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Love in the Time of Graduation: Exploring the Identity Development of College Seniors in Romantic Relationships

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Love in the Time of Graduation:
Exploring the Identity Development of College Seniors in Romantic Relationships

A thesis presented by
Noam Waksman
to the Department of Psychology
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Arts

Connecticut College
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Abstract

This project was a qualitative exploration into the lives of college seniors currently in romantic relationships. Participants included 11 committed, heterosexual couples (22 participants in total) from schools in the Northeast. In each couple, at least one member was a senior in college at the time of participation. Participants were interviewed separately and asked a protocol of questions regarding their relationships and post-graduate plans. No initial hypotheses were established. Instead, the interviews were transcribed and emergent themes and patterns were identified through a grounded analysis of the interviews. Ultimately, a conceptualization emerged from the previously identified patterns and themes, and the participants were categorized along it. The conceptualization captured the divide among participants in where they anchored their source of stability as they tried to navigate their futures. Some participants put their anchors in their relationships and other participants put their anchors in their future career paths and individual exploration. This divide was further explored along the factors that influenced the participants' placing of the anchors, including: gender, external forces (e.g., family and society), and the participants' sense of a personal identity formation. Ultimately, this project served as an exploration into the experiences of young adults in romantic relationships on the verge of a major transition, and it attempted to discover how they balanced individual identity development and relational wellbeing considering that at times the two endeavors compete with each other.

Keywords: romantic relationships, college students, identity, sacrifice, wellbeing

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Dedication

Sharing your life with someone is hard work, especially when you do not yet know what will become of that life. To those engaged in that endeavor, I dedicate this to you.

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If upon graduating from college you get a job offer in California, but your romantic partner of the last three years is going to be in New York for the foreseeable future, what should you do?

Consider the vignette of Tom and Sarah. Tom is on the verge of graduating from his New England college, nearly four years of hard work and burning the midnight oil behind him, and he is lucky enough to receive a job offer from a company across the country in California. The opportunity is enticing, it could possibly set him on the career path he has dreamt about, and he always thought it might be nice to live out West. Meanwhile, Tom's girlfriend of the last three years, Sarah, the person that has been by his side for those formative college years, has made it clear that she wants to be in New York to stay close to family and pursue professional opportunities there. She is potentially considering graduate school on the East coast, but she also knows that she wants to spend some significant time traveling abroad before settling down. Should Tom take the job in California? If he does, should Tom and Sarah attempt to make things work long distance? Should Sarah reconsider her desire to be in New York and follow Tom out West? Should Tom turn down the job offer and look for positions in New York so that he can continue his close relationship with Sarah? Is it wise for either of them to weigh their relationship so heavily in this decision considering that their relationship, unlike a marriage, has an uncertain permanence? How do they avoid making decisions that will lead to feelings of regret?

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These are just some of the big questions that numerous college seniors in serious romantic relationships are forced to ask themselves. Up to this point, there has not been significant research done looking at this unique cohort and the difficult decisions they are forced to make regarding their futures and their relationships while facing a time of major transition.

A big cause for the stress facing college seniors on the verge of graduation is their knowledge that they are about to embrace adult responsibilities and have to make formative decisions regarding their future selves (e.g., how to live and how to contribute to society). There is an immense pressure to “figure it all out” upon graduating from college, and as a result, much of the advice coming from society tells 20-somethings to focus their energy on themselves and their future success. Consider the following headlines from popular blogs, newspapers, and websites: “Why Your 20s Is The Most Important Time To Invest In Yourself,” “Be More Selfish in Your 20s,” and “Your Lifetime Earnings Are Probably Determined In Your 20s” (Hudson, 2013; Lee, 2013; Paquette, 2015, respectively). On top of this fairly standard 21st century pressure, college seniors in relationships are forced to make decisions similar to Tom and Sarah’s that can pit an investment in themselves against an investment in their relationship. Because these are inevitable choices that all college seniors and recent graduates in relationships have to make, society and the media have also weighed in on this specific dilemma, and have produced articles specifically disparaging relationships with such headlines as: “19 Reasons To Avoid Relationships In Your 20s,” “The 10 Reasons A Relationship In Your 20s Makes No Sense At All,” and “The 10 Reasons Why You Should Invest In Your Career Rather Than A Relationship” (Green, 2013; Cuffin, 2013a, 2013b; respectively).

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It is also not uncommon to receive relational pressure from parents who want the best for their kids, encouraging their college-aged children to focus on setting up a positive future over what they might simply see as “young love.” The bottom line is this: there is often an internal and societal pressure to forge a strong career and set one’s self up for success upon graduating from college, even if that success must come at the expense of a relationship.

From a psychological standpoint, there is certainly research and theory suggesting that this societal pressure may be fair and well-intentioned, considering the importance of personal identity formation during the transition from adolescence to adulthood. As Abraham Maslow (1943) stated in his formation of the hierarchy of needs he felt one must obtain *en route* to achieving self-actualization, “What a man *can* be, he *must* be. This need we may call self-actualization” (p. 382). In other words, Maslow laid the psychological foundation for the concept that self-fulfillment motivates human behavior, and in order for one to actualize his or her potential, a focus on the self, among other things, is required.

Although self-fulfillment and societal pressure are a part of identity formation, identity is a multi-dimensional construction. Erik Erikson (1963) argued that identity exists in a sociocultural context, and it is a function of three (sometimes competing) dimensions of the individual: biological, psychological, and social. As individuals construct their identity, they attempt to align their self-concept with their physical selves, personal desires, and social pressures. This “triple bookkeeping” can be extremely difficult as there are often inherent tensions among the dimensions. Considering the vignette of Tom and Sarah, Tom could simultaneously desire to remain committed to his

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romantic relationship, desire to pursue his individual achievement and self-actualization, and feel the need to situate himself in the most advantageous position to execute his goals, while also receiving conflicting social pressure from the important people in his life (e.g., his parents or Sarah herself). Ideally, he wants to satisfy himself, his desires, and all parties involved in his life, but this can be exceptionally difficult, especially at this transitional time in his life.

Although Erikson (1968) did emphasize the three dimensions of identity, his further research on identity formation posited a theory of personality and life-span development with a strict progression of eight stages in which the development of an autonomous self is emphasized. In Erikson's stage theory, stage five is Identity versus Role Confusion in which adolescents must question and explore themselves in order to discover their unique qualities and their place in society (in essence, their identity). Only after there is a mastery of this stage can one move on to stage six, which is Intimacy versus Isolation, the mastery of which requires one to develop healthy, intimate relationships, both in friendship and intimacy, with others. Erikson (1968) suggested that a failure of stage six, resulting in failed relationships and isolation, may be caused by a previous failure to develop a strong identity in stage five (1968). Considering this theory of development, it makes sense why there is pressure on college seniors to find and secure their place in society, both professionally and personally, instead of or before focusing on their relationships.

It should be noted that when Erikson was writing in the mid-20th century and considered adolescence as the time when stage five occurred and identities were formed, most Americans were entering the workforce as adolescents right out of high school.

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Additionally, they were getting married and starting families in their early twenties with greater frequency than current young adults do now. Attending college has become much more common in American society, as well as holding off before starting a family unit, which has pushed back the age at which Americans enter the workforce, solidify their identities, and transition into adulthood. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010), 70.1% of recent high school graduates enrolled in college in 2009, compared to 50.1% in 1965. Therefore, the stage five identity formation Erikson identified is now occurring later with college students facing transitional questions well into their 20's (e.g., Tom and Sarah). For this reason Arnett (2000) coined the phrase "emerging adulthood" to capture this extended period of identity formation that stretches beyond the adolescent years. Arnett, who worked from the theoretical groundwork for human development partially established by Erikson, argued that the period of emerging adulthood was a demographically and subjectively distinct period of development from the ages of 18 to 25 during which identity exploration was undertaken in the main areas of love, work, and worldview (2000). Although tentative identity exploration may begin in adolescence, identity achievement is rarely achieved by the end of high school for emerging adults in the current century, and the majority of serious and focused identity exploration takes place during emerging adulthood, aided by the absence of enduring adult role commitments at this period (Arnett, 2000). It is exactly this serious and pressure-filled identity exploration characteristic of emerging adulthood that college seniors, especially those in relationships, are attempting to navigate head on.

Before one can move on to stage six and consider intimacy and the establishment of relationships as a part of development, research subsequent to Erikson's has suggested

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that there are differing styles in which emerging adults handle the crisis of Identity versus Role Confusion. These styles in turn can result in differing levels of ego-identity achievement. Marcia (1966) developed and validated particular identity formation styles based on stage five of Erikson's identity stage theory. He posited four differing styles for undertaking the task of identity formation with regard to identity achievement in the areas of occupation and ideology congruent with stage five: identity achievement, identity diffusion, moratorium, and foreclosure. The identity achievement style was attributed to an emerging adult that has explored multiple options during the crisis of identity formation and committed to an occupation and ideology; the identity diffusion style to one that has failed to commit to an occupation or ideology due to lack of exploration or lack of interest; the moratorium style to one that was in the middle of identity exploration but was still very much struggling and unable to make commitments that satisfied both him/herself and external influences, and the foreclosure style to one who has made rushed commitments based on his/her parents' (or authoritarian) wishes rather than his/her own exploration or beliefs. The four styles were viewed as four points on a continuum of ego-identity achievement.

Marcia interviewed 86 men enrolled in college, and based on those interviews the identity status of each individual was determined. Once the men had been categorized, they were given four tasks to validate the constructed identity statuses. Marcia found that the identity achievement group performed better than did other statuses on a stressful concept attainment task, and that their self-esteem was slightly less vulnerable to negative information than was true of the other statuses' self-esteem. Marcia also discovered that the foreclosure group strongly endorsed authoritarian values (such as obedience)

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significantly more than did the other statuses, and although members of this status stated confidence in their commitments, their self-esteem was vulnerable to negative information. The foreclosure group is indicative of the social pressure to achieve certain desired professional goals that college-aged individuals can feel from parents or authoritarian figures, but Marcia's research shows that making commitments based on parents' wishes stymies personal identity achievement and can lead one to choices that are not right for the individual. Subsequent research done with both men and women in college has supported Marcia's findings and found that regardless of gender, the achieved identity status is associated with a stronger sense of self than is true of the other three statuses (Ickes, Park, & Johnson, 2012).

It is not surprising that those who have achieved identity, and thus have a strong sense of self, are able to maintain self-confidence and the knowledge of their worth even in response to negative feedback. That being said, the fact that individuals who do not achieve a strong ego-identity are not easily able to maintain self-confidence sheds light on the extreme importance for one to experience proper identity exploration and achievement before committing to any aspect (professional or personal) of their life. If people were to commit to an occupation, ideology, or relationship before properly exploring and achieving their identity and sense of self, they might end up feeling trapped in a rushed or mistaken commitment that they then regret, especially once someone in their life, or circumstance, challenges their commitment. With regard to the vignette, if Tom chooses to stay with Sarah because it is comfortable to do so rather than because he feels confident in his commitment after a process of identity-achieving exploration, as soon as someone questions the relationship or the relationship hits a rough patch, he

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might doubt his commitment and therefore the relationship. That being said, if the relationship does not have any obvious pitfalls at the moment, it can be difficult for Tom to be truly honest with himself or with Sarah and terminate the relationship (at least temporarily) because further exploration is needed.

Erikson's theory of identity, however, has its share of detractors, especially feminist psychologists. As Jean Baker Miller put it, "As we have inherited it, the notion of a 'self' does not appear to fit women's experience" (1991, p. 11). Feminist psychology and psychologists have been critical of Erikson and his identity theory for placing identity before relationships and emphasizing separateness from others, rather than connection to others, in achieving identity (Gilligan, 1982; Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991). Jordan et al. (1991) felt as if the previous theories of human development (such as Erikson's), and their emphasis on independence and self-sufficiency, at best did not apply to women, and at worst, mislabeled them as overly dependent and less capable than men. Gilligan (1982) felt similarly and argued that women relied more heavily than did men on connections with others, but that such connection was a positive thing, and that for women, tasks of identity and intimacy were more connected than was true for men. In their work to illuminate a picture of women's development, Jordan et al. (1991) adopted the phrase "self-in-relation theory" which emphasizes the importance of cultivating connections in the process of achieving identity, and it stands in opposition to Erikson's theory.

A potential takeaway from feminist psychology's rebuttal to traditional identity theory is that, although a commitment to self-realization and identity is crucial for an emerging adult, a commitment to a strong relationship can be equally crucial and an

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important part of identity attainment. This concept is potentially especially true for emerging adults in a loving and committed romantic partnership. Parents or others may disregard the young couple, and society may put pressure on emerging adults to achieve professionally, but serious college relationships are not to be taken lightly. In fact, a recent Facebook Data Science study (2013) indicated that 28% of married graduates attended the same college as their spouse. One does not have to find a future spouse in college, but entering a relationship in college does not necessarily rule out the possibility of it ending in marriage, despite the young age at which it began and the personal and professional development that will inevitably occur along the way. Regardless, intimate romantic relationships can play an important role, both personally and developmentally, in the lives of emerging adults.

Although the predominant social discourse, as previously mentioned, encourages emerging adults to focus on autonomy and career achievement, a narrative encouraging emerging adults to focus on their relationship and reap its benefits does exist. Consider the following headlines: “Why Developing Serious Relationships In Your 20s Matters,” “Why It’s Okay To Be In A Long-Term Relationship In Your 20s,” and “26 Perks Of Being In A Serious Relationship In Your 20s” (Spiers, 2013; Strickler, 2014; Wong, 2015, respectively). Interestingly, all of these articles (that represent the small pool of pro-relationship articles that have been shared extensively on social media and published on prominent blogs and websites) were written by women, and much of their content aligns itself with the ideology of the aforementioned feminist psychologists in their emphasis on relational benefits. The intended audiences of the articles are not just women, however, as the articles include arguments for relationship commitment that may

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appeal to both men and women. That being said, the last headline insisting that “it’s okay” to be in a relationship as a young adult is defensive in tone, seemingly recognizing that it represents the minority and unpopular opinion, reinforcing that society puts greater stakes in individual achievement than in relationship commitment for young adults. It should be pointed out that the articles promoting emerging adults to have strong commitments to their relationships are fewer and harder to find than are the articles promoting a focus on self-fulfillment, and even than the articles directly stating that committing to a relationship is a bad idea for young adults. Even if societal pressure pushes in the other direction, there are numerous other reasons why an emerging adult might consider investing in a committed, romantic relationship.

From a psychological standpoint, there are benefits to investing in a healthy romantic relationship. Certainly being in a committed relationship at a radically transitional juncture in life (such as the one Tom and Sarah are facing) can add stress and uncertainty to an already difficult time, but by no means does research suggest that one should not be in a relationship during transition or that there are no positive consequences provided by the relationship. Researchers have shown that healthy romantic relationships are important for an individual’s happiness, health, and wellbeing, and that the social support afforded by intimate relationships can buffer the adverse effects of stress (Cohen, Doyle, Turner, Alper, & Skoner, 2003; Cohen & Wills, 1985; Holahan & Moos, 1991; Umberson & Montez, 2010). Intimate and close relationships are essential for us to flourish as humans.

One valuable perspective in this research concerns the “interdependence theory of relationships” (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). This theory describes

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“the way in which the two persons control each other’s outcomes in the course of their interaction” (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978, p. 4). It recognizes that there are rewards and costs associated with relationships, and that through maintaining closeness, people will try to maximize mutual benefits while limiting mutual costs. The theory also suggests that committed relationships experience non-correspondence situations, which force an individual to choose between pursuing self-interest and making a sacrifice for the sake of the relationship. Research has indicated that non-correspondence is common and inevitable in long-term relationships (Surra & Longstreth, 1990).

