

The (Future) Object of My Affection:
Developing Beyond Hookup Culture as a Millennial

by

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Submitted to OCAD University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

Master of Design

in

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT AND INNOVATION

Toronto, Ontario, Canada, August, 2016

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Abstract

This project examines the increasing participation in casual sexual relationships and experiences (CSRE's) among millennial emerging adults as a temporal population shift in relationship behaviour, and seeks to imagine how this shift might impact millennials' capacity to form long-lasting romantic partnerships as they develop into their adult stage of life. To do so, it develops a foresight methodology based in cultural historical activity theory, adapting Engeström's model for the structure of human activity as a framework for conceptualizing the systemic dynamic of activity directed toward a future object. The millennial emerging adult's participation in a series of CSRE's is conceived of as an activity directed toward the future object of establishing a long-lasting romantic relationship. Attention is paid to the mediating role of mobile dating apps, linguistic practices associated with CSRE's, and the expansive potential of memes.

Keywords: millennial, emerging adult, hookup, activity theory, Engeström, Tinder, meme

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Peter Jones for your uncompromising academic standards. Your persistent ambition for macro-level analysis and rigorous methodological experimentation has undoubtedly enriched this project.

Thank you to Sean Smith for your critical insights and thoughtful feedback.

Through pushing me to re-examine the heteronormative implications embedded in my analytical framework, you have strengthened my project's relevance and integrity.

Thank you to my family – Emma, Suzanne, and Keith – for continuing to support me through this rather extended and somewhat erratic journey.

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1.0 Introduction

I began this project seeking to investigate the effects that contemporary online dating experiences have upon a person's ability to form and sustain intimate relationships. I started by analyzing the clearly changing media ecology of online dating platforms, and was particularly interested in the emergence of mobile dating applications. I saw these applications as changing the dynamics of online dating, as well as changing how people in my generation were forming relationships. It was my intent to focus heavily on the interface design and user experience of Tinder, which I considered to be the prototypical mobile dating app. Somewhat begrudgingly, I came to accept that in order to substantiate this project, I would need to put greater efforts into understanding the user demographic at hand. At the time, I shallowly conceived of this demographic as "Millennials." I did not know anything about generational analysis, nor did I particularly respect the theories and underdeveloped literature associated with this discipline.

One of my first major findings throughout this course of research was the debate between Jean Twenge and Jeffrey Jensen Arnett: Millennials vs. emerging adults. I was confronted with the following question:

- a) Are we to conceive of this group of people born between (roughly) 1982-2004 as "Millennials," and build from the assumption that they

function within a culture of individualism and disintegrating social norms? Or

- b) Are we to conceive of this group of people as “emerging adults,” and build from the assumption that they will eventually embrace the stability of adulthood, but are currently experiencing an historically novel life stage, characterized by identity-experimentation and self-discovery?

The tension between these perspectives struck me as a fruitful provocation from which to launch foresight inquiries regarding this cohort’s prospects of coming to embrace marital or long-term committed partnership.

Despite this newfound inspiration, I was beginning to question my ability to address this inquiry with methodological legitimacy. Was I to “pick a side”? The debates surrounding Twenge and Arnett are robust and intimidating, calling into question not only the legitimacy of data, but the predictive power of generational analysis. Every argument and counterargument seemed to overflow with empirical evidence (which of course is all subject to interpretation and extrapolation). While I had at this point come to gain great admiration for the discipline, I was now feeling ill-equipped to participate in it. I come from an educational background of the humanities, not social sciences, and do not have experience in collecting or analyzing large amounts of quantitative data. This comment is not intended to reflect a defeatist attitude, but rather a respectful

one. How could I contribute to this discourse without overstepping my bounds, or pretending to be proficient in something that I am not?

In this light, I shifted my focus to compiling pre-existing research relevant to the intimate relationship patterns associated with millennials and/or emerging adults. I opted to suspend “siding” with either school of thought, and instead capture how both perspectives can be employed to make sense of these relationship patterns.

Through this exercise of synthesizing interdisciplinary research, I have identified the following “wicked problem:”

- 1) Engaging in fluid, experimental relationships throughout emerging adulthood is understood to facilitate a developmental process of coming to understand who you are, what you want in a partner, and how you want your relationship with one another to be.
- 2) The social and institutional norms which once structured intimate relationships, especially scripts surrounding traditional dating, and the progression of dating into marriage, have disintegrated amongst the Millennial Generation.
- 3) This disintegration has produced a social climate in which the breakdown of communication, loss of collective understanding, and rise of alienating subjectivity are prominent conditions to the experience of engaging in fluid, experimental relationships.

- 4) These conditions could possibly detract from, if not impede, the individual's ability to productively reflect upon and learn from his/her experiences, so as to developmentally progress toward a readiness for the stable relationships characteristic of adulthood (FKA "marriage").

It was from the identification of this "wicked problem" that my new "research question" began to emerge: How is the emerging adult's developmental progression toward establishing stable relationships characteristic of adulthood hindered by the social climate of millennial hookup culture? And how might this hindrance be addressed?

In Part One of this project, I present my research on hookup culture, and demonstrate how it can be made sense of in relation to both the Millennial and the emerging adult. I then outline my research question, and provide an overview of the methodology I have developed to explore this question. Part Two of this project is dedicated to analysis, but should be regarded both as an exercise in exercise in addressing the research question, as well as formulating and applying a novel foresight methodology. Topics to anticipate include Tinder, friends with benefits, and memes.

Part One: Framework

2.0 Background

“Hooking up” began to gain scholarly attention in the early 2000’s, and is most frequently studied as an activity particular to heterosexual undergraduate students (Paul, McManus & Hayes, 2000; Grello, Welsh & Harper, 2006). It is common for these studies to testify that, among this demographic, hooking up is displacing traditional dating as the primary mode through which to form intimate relationships. In this vein, the hook up can be understood to have progressed from a behaviour to a culture (hereby referred to as hookup culture): “Though casual sex has been a part of college life for decades, a new denigration of, disinterest in, or absence of monogamous, emotionally meaningful relationships may mark the move from subcultural practice to mainstream culture” (Heldman and Wade 327).

