

A Qualitative Study of the Role of Friendship in Late Adolescent and Young Adult Heterosexual Romantic Relationships

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Abstract

Friendship is considered one of the pillars of satisfying, long-term, romantic relationships and marriage. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the role of friendship in heterosexual romantic relationships. Eight single participants, ages 18 to 29, were selected from two West Coast metropolitan areas in the United States to explore whether or not friendship facilitates future long term relationships. Participants reported that friendship helped establish economic independence, adult identity and improved communication skills. Participants also reported that the development and stability of long term relationships was tenuous and temporal in their lives. Late adolescents and young adults in our study believed that their selection of partners was very different than their parents and that the success of their long term relationships was enhanced by a strong friendship with their partner.

Keywords: friendship; adolescence; romantic relationships

Certain psychosocial factors have been found to document that adult romantic affiliations are defined differently by the younger generation. There has been a sizable shift in sociocultural forces such as technological innovations, a globalized job market, constant mobility, shifting gender roles as well as the deinstitutionalization of marriage that influence late adolescent and young urban adult romantic relationships (Arnett, 2004, Coontz, 2006; Le Bourdais & Lapierre-Adamcyk, 2004). This process creates uncertainty in close relationships so that the traditional timelines and milestones for romantic relationships are seen as outdated (Collins & van Dulmen, 2006; Reitzle, 2007). The conventional ways that social scientists conceptualize romantic affiliations may not always be sufficient to explain these newer relationships.

In particular, it is important to understand the ambiguity in the formation and functioning of adolescent and young adult romantic relationships (Arnett, 2004; Collins

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& van Dulmen, 2006). Although research has focused on adult relationships, adolescents and young adults have not been viewed as an individual group (Gibbons & Ashdown, 2006; Hendry & Kloep, 2007). This population is isolated and there is a lack of understanding concerning the development of the next generation of families (Clark, 2004). Earlier research found that personal relationships were defined in the context of a peer group knowledge and this peer group was defined the romantic relationship (Blumer, 1969; Vygotsky, 1978). These understandings would be unique to the participants' postmodern cohort and, therefore, different from that of previous generations (Eyerman & Turner, 1998).

Studies have shown that there are links between romantic relationships and early adult adaptation (Furman & Flanagan, 1997). Romantic involvement influences a variety of areas including social competence, self-esteem, identity and other components of self-concept. These relationships allow individuals to learn patterns that influence the course of subsequent relationships (Beyers & Seiffge-Krenke, 2007). In fact, the quality of romantic relationships often affects current functioning and later psychosocial development. Friendship and romantic relationships include a multidimensional nature that implies the presence of both positive aspects such as appreciation or nurturance versus negative aspects including conflict and painfulness (Berndt, 2002). There seems to be little surprise that friendships and romantic relationships are often connected especially in early development. Peer relationships and close reciprocal relationships during this phase often contribute to the behavioral and emotional characteristics of romantic relationships (Collins & Laursen, 2000). It is important to note that interest in the scientific study in early adult romance has only begun to grow recently despite studies that have shown that close friends are an essential component of romantic development (Connolly, Craig, Goldberg & Pepler, 2004). Understanding the mutual influences between friendships and romantic relationships continues to be an important challenge. Ponte, Guarnieri, Smorti & Tani (2010) indicate that only a handful of empirical studies have examined differences in romantic relationship quality in early adulthood including close friends and romantic partners.

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McCarthy (2001) and Schwartz (2002) have each discussed a new emerging model of a friendship style within heterosexual romantic relationships. This style has been viewed as one of the most admired approaches to coupling (McCarthy, 2001). In supporting this process, Schwartz (2002) found that friendship within a relationship is often developed concurrently with inherent romantic components. Berscheid (2006) and Popenoe and Whitehead (2002) found that adolescents and young adults identified that their partners were also their friends. Additionally, Schwartz (2004) found that in marriages where both partners were committed to a process of fairness and equity, couples often saw each other as best friends. There is no clear agreement on what factors create a friendship-based romantic relationship (Masuda, 2003; Schwartz, 2002, 2004) and researchers have only recently begun to examine the role of friendship in these romantic relationships. Similarity of experiences, interests, communication styles, behaviors, and activities are identified as the attributes of friendship (Mendelson & Kay, 2003).