It makes sense that ongoing relationships go through times in which partners’ needs and preferences are at odds, and that the interests of the individual do not always align with the interests of the relationship. Nevertheless, situations of non-correspondence can potentially threaten the quality and maintenance of romantic relationships. Non-correspondence dilemmas can be navigated successfully, however, through the employment of pro-relationship behavior, which can be defined as any behavior that benefits a relationship and stems from a motivation to maximize the interests of the relationship (Wieselquist, Rusbult, Foster, & Agnew, 1999).

One of these pro-relationship behaviors is sacrifice, and the literature suggests that sacrifice, and a willingness to sacrifice, are essential aspects of loving and committed dating and married relationships (Fehr, 1988; Impett, Gable, & Peplau, 2005; Impett & Gordon, 2008; Van Lange, Agnew, Harnick, & Steemers, 1997; Van Lange, Rusbult, et al., 1997; Wieselquist et al., 1999). Van Lange, Rusbult, et al. (1997) define the willingness to sacrifice as “the propensity to forego immediate self-interest to promote the well-being of a partner or relationship” (p. 1374). These sacrifices can range from

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minor ones (e.g., agreeing to watch an undesirable movie on a Friday night) to more major ones (e.g., giving up an important activity in order to have more time to spend with a partner). Regardless of the level of sacrifice, if one or both partners accommodate or forgive during a time of conflict, it will lead to more positive outcomes than if one or both partners act in a destructive way (Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991). Essentially, accommodating the needs of a partner and the needs of the relationship, and prioritizing those needs over individual ones, is at times necessary to maintain the quality of the relationship. Van Lange, Rusbult, et al. (1997) found that a willingness to sacrifice was a significant predictor of whether a dating relationship persisted over an academic semester, and in her literature review, Noller (1996) found that participants frequently listed sacrifice (among other key traits) as an essential aspect to their understanding of love and commitment. In addition, Wieselquist et al. (1999) showed that sacrifice can increase an individual's commitment to the relationship, increase trust within the relationship, and contribute to a "mutual cyclical growth" process in which the more committed an individual is, the more likely he or she is to sacrifice, which in turn leads to increased trust and commitment within the relationship.

In this way, a sacrifice made by an individual can benefit both a partner and the relationship, but research has also shown that there are indeed benefits to sacrificing for the *individual who sacrificed*. Engaging in an undesirable activity for the sake of a partner tends to make that partner feel good, which in turn can make the person who sacrificed feel good (Lerner, Miller, & Holmes, 1976). Also, even though the partner who sacrifices gives up something and suppresses self-interest in the immediate moment, the act of sacrifice can be beneficial for long-term relationship goals such as improved

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couple functioning. Finally, making a sacrifice increases the likelihood that a partner will sacrifice in return (Wieselquist et al., 1999).

Simply engaging in sacrifice, however, does not necessarily yield the personal, partner, and relationship benefits described above, because the motivation for that sacrifice also has a role in its meaning and influence. Impett et al. (2005) considered an approach-avoidance model of sacrifice in which approach motives of sacrifice focused on obtaining positive outcomes within the relationship and avoidance motives focused on evading negative outcomes. For example, if Tom decided to take a job on the East coast to stay with Sarah because he wanted their relationship to continue and flourish, that would be an approach sacrifice. However, if he decided to take a job on the East coast to avoid the weeks of potential fighting, tears, and the eventual breakup, that would be an avoidance sacrifice. In Impett et al.'s (2005) study, they had college students in dating relationships report on their daily sacrifices for two weeks. The results showed that only approach motives of sacrifice were associated with wellbeing and relationship quality; avoidance motives of sacrifice were detrimental to relationship maintenance. In addition, the research showed that participants' partners' perceptions of the motivation behind the participants' sacrifices impacted the potential benefits of those sacrifices. When partners perceived a sacrifice as stemming from approach motives, they experienced more positive emotions and relationship satisfaction than when they thought that their partner sacrificed for avoidance motives. In fact, the people who perceived their partner's sacrifices as stemming from avoidance motives experience negative emotions. This research highlights the vital importance of the intention behind and the perception of a sacrifice in its ability to provide individual and relationship benefits.

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Although accommodating a partner and attempting to benefit the relationship is a very important pro-relationship behavior, certain types of relationship sacrifices, like avoidant ones, can have significant negative consequences for the individual's wellbeing and the relationship. Longitudinal studies of married relationships have shown that bottling up one's true feelings, resulting in continual sacrifices as part of an attempt at avoiding conflict, is associated with low marital satisfaction (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989; Noller, Feeney, Bonnell, & Callan, 1994). Similarly, in their research on the association between mutuality of commitment—the degree to which partners are similarly committed to their relationship—and couple well-being, Drigotas, Rusbult, and Verett (1999) suggested that there are negative personal and relational consequences if one partner consistently carries the full burden of sacrifice in the relationship.

Focusing on a partner at the expense of focusing on one's self can result in decreased happiness and wellbeing, and there is a significant relationship between unmitigated communion, distress, and a negative view of self (Fritz & Helgeson, 1998). The construct of unmitigated communion describes a focus on others to the exclusion of the self in response to socialization pressure. Research on the construct has shown that individuals in relationships high in unmitigated communion have more psychological distress and depressive symptoms than do individuals low in unmitigated communion (Helgeson & Fritz, 1998). In their review of the construct, Helgeson and Fritz (1998) also suggest that unmitigated communion is a gender-related trait that, due to its relation to high levels of caretaking and communion, which are traditionally feminine traits, is higher among women than men and can help to explain why some women suffer from depression in their relationships.

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Research has highlighted the presence and importance of gender stereotypes and traditional gender roles within sexualized interactions and romantic relationships (Green & Sandos, 1983; Rose & Frieze, 1989, 1993), and this sex role socialization and traditional gender role conflict can have an effect on men and women and their willingness to sacrifice and their sacrificing behaviors. Rose and Frieze (1989) studied the first date scripts of both men and women in an attempt to understand how constructions of sexuality are institutionalized during romantic relational encounters, and they found persistent gender stereotypes in the scripts of both men and women. Both men and women expected men to be dominant and women to be submissive in romantic situations, and the performance of those appropriate gender role behaviors was associated with dating success (Rose & Frieze, 1989, 1993). Considering the presence of sex role socialization in romantic situations and relationships, feminist psychologists have looked at the ways in which socialized traditional gender role expectations of women are associated with women's decreased satisfaction and happiness with their relationships. Jack and Dill (1992) looked at self silencing and the subordination of personal desires among women in relationships and found that these behaviors—which are due to cognitive schemas regarding how women are supposed to maintain relationships—can heighten a woman's risk for depression and a loss of self and authenticity. In a similar vein, Impett and Peplau (2002) researched why some women consent to unwanted sex with a partner and found that women in college reported that they did so in order to fulfill perceived relationship obligations.

Although the research indicates that traditional gender role expectations can result in women over-sacrificing and subordinating their personal desires to the point where

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their relationship and they suffer, gender role expectations of men can also impact their sacrifice behaviors resulting in negative consequences for themselves and their relationships (Campbell & Snow, 1992; O'Neil, 2008). O'Neil (2008) summarized 25 years of research on men's gender role conflict (GRC) and concluded that patterns of GRC, such as restrictive emotionality, obsession with achievement and success, restrictive sexual and affectionate behavior, and socialized control, power, and competition issues, significantly relate to dysfunctional patterns in men's relationships. Campbell and Snow (1992) conducted a study of 239 married men and found a significant relationship between four aspects of male gender role conflict (issues of success, power, and competition, restrictive emotionality, restrictive affectionate behavior between men, and conflicts between work or school and family relations) and marital satisfaction. Specifically, they found that married men who have higher levels of restricted emotionality and higher amounts of conflict between work and family relationships, have lower levels of marital satisfaction than do men who have lower levels of restricted emotionality and lower amounts of conflict between work and family (Campbell & Snow, 1992). The research indicates that although women are expected to put others before themselves, stereotypical constructions of masculinity discourage men from participating in pro-relationship behavior at the expense of self-interest.

While social norms and expectations have put greater importance on individual achievement for men and social facilitation for women within and outside of relationships, there is also research suggesting that this gendered difference in relationship orientation has been too sharply dichotomized (Grotevant & Cooper, 1986; Guisinger & Blatt, 1994; Neff & Harter, 2002). In Neff and Harter's (2002) research on

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the authenticity of conflict resolution, they found that that most women (but not men) who resolved conflicts by consistently self-sacrificing in order to meet their partner's needs rather than their own, thought that this was inauthentic behavior that they adopted to avoid negative repercussions from their partners. This research would seem to suggest that women are not as authentically focused on maintaining interpersonal relationships at the expense of self-interest as traditional gender roles would suggest. In addition, Harter et al. (1997) did a study with over 3,000 adult participants and found that the majority of men and women reported having a mutual relationship style rather than a self-focused autonomy or other-focused connection. This research, which contradicts the singular significance of gender stereotypes and gender role expectations for sacrifice behaviors, and relational and personal well-being, is presented to indicate that although gender role conflict does indeed play a role, there are other factors involved in the willingness to sacrifice and its bearing on relationship satisfaction.

Another factor that has an impact on an individual's willingness to sacrifice is that individual's level of commitment to the relationship. Rusbult (1980) considers the concept of commitment within an investment model of relationships, which is a model based on interdependence theory. The investment model assumes that in general individuals are motivated to maximize rewards and minimize costs. Within this model, Rusbult (1980) defines commitment as "a function not only of the relationship outcome value, but also the quality of the best available alternative and the magnitude of the individual's investment in the relationship" (p. 172). Considering this definition, people who are satisfied with their relationship, have few attractive alternatives to their relationship, and who are emotionally and materially invested in their relationship, will

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have higher commitment to their relationship than will people who are unsatisfied, have many attractive alternative options, and are not invested in their relationship. Multiple studies have indicated that individuals who are highly committed to their relationships are more willing to sacrifice than are individuals who are not committed to their relationships (Van Lange, Agnew, et al., 1997; Van Lange, Rusbult, et al., 1997; Wieselquist et al., 1999).

People's attachment styles, a factor related to their level of relationship commitment (Rusbult, 1980), also impact sacrifice behaviors and the willingness to sacrifice. The work of John Bowlby spawned attachment theory, which explains the development of affectional bonds in infancy and identifies three major styles of attachment: secure, avoidant, and anxious (1969, 1973, 1980). Hazan and Shaver (1987) applied attachment theory to adult romantic relationships and considered romantic love as an attachment process. Their research showed that the three major attachment styles are prevalent among adults and that their relationships are consequently affected by these attachment styles. Subsequent research has supported the presence of attachment styles in relationships by suggesting that individuals displaying anxious or avoidant attachment styles experience increased negativity in their relationships and decreased relationship satisfaction, whereas a secure attachment style leads to increased trust, commitment, and satisfaction with the relationship (Campbell, Simpson, Boldry, & Kashy, 2005; Collins & Feeney, 2004; Li & Fung, 2014; Simpson, 1990). Just as individuals highly committed to their relationship can become dependent on the relationship, certain attachment styles can also have a bearing on individuals' relationship dependence. A study done by Ehrenberg, Robertson, and Pringle (2012) found that securely attached individuals reported

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significantly higher marital commitment scores than did insecure individuals. Thus, considering attachment style is important when considering the various influences on relationship satisfaction and sacrifice behaviors.

Times of distress or obstacles that threaten a relationship (e.g., times of transition like the one Tom and Sarah are facing regarding tough decisions about the future which require sacrifice) tend to highlight insecure attachment styles within members of a close relationship and have a significant negative impact on insecure relationships. Research has shown that anxious individuals report decreased confidence in themselves and their relationship during relationship-threatening situations (Simpson, Ickes, & Grich, 1999). Similarly, avoidantly-attached individuals behave negatively during stressful situations. (Campbell, Simpson, Kashy, & Rholes, 2001). As a result, it is interesting to consider how attachment style could affect relationship decisions and behavior, especially in a time of transition.

The Present Study

The aim of the present study was to investigate how the unique population of emerging adults in committed intimate partnerships and on the precipice of major transition conceptualized navigating that transition. I was interested in exploring the nature of identity development within these individuals and how they attempted to balance a commitment to their individual identities with a commitment to their relationships. No research has yet been done focusing on this specific population of college seniors who are faced with a unique set of decisions that have to be made regarding their future place of residence, career pursuits, and relationship future.

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Therefore, this study focused on them and how their sense of individual identity coexisted with their relationships.

Erikson's (1963) tri-dimensional theory of identity development identified the tension among the three dimensions (biological, psychological, and social), and insight into how this tension plays out with this unique population of emerging adults should be revealing. College seniors, who are prominently members of the emerging adult community in the process of exploring love, work, and worldview as defined by Arnett (2000), are old enough to have an idea of what they want and the determination to pursue it, but young enough so that unknowns regarding their future abound. These individuals remain particularly susceptible to the social and parental pressures in their lives.

Undoubtedly, they are forced to navigate their upcoming transition while receiving conflicting input from the psychological and social dimensions of their identity development, made all the more pressing by their relationship. From a relational standpoint, although individually these emerging adults assuredly enjoy and benefit from their relationship, the transitional requirements of postgraduate life can force them into making major decisions that have far reaching implications for the future success or failure of their relationship. These decisions can pit relational goals, personal goals, and social pressure against each other, and are made all the more difficult due to the uncertain permanence of college relationships in the 21st century.

In order to undertake this initial examination of the identity and communion concerns of emerging adults about to graduate, couples were interviewed as part of a qualitative study. Participants answered questions regarding their identity development, personal goals, relational goals, and the interplay among those dimensions when

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imagining their life after graduation. In the interest of obtaining candid answers, each member of the couple was interviewed separately. Although I hope that candid and authentic responses were obtained, there are multiple layers of self-presentation (e.g., how participants present themselves to the world versus how they present themselves to themselves), and as a result, responses may have fit an idealized “script” rather than reflect authentic truths. This concern is also known as the “press release” issue (Wiersma, 1988). The press release issue as described by Wiersma (1988) is the participants’ proclivity to answer questions in such a way that they, as protagonists in their own self-report narrative, appear to be fulfilling certain socially desirable positions that they are expected to occupy. As a result, their answers can be viewed as a press release of themselves, like a public broadcast of the surface level considerations of their narratives, in which they suppress potential conflict and deny their own authentic desires or perceptions in order to conform to role expectations. It is fair to say that when participants succumb to the press release issue (which is not conscious), that they provide inauthentic and potentially untrue responses. In this study, participants could have felt expectations to fulfill the positions of “girlfriend” or “boyfriend” or “loving partner” or “autonomous achiever” in socially acceptable and desirable ways through their responses. For this reason, the press release issue is well worth considering when examining the interview responses and overall results.

Due to the multi-dimensional tensions contained within identity development and relational commitment, and the exploratory nature of the study, no initial hypotheses were established.

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The structural and dimensional tensions inherent to the studied population (that were examined previously in this introduction) generated the questions that guided the exploration of this study:

- Are there discernable differences or patterns involved in the participants' privileging of one dimension (their relationships) or another (their career paths)? How might relationship satisfaction play into these differences?
- How would gender roles affect future decisions that forced either relationship or career-oriented sacrifices to be made?
- What would the significant voices of parents and society in participants' lives be saying about these decisions, and how would that external input factor into the participants' actual decision making?

It is the hope that an examination of these tensions, through the illuminated patterns, themes, and discoveries gleaned from a grounded analysis of the interviews, will be a valuable first step in the further research on this unique population.

