar to Javier's. Shortly after meeting his future girlfriend, Mickey slept with her while they were working together as fire fighters. They continued to do so at work and then began incorporating activities into their relationship that did not revolve around sex or

work and gradually, the relationship became official. The sex between both Javier and Mickey with their respective partners started as hook ups with no emotional attachment. An emotional attachment seemed to take longer to evolve and both men spoke of reluctance. As mentioned in the Methods section, they might have been portraying themselves this way to me to appear more aloof and desirable keeping with the current scripts on emotional involvement.

Sophomore Bruce experienced physical intimacy with his girlfriend, June (previously mentioned), prior to their being in an official relationship as well. However, he did not surrender to the relationship in the way Javier did, at least as Javier described it. Bruce confessed to June that he spoke of her as his girlfriend to other people before he had spoken with her about their status. From Bruce's interview, it was apparent that there are certain conditions that need to be met in the process of making a relationship official. Two of these conditions are both parties recognizing the official relationship and they need to be ready to tell the people in their lives (be it family, friends, or even Facebook friends). Bruce met the condition of telling other people that she was his girlfriend before the subject came up between the two of them. And then she was the one who asked him if she was his girlfriend. "I really didn't mind the idea at all, I don't know," Bruce said, "I'm more of like a whatever kind of guy, I was definitely gonna ask her eventually, not eventually, like, a couple of weeks, but she kind of beat me to it." This excerpt from his interview is striking in a few ways. First, Bruce made the claim that he was telling people she was his girlfriend, but not in any rush to verify that with her.

Second, claiming himself as “a whatever kind of guy” is an identity claim, which again, brings in the performance aspect of the interview and how he wants to be perceived by others (me, in this case). Here we can apply Goffman’s cynical individual (Goffman 1959). Whether or not Bruce misled me was not his intention, his self-perception led him to answer my questions in the way that he did.

Bruce first knew June as a freshman girl living in the dorm room next to his. He would occasionally say ‘hi’ to her. One day they began talking and started to casually hang out. His fraternity was having a “Meet the Brothers Dinner” and he told me that he wanted to get to know June better so he asked her to be his date. She agreed and this was their first official date. June said, “There was a little spark so I went on the second date he asked me on and we have been happily dating and a good couple ever since.”

Bruce’s story mirrors Frank’s relationship. Frank got to know his girlfriend slowly by meeting her at fraternity parties, dancing with her and sometimes making out. He too asked her to a “Meet the Brothers Dinner” as their first official date. Slowly they started seeing each other more often which led to seeing each other daily and going on actual dates (dinners, excursions to Washington, DC). Finally, one day he asked her to be his girlfriend. Just as Katrina waited for her boyfriend’s cues that they should be an official couple, Frank’s girlfriend seemed to leave it up to him as well. He confessed that physical intimacy had occurred before this point, but they had not had sex. Corey’s girlfriend, too, left it up to him as she actively pursued him. “She actually kind of forced me into dating her because I was kind of one of those

guys who never really had a serious relationship and then um, she, I wouldn't say begged, but kept hounding me until I dated her," he told me. Again, this could be an instance where Corey was trying to make me perceive him as the tough guy who was "hounded" by women. It might be said that his "performance presents an idealized view of the situation" (Goffman 1959: 35). This part of our conversation signifies his self-perception and how he wanted me to perceive him.

As intuited from my interviews, it can be assumed that college-aged women are always wanting to be in an official relationship. As Giddens found, "In contrast to most men, the majority of women continue to identify entering the outside world with forming attachments" (Giddens 1992: 53). Typically, they wait until the men they are dating are ready to take that step or push them into it, as told by some of these men I talked with. Typically, the man does the actual asking for the girlfriend/boyfriend status. Research has suggested that, in general, men see little at stake when they engage in physical intimacy, as opposed to women, who tend to believe their own reputations can be negatively affected by a hook up and who are the ones at risk of getting pregnant, as Oliver and Sedikides (1992) have concluded. In addition, from my research I have found that women do identify themselves in terms of hook ups and relationships. Yet men can still be vulnerable when putting themselves into emotionally intimate situations. The relationships of Javier and Mickey started based solely on sex, but then developed to reach official status marked by some amount of emotional intimacy. Bruce and Frank, on the other hand,

mixed dating and physical intimacy before the inauguration of their official relationships.