Self-disclosure is fundamental to evaluating a friendship relationship, and within this relationship, a person's emotional security can be dependent upon the sensitivity and support of a good friend. Typically, research has indicated that the discussions within a friendship were different than those within a romantic relationship and that sexual relationships occurred within the parameters of commitment and marriage (Berscheid, 2006). Marital roles have changed and men and in romantic relationships often see their partners as best friends. The issues of equity and equality are often negotiated by each couple, and this model has replaced the traditional or hierarchical male-dominated model of marriage (Coontz, 2006). The quality of these friendships correlates with the projected length of their romantic relationship (Gottman, 2004). If a viable friendship allows romantic partners to accept each other's maturation and emotional growth, it follows that friendship may be seen as the foundation on which a satisfying marriage may rest (Schwartz, 2004).

Relational issues for couples may focus on the quality of a friendship (rather than romantic passion) as the goal of romantic partners. This process could elicit the emotionally rewarding and sexually satisfying, non-zero-sum, cooperative-gains, heterosexual, romantic-friendship relationships referred to by some researchers

(Schwartz, 2004). The friendship model of romantic partnering makes more resources available to sustain a family because of non-zero-sum cooperative construction. This, in turn, may help the couple to manage stress and to have more time to tend to personal, relational, and family needs.

Some theorists believe that current functional postmodern styles of behaviors are a reflection of an evolving technocratic, socioeconomic environment (Rosa, 2003). These behaviors appear to be a compensation for the fact that individuals are so busy, so economically challenged, so mobile, and so concerned about life course choices that many of them do not attempt to maintain committed relationships (Arnett, 2004, 2006). Postmodern sexual and romantic relationship styles including sexual friendships are widely practiced. Friendship-based sex might be a functional alternative to the attachment-suppressed, sexual liaisons which adolescents and young adults traversing transitional adulthood sometimes embrace (Arnett, 2006, 2007; Smith, 2007).

Thus, the purpose of our study was to discover the role of friendship in heterosexual romantic relationships with a focus on the basic research tenets of heterosexual romantic friendships including trustworthiness, honesty, acceptance, and self-disclosure.

Method

Participants

Participants consisted of late adolescents and young adults from Oregon, California, Georgia, Texas, Virginia and New Hampshire (N=8). Participants were volunteers and were informed that the study was to help define adult romantic relationships.

Announcements for the research project were placed in weekly and daily local papers within two Pacific coast greater metropolitan areas. During the first contact by telephone or e-mail, the potential participants were screened for age and ability to attend, as well as for physical and mental health. They were informed about the nature of the research project and what their function as participants would be. After initial

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contact, each potential participant was e-mailed a detailed explanation describing the project and interview process. An executive office was rented for the purpose of interviews. A \$30 gift card for either of two national-brand stores was offered each interviewee in exchange for his or her participation. All participants were single and not married. There were a total of eight participants recruited for the primary study and they were divided within two focus groups. Questions for the qualitative interview were developed from the research literature and were reviewed by a panel of three experts.

Participant Demographics

Participants were administered a demographic questionnaire to collect data on age, gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status. A demographic fact sheet was completed by the participants before the focus group began. There were 8 participants with 6 women and 2 men ages ranging from 18-29 with the mean age of 25. Of the participants, 5 have received a college degree, 1 had a degree from a community college and 2 were in high school. Of the participants only 2 were unemployed and most had incomes between \$23,000 and \$40,000. Most participants were living with a roommate with only 2 individuals living alone. Four participants reported having a child. Of the participants, 4 said they were in a serious romantic relationship while a majority had indicated that they had been in a previous romantic relationship for at least two years.

Research Design and Approach

Two focus groups were followed by eight individual interviews. Six natural categories emerged from the coded interviews when they were analyzed with grounded theory methods. This result was done by abductive inference (Pierce, 1974, 1979) coupled with a constant-comparative sorting process (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The procedure of discovering categories was facilitated by the unique Atlas.ti sorting system that ties quotations of the interview transcript to the codes and memos that arise from them. This process continued until six theoretical categories were produced. These theoretical categories were then woven together into a narrative which explained the participants' collective peer group story (Glaser, 1978). That narrative, when reworked for verbal and scientific clarity, was transformed into a grounded theory. That theory

conceptualized how the uncertainty in the participants' socio cultural milieu creates feelings of ambivalence towards serious, long-term romantic relationships and marriage.