Method

Research Design

This study employed a grounded analysis of qualitative interviews. Upon completion, the interviews were transcribed for the purpose of examining them, and the recordings were reviewed in an attempt to discover the themes and patterns that emerged from the participants' answers. These themes and patterns were written down and shared (along with the anonymous recordings) with a research colleague. The research colleague listened to the interviews and identified his own themes and patterns in the recordings. He then checked the themes and patterns I identified to see if they matched his own. We

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discussed any inconsistencies and reexamined the interviews to ensure that the identified themes and patterns were actually substantiated by the interviews. Through multiple discussions and reexaminations of the interviews, certain themes remained while others were removed if we could not find adequate substantiation for them. This process of repeatedly reading through the transcripts and analyzing them with the research colleague led to the emergence of salient repetitive themes

Ultimately, a conceptualization emerged from the text of the interviews, and individual participants and their responses were categorized along the lines of the aforementioned conceptualization. This categorization was also double-checked by the research colleague in a similar process to the one we used to identify salient themes in the interviews. In order to take every precaution against allowing my own biases to influence this conceptualization and categorization, I went through a self-questioning process. Part of this process can be read in the “Qualitative Concerns” section of this Method.

As I analyzed the interviews and certain themes emerged, they were resonant of themes in identity development theory, and a real synergy between theory, data, and analysis presented itself. I tried to capture this synergy through the course of this paper. Ultimately, it was through this grounded analysis process that the results were organized.

Participants

Participants were 11 committed, heterosexual, romantic couples recruited from Connecticut College and other colleges and universities in the Northeast. As a result, 11 men and 11 women participated for a total of 22 participants (see Table 1). Participants were primarily couples that I knew at these schools; the majority of the couples were at Connecticut College. Additionally, I investigated into the presence of couples at

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Connecticut College that I did not previously know, and to that end I was given suggestions of couples (from couples that participated and other people on campus) that would potentially be willing to participate in this study. This snowball sampling helped expand the potential participant pool. Through these means, couples were identified for potential participation. The only prerequisite for participating couples was that at least one member of the couple had to be a college senior at the time of the interview. The other partner could have been younger, have already graduated, or have also been a college senior.

The following table provides salient demographic information about each couple (all of the names presented in the table are pseudonyms):

Table 1

Descriptive Data about the 11 Couples

Couple (N=11)	Age	Year of Graduation	Length of Time Together	Attend Same Institution?	Post-Grad Plans Finalized?
Gwen	22	2015	15 months	No	Yes
Gabe	23	2014			Yes
Holly	21	2015	25 months	No	No
Hank	22	2016			No
Julia	22	2015	9 months	Yes	No
Jake	21	2015			No
Katie	21	2015	31 months	Yes	No
Kevin	21	2015			Yes

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Lila	20	2016	23 months	Yes	No
Luke	21	2015			Yes
Maya	20	2016	11 months	Yes	No
Mike	21	2015			No
Natalie	21	2015	36 months	Yes	No
Nate	21	2017			No
Paula	21	2015	34 months	Yes	No
Peter	21	2015			No
Rachel	21	2015	12 months	Yes	No
Rick	21	2015			No
Sasha	21	2015	53 months	No	No
Sam	21	2015			No
Tessa	22	2015	13 months	Yes	No
Tom	21	2015			No

Measures

The Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-R) Questionnaire (Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000) (see Appendix A)

The ECR-R is a 36-item self-report attachment measure developed by Fraley et al. (2000). The items were derived from an item response theory (IRT) analysis of most of the existing self-report measures of adult romantic attachment, mainly the Experience in Close Relationships (ECR) measure (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998). Like the ECR, the ECR-R yields scores on two subscales: anxiety and avoidance. An example of an item from the anxiety subscale is, “I often worry that my partner doesn't really love me.” An

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example of an item from the avoidance subscale is, “I get uncomfortable when a romantic partner wants to be very close.” Each of the 36 items is scored on a 7-point Likert scale where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree. Two of the 18 items that comprise the attachment-related anxiety scale are reversed keyed, and 12 of the 18 items that comprise the attachment-related avoidance scale are reverse keyed. The order of items was randomized. To obtain a score for each subscale, one averages the participant’s responses for the 18 attachment-related anxiety items and then averages the participant’s responses for the 18 attachment-related avoidance items. Cronbach’s alpha generally tends to exceed .90 for each subscale, and the most comprehensive examination of the ECR-R’s reliability found the alpha to be .93 for avoidance and .95 for anxiety (Sibley & Liu, 2004).

Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) (Hendrick, 1988) (see Appendix B)

The Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) is a short, 7-item scale that serves as a measure for general relationship satisfaction. Each item is scored on a 5-point scale where 1 = low satisfaction and 5 = high satisfaction. Individual item scores as well as the total scale score can prove useful in attempting to obtain a baseline level of relationships satisfaction (Hendrick, 1988). An example of an item on the scale is, “In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?” Items 4 and 7 are reversed scored. Further examination of the validity of the scale found that scores over 4.0 would likely indicate non-distressed partners, whereas scores closer to 3.5 for men and between 3.5 and 3.0 for women would indicate greater relationship distress (Hendrick, Dicke, & Hendrick, 1998). Hendrick (1988) found Cronbach’s alpha to be .86 and the examination conducted by Hendrick et al. (1998) found Cronbach’s alpha to be between .73 and .93.

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Demographics Questions

Each partner was asked to provide the following information:

- Age
- Gender
- Race/Ethnicity
- Sexual orientation
- Academic class year (or year of graduation)
- Months together with partner
- The previous length (in months) of longest relationship
- Parents' marriage status

Procedure

Regardless of the school the participants attended, the procedure to obtain participants was identical. I sent emails to all of the couples that were potentially willing to participate; the email stated the following:

“You are receiving this message because you are currently in a dating relationship in which at least one member of the couple is a college senior. You and your partner are invited to participate in a study looking at college relationships and wellbeing. This study will require you and your partner to separately fill out a series of short questionnaires and then individually answer some questions from me in an interview lasting roughly 30 minutes. If you decide to participate in this study, please write back with your agreement, and I will separately send each of you a link that includes the informed consent form and brief surveys. In addition to this link I would like to set up an interview time with each of you. I hope to hear from you soon.”

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If they wrote back indicating that they were not interested in participating, a reply was sent thanking them for their consideration and there was no continued communication. If they wrote back indicating an interest in participating, further communication established them as official participants, and participant procedure then began.

Once a couple agreed to participate in the study, a new email thread was created and they separately received the following message:

“Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study. In this email is a link that includes the informed consent form and brief surveys. Also in this email is a unique code number that I have assigned to you. You and your partner are receiving identical messages with the exception of this unique code number. Once you open the link, you must enter this code number on the indicated line in order to take the surveys. The surveys must be taken separately from your partner. Additionally, I would like to set up an interview time with you. Please send me your availability for the following weeks to participate in an interview either in person or over Skype. You do not need to do anything to prepare for this interview, but you must have finished filling out the surveys prior to the scheduled interview time. Thank you again for your participation.”

When the participants individually opened the Qualtrics link given to them, it brought them to the Informed Consent document (see Appendix C). After they provided their electronic signature by selecting “Yes” to both of the “I agree” statements (the one concerning their agreement to participate and the other concerning their agreement to an audio recording of the interview), they were shown a box in which they had to enter their unique number code. The line said, “Enter your unique code number. If you do not

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remember your code number, please refer to the email that was sent to you. If you cannot find that email, please email Noam at nwaksman@conncoll.edu so he can reassign you that code number.” A unique code number was assigned so that the researcher could then link the specific response to each of the subsequent interviews. Once they entered their unique code number, they were brought to a page containing the Experience in Close Relationships – Revised (ECR-R) scale (see Appendix A). After completing that scale, they were then given the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) (see Appendix B). Finally, they filled out the demographics questionnaire. Once they completed those three surveys, they were informed that they had completed the quantitative portion of the study.

After they finished the quantitative portion of the study, I separately coordinated a time to conduct the subsequent interview with each participant. Every attempt was made to schedule the interviews of two partners from the same couple as close together as possible. Scheduling dilemmas sometimes made this challenging, but the effort was made because participants were asked not to discuss the interview with their partner until after their partner had also been interviewed. Understanding that the interview dealt with sensitive relationship-related subject matter, and that participants might have wanted to (or felt the need to) discuss the questions with their partners, scheduling the two interviews of a couple close together was the best way to try and prevent this from occurring. In addition to this scheduling as a good practice for the internal validity of the study, it was also the most ethical way to interview the couples in that it reduced the amount of time when one member of a couple might have felt that he/she had to keep information from his/her partner.

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The interviews themselves took place either in a private interview room on the fourth floor of Bill Hall at Connecticut College, or via Skype, depending on whether or not the participant was on Connecticut College's campus for the fall semester of 2014 or the beginning of the spring semester of 2015. The interview was created to last roughly 30 minutes, and participants were told this, but in reality the interviews ranged between 20 minutes and 48 minutes, with a mean interview length of 34 minutes. Every attempt was made to get the interview time as close to 30 minutes as possible, without disrupting the flow or content of the interview, but of course each interview was unique and each participant had different things he/she chose to discuss in greater detail. The interview was recorded (this was noted in the informed consent document) and was a semi-structured interview. There was a protocol of questions, but as the interview proceeded, I sometimes deviated from the protocol based on the focus and direction of each specific interview. The protocol of questions can be found in Appendix D.

After the interview was completed, I informed the participant that the study had concluded and immediately provided them the debriefing information via email (see Appendix E). Before leaving the interview room or ending the Skype call, I made sure to ask the participants if they had any questions or concerns they wanted to address in the moment. None of the participants had concerns, but many asked questions about the study and its intention, which were answered. If the participant's partner had yet to be interviewed, I asked the participant not to disclose anything about the interview or any information that was shared about the study to his or her partner. If the participant's partner had already been interviewed, I informed the participant that he or she was allowed to discuss any aspect of the interview or the study with his or her partner.

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While this never occurred, if any concerns were raised about potential relationship violence by any of the participants during the interview, a protocol to deal with this issue was in place. First of all, I would have informed the participant who raised the concern that I would be reporting it to the necessary individual (which is clearly stated in the informed consent document). If the participant who raised the concern was a Connecticut College student, I would have contacted Darcie Folsom, the Director of Sexual Violence Prevention & Advocacy at Connecticut College, who could be reached at (860)-439-2219. If the participant who raised the concern was from an institution other than Connecticut College, I would have contacted the appropriate Title IX representative at that student's institution. This protocol was in place due to the seriousness of such a concern.

Ethical Issues

This was a study that asked questions about the continuity of relationships and how individuals felt they positioned these relationships within their lives. It was possible that filling out the relationship satisfaction surveys and answering sensitive questions about the future of a relationship could have raised some level of potential anxiety, distress, or conflict within the participant or the couple. To ethically address these potential concerns, participants were instructed to utilize the resources provided for them in the debriefing information. All interviewees were provided with information for contacting counseling services at their particular university. Additionally, the debriefing information provided them with a citation for Professor Jefferson Singer's work on positive couple therapy. Efforts to ensure confidentiality and anonymity were taken at all

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points of the study. Aside from the potentially distressing measures and interview, there were not any additional ethical concerns.

Qualitative Concerns

In the interest of full disclosure, I want to be clear that a large part of my interest in this topic is due to the fact that I am a senior in college currently in a committed, heterosexual relationship, and that I am in the process of trying to figure out how I am going to balance my relationship with my career aspirations in my post-graduate life. The questions that I asked the participants are questions that I am trying to answer for myself as I write this thesis. As a result, I am very close to this topic intellectually, but also personally. I also want to add, however, that going into this project I had a genuine interest in how people my age and in similar positions as me were dealing with these questions and concerns. I knew that I was going to hear things that did not personally resonate with me and my relationship, or assuage any fears I might be having about my own life, but that was never the purpose of this project. So although as an individual I, of course, have certain ideas of how I want my life to proceed, I was very conscious of not projecting my ideals onto the participants through the interview process. I felt strongly about creating a space that allowed the participants to say anything they wanted to, and part of that required making concerted efforts to ensure that my personal biases did not seep into the interviews. I made similar efforts in my analyses of the interviews.

I wanted to conduct qualitative interviews for this study in order to get a more nuanced and in-depth understanding of the participants and their relationships that are currently facing a time of transition. I could have just administered scales and done purely quantitative research, but I was interested in the multi-layered and intimate

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relational details that could not have come out of a purely quantitative study, and that required an interview to be done. There are, however, certain issues that can arise during the interview process, and these issues must be considered when looking at the results.

First of all, I had at least some prior interaction with all the couples that I interviewed, and I had close relationships with most of the couples that I interviewed (either with one partner or both partners) prior to conducting the study. Some of the participants I knew from high school and some of the participants I knew from interacting with them at some point during College. I approached couples that I knew for participation in this study intentionally for three reasons. Firstly, it was easier and more practical for me to attempt to obtain participation from people that I already knew and could easily approach, especially because I was unable to offer any material reward or compensation for participants in the study. The second reason is largely logistical in that because Connecticut College is a small school, and the senior class contains roughly 500 students, it was probable that out of the reasonably small number of seniors currently in a romantic relationship I would know at least one person in the relationship pretty well. Finally, I thought I could have a more productive and in-depth interview with someone I already had a working relationship rather than a complete stranger. Due to the intimate nature of the questions, interviewing a complete stranger could have resulted in a very strained interview in which the participant felt uncomfortable and the content of the interview itself was affected.

There are, however, potential issues with interviewing people that I knew well. Because I knew the participants, and would be seeing and interacting with them again outside the confines of the study (either around campus or over a school break), they

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might have been hesitant to share certain information with me. The couples could have decided not to share controversial or negative aspects about their relationship or themselves, or avoided relating negative perceptions they may have had of their own relationship, in an attempt to avoid any “awkwardness” or potential discomfort down the road when I saw them again in a different setting. Also, they could have actively attempted to maintain a positive image of themselves, their partner, and their relationship (either consciously or unconsciously) knowing that I would be seeing them again. Finally, even though strict and complete confidentiality for every participant was promised and maintained, participants could have been fearful of sharing something with me that they did not want others to know considering that, as a member of their social networks, a breach of confidentiality on my end could have resulted in serious social consequences for them. During the course of the interviews, participants sometimes double-checked the confidentiality of the interview by asking, “This is confidential right?” Clearly, the issue of confidentiality weighed on the participants’ minds. If I had interviewed strangers with whom I had no social connection, although they still could have been concerned about a breach of confidentiality, my sharing of their private information with someone else also outside of their social network, while severely inappropriate and problematic, would not have had the same advanced level of social consequences. Essentially, the participants’ knowledge of the fact that the interview and the study did not occur in vacuum, and that I would continue to see them in various social settings, could have impacted their willingness to share certain information.

The participants’ knowledge that I would also be interviewing their partner also might have weighed on what they considered telling me or not telling me. During the

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course of their interviews, participants frequently referenced their knowledge of the fact that I would be interviewing their partner by saying things like, “I’m not sure if [my partner] talked about this with you” or “I’m not sure if [my partner] told you this, but...” or “Maybe when you talk to [my partner] you will get a different answer.” Clearly, it was something they were well aware of during the interview process, and the fact that I would be having an intimate conversation with their partners as well—a conversation that the participant would ostensibly be mentioned in by the partner—might have caused participants to reconsider telling me certain things about their partner or their relationship as a whole.

The participants also could have been trying to protect me during the interview, either consciously or unconsciously, from potentially distressing information. They could have prevented sharing a secret or a piece of delicate information with me so as to relieve me of the burden of then having to keep that secret confidential from their partner in the subsequent interview or social interactions. In addition, the participants also knew things about my life when entering the interview, and thus every participant knew that I was currently in a committed romantic relationship myself. The nature of my current relationship status is a large factor in my interest in this topic, but the participants’ knowledge of it could have affected their responses to some of the questions. If the participants were feeling down or negative about their relationship, or felt that the future of their relationship—or any relationship at this juncture in life—was in jeopardy, they may have prevented sharing that information with me so as not to potentially hurt my feelings. In an attempt to avoid a situation where I might be forced to cast doubt or become fearful about the future of my personal relationship, participants could have

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chosen to share more positive details about their relationship futures while silencing the negative ones. Therefore, the fact that I as the researcher was a peer in the same relationship situation as the participants I interviewed could have caused the participants to feel empathetic and stop themselves from sharing certain negative information.