The common thread in these relationships is that even though physical intimacy occurred before emotional intimacy and the subsequent relationship, no one was physically intimate with people they hardly knew, per Bogle's (2008) and McCarthy's (2010) definitions of hooking up with mere acquaintances or strangers. All had relationships of some sort prior to physical intimacy as Armstrong et al's (2010) research has suggested. Valeria and Mickey were hooking up with people that they worked with, Javier and Frank met their girlfriends through friends, Katrina was already friends with her boyfriend before they hooked up and June and Bruce knew each other from living on the same hall. These facts negate much of the anonymity of the first physical encounter, which much previous literature on this topic has asserted.

Another common thread with my interviewees was that before they had labeled their relationships as official both parties in the relationship had the feelings that their relationships were emotionally and physically exclusive and had confirmed this with each other. The mutual decision to make the relationship official did not surprise anyone with whom I spoke. Katrina recalled, "We just went casually from friends to more than friends, keeping the official title of you're my girlfriend now you're my boyfriend now, it just sort of happened." This illustrates how relationships organically emerge.

June met Bruce during the first week of her freshman year. As a freshman, she was looking forward to meeting new people that would be more mature than those that she had left in high school. She wanted to avoid a romantic relationship that would be too binding too quickly. But, upon meeting Bruce, she amended her position, "I had to set up perimeters; I wanted to still go out to other parties with other boys and I just told him this is the way it's going to be but at the end of the night you have to know that I'm coming back to you." While trying to describe a scenario in which she still had options, she had tied herself to Bruce. This way that June thought she would enjoy her college freedom while continuing to date the man she met soon after arriving. June said to me that she told Bruce, "You're the only one that I think about like this, you're the only one that I'm really interested in, I may flirt, like I'm not going to lie, that happens, I'm a freshman, I'm new, I'm trying out new things.' And he was okay with that." Here June illustrates something specific to the expectation that students tend to revel in the appeal and freedom of the unfamiliar territory of the college experience.

One theme tying all of these interviews together was the expectation of a new freedom that college provides. For most students, this is the first time being responsible for themselves on a daily basis and away from any parental control. Students seem to want to explore the world beyond what they saw in the confines of their high school environments, with the opportunity to craft a new or fuller self and experience the newfound freedom that college brings. Much of this freedom is sexual. While June emphasized this means meeting new people, for many, it also

means exploring sex in a way students have not before college. Many students were not used to having access to so many people with whom to have sex or the many opportunities to do so. Living away from home easily opens up sexual venues in one's dorm room or apartment. This added sexual element changes the formation of relationships from high school to college. As I have mentioned, negotiating hook ups and relationships are a prevalent part in the college dating scene.

“It’s Official” – The Public Nature of Relationships

In the traditional sense of dating, there seems to have been a period in time when dating was just that, going out on dates, the motives of which could have been to enjoy someone else's company, to gain public visibility or because of parental pressure. Traditionally, dating assumes relationship potential, but neither interested party would explore that idea without ample time to get to know each other in multiple social settings. From the current research on the topic, and the data collected for this project, it is glaringly obvious that this seems to no longer be the case. A link in all of the interviews is an eroding middle ground where dating used to lie. At this historical moment, it seems as though college students rarely engage in casual dating relationships. For example, Javier's and Mickey's relationships, among others, were either all about sex or very serious, mirroring marriage.