Descriptive Analyses

Giorgi's (1985, 1997) phenomenological approach to topic abridgment was used as the avenue for abstracting the themes from the transcripts of the focus group and individual-participant interviews. This research was done in the context of applying Bromage's (2006) adaptation of Giorgi's methodology to the Atlas.ti.5.12 (Scientific Software Development, 2007) qualitative software environment. Following Bromage's method, the researcher (a) divided the transcripts from each focus group and individual interview into meaning units (Quote files). Thereafter, (b) the meaning units were abridged into shorter abstractions using the participants' own language. This operation was done by attaching Memo files to the Quote files. Then, (c) these units were translated into more common psychological language. Subsequently, (d) these latter units were shortened and entered as codes into the Atlas.ti.5.2.12 Code Manager. This process was done in the context of two hermetic units (HU), one for focus groups and one for individual interviews.

Major themes

Major themes arising from the data included marriage, sexuality, and commitment. These are discussed below.

Marriage

The research participants reported having different generational understandings concerning marriage than their parents. They believed that there were many alternative options for people in their late teens and early 20s. With a need to prepare for life course choices, they were ambivalent about marriage. A graduate degree was seen as a certificate of economic liberation for the young adult female participants. The

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participants believed that women's roles have changed dramatically, and the role of simply being a wife was not considered an option.

The participants said that, after they have tested their options and gained real-world experience, they will become more interested in long-term romantic relationships. This interest begins around age 26 and was described as increasing up through age 34. Several female participants voiced their belief that they would plan to have a first child near the age of 30.

Participants were uncertain about what pathway leads to marriage. Thus, they felt that they are on their own in discovering a motivated intentionality within themselves to pursue marriage. Rather than put their trust in eventually having an in-love passionate relationship that would lead to marriage, they were interested in acquiring intimate communication skills and the emotional maturity that was seen as lacking in many of their parents' marriages. They were also concerned about sharing a common goal with a partner. Some of the participants questioned the function and purpose of marriage. All the participants agreed that cohabitation was an acceptable alternative to marriage for young adults.

Sexuality

The participants stated that they often have casual attitudes about sexuality. For young women, there is also a sense of sexual empowerment. The female participants felt that the sexual liberation fight had been won and the salient issue was female economic liberation. The exploration of one's sexuality might take place through exclusive monogamous relationships or through casual encounters.

In consideration of the freedom found in singlehood, the participants reported that dating itself is sometimes seen as a hindrance to autonomy, especially for those who simply do not have the economic resources to date. Participants stated that sex can occur within casual encounters when young adults are "out on the town" with their friends.

Commitment

The word commitment was seldom used by the young adult participants. If the researcher tried to elicit a conversation about it, the word was generally not repeated by the participants. The term *serious relationship* was used by participants. This relationship was described as a spark of romance coupled with a desire to do something special for a romantic partner, as well as a sense of exclusivity.

The participants were also quite aware of traditional issues regarding romantic relationships, but they said that their world is different from that of their parents. Therefore, they believed they had to take approaches to issues regarding traditional values in the context of surviving in a young urban mobile single adult environment. They reported that their world is so different that people in middle and older adulthood have to take an emotional interest in young culture before they can understand the behavioral and cognitive strategies that are necessary for successfully coping in it. Interestingly, participants mentioned several times that the world is changing so rapidly that they do not understand young adolescent coping measures, and that some of the things they see and hear are upsetting to them.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the six major subcategories that emerged from the transcripts of the focus group and individual interviews. These subcategories supported, explained, and elucidated the core category that the uncertainty inherent in the research demonstrated ambivalence towards serious, long-term romantic relationships and marriage. These subcategories are discussed below.

Romance as a Non-Committed Learning Experience

The research participants reported that making life course decisions concerning career, finances, and lifestyle was generally more important than establishing long-term

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romantic relationships. They actually did not use the expression *committed relationship*, as committing to a relationship was seen as something people did at around age 30 or older. Before that time, romantic relationships were seen as being very tenuous affiliations.

This tenuousness was reflected in the fact that postmodern relationships behaviors are so variegated that there are no agreed upon peer group guidelines for romance. That was made clear during a focus group discussion. A 21-year-old male consultant said:

I think it's very unclear—the differences between romance, and dating, and relationships. Is it all the same thing? Is it different facets to the same piece? What is appropriate, and what is not— it's very confusing ... There aren't any clear rules to dating, even much less for all relationships. There's not really any set of guidelines.

Evidence of how this process causes confusion was evident in every interview. Without common peer group guidelines, definitions, or milestones, each relationship is seen as a new situation where one learns by trial and error. Under these circumstances, romance becomes a non-committed learning experience. Inherent in this conceptualization is that dating is a casual, dressed-down experience, where finding a marriage partner is not a central concern. Dating itself is sometimes replaced by social activities where a person is invited to do something with a potential-partner's friends.