Another factor that potentially prevented participants from being honest and forthcoming in their responses is one that pervades nearly all psychological research: a social desirability bias. Participants have a tendency to provide responses for both qualitative and quantitative measures that will be viewed favorably by others. This bias can be especially present in lengthy self-report interviews, and considering all the potential concerns discussed thus far, participants would appear to have considerable incentive to provide socially desirable answers that depicted themselves, their partners, and their relationship in a good light.

Just as gender differences were considered when looking at the participants' responses, my gender as a man in an interview setting must be considered in that it could have affected how both the men and women participating talked to me. Although our similar situations and roles could also have encouraged the men participating to be more open and forthcoming—considering that there was an already established mutual experience and understanding of the relationship situation—a fear of judgment from a fellow man may have prevented him from sharing certain details about his relationship. The men talking to me might have attempted to relate to me as a fellow man in a relationship, and assumed that I had certain experiences and expectations of manhood within relationships. Therefore, they may have highlighted aspects of their relationship behavior that subscribed to socially accepted ideas of manhood. Revealing something

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they did or thought that could be considered “unmanly” may have been uncomfortable for them to say to another man, so they chose not to. My gender could also have impacted the way in which the women I interviewed responded to the questions. Similarly to the men I interviewed, the women could have assumed that I had certain experiences and expectations of how a woman in a relationship like theirs should behave, and therefore attempted to highlight aspects of their relationship behavior that prescribed to socially accepted expectations of womanhood within relationships. Also, as a man with no experience being a woman in a heterosexual relationship, the women I interviewed, unlike the men, may have had a hard time relating to me and felt an inability to relate certain experiences to me. Finally, although I tried to conduct every interview in a uniform and professional way, the dynamics involved certainly may have differed in my interviews with men versus my interviews with women.

The above qualitative concerns are pertinent to this interview-based qualitative research, and they are being addressed to contextualize the results of this project. The interviews conducted in no way occurred in a vacuum, and while every effort was made to facilitate standardized and unbiased interviews, the context in which they occurred is important to note.

Results

Initially, the scores for the two measures—the Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-R) Questionnaire (Fraley et al., 2000) and the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) (Hendrick, 1988)—were calculated. The results of the RAS were calculated by averaging the item scores for each participant—a scoring system endorsed by Hendrick, Dicke, and Hendrick (1998). The results indicated that across the

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sample, participants were generally fairly satisfied in their relationships ($M = 4.34$, $SD = 0.46$) (where scores could range from one to five).

The scores of the ECR-R were calculated similarly by averaging the scores for all items within each subscale for each participant, resulting in an anxiety score ($M = 2.78$, $SD = 0.94$) and an avoidance score ($M = 2.42$, $SD = 0.73$) for each participant (where scores could range from one to seven). Subsequently, the relevant attachment category (i.e., secure, dismissing, preoccupied, and fearful) was determined for all participants on the basis of their scores on the two ECR-R dimensions. To make these classifications of attachment category, a strategy was borrowed from a doctoral thesis (Elliot, 2011) in which the researcher devised a classification protocol based on recommendations from the ECR-R's developer, Dr. Fraley. According to this classification, individuals who scored 1 SD above the mean on the anxiety subscale and less than 1 SD above the mean on the avoidance subscale were identified as high in attachment-related anxiety (preoccupied); individuals who scored 1 SD above the mean on the avoidance subscale and less than 1 SD above the mean on the anxiety subscale were identified as high in attachment-related avoidance (dismissing); individuals who scored 1 SD above the means of both subscales were identified as high in attachment-related anxiety and avoidance (fearful); individuals who scored less than 1 SD above the means of both subscales were identified as high in attachment security (secure).

The results of the ECR-R can be found in the table below:

Table 2

Scores on the Anxious and Avoidance Subscales of the ECR-R and the Relevant Attachment Categories of All Participants

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Couple (N=11)	Anxiety Score	Avoidance Score	Attachment Category
Gwen	3.61	1.50	Secure
Gabe	2.39	3.28	Dismissing
Holly	2.89	1.72	Secure
Hank	3.11	3.06	Secure
Julia	2.56	2.50	Secure
Jake	4.11	2.84	Preoccupied
Katie	3.72	2.50	Preoccupied
Kevin	4.72	3.17	Fearful
Lila	2.50	1.94	Secure
Luke	2.94	1.78	Secure
Maya	3.67	2.83	Secure
Mike	2.94	3.72	Dismissing
Natalie	1.11	1.72	Secure
Nate	2.44	2.17	Secure
Paula	1.94	1.67	Secure
Peter	2.50	2.61	Secure
Rachel	1.78	3.28	Dismissing
Rick	2.33	2.22	Secure
Sasha	1.50	1.39	Secure
Sam	3.17	2.83	Secure
Tessa	1.28	1.44	Secure

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Tom	3.89	3.56	Fearful
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On a scale where anxiety and avoidance ranged from 1-7

In order to contextualize these results, normative data derived from an online version of the ECR-R that is run by Fraley and that has been taken by over 22,000 participants (average age = 24) are presented: anxiety subscale ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 1.33$), avoidance subscale ($M = 2.93$, $SD = 1.18$) (Elliot, 2011). These results suggest that, in general, the participants in this study were less anxious and less avoidant in their relationships than the average person who takes the ECR-R.

The Couples

It should not necessarily come as a surprise that the participants reported high satisfaction and low attachment anxiety and avoidance in their relationships when considering that these were people who were considerably invested in their relationships. As a researcher, I was allowed only a glimpse at the participants' relationships and relational pasts, but this glimpse revealed truly loving and dedicated partnerships. Their answers to questions regarding their current relationship experiences and the role of their relationships as a fundamental entity in their lives elicited such answers as:

Being in a relationship, especially this one, makes me feel like it's a healthy lifestyle...it keeps me on my toes but it also takes away stress...it's very comforting, I'm not sure how else to describe it, everything just feels grounded. (Rick)

Even though there are times I wish I knew what would have been if we met later, having a partner, as you keep saying, it's such an accurate word because it's someone who's there to support you no matter what, is very positive. Having a best friend who you can trust completely. (Paula)

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I make the choice to spend time with her because it does make me happy, so, even if it means, I'm not going to spend time with my friends for this part of the evening, I'm spending time with her because it makes me happy. It's like a trade off, and I think it's good... We spend time with each other because it makes us happy, and it contributes to our wellbeing being in the relationship, having each other. (Luke)

You know, if I have the choice between staying at lunch with her for an extra half an hour, or proofreading a paper that I'm about to turn in, and I choose every single time for three years not to do the proofreading, that adds up...but I wouldn't trade it for the extra point or two on my GPA. (Kevin)

These are people who not only understand the potentially personal, social, and academic consequences associated with being in a relationship during college but have experienced these tensions firsthand, and yet have decided to remain invested in their relationships over months and years. They have consciously sacrificed certain aspects of their social lives, made major decisions regarding where and how to spend their summers solely because it allowed them to spend more time with their partners, and have failed to complete an assignment every once in a while, all in service of their relationships. They have invested, however, because it has paid dividends, because their partnerships are valuable to them, and because, as it can be seen from the quotations above, it has made them happy.

Certainly no relationship is perfect, and nearly every participant related one or more obstacle—usually more—that their relationship has had to overcome, but they have overcome them together, and through it all, these people have remained invested in each other.

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A Time of Transition

Part of the reason this project was undertaken was to explicitly examine the impending volatile period of time that occurs right after undergraduate graduation for college seniors. As previously stated, Arnett (2000) considered this time of emerging adulthood as the most volatile years of life for most people. As a researcher, I was curious how this unique population planned on navigating such a transitional time with all of its inherent tensions and necessities: finding a place to live, finding a source of income, and maintaining personal and relational wellbeing. Although I was the one asking the questions during the interviews, it quickly became apparent during the course of the study that the participants were already in the process of asking themselves these same questions (albeit less formally). During the course of the interviews, the participants made it clear that they were acutely aware of the magnitude of this upcoming window of time occurring post-graduation, as well as the radical transition it would bring:

Since we are seniors, everything is going to be changing... This is such a transitional time that it's hard to balance things and weigh importance. (Rachel)

I think whether my relationship will continue for the next two years really, really depends on what I choose to do within the next few months. (Katie)

I mean this [upcoming time post-graduation] is huge, it's huge for our relationship, it's a game changer... It's going to be hard, the shit is going to hit the fan at one point, and it's going to be hard going either way. (Peter)

I think it's [post-graduation] going to be very difficult, I think we're going to have to navigate a lot, and ask ourselves really difficult questions. (Lila)

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This is a time in my life [post-graduation] where I really have no idea what's going to come up. This is the first time in my life where I don't know what's next...honestly I have no fucking clue what is going to happen. I don't know what curve balls are going to be thrown. (Jake)

Although it may seem self-evident that emerging adults graduating from college need to start “figuring things out,” the recognition from the participants that they were about to enter into a period of time in which the decisions they made would have major implications for the rest of their lives—across relational and career-oriented dimensions—validated the exploration of this transitional time.

Conceptualization

Ultimately, a conceptualization emerged from the repeated analysis of the interviews, providing categories that could locate the interviewees with regard to the navigation of their post-graduation futures. This conceptualization was developed from previously identified salient themes and patterns present in the interviews. My research colleague double-checked the identified themes to ensure that I was not seeing something that was not there (due to my own biases), and to ensure that I was not missing any important patterns. He also examined the conceptualization and the subsequent categorization of the interviewees according to the parameters of the conceptualization and provided salient feedback and commentary. This was the process through which the results took shape. The following paragraph presents the conceptualization:

When considering their post-graduate futures and how to successfully navigate that future with all of the challenges it entails (e.g., geographical, social, monetary, relational, and emotional), participants were divided on where they anchored their source

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of stability as they attempted to tackle the obstacles and unknowns of the future. Some participants viewed their relationship and its future as the most stable entity in their lives and considered their career path and personal development as an unknown that would be figured out along with their partners. Some participants viewed their career paths, the necessity of getting a job, and personal exploration as the most stable realities of their future and considered their relational future to be an unknown that would ideally align with their personal endeavors. The former participants can be said to have put their anchors in their relationships, and the latter participants put their anchors in their individual career paths. This difference in the placement of anchors was the central dimension along which participants were categorized. Considering Erikson's (1968) identity stage theory, this division of anchor placement among participants could also be seen as a split between a focus on either stage five, Identity versus Role Confusion, or stage six, Intimacy versus Isolation. Although Erikson asserted that a focus on stage six necessitates a previously mastered stage five, the conceptualization of this study suggested that for young adults currently in relationships the drive for personal identity and the drive for intimacy occur simultaneously. The decision to anchor one's self in one or the other endeavor, although impacted by many factors, was not necessarily dependent on Erikson's predetermined order. In fact, the conceptualization aligns itself, in part, with Jordan et al. (1991) and their self-in-relation theory of development. Although Jordan et al. intended to illuminate the identity development of women, their theory emphasized cultivating intimate connections as a part of identity achievement and challenged Erikson's notion that a focus on independence and personal achievement must occur before a focus on relationships in order for successful identity development to take place.

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It should be noted that there was a small group of participants who did not neatly place their anchor in one side of the conceptualization or the other, but rather in some middle ground. These people simultaneously endorsed and disparaged both the concept of prioritizing their relationship over their personal endeavors, and the concept of prioritizing career and personal exploration over their relationships. These participants were truly caught in the middle of what Erikson (1963) called triple bookkeeping, and they were unable to place unique significance on the biological, psychological, or social dimensions of themselves as individuals. Their inability to place a definitive anchor on one side of the conceptualization or the other is worthy of exploration within the context of identity development.

It is important to consider that the placement of anchors by participants was influenced by both internal and external sources. Their gender, their sense of a stable identity, their knowledge of how their relationship had fared through previous tests and trials, and the reinforcement (or lack thereof) received from significant external forces in their lives (e.g., parents, family, friends, and society) all played a role in where the participants placed their anchors. The pressure from significant people in the participants' lives, specifically parents, proved to be influential in the participants' anchor placement and their subsequent level of satisfaction with that placement. The unique influence of parents makes sense, however, when considering Marcia's (1966) research that suggested that emerging adults who have yet to master stage five of Erikson's identity stage theory, and therefore have incomplete identity achievement, are more likely to endorse authoritarian values and less likely to feel confident in their choices than are individuals who have successful identity achievement. None of the participants in this study have

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successful identity achievement, because, as Arnett (2000) asserts, they are still very much emerging adults in the process of serious and focused identity exploration, and they have yet to actually explore multiple potential future paths for themselves. Therefore, it is not surprising that authoritarian and social input was a large factor in the participants' anchoring decisions.

The results were organized in the following manner: the participants and their individual anchor placements were established, followed by relevant and representative quotations from both participants who anchored themselves in their relationship, and participants who anchored themselves in their career and personal paths. Then, for both anchor placements, factors affecting that anchoring decision were identified and relevant quotations were given as evidence for the presence of those factors. Finally, quotations that highlighted inherent contradictions in participants' answers were presented.

The following table presents the participants of each couple and their anchor placement:

Table 3

Conceptualization Table Identifying Each Participant's Anchor

Couple (N=11)	Anchor in Relationship	Anchor in Career/Personal Exploration	No Definitive Anchor
Gwen	X		
Gabe			X
Holly		X	
Hank		X	

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Julia		X	
Jake		X	
Katie	X		
Kevin	X		
Lila		X	
Luke		X	
Maya		X	
Mike		X	
Natalie	X		
Nate	X		
Paula		X	
Peter		X	
Rachel		X	
Rick		X	
Sasha		X	
Sam		X	
Tessa			X
Tom	X		

Anchor In Relationship

Gwen:

Yeah, it [my relationship] completely factors in [to my future decisions about what job to take and where to live], which I think is kind of unfortunate, but it's the way

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that cookie crumbles. I accepted a job [on the East coast in the same city which my partner lives in], which is awesome, and it's a job that I'm sure I'll love, and that's great, but this particular job I could have applied anywhere in the world and it wouldn't have been any different, and the reason I'm in [this East coast city] is because of [my partner].

...

I think that my mindset in general is, like, your early twenties you should be, like, exploring and it should be for you, and you should travel if you want to travel, go to grad school if you want to go to grad school, it just happens that [my partner] and I met early and that this is happening, and I've always been a very reliant person, and I tend to make decisions off of other people, and I think that's just who I am. I think it's okay to do what I'm doing, definitely, I think a lot of people do that, a lot of people get married right out of college, or they base life decisions off of someone else, but I definitely wouldn't say that what I'm doing is the right way to do it. I think that it would be great to have a couple years to just have by myself, but that's not the way that it happened...I think it feels like this is what I should be doing, I'm not making any huge sacrifices, and I'm just making small sacrifices—not small—but I'm making small sacrifices on big decisions that just happen to let me be with the person that I'm, you know, dating. And I don't think that that's wrong, at all.

Although Gwen stated that when she thinks about the period of emerging adulthood abstractly she imagines it as a time of individual exploration, she firmly anchored herself in her relationship when she talked about basing her future decisions on her partner. Also, as one of the few participants who already had her initial plans for post-graduation finalized, her anchor was further solidified by the fact that she already made

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the decision regarding where to live—choosing to move to a city across the country from her hometown—because her partner was there.