My research suggests that Facebook, the worldwide online social network, has a hand in how relationships are displayed to the people in relationships and their friends, thus intensifying the serious aspect of the relationship. Facebook was a

factor in how Agnes and her boyfriend approached their relationship. In the beginning of her relationship, Agnes said that she and her boyfriend did not post anything about their relationship on Facebook in consideration of their exes' feelings. "Because they still have Facebook and they're still our friends. And I didn't want them to be like, oh, they broke up with me like a month ago and now they're dating someone new," she noted. Agnes said,

We talked more about not putting anything on Facebook that would give it away. Like we didn't post any pictures and stuff. I think talking about that, was like I wanna put the pictures but we shouldn't, but then people will think we're a couple. But we are in a relationship because we want to put those pictures up.

Though it might seem trivial to assign great weight in marking relationships to Facebook, the social network has been a prevalent part of the college experience since its inception in 2004 (Facebook 2010). The Facebook official label (changing your relationship status from "single" to "in a relationship") does not display relationship status to someone's social network, "it solves any doubt about whether or not you're really a couple or if you're just hooking up on the side then kind of going off and doing your own thing," June said in our interview. The Facebook official relationship thus becomes the definitive declaration; it provides a feeling of stability.

As students proceed through relationships while in college, they add pictures of their relationships to their own Facebook profile sites. When a student changes his or her relationship status to "in a relationship" and posts pictures of his or her significant other, the student engages in this ritual aspect of the college experience

and Facebook. This public declaration signifies an identity shift from a single person to now a girlfriend or boyfriend. This is a move that often lacks the awareness that this new relationship will end at some point, undoubtedly with the painful process of changing the relationship status back to “single” (thus popping up in friends’ homepages that “Jane Doe’ is no longer in a relationship” next to a little broken heart) and taking down pictures of the formerly happy, serious relationship, shifting the identity back to single. These relationships will not last forever but no one seems to grasp that while in their midst. Posting a relationship status and pictures of the relationship on Facebook may have longer-term implications and indirect effects than is considered in the moment such as having to reroute identity from a relationship identity back to an individual identity. It seems that for most college students on Facebook, the ritual of posting the artifacts of a relationship on the website makes the relationship real and perhaps might propel it to a more serious status sooner.

The steps a couple takes to make a relationship official will obviously vary. Agnes and her boyfriend had both gotten out of serious relationships when they met through a dating website, Okcupid, indicating their desires for a relationship of some kind. They had agreed with each other to start their relationship slowly, allowing it to progress naturally. Agnes pointed out that even though the relationship was not recognized on Facebook, she and her boyfriend were together exclusively from their first date onward. Reinforcing their sense of exclusivity, she

had met his mother and brother on their third date, thus entering quickly into a serious and public relationship.

It was only after Agnes's boyfriend told her that he loved her that they made the relationship official on Facebook. It was a month after they had met and this was when they began referring to each other as boyfriend and girlfriend. Thus, we can see that their past relationships (based on how Agnes did not want her exes to see her new relationship on Facebook) had played a key role in the timing and development of their current relationship. Once her boyfriend told her that he loved her, their public relationship trumped any desire to protect her exes through Facebook. This suggests that people will factor into their current relationship not only their own past relationships but their partners' past relationships as well.

Ali's story seemed the most traditional in terms of having a series of dates and moving into eventual exclusivity, but once this exclusivity was reached, it was at an extreme point of seriousness. Ali met his girlfriend shortly after she had broken up with another man. As soon as mutual friends introduced them to each other at a social function, he knew that he liked her and that he could sense that she could possibly feel the same way about him. Ali quickly became consumed with thoughts of her but it was difficult to figure out whether she felt the same. He told me, "I wanted to be with her, I wanted to talk to her, but at the same time I had to, you know, go to school and do other duties and other responsibilities that I had." Nevertheless, he told me that he was inexplicably drawn to her and wanted her in his life, to be there for her. He immediately launched in about how his girlfriend had

recently gotten out of an emotionally draining relationship with an ex who was demeaning and controlling. Ali talked to me of his campaign to break down the emotional walls that were the result of her past relationship.