2.1 Casual Sexual Relationships and Experiences (CSRE’s)

The term “hookup” is both socially and academically ambiguous. In scholarly work, the term has been attributed a range of definitions, which tend to vary in the following categories: sexual activities involved, level of commitment associated with the engagement, and relationship between partners prior to hooking up (Claxton and van Dulmen 139-140). A helpful development in the hookup culture literature is the suggestion that “hooking up,” rather than being considered as a discrete activity, should be positioned as a

broad category which encompasses various forms of “casual sexual relationships and experiences” (Claxton and van Dulmen 140). The phrase “casual sexual relationships and experiences” (CSRE’s) is intended as an umbrella term covering the various forms of intimacy and/or sexuality experienced by emerging adults outside of committed romantic relationships. The semiotic breakdown of this phrase is illustrated below in Figure 1.

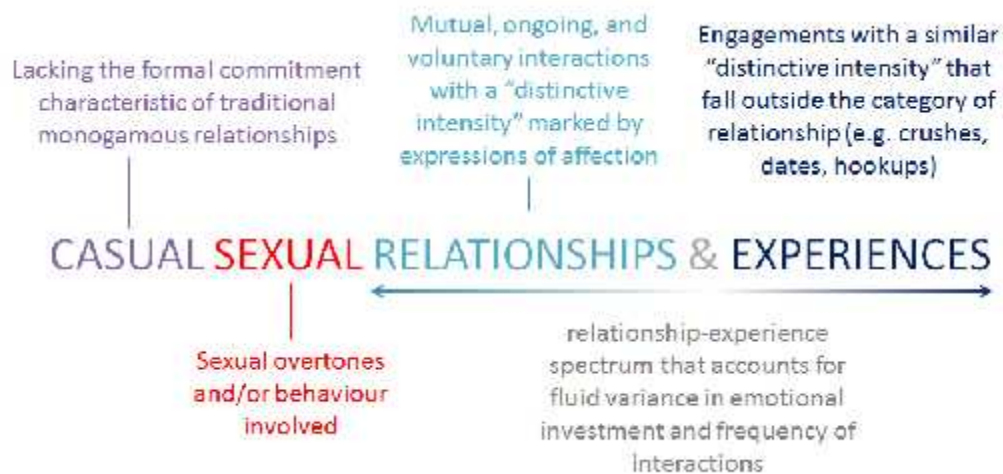


Figure 1: “Casual sexual relationships and experiences” semiotic breakdown

Source: Daly-Buajitti, Melissa. 2016

Three distinct forms of involvement are seen to fall within the CSRE category, and are defined below: friends with benefits, one night stands, and booty calls (Claxton and van Dulmen 140).

-) **One-night stands:** primarily sexual experiences that occur only once, and usually between strangers or acquaintances

-) **Friends with benefits:** friends who engage in sexual activity with one another, but do not consider the relationship to be romantic
-) **Booty calls:** propositions that initiate imminent sexual activity with a casual partner

As I will discuss later, these three relationship types only show the tip of a very nebulous iceberg. There is much more complexity to each of these types of experiences than their rigid definitions might suggest. The intent here, however, has been to provide a snapshot of the shifting relationship patterns that constitute hookup culture.

2.2 Accounting for the Emergence of Hookup Culture

In studies examining the emergence of hookup culture, a common notion is that this new regime of intimacy began to replace dating culture in tandem with the 1960's Sexual Revolution (Heldman and Wade 327). The Sexual Revolution is associated with a generational shift, driven by the Baby Boomers, toward activities and ideologies reflective of an increase in sexual permissiveness (Twenge, Sherman, and Wells 2274). Around this time, heterosexual college students began to prefer "informal group partying" over "traditional dating" as their primary means of meeting and/or initiating relationships with sexual partners (Horowitz qtd. in Bogle 778). The group party served as an activity which countered the "formal rules and rigidity of dating" (Strouse qtd. in Bogle 778) with a more casual and fluid script.

The following factors, as outlined by Heldman and Wade, can also be seen to have influenced the emergence of hookup culture:

- 1) The institution of co-ed dormitories on college campuses (327-328)
- 2) Growing disproportion between the number of women and men in college settings, whereby men have become a “‘scarce resource’ on campus with greater power to determine sexual norms and scripts” (328)
- 3) Rising levels of alcohol consumption and binge drinking among college students (328)
- 4) Increasing accessibility of pornography via the internet, which arguably challenges the idea that sex should occur within a monogamous relationship (328)
- 5) Proliferation of sexually explicit mass media (328-329)
- 6) Increased uptake in self-objectifying behaviour by young women (329)
- 7) A generational increase in narcissism, which is seen to correlate with taking a “conquest” or “game-playing” approach to romantic relationships (329)
- 8) Reduced sensitivity around HIV/AIDS, and growing confidence in ability to manage sexual risk due to sexual education (329)
- 9) Postponement of marriage, in combination with earlier ages of sexual initiation, which fosters an unprecedented period of pre-productive sexual maturity (330)

What this list should demonstrate is that hookup culture stems from and is continuously fueled by a diverse combination of forces. Each of these factors warrants its own investigation, but none can independently account for the emergence of hookup culture, nor would such an analysis provide holistic insight into the societal implications of this phenomenon. To account for this emergence with a broader lens that can provide greater range for imagining the life course of this phenomenon, I will turn to a framework of age, period, and cohort effects.

2.3 Age, Period, and Cohort Effects

Three primary effects are often used to account for population changes over time: age, period, and cohort. Age effects account for the changes individuals face as they develop through stages of their lives. Period effects account for the changes within a population given the conditions of its particular moment in history. Cohort effects account for the changes within a particular group of people given the social conditions and/or events they face during their formative stages of development (Yang 205). The following dialogue illustrates the distinction between these effects:

A: I can't seem to shake off this tired feeling. Guess I'm just getting old.

[Age effect]

B: Do you think it's stress? Business is down this year, and you've let your fatigue build up. [Period effect]

A: Maybe. What about you?