Katie:

So he [my partner] is moving to [the South] for [his job], and, um, he said yes to them, so he's doing that...So, like, the choice is right now between breaking up and me moving to [the South] ... He really wanted [his job] and I really wanted him to get [his job] because it's like the best thing ever for him, for his future... So they pick you based on how willing you are to go anywhere, so he researched everywhere and was looking at all these places and I was just kind of like, "Yea, I'll go anywhere," because I didn't really think that we would get put in [the South]. Honestly, this year, I think it's like a 7% acceptance rate [for his job] so, like, so unlikely that he would get it, and I was kind of like, "I don't think you'll get it, but please get it, and then, like, please also get it somewhere that I would want to go, and that wouldn't be weird for me to go independent of you." And now, it's like—this is so weird, but, I mean, I was kind of like, "Yea, apply wherever, because I'll go with you," and then once it happened—this was like 5 days ago or something—I totally freaked out, because then I was like, "Am I going to move to [the South] or are we going to break up?"

...

I think there could be something for me in [the South] and I'm thinking about applying to [the same job as my partner] in [the same place], just to see if that could ever happen, because it would be pretty cool if I could, like, get [that job] and it would be pretty cool if I could be in [the same state as my partner] conveniently. So I am definitely—I would say planning on going there, as of now.

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Unlike Gwen who had already made her decision regarding whether or not to move a considerable distance in order to be with her partner, Katie was in the midst of that decision making process at the time of her interview. It should also be noted that Gwen had a job opportunity—one that she was excited about—lined up in the city she chose to move to on account of her partner, whereas Katie had no job prospects lined up and had never even conceptually considered moving to the part of the country where her partner had received his job offer. Nevertheless, despite having numerous concerns and unanswered questions, Katie anchored herself in her relationship when she admitted that she was planning on making the decision to move with her partner to where he got his job. Understandably, she felt the need to find a job in the state where her partner was moving, but she was willing to be flexible regarding what that job would entail because she felt that being with her partner was more important than pursuing specific career opportunities.

Kevin:

The decision to accept [my job], we definitely had to talk a lot about that, but at the end of the day, most of the discussions we had with each other, and our families were pretty much, for better or worse, like, “Neither of us is going to get a better opportunity, so we should do what we can to foster accepting it, as best as possible.” I think we’re both in agreement that if she were to get an opportunity that was debatably as good...let’s say she got [the same job as me] in a more preferable location, or got into some super selective PhD program, then we would sit back and go back to the drawing board, and I would have to try and get out of my contract, or something like that.

...

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We've never really seriously considered that [going to different places post graduation]. Like, that has come up, just because you can't have a conversation without consider the possibility of splitting up, but no, I don't we have ever really considered that... We would try it [long distance] but we are both under the impression that, that wouldn't work out... If she put her foot down, and she was like, "I'm going to Kansas, and you can't stop me—" I don't know why Kansas, but if she was going to Kansas, and I couldn't stop her, then I wouldn't go [to my job]. It wouldn't be—I might whine and cry about it and argue with her to no end, but at the end of the day I would just follow her there... If she was absolutely 100% certain [that she was not willing to move to the South with me for the job] and I didn't think there was any bartering with her, I may have formally accepted [the job], but with plans to decline later.

Initially it may seem that Kevin placed his anchor in his career plans considering that he accepted a job far away from his and his partner's homes, but he made it clear that even though he felt this opportunity was his dream job, he valued his relationship over anything else. As his partner made it clear, he communicated with his partner about the geographical implications of the job and made sure that she would be willing to go with him before he even applied. Then, once he got the job offer, he communicated with his partner to ensure that she was willing to go with him before accepting the position. Finally, although the plan at the time of his interview was for his partner to move with him, as he related in the quotation above, if his partner decided that she was no longer willing to move, or if she received an amazing opportunity of her own, he would sacrifice the job to stay with her. For Kevin, before considering his job or career plans, the one thing that he felt was a certainty about his future was his being with his partner. As he

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stated, when he imagined his life post-graduation, his relationship was the fundamental part of that future upon which other decisions would be based.

Considering that Kevin presented with a fearful attachment style, it is interesting that he would be so explicitly invested in this relationship. It is possible that because he is invested in this relationship, he is anxious about losing it, and he would sacrifice quite a bit in order to avoid going back on the relationship market.

Tom

I feel like I would try to find a way to weasel myself into whatever [career endeavor] she was doing [laughs] ... We try to measure for ourselves what it is that's important, and if something isn't as important to me, and, you know, [my partner] thinks that it's important for her, then screw it, you know? [laughs] I'd rather be with [my partner] than some stupid little thing, or stupid big thing. Honestly I would rather be with [my partner] than go to graduate school [laughs] ... The opportunity of going to grad school is just, like, useless if I'm not with the person that I love.

Tom was completely comfortable with allowing his partner's ambitions and his relationship to determine his future decisions in terms of what he would be doing and where he would be doing it. He was one of the few participants who explicitly said as much, even among the participants who anchored themselves in their relationships. Tom was comfortable with the placement of his anchor in his relationship, and he would consider his relationship first in his future decisions.

Like Kevin, Tom also presented with a fearful attachment style and was also strongly anchored and invested in his relationship. It is interesting to note that the only

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two participants who presented with a fearful attachment style were the two men with the strongest anchors in their relationships.

Nate

I would severely regret that [making a professional decision that caused my relationship to suffer] ...I would say rejecting a position to stay together would be a better option.

Although Nate expressed concern about the job market and the need to find a steady income post-graduation, he stated that he would not make a career-oriented decision that had negative consequences for his relationship even if he had to pass up a potentially rewarding professional opportunity. Because he valued his relationship and anchored himself in it, he was willing to make a decision that potentially caused his career to suffer, at least momentarily, in order to avoid a situation in which his relationship suffered—something that he would deeply regret.

Unlike Kevin and Tom, Nate presented with a secure attachment style, yet he was still anchored in his relationship. When considering this stark difference in attachment style between Nate and the other two men, it might be useful to note the unique circumstances of Nate's relationship and responsibilities as an emerging adult. Nate was a unique participant partially because he was the only participant living with his partner at the time of the study, and he had been living with her for some time. Also, although he was a college student, he was living off campus and was solely responsible for paying his own bills and maintaining his own financial wellbeing. Finally, he was in a special program at his school with a very specific career-oriented track, so he was confident about what he would be doing as a career and how he would achieve that. The bottom

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line is that Nate was grounded in many dimensions of his life, which was not true of Kevin and Tom, and that may have had something to do with their attachment style differences.

Factors Affecting This Anchor Placement

Parental/Familial Influence

Katie

My family has never really had a good relationship with my boyfriend...They're all very much like, "So, like, you don't actually think it's going to work out, right?" And I'm like, "I know what you're trying to do, I'm not stupid." So that's been...the majority of the doubts that I've ever had in this relationship have been from my family, and, like, what they think about him, and how they want me to deal with it. And it's like—that actually causes problems in my relationship, and it's like, I don't know how to deal with it because they—they like kind of manipulate me into wanting to break up with him...I'll go home for the weekend, and I'll see my family, and they'll be just like, "Oh yeah, so like these are all the things you can do with singlehood..."

As was the case for many of the participants who placed their anchor in their relationship, Katie's family—specifically her mom—was not very supportive of her anchor placement. Although Katie's family did not have a particularly good relationship with her boyfriend—a factor that certainly played a role in Katie's family's lack of support for the relationship—Katie also suggested that her family was against her anchor placement because they wanted her to take advantage of "singlehood" and focus on exploring herself during this period of emerging adulthood. Therefore, Katie's family made it clear that they were not only against her specific relationship, but also the idea of

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her being in a relationship in general. Katie admitted that the pressure from her family to question her relationship and to focus on herself and her own pursuits has caused serious issues in her relationship.

The familial pressure Katie received sheds some light on her preoccupied attachment style. A large component of her worries regarding her relationship directly stem from negative familial pressure.

Gwen:

I don't think they [my parents] are aware of how much my relationship played into that decision [to get a job on the East coast in the same city as my boyfriend] ...in terms of the role of the relationship in decision making, those big things in general, I think that they don't want me to do anything in which I rely on my relationship, or make any decisions that aren't just for myself, that are based on someone else.

Although Gwen's parents liked her partner and her relationship very much, they still made it clear to Gwen that they expected her to make decisions regarding the future that would benefit her as an individual—to put her own needs before the relationship. Luckily for Gwen, her partner lived in a bustling city in which Gwen was able to find an exciting job opportunity, and so she was able to keep hidden from her parents how much her relationship factored into those decisions. Gwen's situation worked out in such a way that she was able to satisfy both her family's desires and her own, but Gwen still expressed feeling pressure from her parents that was in opposition to the choices she wanted to make regarding her partner.

Although Katie and Gwen faced similar scenarios (wanting to make a large relationship-oriented decision of which their families would not approve), Gwen was able

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to navigate her decision-making and ultimate transition without as much apparent tension as was true for Katie. It is possible Gwen's secure attachment served her well during that process, but it is also possible that the external pressure in her life that disparaged her relationship was not as severe as the pressure Katie felt. Also, it is interesting to note that although Gwen had a secure attachment style, her score on the anxiety subscale was still fairly high and almost at the cutoff point for a preoccupied attachment style.

Natalie

My grandparents sort of expect me to have a significant other...I think they [my parents] also sort of expect me to have somebody in my life...

Natalie was the only participant who expressed feeling pressure from her family to be in a committed relationship during this period of emerging adulthood. Although she stated that her parents would generally support her decisions as long as she was happy, she was aware of her family's expectation that she have a committed partner. Therefore, Natalie was in the unique position of being able to satisfy both her own desires and her family's expectations by firmly anchoring herself in her relationship. This unique position may have contributed to her secure attachment style.

Interestingly, all of the men who anchored themselves in their relationship stated that there was very minimal, if any, communication between them and their families regarding their relationships and their relationships' roles in their future decisions. As a result, they felt free to make the relational decisions they wanted to make and did not feel pressure from their families in opposition to their anchor placement.

Social Pressure

Gwen

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I think there is, like, such an enormous amount of pressure [on emerging adults to figure out the rest of their lives at a young age], no matter how many people tell you, like, “Oh, you don’t have to have anything figured out.” I think, like, academically, there’s more pressure from society that I need to have a job, that I need to know where I’m going to go, what I want to do, what [grad] school I want to go to, what I want to study after [college], things like that. Relationships, I don’t think that there is—I think there is a pressure to not be in a relationship, to be a free bird and, like, do what you want, and concentrate on yourself. I think there’s that pressure, to succeed in the professional world, but, like, be independent.

Similar to the pressure she felt from her family, Gwen reported feeling immense societal pressure that ran in opposition to her anchor placement. Not only did she feel societal pressure to *not* be in a relationship, but she also felt pressure to actively pursue her career path over any other pursuit. She felt strongly that society valued independence over relationships.

Katie

I think people want me to pursue other things [other than the relationship] because I’m young, and because I have been in a serious relationship for a long time, and it’s like, “Get out of that.”

...

I’m terrified of being like, “Yea, I’m moving to [the South] for my boyfriend,” because like who the fuck moves to [the South] for their boyfriend?

...

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I just feel really weird, and different, and, like, not normal with the commitment [to the relationship].

...

I feel the pressure to have a great relationship, definitely, because I'm afraid that everyone is just judging me based on my relationship all the time, which I feel like they are.

Although Katie said that she could not imagine a commitment to her partner that was anything less than the intense commitment she displayed, she also said that due to social expectations and pressures in college, she felt strange for being in such a serious relationship in college. She did not feel comfortable relating to others what lengths she was willing to go to in order to maintain her relationship, but she simultaneously felt the need to maintain her relationship in order to justify her decisions to society. Because she felt societal pressure to pursue individual achievements outside of her relationship, but had ignored that pressure by committing herself to her relationship, she felt an internal pressure to continue her relationship in order to demonstrate to society that she was correct to ignore their pressure. Similar to Gwen, it was clear to Katie that society expected her to be personally successful and actively disapproved of serious relational commitment. Therefore, she did not feel comfortable opening up to her family or friends about her relational issues.

Nate

You hear a lot of couple stories, you know, when they're married and in the future and they say, "Oh, we met in college and we lived together in college," but you don't really see it. Like, I can't think of any of my friends that live with their girlfriend, I

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can't think of that, so while I hear all these things [about committed college relationships] there are no examples around me.

Unlike Gwen and Katie, Nate did not feel as if there were a significant amount of social pressure in opposition to emerging adult relationships, and he even suggested hearing frequent success stories about college couples. At the same time, he admitted to not actually witnessing any committed college relationships similar to his own. So while he did not feel judged for his relationship, he did feel as if it put him in the minority among his similarly-aged peers. His statement on social pressure, although not as extreme as Gwen and Katie's, continued the trend of participants feeling that being in a committed relationship at their age was "not normal" and made them outsiders to a certain extent. Every participant, including Natalie, stated feeling social pressure to achieve professional goals and obtain a worthwhile career.

Emerging Career Commitment

Katie

I see, in a weird way—because I have, like, no idea what I want to do with my life—so right now I'm kind of like, "I just want to get a job that has anything to with anything that I'm interested in, that isn't working at McDonalds, and I'll be fine until I figure out what I want to do." Because I need to take time to figure that out, because I have a list of, like, things I want to do and there's, like, ten careers, and I'm just like, "Well..."

Nate

The fact that I'm leasing an apartment, I pay all my own bills, I don't have any help from my parents, there's a lot of pressure in making sure I stay afloat. I think the

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relationship definitely helps with the stress though because, for me at least, I'll have all this shit to do and it's stressful, but at the end of the day you have someone really close to you that you can talk to and help each other out.

The above quotations from Katie and Nate highlighted the opposite ways in which commitment to a vocational future can encourage participants to place their anchors in their relationships. Katie was very unsure about what she wanted to do with her life. Certain fields interested her, but she did not feel any particular passions and she expressed needing more time for exploration in order to figure that out. Nate, on the other hand, knew exactly what he wanted to do with his life, was in a specific career-track program at his school in order to pursue his desired career, and was already dealing with many of the potential challenges facing adults such as financial independence and living with a partner. Nate was a unique participant in that he seemed to have a secure identity achievement even while smack in the middle of his emerging adulthood years. Despite having a very different sense of identity achievement, however, both Katie and Nate partially explained their anchoring decision by their sense of identity achievement. Katie felt as if her future plans were very unclear while her relationship was a known source of stability, and so it made sense to her to anchor herself in her source of stability—her relationship. Nate was confident about his future plans but found turning them into present realities was stressful, and so he anchored himself in his relationship due to its ability to alleviate stress and provide to his overall wellbeing. Interestingly, two opposite senses of emerging career commitment both contributed to participants anchoring themselves in their relationship.

Anchor in Career/Personal Exploration

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Julia

I definitely think that because of the situation where we are, because we both live in the same town, I don't necessarily think that it's something that when we're graduation that we need to break up. But I also don't necessarily think that because we both live in [the same city] that we need to stay together. I think it's kind of something that we're going to have to see where it goes. And yeah, I mean at this point, this stage, I don't have a reason why we wouldn't be together still, but I know that there's going to be a whole host of other things that will come into play... At this point in life I think you have to follow the career path. I think relationships can mean a lot and they can be a big part of your life, but I think at 22 you're not—it's too early to make huge life decisions because of it.

Julia's relationship was unique in that she and her partner were from the same city and both knew, independent of each other, they wanted to live in that city post-graduation for reasons of family, money, and career opportunities. Due to her relationship's unique circumstances, Julia and her partner were not forced into definitively making the same difficult decisions regarding the future that many other participants were forced to make. That being said, Julia and her partner were acutely aware of the fact that they would be in the same geographic location. Julia stated, however, that although she knew that her proximity to her partner would make her relational future easier and more probable—which she was happy about—she was aware that the next few years of emerging adulthood could bring about radical transitions and that she needed to put her personal and career interests before her relationship when navigating those transitions. She also suggested that more than just geographic proximity was necessary for the continuation of

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the relationship, and that orienting herself in the adult world and the unknowns of how her relationship would hold up in new circumstances were also important factors. In this way, Julia anchored herself in her career path and personal exploration even though her post-graduation proximity to her partner was guaranteed.