I really understood that she had a very traumatic experience and I made some sort of a vow to myself to take care of her, to make her understand that she needs to get over her ex, and I want to come into her life and provide her happiness and so forth, and over the time that we've been together, made me a very patient and understanding boyfriend. She has realized and appreciated this love that she has now and has gotten completely over her past and it's been working out really well...

Ali went into more detail with me and elaborated that his relationship was born out of friendship. They talked on the phone frequently (which seems rare in a time when texting and Facebook communications rule). He made his feelings abundantly clear though she sidestepped his advances and wanted to stay as friends only. Eventually, on his birthday, she confessed to him that her feelings were mutual and they have been in an exclusive relationship since. Ali's story seems far less complicated and tainted with sexual intricacies than others that I did interview. Ali and his girlfriend did not become physically intimate until eight months after their relationship became official. Ali's serious feelings for his girlfriend were apparent to him as soon as he met her.

Nicole was the only person who I interviewed who did not see dating as a precursor to a relationship. Dating was just that, a series of dates, she stated, "Because if you look up the definition of date in the dictionary hopefully it says something like girls going out with guys and just enjoy each other's time [sic]," and this is just what Nicole did. She, similar to Ali, was a traditional dater. She pointed

out to me that she was never physically intimate with anyone until the girlfriend/boyfriend title was established. Therefore, she did not become physically or emotionally vulnerable until the mutually agreed designation as official was articulated, which communicated to her the man's level of emotional commitment. Nicole's case was anomalous when compared to all my other interviewees. It is interesting that most people, unlike Nicole, were willing to withhold deep commitment based on the title but not withhold physical intimacy.

All of the women I spoke with, except Nicole, appeared to be conducting a cost benefit analysis on every potential relationship, putting themselves into it physically but waiting to ensure the benefit outweighed the cost before the wholehearted investment of the self. Once this was realized, the dating relationship could move into the "official" phase and it suddenly would take on a degree of seriousness. There is a script to follow and a woman can be much more interested in the script itself than the boyfriend. As Valeria explained,

When you don't put a title on things, you're not guided to act a specific way because everyone has a preconceived notion of how you're supposed to act if you're a girlfriend with a boyfriend. It's not the way I saw things, when we weren't in a relationship, we were just ourselves. [sic]

Valeria talks to the relinquishing of the self to form a new relationship identity, touching on the change of the self to accommodate another person.

Stets explored the stages of a relationship in her 1993 article. Although her research is over 15 years old, her conclusions remain relevant. She marks the stages as casual dating (with little conflict and little emotional investment), the somewhat serious stage (with an increase in affection but also an increase in potential for

conflict), and the serious stage (with high levels of interdependence, love, trust and potential for conflict) (Stets 1993). Valeria falls within Stets' point of interdependence, in that once her relationship was labeled; the couple became dependent on each other in a contrived way that had not existed prior, as Valeria had previously concluded (Stets 1993). My research suggests that as soon as the boyfriend/girlfriend title is agreed upon, the relationship becomes different. University students no longer maintain a sense of self that exists independently of the relationship; they become defined by it, and interdependence, while not entirely necessary, becomes a requirement of most college relationships. Katrina, however, revels in this interdependence. She said, "sometimes I really feel like he is like the only one there for me and with me and he knows me. He's like my best friend." In some cases, whether intentionally or not, the players in this process have entered it in an effort to find the right potential mate with whom to open up intimately.

The relationships of my respondents seem to skip the semi-serious stage and become strongly emotionally involved once the relationship becomes, as June said, "Facebook official." This has to do with the public nature of a relationship; the title becomes a public declaration with corresponding obligations. Current research and my personal research suggest that the Facebook categorization and the serious relationship seem geared to locking the process into an "auto-pilot" nod until it ends either in a permanent tie or in failure.