In this environment, choosing romantic or sexual partners is sometimes a product of rational choice rather than the outcome of falling in love. Passionate romantic love was, in fact, seen as too unstable a foundation on which to base a long-term relationship. Rather than search for a permanent partner, the participants tended to analyze whether someone met their present functional needs. This focus on rational decisions, however, does not mean the participants did not fall in love. Falling in love was, rather, as one participant said, "Something you try once or twice, and then move on because it is just too crazy."

Friends Provide Emotional Support

Friends often figured more prominently than romantic partners in providing emotional support for the participants. They also generally turned to their everyday friends for the emotional support rather than to their families. This included seeking out their friends to get feedback and insight concerning stressful social issues, such as problems concerning sexual and romantic partners.

The research participants reported that they often developed intimate, cross-gender, communication skills within their friendship groups. The development of these skills was seen as a necessary preparation for later serious romantic relationships. It follows that the mutuality and emotional support found within a best friends' relationships becomes something that might be expected in future long-term romantic relationships. Yet, with such a strong reliance on friends to provide so much of each other's emotional support, the participants reported that they do not always expect a deep emotional attachment to take place in their current romantic relationships.

Low Key Sexual Relationships

The research participants reported that their approach to sexual relationships varies from that of previous generations of young adults. Nowadays, the period between reaching sexual maturity and selecting a long-term partner generally lasts from 10 to 20 years. Consequently, casual sex practices have replaced the search for long-term partners and marriage. As a result, there is a strong focus on preventing sexually transmitted-diseases.

At the same time, sexual exploration has become an accepted female prerogative. Women do not want to be judged by how many sexual partners they have had. They want to learn about sexuality, rather, because it is an important part of life. It followed that the participants reported that their peers generally did not make moral judgments about each other's behaviors. That arises from the belief that seeking sexual pleasure is normal and the idea that one does not have to be passionately in love in order to have a sexual relationship. In taking these positions, however, the participants said

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they believed they still held to the same moral values as their parents. Their way of expressing those values was what had changed.

Marriage is Deemphasized

The research participants said that their peers had set the bar for choosing a marriage partner quite high. They saw marriage, however, as a relationship that would happen at a later stage of their lives when they had reached full adulthood status. They did not want to follow the pattern established by their parents. That was described as falling in love, marrying, and having children, followed by incessant arguing and divorce, and then repeating it all over again.

Marriage was seen as a negotiated agreement, not as a contract. As such, the functionality and satisfaction of a relationship was seen as being dependent on the level of the partners' communication skills. The only milestones leading to marriage were finishing school and establishing economic independence. The participants also expected that future partners would have achieved a semblance of emotional maturity and would be capable of admitting to their mistakes.

Current partners, however, were often exempt from the high expectations pertaining to future marital partners. That was because current romantic and sexual relationships were regarded as transitional learning experiences. From this position, past relationships could be seen as win-win affiliations, where both people learned something.

The general economic and demographic strength of the singlehood culture was seen as acting as a counterweight against the traditional marriage culture. So did the fact that motherhood was seen as being under-supported by society. It followed that three of the participants did not expect to marry or have children.

Cautious Romantic Attachment

The research participants reported that the process of bonding to a romantic partner was a serious issue to be approached with caution. This related to seeing couples

in their parents' generation bonded together in a contentious relationship that embodied an endless argument. Rather than faulting their parents' generation, they generally blamed the bonding process itself. Falling in love in order to create a committed romantic partnership did not make sense. An in-love passionate attachment was seen as being a very unstable and unreliable bond. They said there had to be a better way.

As it stood, however, there was no agreed upon approach to romantic bonding to replace falling madly in love. When the participants spoke of romantic bonding, they said their cautious style of making romantic attachments could be likened to putting a potential partner through a vetting process. This is different than what was traditionally called dating. Bonding and dating seem to be separate issues, similar to how sex and reproduction have become separated (Baker, 2008). The bonding process for some of the participants appears to be more akin to watching how a potential long-term partner handles oneself in various situations over time. This slow process of building a relationship differs from making a blind commitment that cannot be renegotiated.

The participants also did not speak of searching for the perfect soulmate. They said there are too many life course tasks to accomplish before they needed to be that serious about a partner. In all actuality, only one of the 16 research participants was looking for a mate. But the participants also noted that the resultant tentative relationships were not necessarily what people really wanted or desired. It was, rather, all they could achieve considering their current socioeconomic status.