B: Actually, I'm exhausted too! My body feels really heavy.

A: You're kidding. You're still young. I could work all day long when I was your age.

B: Oh, really?

A: Yeah, young people these days are quick to whine. We were not like that. [Cohort effect] (Suzuki qtd. in Bell and Jones 163)

These effects can help to frame two of the most prominent perspectives in studies addressing the rise of hookup culture. The first perspective, which can be understood to centre on cohort effects, asserts that this shift in relationship patterns is a phenomenon of the millennial generation. The second perspective asserts that this shift in relationship patterns is characteristic of an historically novel life-stage, termed "emerging adulthood." Associating hookup culture with a life stage can be understood as an age-effect. That being said, emerging adulthood is a relatively new concept and phenomenon, which is thought to have surfaced as a condition of highly industrialized societies. Attributing this new life stage to cultural and economic changes rooted in historical progress can be understood as a period-effect. As such, the second perspective can be understood to combine age and period effects.

The conflict between these two perspectives can be felt with most salience when attempting to extrapolate around the long-term implications of these shifts in relationship behaviours and attitudes. How will millennial emerging adults, who are observed to be immersed in these shifting relationships patterns, characterized by an uptake in hookup culture and a rejection of traditional dating, come to approach marriage and long-term

committed partnership? Consider first that a generational cohort effect can be understood as “a cultural change primarily affecting young people that is retained with age” (Twenge, Sherman, and Wells 2273-2274). As such, the sexual attitudes and behaviour observed among Millennials can be attributed to values they have formed in earlier stages of their development, and can be expected to persist as they continue to develop. Following this reasoning, the rejection of stable, committed relationships may continue to be a central component of Millennial culture, ultimately challenging the institution of marriage. From the age-period-effect perspective, however, emerging adults will inevitably develop into an adult life-stage, whereby their engagement in hookup culture will accordingly diminish as they “settle down.” In this school of thought, emerging adults have postponed marriage and long-term committed partnership to a later age, but still hold these relationships as a future desire. This project intends to consider, draw from, and synthesize both perspectives.

2.4 Shifting Relationship Patterns as a Cohort Effect

Jean Twenge, who is perhaps most famously known for characterizing Millennials as “Generation Me,” conducted a study in 2015 which identified a trend in American culture toward greater sexual permissiveness, both in terms of attitudes and behaviours. In this study, sexually permissive attitudes were measured in relation to acceptance of pre-marital sex, teenage sex, extramarital sex, and same-sex sexual activity. Sexually permissive behaviours were measured

in relation to number of sexual partners, types of sexual partners (regular partner, casual date, friend, acquaintance, neighbour, co-worker, paid sex), and engagement in extramarital sex. Millennials were found to have the most sexually permissive attitudes of any generation: among 18-29-year-olds, acceptance of premarital sex has risen from 47% of Boomers in the early 1970s, to 50% of Gen-Xer's in the early 1990s, to 62% of Millennials in the 2010s. In addition, among 18-29-year-olds reporting non-partner sex, having sex with a "casual date or a pickup" rose from 35% of GenX'ers in the late 1980s to 45% of Millennials in the 2010s (Twenge, Sherman, and Wells 2277-2278). The study employed a mixed-effects analysis to distinguish the effects of time period, generation, and age, and found that increases in sexually permissive attitudes and behaviour were primarily due to generational effects.

It is suggested that this shift in values could be tied to a concurrent rise in cultural individualism. The following reasoning is applied:

Individualism is a cultural system that favors the needs or desires of the individual over those of the group. As a result, more individualism should mean a relaxation of rules around marriage and sexuality. At base, marriage represents society's official recognition of a sexual relationship. Cultural individualism instead promotes the idea that social rules and societal recognition are less important, which may encourage more acceptance of sexual behavior outside of marriage. (Twenge, Sherman, and Wells 2274)

Affiliating Millennials with individualism is a primary theme throughout Twenge's work. Specifically, she sees the rise of the individual and the decline of social

rules as interlocking cultural shifts most central to the ethos of Generation Me. As demonstrated through her study of changes in sexual behaviour and attitudes, this ethos can be seen as a driving force behind the emergent culture of relationships and intimacy among Millennials.

In referring to the “rise of the individual,” Twenge is concerned with the prevalence of self-focused mentalities in which individual needs and desires are put before all else. To account for this rise, she points to and outlines the evolution of self-esteem as a cultural movement. Rooted in the modern concept of the individual as an autonomous and free being, this movement was pioneered by the Boomer generation, who placed emphasis on self-fulfillment and the personal journey. Whereas Boomers drove this shift in their young adulthood, and as a conscious, group-based effort, Millennials have been born into a culture already saturated with these values. Having been raised in an environment of “unconditional validation,” they take for granted that they are all personally special. They have been taught to put their own needs first, and have enjoyed unprecedented freedom to pursue pleasure and self-fulfillment. Furthermore, they have been raised by their Boomer parents to believe anything is possible, and to follow their dreams.

Twenge sees hookup culture as intrinsically linked to the cultural impetus placed on individualism and freedom. She describes the Millennial approach to sexuality as having a “do what feels good for you, and ignore the rules of

society” mentality (Twenge 206). An example of individualistic approaches to romance can be seen in messaging along the lines of “I love myself, and I don’t need anybody else,” or “above all, you must love yourself.” Hookup culture theoretically posits a novel disconnect between sex and emotional involvement, which enables participants to enjoy sexual pleasure without becoming tethered to the needs of another.

With regard to the decline of social rules, Twenge points to a decrease in the social pillars of duty, responsibility, consideration, and loyalty. This change in values, she argues, can be seen embodied in a growing disregard for authority – be it the authority of a superior (such as a boss or teacher), or the authority of a social institution (such as marriage). Also observed is an increasingly casual approach to manners, attire, and previously formal occasions (such as traditional dates). Rather than conform or comply with such authority, Millennials ascribe to the prevailing notion that morality is subjective, and to be determined by one’s personal opinions.