Jake

I've thought a lot about it [the future]. I mean ideally I'll have a job in [the city where I'm from], she will too, but you know, I think your early twenties are a part of your life for exploration, so if an opportunity that I couldn't turn down presented itself in another country, I would take it. I really don't know what is going to happen after graduation, so I can't really judge right now, but I will hope for [a job] that she might be close to, but I'm putting myself first, really, with that search.

Jake, ostensibly in the same relational situation as Julia, emphasized that he felt personal exploration was the most important endeavor one could undertake during the years of emerging adulthood. Although ideally he hoped that his relationship would continue into the future, he emphasized the importance of individual exploration, and like his partner, he anchored himself in that exploration and his career path.

Luke

I always knew that, like—I think for a while I knew that I was going to be going to [the West coast] after graduation. Like, whenever—not necessarily, like, this year but I kind of started to think about, “I'm going to be going there, and that means going away from family, from [my partner], and—” that doesn't mean I want to sever those ties, like I still want those relationships to remain, um, but, I don't know. I just always feel like I had to do it for me, and whatever comes of a relationship—hopefully it stays strong—but,

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like, I'm at the point in my life where it's like, I'm not making decisions because of my—you know it's like if you're married and you have a job offer, it's like, "Do, do we go together? Do we stay?"—but like, at this point, I have to do me.

Luke and Lila are another couple that anchored themselves in their relationship but with very different circumstances from Julia and Jake. As compared to Julia and Jake, Luke had already finalized his post-graduation plans, and those plans involved him moving across the country from both his home and his partner's home after graduation in order to pursue his ideal job and career path. Unlike Kevin, who was also moving far away from home to pursue his dream job, Luke made his decision to accept the position knowing that his partner would not be able to join him for at least one year (due to the fact that she was in the class year below him), and that even after she graduated she would most likely want to stay closer to home for personal and professional reasons. Although Luke, like Jake, admitted that he did not want his relationship to end and that ideally long distance would work or his partner would join him, Luke was also firm in his conviction that he felt he had to put job opportunities and his career path before his relationship. Luke also pointed out that his relationship, consisting of two emerging adults, was different than a marriage, and as such, he felt the relationship should be taken less into account when making future decisions.

Lila

I'm a little bit more ambiguous in what I want to do and where I'm going to end up, and I think I'm going to be a bit scattered after I graduate, and I think like, I may explore, like, if there's an option of what I can do near him, but, at the end of the day...there will be many, many factors, and he will be one, but I think I'll probably end

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up taking whatever is—whatever job is more appealing to me, as opposed to being somewhere for him.

Lila was in the opposite position from Luke in the sense that she was going to be at college for another year and she was still unclear about what she wanted to do post-graduation. That being said, although she admitted to considering job options that would take her away from home and closer to her partner, she anchored herself in her career path by stating that when the time came, she would pursue the best job option for herself rather than choose an option on account of her partner. Even though she anchored herself in her future career path, just like her partner, her anchor was not as strongly placed as her partner's. This tension was explored in the discussion.

Sasha

We both need to live our lives in terms of making the career decision we want and if it comes together that's awesome, but we can't get stuck somewhere we don't want to be because of that [the relationship].

Mike

I think, it [my relationship] will factor in maybe a little bit [to post-graduate decisions], but I think at the end of the day the main thing is going to be the opportunities that are afforded to me, um, in terms of job availability...even if it might threaten the relationship, um, I think I, I, I might prioritize, getting, getting a decent job

...

I'm wary of defining key parts of myself along the lines of a relationship, you know? I'd be wary of taking a job closer to [my college] if it wasn't perhaps the best job just because I was in a relationship, um, I'd be wary of doing that because I think it

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would threaten, um, my development as a human being, and also just the thought that, you know, I'm not really sure how I would feel 5 years from now [regarding the relationship].

The above quotations from Sasha and Mike conveniently summed up the major concerns and outlooks expressed by the participants who anchored themselves in their relationships (not that the previous quotations from the two couples were not representative, because they were, but those quotations were also situation specific to those two couples). Similar to the participants anchored in their career paths, Mike was very committed to his relationship and considered it a hugely important dimension of his life. Ideally, he wanted his relationship to continue, admitted that it was certainly worthy of consideration when making decisions about the future, and said he would be sad if it ended, but he felt that at the end of the day he had to make the decisions that privileged himself as an individual even if they came at the expense of his relationship. He shared the often-stated sentiment that he was wary of allowing his relationship to dictate his future. He felt more certain about the fact that he would need to figure out what he wanted to do with his life and how to make money than he did about how he would feel about his relationship in the coming years. Sasha succinctly articulated a similar fear of ending up somewhere in life that she did not want to be if she allowed her relationship to dictate her future decisions. These were the concerns that emerged from the participants who anchored themselves in their career paths and personal exploration.

Hank

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So when I actually graduate college, I don't see being in a relationship realistically, and that's not because I want to like, [sarcastic] "go focus on my career," it's just because I think I want to drop everything and disappear for a little while.

...

I feel like after college is a liberating time for most people, and I know that I have the ability to go and drop everything and disappear for a while...I would want [my partner] to know that she has my support to do whatever she wants, and then I would want the same in return. But no, I don't feel like coming out of college—unless [my partner] gets pregnant or we're going to get married—do I feel like I need to make sacrifices for what I want to do.

Hank was a unique participant in that he was not concerned about his future career. He had very little interest in cultivating a career path and much more interest in allowing himself the time and space for exploration post-graduation. Although most participants were greatly concerned with both their future careers and their future capabilities for personal exploration whereas Hank was only concerned with exploration; he aligned himself with similarly anchored participants by stating that he felt the need to put his individual pursuits and interests before his relationship post-graduation.

Factors Affecting This Anchor Placement

Parental/Familial Influence

Peter

They [my parents] have basically been saying, you know, that I got to be me and I got to make the best choice for me, and that [my partner] is great, and if she can stay in

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my life that's fantastic, but I shouldn't bend over backwards to be with her. I have to make the best decisions for the long term for myself.

Similar to the participants who anchored themselves in their relationships, the participants who anchored themselves in their careers and personal exploration generally received parental and familial pressure to make future decisions in the interest of their potential careers rather than their relationships. The difference between the participants was that the familial pressure challenged the decisions and intentions of those participants who anchored themselves in their relationships and supported the decisions and intentions of those participants who anchored themselves in their career plans. For the latter participants, parental and familial pressure generally reinforced their outlook on the future. In the quotation above, Peter related advice from his parents that echoed his personal outlook on the future that he had previously shared during the interview.

Rachel

I think it's kind of assumed from my parents that jobs, or internships, or whatever, should probably come first, yeah. But we haven't actually had that conversation yet.

Rick

If anything, what they [my parents] have either said or I have implied from what they have said—because maybe they are trying to be a little subtle—but what I get from them is, “Try not to make a relationship decision get in the way of a career of the beginning of your life.”

The above quotations from Rachel and Rick are meant to show that even when the participants were not receiving explicit advice from their parents and families regarding the future, they assumed that their parents were suggesting—or would have suggested if

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they asked—that they put their career interests over their relationships when making future decisions. The participants who anchored themselves in their career paths and personal exploration assumed that their parents would support that anchoring even if that support was never explicitly stated.

Luke

I don't think my mom or my dad—because those are the two I would think of as, like, my most significant advisers—they've never necessarily said like, "You need to consider the role of your relationship, you know, in your professional career and how those two connect." ...I don't think my mom would ever say, like, "Hey, you're going to [the West coast], maybe you want to stay home because of [your partner] is back there."

The above quotation from Luke is meant to highlight the fact that most participants, whether they conducted conversations with their parents about the future or not, could comfortably assert that their parents would never tell them to reconsider career-oriented decisions in order to make their relationships more of a priority. The participants who anchored themselves in their future careers understood that their parents did not have to be too vocal with advice because they were already doing what their parents wanted them to do.

Social Pressure

Rachel

I think there is a ton of pressure from when we are kids...I think it's the expectation to graduate, have your degree, and get a job with that degree and, kind of, be set. It's not really acceptable to graduate and just, like, be a bum [laughs].

Sasha

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Having the relationship is one thing I don't—I don't really think of that as a pressure that society puts on you. I honestly don't really know why. I think of that as, like, a bonus situation. I think there is way more pressure on me and everyone else to have the best job, and, like, show everyone that you have the best job...I bet in like three years I'll feel the relationship pressure when—I dread, like, when all of my friends start getting engaged, like, I totally dread that because then I know it's going to become a societal pressure...

Again, similar to the participants who anchored themselves in their relationships, the participants who anchored themselves in their career paths felt social pressure to obtain the best possible job rather than pressure to obtain the best possible relationship. Sasha pointed out, however, that she thinks the current societal pressure on college seniors to get a good job is dependent on their relatively young age, and that once they get a little older and solidify their position in the job market, societal pressure will shift its focus and place pressure on them to get married. Currently though, social pressure aligns itself with parental pressure in its insistence that emerging adults focus on their careers over anything else. Earlier in her interview, Sasha even admitted that she felt social pressure discouraging her from making decisions that could benefit her relationship, and that she felt judged for perceived “over-commitment” to her relationship.

Hank

Why should I [feel pressure]?...I should start thinking about potentially what I want to do in the future and study at graduate school, like, let me explore my interests, because that's what I think your career should be, it should be your interests. But it's not

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like, [sarcastic] “I should get an internship at a political party thing,” and then sleep on a mattress in New York City and be a fucking coffee boy. No. I feel bad for those people.

Hank was again unique in his ability to ignore societal pressures telling him to focus on his career. That being said, he had intentions to attend graduate school, pursue an advanced degree, and eventually cultivate a career—he just did not feel the rush to get to that point that many participants stated they felt. Hank was the only participant anchored in the need for personal exploration who did not feel societal pressure to immediately pursue a career path post-graduation.

Gender

Although the social and familial pressures on the participants proved to be similar regardless of where they placed their anchors (the difference being that the pressures either challenged or reinforced the anchor placement), some gender-specific pressures emerged from the interviews I had with women who anchored themselves in their future careers.

Paula

My mom is all about the “make or break” kind of thing, like, “Alright, you’re graduating, either move in together or maybe break up. Pick one, either getting married or moving on” [laughs]. That’s pretty much the only person who has dared to say something like that...She just, kind of, doesn’t want to see me, like, waste years of my life with someone and then not end up with them in the long run.

Julia

I was talking to [my sister] over Thanksgiving and she was like, “I never used to think of finding anyone, like I was out of college, and I was single, and I was having fun,

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and now I'm 27 and I need to start thinking about it. It's scary." So I definitely feel like there's that pressure of wanting to be with someone at a certain time. There's definitely a timeline, especially for women I feel like.

Across all the interviews, it became apparent that women felt the pressure of marriage as a realistic goal within the next 10 years (either internally or externally) more than did men. Not all the women interviewed felt this pressure, but even just the concept of marriage—specifically as something worthy of consideration rather than an abstract future event—was brought up by women more frequently than by men.

In the quotation above from Paula and Julia, they related a potential pressure not felt by any of the men interviewed: the pressure to consider marriage even when making decisions that privileged the individual over the relationship. Paula and Julia were not being told to sacrifice personal endeavors in order to maintain their committed relationships, but they were also receiving advice suggesting that soon enough they would need to (or want to) establish the kind of committed relationship that resulted in marriage, and that they should make their future decisions in light of that. Paula, despite being someone with strong career aspirations, even received pressure from her mom to make decisions about her relationship right now based on whether she thought it could result in marriage. Paula's mother's advice would seem to suggest that she felt the next few years were of vital importance for her daughter in terms of finding a potential husband. Julia echoed this notion when she said she felt there was a timeline within which women (herself included) need to start thinking seriously about committed relationships. In opposition to this gendered pressure, none of the men shared stories of parents, siblings, friends, or society pressuring them into starting to think seriously about

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marriage, and the majority of them said that they were not considering marriage at all when making their decisions about the future.

To be clear, none of the participants, men or women, reported feeling pressured at this juncture in their lives to privilege their relationships or the potential for marriage over their personal endeavors and career paths, but more women than men reported feeling pressured to at least consider marriage—either with their current partner or with some future partner—when making future decisions.

Emerging Career Commitment

Holly

I also don't know what I want to do next year, and if I did then I think I would take into consideration our relationship and I would probably make allowances for it, but because I have no idea what I want to do, then I'm not even really conceivably thinking about it [how my relationship fits into my post-graduate plans] that much, because I just don't know what I want to be next year.

Similar to Katie, Holly was very unsure of what her passions were and she had no idea what she wanted to do post-graduation. Unlike Katie, however, Holly related that due to her confusion as to what she would do post-graduation and her need for further exploration in order to figure that out, she was unable to truly consider how her relationship fit into her future plans. Holly's partner was a year behind her in school, so she knew where he would be for the year after her graduation, but instead of anchoring herself in that geographic knowledge, she anchored herself in her potential future career and the work she would have to undertake that would allow her to begin on a worthwhile career path. Holly was firm in her conviction that she needed to explore more and figure

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out her interests and career path first, and then only after accomplishing that could she consider geographic factors and her relationship in her future decisions. Holly's identity formation style could be considered in line with Marcia's (1966) moratorium style. This connection was further explored in the discussion.

Maya

I want to explore, and I just feel like there's more out there than, like, what my relationship would allow me to, like, see if I was to just stay in it in its current state.

Jake

I'm still learning who I am. College did a lot, but I'm still a pretty unfinished person...

Jake succinctly summed up the sentiments of many of the participants who anchored themselves in their career path and personal exploration. Jake, like many of the participants (and many emerging adults), stated feeling that college had allowed him to undertake the lengthy process of figuring out who he was and what he wanted to do—the process of successful identity achievement—but that there was still a lot of personal exploration required before he successful identity achievement. One of the often-repeated concerns with privileging a relationship over a career path reported by the participants who anchored themselves in their career paths, was that they would deny themselves vital opportunities for personal exploration and that they would regret not figuring out and pursuing their passions. It was exactly that sentiment that Maya articulated in the quotation above. Feeling that they had not yet successfully figured out what they wanted to do with their lives or who they were as people was a big factor in the participants' choice to anchor themselves in their career paths and personal exploration.

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No Definitive Anchor

Two participants did not fit along the dichotomy of the conceptualization and thus had no definitive anchor. Interestingly, the two participants lacked definitive anchors for opposite reasons: Gabe simultaneously anchored himself in both his career plans and his relationship and did not feel that he had to make affordances for one or the other, or that he had to privilege one over the other, whereas Tessa continuously flip-flopped during the interview and did not definitively place her anchor in either her career plans or her relationship.

Gabe

I feel like we have a really special connection, we function very well together, and you know, we do things like long distance very well. So even though I would be like, “Hey, hang out, I’ll be back in a little bit,” actually shows nothing of my commitment level. If anything it shows that I am fully committed, and, you know, to have my cake and eat it too. But yea, I feel like commitment level at 100% in a scenario like that...I feel like we’re not in high school anymore, and as an adult you really have to factor in things like professionalism and a relationship at the same time, and, you know, it doesn’t have to be one or the other, it doesn’t have to be a huge drama fest or anything like that, it just has to be, “Hey, you go succeed, I’ll be here when you get back.”

In the quotation above, Gabe was considering a scenario in which his professional endeavors forced him to live somewhere far from where his partner was for an extended period of time. He felt strongly that he could be completely committed to both his relationship and his career, privileging both without sacrificing either in any way. He admitted that the actual allocation of time to career endeavors or the relationship would

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fluctuate, but he felt that was a normal reality of adulthood and that it presented no potential consequences to his relationship or his career plans. Gabe was a unique participant in his conceptualization of a future that allowed both him and his partner to pursue career endeavors with complete commitment without his relationship suffering any serious consequences.

Tessa

I think we are very flexible about our life plans, but I think we want to be exploring together

...