Postmodern Developmental Tasks

The research participants reported that in today's complex world assertive behaviors are essential for mastering the tasks that establish full adulthood status. Some adolescents and young adults, however, react with indifference to the challenges of young adulthood. That was considered acceptable by the participants' peers until age 26. Thereafter, it was expected that they stop "acting like adolescents and grow up."

The participants reported that young women's concept of self is different from their mothers and grandmothers. This arises from younger women's increasing sense of economic and sexual empowerment. Thus, a life course task is to discover economic

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independence, not the establishment of a long-term romantic relationship. A woman would also not necessarily expect to have a strong *we-ness* identity from being part of a couple when she did marry. Nor were women expected to base their future identity solely on being a mother. In this context, the participants generally agreed that a romantic partner is one person in a social support network, not the entire connection.

The male participants had low-key attitudes about how gender roles were changing. So, for example, in one of the focus groups two women were discussing cross-gender friends having sex together, a behavior called *friends with benefits*. The dialogue ensued as follows:

First Woman: "I think that friends with benefits is along the lines where there's always one person that kind of thinks it may be going somewhere, or would want it to, and the other person could care less if the relationship ended tomorrow."

Second Woman: "It's usually the male that doesn't care."

First Woman: "I've been in a situation where it was the other way around."

Second Woman: "That happens."

Male Participant: "You go, girl!"

The young man's low-key response elicited laughter. This verbal process was typical of how the young men handled cross-gender tension in the focus group discussions. The important point, here, is that there were no apparent gender differences in willingness and ability to communicate about romantic, sexual, and gender identity issues. Those who were unwilling or unable to attempt to do this were seen as deficient in mastering the essential tasks of adolescence and young adulthood.

Theory of Uncertainty and Ambivalence in Young Adult Romantic Relationships

All six of the subcategories relate to the uncertainty and ambivalence that young adults experience in their romantic relationships. When woven together into a conceptual narrative, they generated a theory that elucidates and explains the peer group understandings that provide the social framework in which the participants' romantic relationships took place. That theory is stated as follows:

Young single persons generally view romantic relationships as tentative affiliations. This general sense of uncertainty arises from the lack of agreed-upon, peer group guidelines for romantic relationships. This, in turn, can evoke a sense of ambivalence towards passionate romantic partnering, long-term commitments, and marriage.

It follows that romantic relationships are often seen as non-committed learning experiences. This attitude arises from a social milieu in which serious romantic relationships must compete for time and energy against career goals, financial concerns, and casual sex affiliations that are supported by a strong singlehood culture. It follows that many young people have adopted a style of romantic attachment whereby they make rational decisions about serious relationships during a cautious commitment process.

Within this milieu, socially successful young people often display an assertive style of communication in their cross-gender interactions. These interactions may eventually lead to negotiated romantic relationships where partners support each other's life course development. Yet due to a lack of role models that exemplify intimate relationships, social success can be conceived of in terms of superficial affiliations for sexual convenience. Consequently, some young people may want to have a meaningful relationship but feel ambivalent about trying to do so because they would not know how.

Consequently, adolescents and young adults often rely on their friends to provide a means of emotional support, companionate bonding, and a place to improve cross-gender communication skills. This support acts as a coping mechanism for dealing with the ambiguous relationship environment, where changed timelines and milestones delay young adult involvement in committed romantic partnerships.

The ambiguous character of romantic relationships within this environment propels a subgroup to focus their social energies on partying and having fun. Their casual-sex relationships preclude opportunities to learn intimate cross-gender communication skills that might eventually lead to meaningful relationships. As a result, they sometimes avoid bonded attachments altogether.

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The conceptualization of the uncertain nature of postmodern romance was supported by several key themes that emerged from the experiences of our research participants.

1. The participants reported that romantic relationships were seen as non-committed learning experiences that did not necessarily lead to marriage. Consequently, they often relied on their friends to provide the emotional support which was traditionally given by spouses and the nuclear family.

2. They also reported that casual sexual relationships were generally accepted without the encumbrances of moral judgments. At the same time, in-love passionate bonds were not seen as enduring or stable enough to support long-term romantic relationships and marriage.

3. It followed that the participants endorsed a cautious style of romantic attachment in a situation where the bar for marriage was set quite high. In this atmosphere, traditional gender roles were in a state of flux, as women actualized their new economic and sexual empowerment. Adjusting to these circumstances, men and women showed no apparent differences between abilities or willingness to communicate about romantic and sexual issues.