The girlfriend/boyfriend label can imply a heightened sense of security and longevity for both sexes, whether a partner wants it or not. To Javier, this label

meant he was unable to escape the relationship. When I asked him what this label mean, he said,

Javier: As a girl, as my girlfriend.

Lara: Why, what does that imply?

Javier: I don't know, that I'm stuck, that I can't get out of it.

Javier went on to tell me that he was too nice to break up with his girlfriend, and while he liked her company, she had the tendency to be clingy and to want to be around him all the time, a prospect that he did not enjoy. Corey said that his relationship took the same turn once it became official. He and his girlfriend spent time together to instill what they thought was a sense of security but it was too much time and it ended up becoming very boring. He told me, "like every other night we would go out to dinner and we would order the same f*cking thing. It just got really really mundane. That's what used to be like fun to us and that was the problem. It got so mundane, it really did." June also told me that she and Bruce spent six nights of the week together. The problem is that college students in these serious relationships think they need to spend large amounts of time together, but they usually lose their sense of self at a time when focus on self is normative, and realize a relationship identity instead which ends up stifling both parties.

Steven lamented his most recent relationship and how quickly his girlfriend had wanted an expressed level of commitment from him. While he was not against the idea, he was not ready for her desired level of commitment so quickly. "I was trying to slowly work into a relationship," he said. "But she wanted serious

commitment. Serious everything, and I wasn't about that." He told me that he felt pressure from her to commit within two weeks of the beginning of their dating relationship. He elaborated that within two weeks of them hanging out and having sex she had told him "that she had fallen for me." Steven did not reciprocate this intensity of feelings so quickly, and he finally told her that he could not commit in the way that he knew she wanted even though he still wanted to get to know her better. Partakers in these relationships crave this type of seriousness that is a sort of precursor to the level of seriousness in a marriage with large amounts of emotional intensity (the woman that Steven dated for two weeks is an example of this).

Tyrone's engagement focused on his need for a companion, not the specific woman. He felt pressure to be in a relationship as he felt that he existed in a world where a tyranny of coupledness exists. Much of our talk revolved around him wanting someone with whom to share his thoughts. His relationship with his ex-fiancée had become emotionally intense quickly after they met. Even as Tyrone realized there had been ongoing strife since the beginning of their relationship, he decided, nevertheless, to propose marriage a year into their relationship. His impetus to propose came from himself and his own needs for companionship, but he seemed to do it blindly, not weighing out the rationality of the situation.

Why I proposed um, I don't know, I just, I don't know, I guess I felt like I was ready for that step and we'd been together for a while. But I hadn't been in a relationship before so I didn't know the right timing or anything like that. So I went with what felt best at the time, I was like, you know, I feel pretty confident right now.

Thus it seems that he did not think of his girlfriend and their relationship, only really of himself.

Many people say they do things that are expected of them, following what they think to be a script of a predetermined set of guideline practices. For example, Javier aligned gradually to his role as a boyfriend, stopping stringing his girlfriend along. Other times people will claim, "It's not the right time for me to be in a relationship." With Ali, for example, his girlfriend knew that she was not ready to be in a relationship, but she knew of Ali's feelings for her and reciprocated. Once she was able to get past the emotional trauma of her past relationship, she decided to be with Ali. Luckily for them both, Ali was still willing to be with her. In these cases, the people making the decisions did not weigh their needs equally against the needs of someone else. This point can be better understood with June and Bruce. When they met, it was not at a perfect time for June since it was so soon after her arrival at college, but she compromised and then slowly their relationship grew to a point where they felt as though they were girlfriend/boyfriend and went to each other to confirm. These examples illustrate that the timing of relationships is an important factor in relationship formation.