I think a person should do whatever they want to do. I know there's this whole societal, specifically American, discourse, like, "Oh, be self-reliant and pursue what you want to do, find yourself, and then you can consider altering your life for this other person," but, like, if you're ready to, I don't know, do stuff with, like, a significant other then I think that's fine.

...

Probably I wouldn't want to go to [Europe] if I didn't think that [my partner] would come along, you know? But I'm not, like, "Oh I'm not going to pursue this [certificate program] because [my partner] wants to do—" I'll just be like, "Yo, [partner], sorry, you have to wait a year."

...

I don't think that it [my relationship] comes first for me, because, at the end of the day, if I find something that I want to pursue, like, I would pursue that. Like, I would plan to be in a long distance relationship with [my partner] or hold off on the relationship.

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At the time of Tessa's interview, she was planning to move to another country with her partner post-graduation without a definite plan what she would be doing in that country, but she also stated that she did not feel comfortable making her relationship a priority at this juncture of her life. She stated that it was important to her to explore her interests outside of her relationship, and also to experience other relationships before she settled down, but she also said that she wanted to explore new experiences post-graduation with her partner, and that she was confident her relationship would continue for the next two years. Unlike Gabe, Tessa felt that she would have to make decisions that either privileged her career plans or her relationship, and she could see those decisions having consequences for her relationship or her future career, but she fluctuated between her decisions to privilege one or the other when considering her future. During the course of the interview, Tessa vacillated between placing her anchor in her career plans and placing her anchor in her relationship, and due to that frequent vacillation, she did not definitively place her anchor in either one.

Unconscious Ambivalence

Throughout the course of the interviews, an interesting pattern emerged among some of the participants who anchored themselves in their career paths: after spending the interview talking about how they felt they had to privilege their own careers even at the expense of their relationships when making future decisions, when asked if they were confident their relationships would continue for the next two years, they said that they were fairly-to-very confident that it would continue. Out of the 14 participants who anchored themselves in their career paths and personal exploration, 5 participants said that they were fairly-to-very confident that their relationship would continue for the next

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two years, 4 participants said they could see it going either way and they just could not be confident one way or the other, and 5 participants said that they could not be confident about their relationship continuing.

It is not being suggested in any way that these relationships could not remain intact for the next two years—because they potentially could—or that any of the participants were incapable of maintaining their relationships—because they were capable—but it was surprising to hear participants talk about how they needed to make (or had already made) career decisions for themselves even if it took them far away from their partners, then talk about how they did not think a long-term long-distance relationship was feasible or fair to either member of the relationship, and then say that they were confident that their relationships would continue for the next two years. The statements did not seem to add up, and is being referred to in this paper as unconscious ambivalence.

Consider the following example of unconscious ambivalence:

Ultimately, where I end up will be determined by which opportunities are most realistic and best for progression through my career...

...

The only thing that could really fracture our relationship to a huge degree would be that major decision, like, “Well, are we going to be together for the rest of our lives or are we going to be in our separate spheres with no real contact?” Because we understand that long distance can work for college...but in the real world it probably wont fly. So that’s going to be something that comes into a lot of consideration, but personally I don’t want that to be the deciding factor.

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...

I'm pretty confident [that this relationship will continue for the next two years].

The above quotation progression was from an interview with one of the participants who anchored himself in his career, and the quotations are presented in chronological order. The progression is fairly representative of the other three participants who anchored themselves in their careers but remained confident that their relationships would continue for the next two years.

This participant did admit that he would try his best to pursue his desired career in a geographic location that was as close as possible to his partner, and that he was willing to make small sacrifices to allow for that ideal scenario. Considering the above quotations, however, it is surprising that he could be “pretty” confident that his relationship would continue for the next two years. It was clear that he wanted the relationship to continue, but considering that he felt he needed to make career-oriented decisions that could result in his relationship being a long-distance one, and that he did not think a long-distance relationship was feasible post-graduation, his statement asserting that he felt fairly confident about his relationship continuing for the next two years did not seem feasible—it seemed like an internal contradiction.

These participants' reasoning for their confidence boiled down to three potential possibilities: 1. Despite the future decisions they felt they had to make that privileged their careers over their relationships, they genuinely thought their relationships could prevail through the established challenges 2. They were deceiving themselves because they had yet to consider, or did not want to consider, the fact that their anchoring choice, despite being a perfectly legitimate way to navigate young adulthood, could end a

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relationship that they cared about so deeply. 3. They were not actually confident, but they said that they were because they did not want to admit, either to themselves or to me, that they were not confident about the future of their relationships. The third potential reason was a possible limitation of the study that is discussed in more depth later in this thesis. Regardless of the reasoning, however, the unconscious ambivalence of some participants was an interesting internal contradiction that emerged.

Discussion

This study explored how college seniors in committed romantic relationships conceived of navigating their post-undergraduate lives when considering both their career-oriented aspirations and the future of their relationships. Although research has been done on identity development and on the realities of emerging adulthood (ages 18-25), this study attempted to narrow its focus on the transitional time of undergraduate graduation which falls right in the middle of emerging adulthood as defined by Arnett (2000). The realities of an emerging adult in college (ages 18-21), and the realities of an emerging adult who has already navigated the workforce and the adult world for a couple years of (ages 23-25), are different from the unique realities of an emerging adult who has just graduated and is making the transition between the two aforementioned realities (ages 21-23). Also, the realities of a college senior in a committed relationship are not the same as those of a college senior not in such a relationship. Although all college seniors on the verge of graduating are in the midst of figuring out what they want to do with their lives and needing to make pressing future decisions, college seniors in relationships have to make all those same decisions *and* consider their relationship and their partner's potentially opposing goals when making those decisions. This study focused on the latter

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group as a unique population with unique dimensions involved in their future decisions, and through in-depth interviews, it attempted to obtain a beginning understanding of how the members of this population planned on navigating their futures.

Through a grounded analysis of the interviews, it became evident that the participants were anchoring themselves in one of the dimensions of their lives in order to stabilize themselves when contemplating their futures. This anchoring was indicative of a participant selecting a particular dimension of his or her life to serve as the central and most valued dimension moving forward. These anchors defined the participants' future decisions in that they ensured those decisions prioritized and privileged the anchored dimension. To continue the metaphor, the participants' anchors were what stabilized them and guided their navigation of the choppy waters of post-graduate life. In this study, the participants anchored themselves in one of two dimensions: their relationships or their career paths and personal explorations. The conceptualization that emerged from the grounded analysis of the interviews highlighted this divide and categorized the participants based on their anchor placement.

Some patterns emerged when connecting the participants' anchor placement to their attachment style categorization. Although the results of the ECR-R indicated that most of the participants were secure in their relationships, participants who scored higher on the anxiety subscale tended to be anchored in their relationships. Three out of the six participants who anchored themselves in their relationships had an anxiety score that was over 1 *SD* above the mean, and a fourth participant had an anxiety score that was close to a full standard deviation above the mean. The two participants anchored in their relationship but securely attached had some of the lowest anxiety and avoidance scores in

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the entire study. As previously discussed, however, this was a unique couple containing two participants who were advanced and grounded in many of the dimensions of emerging adulthood that other participants were only beginning to try and navigate (e.g., career pursuits, financial stability, and future relationship stability). Also, neither of them was receiving any negative familial pressure regarding their relationship. Comparatively, only 1 participant out of the 14 participants who anchored themselves in their career paths had an anxiety score that was over 1 *SD* above the mean. It would seem that either having high attachment anxiety contributes to people anchoring themselves in their relationships, or that people anchoring themselves in their relationships—and the resulting negative external pressures—contributes to increased attachment anxiety. Either way, a relationship between the two emerged.

Another pattern that emerged was that the only two participants who were categorized as fearful—meaning they were identified as high in attachment-related anxiety *and* avoidance—were the two men most strongly anchored in their relationships. Fearfully attached individuals usually avoid entering into committed relationships in the first place, so initially it was surprising that any of the participants were categorized as fearfully attached. It was even more surprising realizing that they were both so strongly anchored in their relationships. One possible explanation for this was that because they did manage to enter into a committed relationship, they wanted to avoid having to redo the process of finding a partner, and so they strongly anchored themselves in their relationships to ensure their continuation.

Considering the inherent tensions among the various dimensions of an emerging adult's life (e.g., what one wants to do for a living may not be what one feels one needs to

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do when considering financial implications), and the added dimension of a relationship, the anchors served as a starting point from which the participants could begin to navigate their lives post-graduation. Although ultimately the participants did select a single dimension of their lives within which to anchor themselves, they were acutely aware of the transitional time awaiting them post-graduation. They expressed a feeling of being pulled on strongly by multiple different dimensions when considering their futures. This inner tension makes sense when considering both Erikson's concept of "triple bookkeeping" (1963) and Arnett's theory of emerging adulthood (2000). Erikson (1963) asserted that a successful sense of one's identity could only be achieved through a consideration of all three dimensions of that individual—biological, psychological, and social—but that these dimensions, rather than coexisting in harmony within an individual, inherently oppose each other. When he introduced his concept of triple bookkeeping, Erikson said, "Thus again, three contemporaneous processes, instead of supporting one another, seem to have mutually aggravated their respective dangers" (Erikson, 1963, p. 43). The participants' reported struggle in determining which dimensions of their life they should consider when making future decisions illustrated the tricky balancing act required of triple bookkeeping and successful identity achievement. Building on Erikson's work, Arnett (2000) identified emerging adulthood as a distinct period of time when multiple life options regarding worldview, work, and love remain possibilities, but these potential directions often run in opposition to each other. Arnett's definition of emerging adulthood suggests that it is a period in life simultaneously insistent upon opportunistic exploration and restrictive decision-making. Considering the participants were attempting to navigate the most defining transition of that already tricky

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time period, it was not surprising that the participants felt compelled to seriously consider multiple dimensions and potential directions in their lives. The fact that two participants were unable to definitely anchor themselves in a particular dimension of their lives serves as a testament to the inherent difficulties of triple bookkeeping in identity development and emerging adulthood.

To be clear, the anchors that emerged for the participants in their attempts to navigate the future were not the resulting occupational and ideological commitments characteristic of successful identity achievement (Marcia, 1966). It was not the case that participants began their interviews with uncertain futures and emerged with successful identity achievement and the ability to definitively make decisions about their future directions. That kind of successful identity achievement is only obtainable through experience and the actual exploration of the various dimensions of one's life (Arnett, 2000; Erikson, 1963, 1968; Marcia, 1966). While the undergraduate experience (which constitutes the first four years of emerging adulthood) does foster increased independence and exploration, it also delays the unrestricted exploration characteristic of post-undergraduate life. Many of the participants expressed feeling that they needed to experience and explore multiple potential life paths before being comfortable with the idea of settling for one path, whether that path is career driven or relationship driven. This expressed desire to avoid committing to a life path without fully exploring all of the life paths fits into psychologist Barry Schwartz's concept of the *paradox of choice*, which asserts, among other things, that people are deeply concerned about the potential for missed opportunities when confronted with multiple choices (2004). This aversion to missed opportunity is especially relevant to the participants of this study as emerging

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adults faced with numerous choices but yet unable to explore those choices. In the literary world, Jonathan Safran Foer might have captured this concern most succinctly in his novel *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, when he wrote, “Sometimes I can hear my bones straining under the weight of all the lives I’m not living” (p. 113). Considering the participants’ positions in the process of exploration and their aversion to missed opportunity, the anchors that emerged could be viewed as initial footholds for guiding the undertaking of further exploration, rather than the experience-backed decisions of an adult who has achieved a successful identity. Of course, it should also be noted that many young adults are not afforded the luxury of worrying about missed opportunities, and are instead forced into pursuing whatever opportunity allows them to make ends meet. So although it can be a burden, it is a privilege to have multiple future options and the means to pursue them.

In addition to the fear of missing out on potentially rewarding future opportunities, Marcia (1966) identified four different styles for undertaking the task of identity formation which, when applied to the participants, may be useful in understanding their reluctance to make commitments. Consider Holly’s quotation from the results section, which served to represent the somewhat prevalent outlook held by participants who anchored themselves in their career paths: that the demands of personal exploration rendered them incapable of committing to their relationships fully. One of the identity styles Marcia identified was the *moratorium* style that described individuals who used the continued need for identity exploration as a means by which to avoid making commitments. The moratorium style could be attributed to participants like Holly. Other identity formation styles were also present among the participants of this study. Holly’s

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opposite on the other side of the conceptualization was Katie, as Katie also had no idea what she wanted to do post-graduation, but used that uncertainty about her future path to further commit herself to her relationship. Katie's family, however, actively wanted her to end her relationship and embark on a process of individual exploration. Therefore, Katie's commitment to her relationship could be viewed as a staunch rejection of the foreclosure identity style, a style attributed to individuals who make less reflective commitments based on external, authoritarian wishes rather than their own desires. Considering Marcia's identity formation styles and their application to the participants in this study can help to provide insight into the reasons behind the anchoring decisions that were made.

In this study, participants anchored themselves either in the future exploration of their relationships in new settings outside of college, or in individual and career-oriented future exploration. Erikson's research and his stage theory of identity (1968) argued, however, that the only type of exploration involved with successful identity achievement was individual in nature. Erikson asserted that the achievement of genuine intimacy with a partner was only possible after one had undertaken significant individual exploration and achieved a successful identity in isolation from relationships. Therefore, this study stood in stark opposition to Erikson's predetermined progression of identity achievement and located itself among the feminist psychology criticisms of Erikson's identity theory in its illustration of how intimacy was not only capable of occurring simultaneously to individual exploration, but also, for some people, an important part of their identity achievement and exploration (Gilligan, 1982; Jordan et al., 1991). Granted, the majority of participants anchored themselves in their career paths, and many participants

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expressed the Eriksonian notion that they felt they had to individually explore and determine their career paths before they were able to focus on their relationships, but 6 out of the 22 participants (27%) anchored themselves in their relationships and stated they wanted to explore their relationships in new settings and ensure that all future exploration, personal or otherwise, occurred side by side with their partners. Also, it should be noted that regardless of where the participants anchored themselves, it was apparent from their high scores on the relationship satisfaction scale and the stories of partnership and intimacy that emerged from the interviews that they all had experienced genuine intimacy with their current romantic partners. So although this study did not find Erikson's theory of identity to lack validity (because it certainly applied to many of the participants), it did find that Erikson's theory was not all-encompassing and that his progression of identity achievement could not always be so exactly applied to emerging adults in committed relationships undergoing the process of identity achievement.

Also interesting to note, considering the origins of feminist critiques of Erikson (the fact that Erikson's individually focused identity achievement did not recognize the realities of women's relational identity growth), there were the same numbers of men and women in each anchoring position of the conceptualization. There were three men and three women among those participants who anchored themselves in their relationships, and there were seven men and seven women among those participants who anchored themselves in their career paths. Jordan et al. (1991) set out to present a model of women's identity in which they portrayed how a woman's sense of self was relational and developed in the context of her relationships. Their eventual hope was to shift the focus of psychology from "the self" to an emphasis on relationships and relational

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growth. Although the theme of “the self” and individual exploration came up fairly frequently during the interviews, the concept of relational growth did too, and the fact that there was such an equal representation of men and women across anchor placement could be a sign of a shift towards a more holistic and encompassing approach to identity formation—at least as far as gender is concerned.