This decline of social rules can be seen to influence intimate relationships in various ways. In perhaps the most apparent sense, we see a loosening of the formalities surrounding marriage: people marry later in life, and marital status is less starkly attached to a person’s social standing. Related to these loosening formalities is the increasing prevalence of pre-marital sex, which correlates with the emergence of hookup culture. Decline of social rules can also be observed as

an increasing casualness around dating, as demonstrated through the rejection of formal commitment characteristic of CSRE's.

2.5 Shifting Relationship Patterns as an Age-Period Effect

In 2000, Jeffrey Jensen Arnett proposed the concept of “emerging adulthood” to account for the shifting lifestyle patterns of contemporary 18-25 year olds. He observed that, in tandem with the general postponement of marriage and parenthood until the mid to late twenties, it was becoming less normative for individuals to assume traditional adult roles in the late teens and early twenties. “Emerging adulthood” thus describes an historically novel life stage which falls between adolescence and adulthood.

He attributes this life stage to the economic conditions of highly industrialized societies, in which the displacement of manufacturing jobs by machine automation, and the subsequent shift in demand for a workforce with information- and technology-based skills, has increased uptake in post-secondary education, lengthening the period of time people spend developing their skill-set before fully beginning a career (Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood* 3-4). This extended transition from adolescence into adulthood serves as a time of exploration and flux.

The following is an excerpt from the publication in which Arnett first introduced the concept of emerging adulthood:

Having left the dependency of childhood and adolescence, and having not yet entered the enduring responsibilities that are normative in adulthood, emerging adults often explore a variety of life directions in love, work, and worldviews. Emerging adulthood is a time of life when many different directions remain possible, when little about the future has been decided for certain, when the scope of independent exploration of life's possibilities is greater for most people than it will be at any other period of the life course. ("Emerging Adulthood" 469)

In contrast to Twenge, who attributes hookup culture to a rise in individualism and disregard for social norms, Arnett attests that these behavioural shifts are specific to the life stage of emerging adulthood. The postponement of marriage correlates with new challenges of education and professional establishment, and engaging in CSRE's can be understood as a method of exploring various relationship experiences before entering marriage (Arnett, "Emerging Adulthood" 478).

2.6 Marriage

Although marriage has traditionally been perceived as the designated event which marks an individual's transition from adolescence into adulthood, emerging adults are beginning to reject marriage as "an essential marker of adulthood" (Arnett, "Learning to Stand Alone" 1). That is, they are beginning to evaluate their sense of being an adult by new criteria, amongst which marital status is not included. These new criteria include taking responsibility for oneself, making independent decisions, and establishing financial independence (Arnett, "Learning to Stand Alone" 2).

We can see how from Twenge's perspective, this shift in values would be interpreted as reflecting a rise in cultural individualism which poses a threat to marriage. It has, however, also been suggested that these criteria represent a form of "relational maturity that prepares an individual for later marriage and family life" (Carroll et. al. 223). Furthermore, despite their decrease in perceiving marital status as a marker of adulthood, it has been demonstrated that the majority of emerging adults still hold marriage as a goal. That is, they are expecting to get married, and are planning for marriage (Carroll et. al. 225). At the same time, declining marriage rates have been observed on a global scale, throughout industrialized countries (Garrison 501). Considering these divergent findings, it can be said that although millennial emerging adults may still hold marriage as a goal, this goal is less imminent, less of a priority, and less certain of being achieved than it has been for previous generations.

2.7 Emerging Adulthood as a Stage of Romantic Development

The concept of emerging adulthood has been applied to re-examine our theoretical understanding of how individuals develop an ability to form and sustain romantic relationships. Studies examining the stages of romantic development (referred to as "romantic stage theories") have demonstrated that individuals typically establish their ability to form and sustain romantic relationships over the course of adolescence. This development is modelled as moving from sexual awakening toward involvement in romantic relationships

that are steady, exclusive, and highly intimate, whereby the central task is learning to negotiate and balance aspects of self and other (Shulman and Connolly 28-29).

The implicit suggestion here is that following adolescence, individuals will begin to establish committed romantic partnerships that will endure throughout adulthood. Contrary to this expectation, in contemporary Western culture, individuals in the age-range of 18-30 years old do not uniformly engage in committed long-term relationships. Instead, this cohort is observed to experience relational instabilities that consist in moving between committed relationships, and engaging in “sporadic romantic encounters” (Shulman and Connolly 29-30). Shulman and Connolly suggest that the relational instabilities observed amongst emerging adults might reflect a distinct stage of romantic development, in which the primary task is for the individual to learn to coordinate “dyadic commitment with individual life plans” (30-31).

“Relational instabilities” here refer to experiences of moving between committed relationships, and engaging in “sporadic romantic encounters.” A distinct range of relationship patterns is attributed to this classification of “relational instabilities,” including the previously mentioned CSRE’s, as well as cohabitation, and “stay over” relationships. Cohabitation describes the experience of unmarried couples living together. Whereas cohabitation has previously, and traditionally, functioned as a formalized and cognisant step

toward marriage among romantic partners, it is now more often a circumstance that couples gradually fall into without much deliberation. Couples have begun to employ “moving in together” as a means of testing the relationship, or as a logistical convenience (Shulman and Connolly 30). “Stay over” relationships describes the experience of unmarried couples who do not live together, but spend 3-7 nights of the week sleeping over at one another’s residences. These relationships are conceived of as distinct from cohabitation in that they involve specific relationship boundaries not present within cohabitation, such as being able to physically separate in times of conflict (Jamison and Proulx 156).

The task of coordinating individual life plans with dyadic commitment can be understood as a process through which both partners in a relationship address their own aspirations and cooperatively integrate them with one another. Shulman and Connolly elaborate on the dynamic of this process:

It is through individual deliberations carried out alongside joint discussions and resolutions with their romantic partners that young people will feel competent enough to make the transition to a long-lasting romantic partnership (31).

In this sense, the emerging adult stage of romantic development is characterized by learning to reflect upon personal needs in relation to those of one’s partner, and to navigate compromise – both in the form of personal sacrifice, and as a cooperative exercise involving open communication.