4. The research participants perceived these attitudes and behaviors to be a part of a generational response to the socioeconomic structural changes that are taking place worldwide. In having a common voice on these issues, the participants demonstrated how their peer group's epistemological understandings concerning romantic relationships were socially constructed (Gergen, 1999). These findings also demonstrate how changes in the socioeconomic structure have pushed a substantial segment of participants into identifying with the postmodern era. Within this segment of the population, romantic relationships are not defined as taking place on a set timeline with agreed upon peer group milestones and expectations (Arnett, 2004). Rather, relationships are individually-negotiated, tenuous arrangements, often conceptualized in terms of time, distance, place, and convenience. The participants did not expect the uncertainty inherent in these arrangements to resolve before they reach full adult status at approximately age 30.

5. It was significant that the participants had ambivalent feelings not just about long-term relationships but also about each step of the traditional partnering sequence. That sequence is commonly considered to have five steps: dating, falling in love, making a commitment, marrying, and having children. The female research participants said that this leaves out the parts about discovering one's sexual and economic potentials, two tasks that must be accomplished before they settle down with a permanent partner. Both men and women said these traditional behaviors seemed more appropriate for people who were aged 30 and older.

6. All the participants agreed that commitment is something that must wait until they have attained full adulthood status and are performing the associated adult roles. Meanwhile, they said they live in relationship limbo on the edge of full adulthood, where they see making commitments to relationships, as well as to adult roles, as a slow, cautious, cognitive-oriented process.

The underlying issue here is that socioeconomic structural change has been taking place for the participants' entire lives. They have watched as the rules that guided relationships for their parents' generation lost their relevance as the socio cultural milieu changed. In the process, they became aware of the lack of role models who displayed functional behaviors concerning romantic partnering that were appropriate for their evolving socio cultural niche. But they also believed they had accommodated to this situation by acknowledging and adapting to the uncertainty inherent to this stage of their lives. They would have liked to have guidelines for romance to replace the traditional ones that were viewed as dysfunctional, but they were not overwhelmed by the lack of them. In the meantime, they simply accepted the fact that the development of emotional maturity must precede the development of the ties that bind romantic partners into long-term relationships.

In conceptualizing this tentative situation, we believe we have offered a different template for comprehending young adult behaviors and attitudes. While the traditional template frames marriage as the goal of dating activities, our template frames romantic relationships as normative within the postmodern reality of constant change (Beronsky, 2005; Rosa, 2007). In that framework, the new task for participants is to develop

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positive coping strategies to deal with their feelings of ambivalence regarding serious, long-term romantic relationships. One such strategy is to learn meaningful cross-gender communication skills in the context of friendship groups. Another is to have tolerant, non-judgmental attitudes about sexual affiliations, along with flexible approaches to traditional gender roles.

Our findings differ from research studies that frame commitment to meaningful relationships as a normative prospect that is achievable for young adults under age 30 (for example, see Levitt et al., 2006). Contrary to that traditional framework, our participants believed that establishing a meaningful, long-term romantic partnership before age 30 is very difficult. They could cite only a couple of rare cases where a few especially-mature couples had accomplished it.

Life course and identity theorists have been trying to understand postmodern issues for more than a decade (Arnett, 2000). The focus of their work has been on the large variety of life course choices available in the postindustrial environment. They have also focused on how long and complex a process it is to establish a full adult identity in a globalized technocracy. The elongated period of time wherein adolescents move forward and commit to adult roles has been called *emerging adulthood* (Arnett, 2000). Arnett (2004) postulated that during this extended sojourn between adolescence and full adulthood many young adults are live in an identity moratorium (Erikson, 1968; Marcia (1968).

During the course of the current study, the participants disclosed that they were strongly aware of how the young adult life course developmental tasks are changing from generation to generation. They were also aware of how their peer group conceptualization of these tasks influences how individuals experience themselves and form an identity within the evolving postmodern social reality. They also reported how adolescent and young adult identity rumination starts to end at age 26 but that they are generally not clear where their life course choices are probably going to lead. Our participants believe that a full adult identity often does not coalesce until age 30, which is in agreement with several researchers (Luyckx, Schwartz, & Goossens, 2008). We believe that this information, and various other aspects of our findings, will be

helpful to identity and developmental researchers as they design protocols to capture the essences of these processes.

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