Focus to the Future

Once the initial romantic connection has been realized, these undergraduates focused on more practical aspects of long-term relationships. George Mason University prides itself on having a diverse student body and my respondents represented that well. A demographic that was hard to account for however is

economic and social class in part because I did not decide to look at that as I collected data. I suspect that class is meaningful but I did not have enough data to address it. Based on my interactions with the people I interviewed, I assume that all of them fit into some part of the middle class spectrum. Most of my respondents talked to me about jobs that they had while going to school, though Frank, Bruce, and June did not mention jobs. No one went into great detail about why they had the jobs (whether to help pay for school or for extra spending money) but all talked about balancing course loads, jobs and social lives. Ali spoke to me of his personal goals and where his girlfriend fit into them. He said, "I feel like I should get on my feet, get my education, get settled, get a great job and then know that right now, in my next chapter in my life that I can marry her." All the interviewees supported the finding that official relationships indicate a considerable emotional investment, and a potential relationship termination would be a substantial loss, the stage in an intimate relationship cited by both Stets's 1993 research and Philip Blumstein and Peter Kollock's 1988 research.

For all of these students, life course progression matters at this point in emerging adulthood (for most students, adulthood is marked by graduation from college). In this same vein, college students are looking for partners whose ultimate life goals mirror their own. Valeria articulated the woes of a boyfriend who did not seem to have life goals and ambition as she did; her boyfriend had no interest in school while she juggled a full course load and worked as often as possible. Valeria was an example of the development as a woman in terms of placing the trajectory of

her life into the terms of a career. Many college-aged adults think that they might meet their future spouses in college and so having a boyfriend or girlfriend whose priorities parallel their own is paramount. In terms of what Valeria wanted for her future, her boyfriend did not fit in. As our conversation went on, she seemed to be registering that she and her boyfriend were no longer well suited for each other. When I asked her what was an important trait her ideal partner would have, she said, without hesitation, "goals." She admitted to romanticizing her ideal man, claiming to want someone to fulfill her ideals as she had picked up from books and movies. She wanted someone who was as levelheaded and aspiring about life as she was and serious about her as well.

Tyrone also underlined the importance of a mate with goals. When referring to his ex-fiancée, he said, "She always wanted to find some type of job where she only had to work like three days a week and it was unrealistic goals [sic]." After his broken engagement, he is "just looking for someone who genuinely cares about people, smart, attractive, um, that has future plans but they don't have to have everything in order, but have an idea of what's going on in the world." Theo emphasized the need for a girlfriend who possessed the same values as he, most importantly that she be family-oriented. These conversations tend to illustrate that college students are thinking about their futures and how a potential life mate might fit.

These conversation snippets suggest that everyone has expectations when it comes to a mate. As Anthony Giddens presents in his 1992 book *The Transformation*

of Intimacy, with changing gender roles, women have become more career and goal-oriented. He found that “men mostly welcome the fact that women have become more sexually available, and claim that in any longer-term sexual tie they want a partner who is intellectually and economically their equal” (Giddens 1992: 11). As Arlie Russell Hochschild (2003) further elaborates in her *The Commercialization of Intimate Life*, “Economic reasons for men and women to join lives have grown less important, and emotional reasons have grown more important” (Hochschild 2003: 123). With more women having education and career goals, they are more likely to choose a mate where emotional compatibility is the most important factor. College relationships assume that economic equality exists already. My research suggests that this economic and emotional equality is a requirement for long-term relationships – whether the students are attempting to ascend the class structure through education or maintain their status, the expectation is that potential mates will have similar objectives.

Conclusion

I conducted this research to develop an appreciation of how college students navigate sexual and dating scripts today. The problem is that there is no concrete answer as to when and at what point a relationship becomes official. However, my research identifies patterns and underlines what factors move two people to that point. As shown through the literature review, most of the previous research is no longer current; this does not make it irrelevant but highlights a need for updating. My research is intended to supplement past findings and revitalize them by bringing them to the dramatically changed scene of second decade of the 21st century.