2.8 Summary

To summarize these two perspectives in very simple terms:

-) **Cohort Perspective:** Hookup culture reflects a cultural rise in individualism and a rejection of social norms. These values have been instilled in millennials at a young age, and can be expected to persist throughout their lives. These generational shifts threaten millennial prospects of developing long-lasting romantic partnerships.
-) **Age-Period Perspective:** Hookup culture reflects the exploratory and unstable characteristics of the emerging adulthood life stage. Emerging adults have postponed marriage, and do not view marriage as an integral aspect of adulthood, but still want to get married. Once they developmentally progress into adulthood, they will develop long-lasting romantic partnerships.

I accept neither perspective fully. It seems bleak and extreme to imagine a generational rejection of developing long-lasting romantic partnerships in which all Millennials end up alone because they are so self-involved. At the same time, it seems overly optimistic and simplified to assume that Millennials can just progress through an historically novel life stage, and then carry on with assuming an otherwise traditional life trajectory. Where is the middle ground between these perspectives? The remainder of my project will explore this question.

3.0 Research Questions

Even if we accept that Millennial emerging adults still envision themselves eventually developing long-lasting romantic partnerships, we must acknowledge that this goal is abstract, distant, and mediated by a complex landscape of shifting relationship patterns, disintegrating social norms, new social technology, and economic uncertainty that has rendered many other benchmarks of adult stability less feasible.

-) How might we conceptualize the dynamics at play in this mediated pursuit of an abstract and distant goal?
-) How can we account for the obstacles that might challenge the pursuit of this goal?
-) How might these obstacles be addressed, so as to facilitate successful pursuit of this goal?

4.0 Methodology Introduction

I have focused my efforts on developing a theoretical framework with which to synthesize and collectively make sense of the diverse perspectives from which this topic is approached. This topic is extremely interdisciplinary, drawing from generational analysis, life-stage theory, sexuality studies, family studies, and media studies. Further, I am not only seeking to make sense of this topic as a current phenomenon. This is a project of foresight, and as such it calls for a method that supports extrapolating upon present conditions in order to imagine that which might emerge and that which might be possible in the future.

I have positioned the opposing perspectives of Twenge and Arnett as an initial framework within which to make sense of hookup culture as a temporal population change. I comparatively assess this phenomenon as a cohort effect (relative to Millennials) and as an age-period effect (relative to emerging adulthood). This approach can be understood as a means of considering a cultural shift in relation to its historical positioning. Doing so sets the groundwork for posing questions about the potential implications of this shift. In the practice of foresight, it is important that we first seek to understand how something has come to be before proceeding to project around its impact on the future. The understanding of Millennials and emerging adulthood that I have developed through my research can be understood as an analysis of social

practice from the perspective of cultural historical activity theory, and will continue to inform my inquiry throughout this project.

This is a project of foresight in the sense that it examines how a particular cohort will progress to develop long-lasting romantic partnerships as they transition into their adult stage of life. Although we can anticipate this transition, we don't know specifically what dynamics it will entail, what obstacles might present, or how the cohort's ability to develop these types of relationships might be challenged. Of particular concern is how participation in hookup culture might effect this transition.

In order to explore these factors, I have adopted Yrjö Engeström's model for the structure of human activity as the overall framework of my study. With this model, which promotes conceiving of an activity as a system, I examine how the millennial emerging adult engages in a series of CSRE's while also pursuing the distant goal ("future object") of developing a long-lasting romantic partnership. This model facilitates mapping out various dynamics relevant to the activity at hand, including the interdependence of career and relationship goals, the mediating role of mobile dating applications, the influence of linguistic practices within hookup culture, and the clash between CSRE's and long-lasting romantic partnership. Mapping these dynamics facilitates the identification of tensions or dysfunction within the activity system. These tensions can be understood as conditions that challenge the millennial emerging adult's

readiness to establish long-lasting romantic partnerships, and can be further investigated as opportunities for innovative intervention.

Engeström's model is not specifically intended as a foresight tool, but through developing and incorporating the concept of a future object (which I will elaborate upon soon) I demonstrate how the model can be applied to the practice of foresight. Activity-theory-based studies typically focus on analyzing the dynamics of activities directed toward more immediate and delineated objects (motives). This study is distinguished by its focus on a *future* object that is distant, abstract, and in the process of forming. Through incorporating the future object, this project pushes Engeström's model to embody an extrapolative scope. I believe the model is already well-suited to this purpose due to its systemic structure, which fosters mapping the relations between diverse and highly specialized data points. This mapping produces a systemic overview that provides a high-level account of "the big picture" without paring away any valuable detail.

Engeström's model calls into focus the mediating role that instruments play within activity systems. For this segment of my analysis, I will focus on the mobile dating app, Tinder, as an example of a mediating instrument. In order to methodically examine the media ecology within which Tinder is embedded, I will employ McLuhan's Tetrad of Media Effects as an analytical framework. The Tetrad is a framework with which to analyze the dynamic process by which any

given medium comes to alter our social processes. It lends itself well to foresight practice in the sense that it provides a structure for imagining the life-course of a technology's influence upon society.

I will now discuss in further depth the particular structure of these two frameworks drawn from Engeström and McLuhan.

5.0 Cultural Historical Activity Theory

This project has embraced Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) as its primary analytical framework. My understanding and application of CHAT has been developed in particular relation to the works of Yrjö Engeström. The following excerpt from his biography provides a brief account of his contribution to CHAT:

Engeström applies and develops cultural-historical activity theory as a framework for the study of transformations and learning processes in work activities and organizations. He is widely known for his theory of expansive learning and for the methodology of developmental work research. (Engeström, *From Teams to Knots* i)

5.1 “Activity” and “Expansive Learning”

Before discussing Engeström’s model, I will first introduce his concepts of activity and expansive learning, and articulate how progressing through a series of intimate relationships can be conceived of as an activity with potential for expansive learning. Engeström summarizes his concept of activity in the following passage:

Activity is seen here as a collective, systemic formation that has a complex mediational structure. Activities are not short-lived events or actions that have a temporally clear-cut beginning or end. They are systems that *produce* events and actions and evolve over lengthy periods of sociohistorical time (Engeström, *From Teams to Knots* 50).