When considering the factors that weighed on the participants’ identity anchoring, however, there were gendered differences present—most notably in external pressure coming from society and family. Erikson (1963) identified the social dimension as one of the three elements of triple bookkeeping, and participants reported feeling immense social and familial pressure to achieve socially desired goals. In fact, the social dimension of identity development proved to be the most difficult for the participants to balance. A large part of that was due to the fact that nearly every participant reported feeling familial and social pressure to achieve professionally-oriented and career-oriented goals, while simultaneously feeling like they were “outside” of the social norm due to their being in a committed romantic relationship. This familial and social pressure impacted the two different anchor placements very differently. It reinforced the anchors of participants who anchored themselves in their career paths, but it severely challenged the anchors of participants who anchored themselves in their relationships. Additionally, familial and social pressures on the participants were slightly different depending on the gender of the participant. As noted in the results section, women were encouraged more than were men to keep the “necessity” of marriage in mind when making future decisions, even if the participant did not plan on actually getting married anytime soon. This gendered external

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pressure was in line with the potentially harmful traditional role expectations of women (Jack & Dill, 1992).

The final noteworthy finding to emerge from the grounded analysis of the interviews was the presence of unconscious ambivalence in some of the interviews conducted with participants who anchored themselves in their future career paths. This unconscious ambivalence was possibly the result of genuine internal contradictions within the participants, suggesting that they really believed that their relationship's future maintenance was stable (or were unwilling to believe that it was not stable) despite all of the things they had said earlier in the interview that directly opposed the probability of its future stability. It is also possible, however, that the emergence of this unconscious ambivalence was due to inherent limitations in the study. I shared a social circle with all of the participants I interviewed, and there was a high likelihood that after the study I would be interacting with either a participant or a participant's partner outside of the context of the study. Due to this close proximity, participants may have been reluctant to tell me they did not have a lot of confidence in the future of their relationships, either to spare me the dilemma of having to keep a secret, or to ensure that I would not be able to tell their partner about their lack of confidence even accidentally. Also, all of the participants I interviewed were aware of the fact that I would also be talking to their partner, and that could have affected their answers. For example, even in relationships in which both partners had the same anchor, the strength of that anchor differed between the two people in the couple. So if both members of a couple were anchored in their careers, but partner A's anchor was less strong than partner B's, they maybe have possessed differing levels of confidence regarding the future of their relationship (in this scenario

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partner A would be more confident than partner B). Then, when partner B was answering my questions knowing how partner A felt and that I had already talked to partner A, partner B may have hidden his true opinions and told me that he was confident in the future of the relationship because he did not want to seem mean or as if there was a disconnect between him and his partner. In essence, the knowledge of the fact that I would be talking to their partners could have contributed to the unconscious ambivalence that emerged among some of the participants.

Finally, the press release issue (Wiersma, 1988) may have contributed to the presence of the unconscious ambivalence. If the participants' responses were viewed as a public broadcast of socially desirable narratives, it would make sense for those who did not have confidence in the future of their relationship to say that they did in order to minimize conflict. As evidenced when the participants talked about social pressure that they felt, many participants felt as if their relationships were under a microscope, and it was the expectation that the relationship was a strong and committed one in order to justify being in a college relationship in the first place. Considering this perceived pressure and the desire to confirm social expectations and desires, when asked a direct question about the future success of their relationships, participants may have automatically said they were confident about the future in order to conveniently fit their answer into their socially acceptable press releases of their relationships.

The social and physical proximity I had to the participants, the fear they had of their partners finding out something bad that they said, the knowledge they had that their partners were also interviewed, the press release issue, and the social desirability issue were all limitations of the study that may have had effects on the study beyond just

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contributing to the emergence of unconscious ambivalence. Further limitations included the limited sample of participants and the limited scope of the interviews. Out of the 22 participants, they were nearly all White and all of the couples were heterosexual. As a result, the sample was fairly homogeneous. Also, non-participation bias could have impacted the results. Not all couples approached for potential participation agreed to participate, and the couples that did agree to participate may not have been representative of college seniors in relationships. The interviews themselves lasted roughly 30 minutes in order to make it feasible for me to transcribe 22 interviews and conduct a grounded analysis of those transcriptions within the time frame of this study. As a result, certain factors that could have contributed to the participants' conceptualization of how to navigate their futures—such as issues of socioeconomic diversity—were not explored in the study. Also, the interviews were only held once, either in the fall semester or at the very beginning of the spring semester, and there was no follow up with the participants to see how their answers might have changed once they were closer to the actual time of their graduations.

Repeating this study but making it a longitudinal one with follow up interviews and a more in-depth question protocol would likely prove to be a valuable endeavor. Although this study examined emerging connections between attachment style and anchor placement, future research could take a more quantitative look at the ECR measures. Additionally, the existence and location of participants' anchor placements that emerged in their answers to questions was a worthwhile finding, and future research could attempt to create a coding system by which to quantify the presence and location of these anchors in future participants' answers. Ideally, this qualitative foray into this

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unique population at a unique juncture in their lives may serve as a foundational base from which to inform future research on college students in committed relationships facing the major transition of emerging adulthood.

In conclusion, this study illustrated the immense joys and privileges, as well as the unique dilemmas and concerns, of emerging adult college students in committed relationships facing the radical transition of entering into the adult world. Ideally, the depictions of loving, invested, and committed couples, comprised of partners very much in the process of establishing their identities, provided strong evidence for the possibility and presence of genuine and mutually beneficial intimacy among emerging adults with incomplete identity formations. At the end of the day, individual and professional exploration may come first for many people, and that is perfectly legitimate, but that does not also mean that those people are incapable of forming intimate and meaningful romantic relationships until their exploration is successfully completed.

The final question of each interview asked the participants to conceptualize how they might navigate their futures while simultaneously balancing their personal, professional, and relational wellbeing. Nearly every participant immediately said “honest communication.” I encourage all emerging adults in committed relationships to follow their own advice. Successful honest communication requires people to be honest with themselves, and one of the benefits of having a partner with whom to try and navigate times of transition is that communication ideally leads to honesty and self-knowledge. If emerging adults can be honest with themselves and honest with their partners, even if it results in an initially uncomfortable and undesirable situation, their paths to successful identity achievement can become much clearer.

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Appendix A

The Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-R) Questionnaire

Instructions: The statements below concern how you feel in emotionally intimate relationships. I am interested in how you *generally* experience relationships, not just in what is happening in a current relationship. Respond to each statement by clicking a circle to indicate how much you agree or disagree with the statement.

1=strongly disagree, 4=neutral, 7=strongly agree

1. Sometimes romantic partners change their feelings about me for no apparent reason.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

2. I talk things over with my partner.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

3. I find that my partner(s) don't want to get as close as I would like.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

4. My partner only seems to notice me when I'm angry.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

5. It's easy for me to be affectionate with my partner.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

6. I often wish that my partner's feelings for me were as strong as my feelings for him or her.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

7. I find it relatively easy to get close to my partner.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

8. I don't feel comfortable opening up to romantic partners.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

9. My desire to be very close sometimes scares people away.

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1 2 3 4 5 6 7

10. I rarely worry about my partner leaving me.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

11. It's not difficult for me to get close to my partner.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

12. I get uncomfortable when a romantic partner wants to be very close.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

13. I'm afraid that I will lose my partner's love.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

14. I'm afraid that once a romantic partner gets to know me, he or she won't like who I really am.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

15. When I show my feelings for romantic partners, I'm afraid they will not feel the same about me.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

16. I worry a lot about my relationships.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

17. I prefer not to show a partner how I feel deep down.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

18. When my partner is out of sight, I worry that he or she might become interested in someone else.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

19. I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on romantic partners.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

20. It makes me mad that I don't get the affection and support I need from my partner.

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1 2 3 4 5 6 7

21. I do not often worry about being abandoned.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

22. I am nervous when partners get too close to me.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

23. I worry that I won't measure up to other people.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

24. I feel comfortable sharing my private thoughts and feelings with my partner.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

25. I usually discuss my problems and concerns with my partner.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

26. I prefer not to be too close to romantic partners.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

27. I tell my partner just about everything.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

28. I feel comfortable depending on romantic partners.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

29. I often worry that my partner doesn't really love me.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

30. I find it easy to depend on romantic partners.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

31. My romantic partner makes me doubt myself.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

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32. My partner really understands me and my needs.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

33. I often worry that my partner will not want to stay with me.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

34. It helps to turn to my romantic partner in times of need.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

35. I am very comfortable being close to romantic partners.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

36. I worry that romantic partners won't care about me as much as I care about them.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

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Appendix B

Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS)

Please mark on the answer sheet the letter for each item which best answers that item for you.

How well does your partner meet your needs?

A	B	C	D	E
Poorly		Average		Extremely well

In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?

A	B	C	D	E
Unsatisfied		Average		Extremely satisfied

How good is your relationship compared to most?

A	B	C	D	E
Poor		Average		Excellent

How often do you wish you hadn't gotten in this relationship?

A	B	C	D	E
Never		Average		Very often

To what extent has your relationship met your original expectations:

A	B	C	D	E
Hardly at all		Average		Completely

How much do you love your partner?

A	B	C	D	E
Not much		Average		Very much

How many problems are there in your relationship?

A	B	C	D	E
Very few		Average		Very many

Appendix C

Informed Consent

I hereby consent to participate in a research study conducted by Noam Waksman as part of an honors thesis supervised by Professor Jefferson Singer in the psychology department at Connecticut College. I understand that this research will involve responding to an interview conducted either in person or through Skype concerning my relationship experience and wellbeing AND completing brief questionnaires about the relationship. I understand that the researcher will interview both myself and my partner. These interviews will be conducted separately. I understand that I will answer questions regarding my background, satisfaction with my relationship, and the potential future of that relationship. This interview will take approximately 45 minutes for each partner. I understand that the researcher will not divulge any of the information from my interview or the questionnaires to my partner, nor from my partner's interview or questionnaires to me. Although I understand that the direct benefits of this research to society are not known, I have been told that I may learn more about aspects of wellbeing during young adult relationships facing transitions.

I understand that it is possible that answering sensitive questions, and knowing that my partner is also answering these questions, about the future of our relationship may raise some level of potential anxiety, distress, or conflict within the relationship. All interviewees will be provided with information for counseling services (number below) if this distress were to persist.

I understand that my interview will be audio recorded to allow Noam to reference the interview when analyzing his results. The recordings will be digital recording and not actual tapes. The digital recordings of my interview will be password protected and labeled with my unique ID number only. Please bring your ID number with you to the interview. This recording will be kept confidential and subsequently destroyed upon completion of the thesis.

I understand that I may decline to answer any questions as I see fit, and that I may withdraw from the study without penalty at any time. I understand that all information given to Noam Waksman will be confidential, and that I as a participant will be identified with a pseudonym and NOT my name. I understand that while quotations from my interview may be used in published research, no uniquely identifying information will be used in order to maintain confidentiality. Every effort will be made to disguise any information that can be traceable back to a specific partner or couple.

I have been told that Noam Waksman can be contacted at nwaksman@conncoll.edu or (781) 864-6414. For Connecticut College students, Counseling Services can be reached at (860) 439-4587. For students from other institutions, contact information for counseling can be found at www.ulifeline.org. If any concerns are raised about potential relationship violence by Connecticut College students, it is the responsibility of this investigator to notify Darcie Folsom, the Director of Sexual Violence Prevention & Advocacy, who can

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be reached at (860)-439-2219. If a student from an institution other than Connecticut College raises a concern about relationship violence, then this investigator will contact the appropriate Title IX representative at that student's institution. Professor Jefferson Singer, faculty adviser for this project, can be contacted at jasin@conncoll.edu or (860) 573-9927.

I have been advised that I may contact the researcher who will answer any questions that I may have about the purposes and procedures of this study. I understand that this study is not meant to gather information about specific individuals or couples, but rather to identify patterns across relationships. I consent to publication of the study results as long as the identity of all participants and relationships are protected. I understand that this research has been approved by the Connecticut College Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (IRB). Concerns about any aspect of this study may be addressed to Jason Nier, Chairperson of the Connecticut College IRB (at janie@conncoll.edu).

By signing my name, I acknowledge that I am at least 18 years of age, and that I have read these explanations and assurances, and voluntarily consent to participate in this research about young adult relationships.

Print Name: _____

Sign Name: _____

Date: _____

I hereby consent to an audio recording of my interview with an understanding that this recording will be kept confidential and subsequently destroyed at the end of this research project.

Print Name: _____

Sign Name: _____

Date: _____

Appendix D

Interview Protocol

- Are there important people in your life (i.e. parents, siblings, friends) that try to offer you advice regarding the future of your relationships post graduation?
 - If yes, what kinds of things do they say?
- In your current relationship, have you ever not completed an assignment or not studied adequately for an exam because of making your relationship a priority? Give an example. Has your partner ever done the same?
- Have you ever forgone a social event or extracurricular activity because of making your relationship a priority? Give an example. Has your partner ever done the same?
- Have you ever made choices to leave campus for a weekend/extended visit to see your partner? Has your partner ever done the same?
 - How often?
- Do you think these past decisions have had any consequences for either your academic or social life on campus? What about for your partner?
- Have these past decisions had any consequences for your personal wellbeing (e.g. happiness, mental health, or physical health)? What about for your partner?
- When you made decisions about how to spend your summer, where to spend your holidays and breaks, and study abroad, how much of a factor was your relationship in that decision making process? How about for your partner?

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- Now thinking about lies ahead after graduation, how will your relationship factor into the following potential decisions made by you or your partner? What about your partner?
 - Potential decisions: regarding where to live, how close to home you might live, what job to take, what graduate school to attend (or the timing of when you would attend), the pursuit of international opportunities or travel.
- What have your parents or other significant influences said about the role of your relationship in these future decisions?
- What do you think your commitment to your relationship should be for someone your age?
 - Do you think it is okay to sacrifice a career opportunity for your relationship?
- How confident are you that this relationship will continue for the next 2 years?
- Depending on the decisions you might make, what kinds of consequences could there be for your relationship?
- How much pressure do you think society puts on having it all in terms of having a strong relationship and a strong career path, especially at this young age?
- How do you think you and your partner might navigate these future decisions while maintaining the wellbeing of your relationship and your personal wellbeing?

Appendix E

Debriefing Form

Thank you for participating in this research dealing with young adult relationships facing transitions and wellbeing. As a college senior, I am interested in relationships entering a period of imminent transition. Although there has been research conducted on pro-relationship behavior that leads to satisfactory dating and married relationships (such as willingness to sacrifice), this research has generally not considered how this behavior applies to the transition of college life. Graduating from college forces one to make important life decisions regarding career and place of residence. These decisions, which can have a major impact, are often affected by and considered through the lens of one's current relationship. The goal of this study was to make a preliminary examination of how a couple can navigate this experience of imminent transition while maintaining the wellbeing of both members in the couple.

During this study you were asked to answer questions regarding your relationship, which may have caused some anxiety or inter-relationship conflict. If you are a Connecticut College student feeling distress please contact the Student Counseling Service Center at (860) 439-4587. If you are at another institution, please visit www.ulifeline.org where you can find information for student counseling services at your school

If you are a Connecticut College student and this study has raised any concerns regarding relationship violence, please contact Darcie Folsom, the Director of Sexual Violence Prevention & Advocacy at Connecticut College, at (860)-439-2219. If you are at another institution, please contact your school's Title IX officer.

If you are interested in this topic and want to read the literature in this area, please contact Noam Waksman (nwaksman@conncoll.edu) or Professor Jefferson Singer (jasin@conncoll.edu). Additionally, you can contact the chair of the IRB, Jason Nier (janie@conncoll.edu), if you have any questions or concerns about the manner in which this study was conducted.

Listed below are a few sources you may want to consult to learn more about this topic and positive relationship practices:

Van Lange, P. A. M., Rusbult, C. E., Drigotas, S. M., Arriaga, X. M., Witcher, B. S., & Cox, C. L. (1997). Willingness to sacrifice in close relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 72, 1373– 1395. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.72.6.1373

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Impett, E. A., Gable, S. L., & Peplau, L. (2005). Giving up and giving in: The costs and benefits of daily sacrifice in intimate relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *89*, 327-344. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.89.3.327

Singer, J. A., & Skerrett, K. (2014). *Positive couple therapy: Using we-stories to enhance resilience*. New York: Routledge.