By my qualitative research, I have developed conclusions on the mechanics of relationship formation, as well as the behaviors and attitudes around it, as shown through the experiences of college-aged men and women. With in-depth interviews, I have delved into the intricacies of how dating works in and the relevance to the lives of undergraduates at George Mason University. I explored how students define themselves within changing dating and sexual scripts in a time of vast sexual availability. With my research, I have been able to place George Mason University in the dating sphere of colleges and universities across the US.

Despite seeming differences in sexuality based on gender and the professed

male penchant to play the field, maybe men and women in undergraduate culture are not as different from each other in their ultimate relationship goals as is commonly thought. Though my sample was small, I have been able to come to some tentative conclusions. Firstly, the mechanics of dating are not easily categorized. But, I believe that my research offers perspective on many issues of interest. The ambiguity of sexual encounters such as the hook up and those leading to a relationship does rule the social scene on George Mason's campus and was apparent throughout my interviews. This was illustrated time and again by my respondents, those who just played the field as well as those who ended up going from sex to a relationship.

The most tentative conclusions come from the section dealing with the pathway to relationship formation. My respondents got into relationships in many ways. Javier, Mickey, and Steven spoke to me at length about finding someone to have sex with and then that physical intimacy morphing into a relationship. In the same vein, but not as explicitly, Katrina and Valeria had physical relationships before emotional ones. On the other end of the spectrum, Nicole and Ali did not engage in sexual activity until relationship intentions were clearly stated. June and Bruce, Frank and Agnes covered the middle ground where dating was important but they were not as strict with rules about sexual intimacy as Nicole and Ali. Therefore several much different patterns can be identified.

The public nature of relationships has little variation, it seems, based on my interviews. All of my respondents spoke to me about negotiating the label of the

relationship into the public space of college. It appears that students become quickly wrapped into the label and the relationship becomes interdependent to a stifling degree. Facebook reinforces this as it signifies a degree of seriousness not only to the couple's personal networks, but to the couple themselves.

While some might argue that many facets of the undergraduate dating relationships have remained more or less the same over time (e.g. the male tendency to play the field, the female priority on first establishing emotional content), the explosive impact that social media has had on the forging of relationships is the most glaring, perhaps even revolutionary change. It has come on the scene so recently that even the latest previous research has considered its impact. I was pleased to be able to report conclusions about it. It will be interesting to see whether social networks retain their seminal role for any length of time or are replaced by other mechanisms as technology continues its rapid evolution and the campus reacts. In any event, campus life may well come to be considered a laboratory for testing the effect technology can have on the more intimate aspects of our social lives.

There are a few areas that I was unable to take into consideration when conducting my research. I did not factor in race or economic status into my findings. I knew that through qualitative interviews, those would be difficult factors to delve into comfortably. I had hoped to be able to factor gay perspectives in my analysis, but could not. I interviewed one gay student, Brock, and, while his interview offered perspective, it was difficult to decipher patterns that worked with my emerging

themes. Conducting a similar study including more gay students, or one comprised of just gay students, would be insightful in gender studies as well as gay and lesbian studies. I would not be shocked if the conclusions ended up being the same as mine.

The respondents I spoke with seemed latently aware that they are the post divorce generation and all seemed to have the desire not to fall into the marriage/divorce cycle. They appear to take relationships seriously and weigh long-term possible futures with everyone they become more than casual romantic partners with. It is an intricate dance as they juggle control within intimate relationships as well as all the facets of life. They are looking not only for a romantic connection but also for partners whose goals mirror their own and who, as students, have serious priorities about their future. It may sound hackneyed but it seems a fair statement that everyone I interviewed had a dream of a type of personal “happily ever after” with someone special. Valeria aptly summed the thought up. As she so eloquently put it, “Someone who’s looking to do big things. Someone who dreams big, I like big dreamers.”

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Curriculum Vitae

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