Following this reasoning, I have chosen to analyse the emerging adult’s engagement in series of relational instabilities as an activity, rather than focus on the dynamic of a singular relationship from within the series, which would be

more accurately conceived of as a short-lived event or action. The emerging adult's progression through a series of relational instabilities can be understood as *collective* in that a cohort of emerging adults is engaging in this activity, not only analogously, but also symbiotically, as they form relationships with one another. The activity can be understood as *systemic* in that it involves the coordination of multiple categories of activity, as demonstrated through interdependence of relationship, work, school, and residence.

The notion that activity systems evolve over length periods of sociohistorical time is also of significance to this project, as the emerging adult life stage and its associated relationship patterns have been posited as historically novel phenomena that can be seen as having evolutionary potential in the realm of partner selection. This evolutionary potential can be imagined through Engeström's concept of expansive learning, which he defines as "learning in which the learners are involved in constructing and implementing a radically new, wider and more complex object and concept for their activity" ("Studies of Expansive Learning" 2). In relation to this definition, we can conceive of emerging adults as the learners – but what are they learning?

Engeström elaborates on the premise of expansive learning in the following passage:

When whole collective activity systems... need to redefine themselves, traditional models of learning are not enough. Nobody knows exactly what needs to be learned. The design of the new activity and the

acquisition of the knowledge and skills it requires are increasingly intertwined. In expansive learning they merge. (“Studies of Expansive Learning” 3)

Imagine the concept of a whole collective activity system needing to redefine itself in relation to the landscape in which emerging adults seek to form intimate relationships. In the emerging adult stage of life, individuals must make interdependent life decisions about various critical factors, including (but not limited to) romantic relationships, education, career, and places of residence. As mentioned previously, the duration of life-course allotted to deliberating upon and exploring these choices is historically novel, as reflected in the recent classification of “emerging adulthood” as a discrete life stage. Contributing to this complexity is the condition of increased economic precarity. Shulman and Connolly succinctly articulate this challenge as the need for emerging adults to “resolve these multiple age-related tasks while simultaneously adapting to the context of a world that has become less certain” (31).

5.2 Engeström’s Triangular Model

In *Learning by Expanding*, Engeström develops a triangular model through which to analyse the “inner dynamic relations” (65) of any given human activity. His intent is for this model to function as “the smallest and most simple unit that still preserves the essential unity and integral quality behind any human activity” (65). Drawing from Marx, he structures this model around the notion that the three dominant aspects of human activity are production, distribution,

and exchange or communication (62). Figure 2 illustrates the structure of this model.

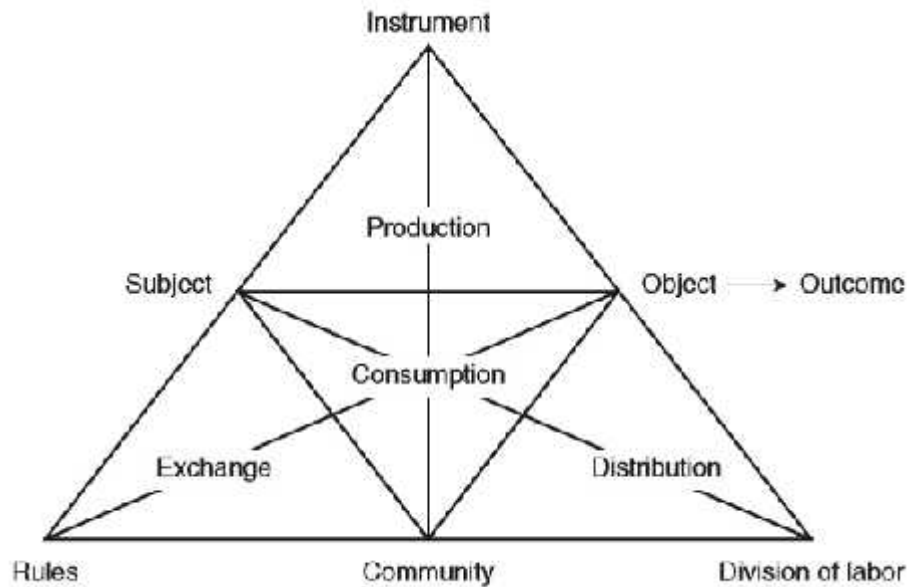


Figure 2: Engeström's triangular model for the structure of human activity

Source: Engeström, Yrjö. *Learning by Expanding: An Activity Theoretical Approach to Developmental Research*. 2nd ed. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015. Print.

The top triangle of this model can be taken as the starting point for analyzing an activity. Here, the subject's pursuit of their object (as motive) is mediated by the instruments (resources, apps, materials, etc.) used in the actions accomplished within the given activity. These three nodes are described as follows:

-) **Subject:** The individual who is engaged in the activity; this person's point of view is to be taken as the perspective of the analysis (Engeström, "Studies of Expansive Learning" 6)
-) **Object:** The objective or outcome to which the subject directs his or her activity
-) **Instrument:** The tools, signs, and models that mediates the subject's relation to the object; instruments turn objects into outcomes

The bottom three nodes of this model are intended to capture the "less visible social mediators of activity" (Engeström, *From Teams to Knots* 27):

-) **Rules:** "the explicit and implicit regulations, norms, conventions and standards that constrain actions within the activity system" (Engeström, "Studies of Expansive Learning" 6)
-) **Community:** individuals and groups who also hold the same general object as the subject (Engeström, "Studies of Expansive Learning" 6)
-) **Division of Labour:** Engeström attests that the fundamental contradiction of human activity stems from the division of labour, describing human activity as having a "dual existence as the total societal production and as one specific production among many" (*Learning by Expanding* 66). When employing his triangular model to analyze a given activity, we are to see this contradiction reproduced as "the clash between individual actions

and the total activity system” (*Learning by Expanding* 66). Analysis in this section should focus on division of tasks and power within the activity.

5.3 Contradictions and Disturbances in Engeström’s Model

Engeström’s triangular model is structured to facilitate a mode of analysis whereby one can identify contradictions within the activity system at hand. Locating and making sense of the contradictions within an activity system is central to understanding the activity’s developmental potential, as well as the obstacles to such development. Engeström elaborates on the nature of contradictions in the following passage:

Contradictions can typically be identified as tensions between two or more components of the system. Such inner contradictions emerge when one component changes or develops beyond the operational logic of the other components (*From Teams to Knots* 27).

Lending guidance to how we might identify a contradiction, Engeström notes that disturbances, as symptomatic of underlying contradiction, often manifest in the forms of obstacles, difficulties, failures, disagreements, and conflicts (*From Teams to Knots* 27). He describes disturbances as “deviations from the normal scripted course of events... normal being defined by plans, explicit rules and instructions, or tacitly assumed traditions” (*From Teams to Knots* 24).

Consistent with this approach to activity analysis, I will identify disturbances and contradictions within the total activity system. The

contradictions identified will be used to highlight areas of simultaneous developmental tension and developmental potential within the activity system. It is toward these areas that innovative intervention should be directed. In this sense, I will use the activity model as a tool for problem framing.

6.0 Marshall McLuhan's Tetrad of Media Effects

Marshall McLuhan's Tetrad of Media Effects, proposed in the *Laws of Media* (1992), is a conceptual framework with which to analyze the dynamic process by which any given medium comes to alter our social processes. This dynamic of alteration is conceived of in terms of four simultaneous and interdependent effects, outlined as follows (Schaefer and Steinmetz 506):

-) **Enhancement:** What the medium amplifies or intensifies
-) **Obsolescence:** What the medium drives out of prominence
-) **Retrieval:** What the medium recovers which was previously lost
-) **Reversal:** What the medium does when pushed to its limits

The Tetrad can be visualized with the template shown in Figure 3.

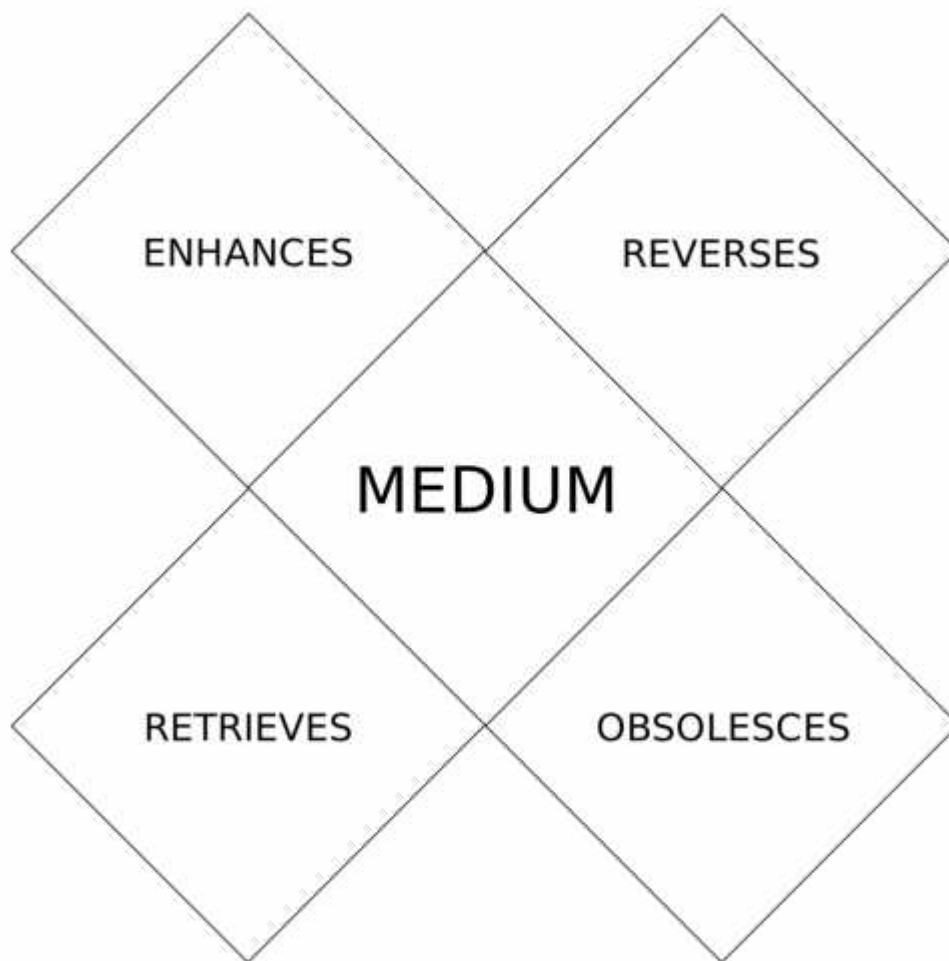


Figure 3: Tetrad of Media Effects Template

Source: Wikipedia contributors. "Tetrad of media effects." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 27 Mar. 2016. Web. 10 Sep. 2016.

The tetrad lends itself well to foresight practice in the sense that it provides a structure for imagining the life-course of a technology's influence upon society. By this structure, that which might happen in the future (explored most thoroughly in the reverses quadrant), is conceived of in relation to what we

can learn from past (retrieves quadrant), and what we observe to be happening in the present (enhances and obsolesces quadrants).

I use this analytical framework and template to examine and outline Tinder's role as an online dating tool, and the particular effects it has upon the process of finding and meeting intimate partners. My approach is to first break Tinder into various discrete technologies that make its existence as a tool possible. Tinder is not just one technology; it is a combined application of various pre-existing technologies. It is an app designed to work with the mobile phone. The swipe – perhaps its defining function – is a command gesture tied to the affordances of the touch screen. It falls within a new location-based genre of online dating enabled by GPS software, which also employs previously-developed operations of search filtering. After dissecting these components, I use the Tetrad to examine them separately. I then look for patterns and common themes across these analyses, and discuss Tinder's overall influence as a mediator of relationship formation.

Part Two: Analysis

7.0 Analysis Overview

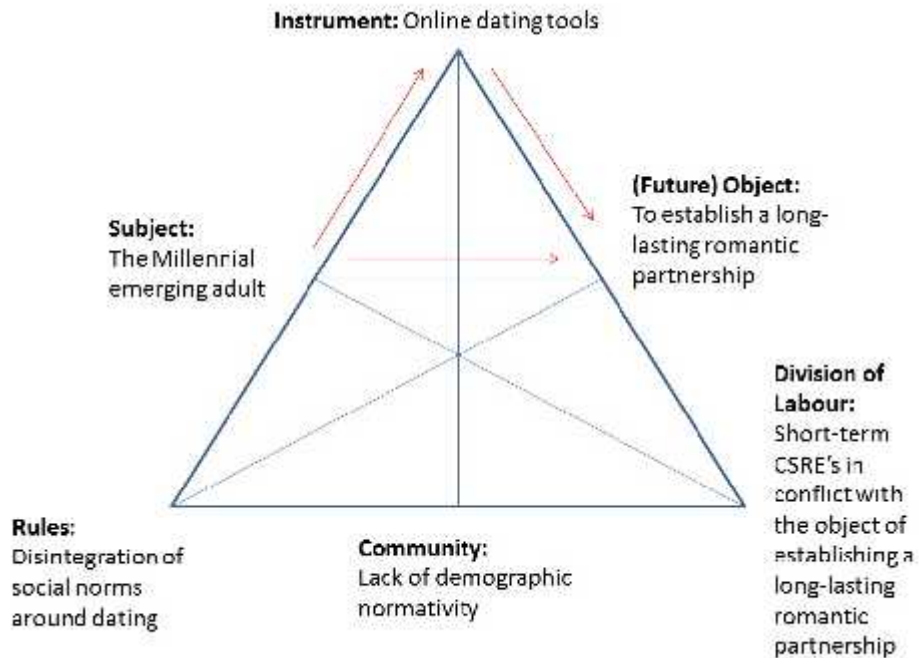


Figure 4: The activity of progressing through a series of relational instabilities during emerging adulthood

Source: Daly-Buajitti, Melissa. 2016.

Figure 4 illustrates my use of Engeström's model to imagine the emerging adult's experience of progressing through a series of relational instabilities as an activity. In Chapters 8-13, I address each node of this model as its own chapter. In Chapter 14, I account for the key contradictions within this system. In Chapter 15, I respond to these contradictions through proposing opportunities for expansive potential within the system.

8.0 Subject: The Millennial Emerging Adult

The emerging adult is an individual between the ages of 18-30 (although this age range is not definitive, and may extend into the thirties), growing up in an industrialized society, and transitioning through a period of life in which he or she experiences unprecedented freedom to explore a variety of life directions prior to assuming the formal responsibilities associated with adulthood.

Accompanying this exploration is the tendency to shift through different life directions with transience and inconsistency, particularly in the realms of work, residence, relationships, and worldviews. The following passage illustrates these conditions:

They may find a job, decide on an occupation, leave it later, return to some kind of training, and then pursue a different occupation again. Others may oscillate between periods of work and of unemployment, or between living independently and living with parents... Young people live "divided lives," experiencing aspects of youth and adult life simultaneously, feeling that they are "nowhere" or marginalized. Transitions are no longer successive, manageable sequences and passages, but are now characterized by fluctuations, discontinuities, reversals, and uncertainties. What may look like a successful transition may be unstable and collapse after a period of time (Shulman and Nurmi 58).

Critical to note is that the life stage of emerging adulthood is not a reality for all young people growing up in industrialized society, and is likely more specific to middle-to-upper-class individuals (Arnett, "Emerging Adulthood" 478). As one study candidly remarks (albeit in defence of its own lack of a diversified sample), "The ability to shed adult responsibilities in the service of

self-exploration is a privilege not available to all 18- to 29-year-olds” (Jamison and Proulx 168). Another study acknowledges that postponing marriage is much less of a trend among “people of lower educational and personal aspirations” (Shulman and Connolly 36). I would suggest that the term “aspirations” be substituted with something along the lines of “opportunities,” and that we clarify “personal aspirations” to be particularly career-specific (as it is of course problematic to rank the aspiration of starting a family below that of pursuing a career). The importance of this clarification will become clearer as I progress to discuss the interdependence of career and relationship goals in the next chapter.

9.0 (Future) Object: Establishing a Long-lasting Romantic Partnership

Insofar as emerging adulthood is characterized as a period of traversing various life paths, and gradually setting down, we can imagine the emerging adult's ultimate object to be that of transitioning into adulthood. That is, establishing, with deliberateness, a stable positioning in life, especially with respect to solidifying a career and committing to a romantic partner. These two dimensions of adult establishment are quite codependent, and might be said to traditionally merge in the object of establishing a family, central to which are the combined values of committed love and financial security. This codependency is reflected in the suggested task of learning to coordinate "dyadic commitment with individual life plans" (Shulman and Connolly 30-31), whereby dyadic commitment can be seen as pertaining to the relationship dimension, and individual life plans to the career dimension.

9.1 Activity Directed Toward a Future Object

As described so far, the emerging adult's object is quite traditional. I will suggest that the historically novel aspects of this object are its prolonged duration of establishment and increased emphasis on choice, which are reflected in the characterizations of emerging adulthood as a period of instability, flux, exploration, and freedom. Because the object is so distant, and is mediated by an extended period of choice and deliberation, we can imagine that part of the object is to solidify what the object is: *Who am I? What do I want to do? Who do*

I want to be with? The emerging adult tackles these questions through his or her exploration of different life paths. This exploration can be directed toward preparation for adult life, but can also be engaged in for the sake of enjoying a range of life experiences before the possibility of doing so is limited by adult obligations (Arnett, "Emerging Adulthood" 474). Both types of exploration can contribute to the solidification of one's object.

One study examining the ways in which emerging adults formulate their future goals defines goals as "dynamic structures that undergo processes of reconstruction across time to meet contextual realities" (Shulman and Nurmi 61). In this light, we can understand that the emerging adult must simultaneously formulate and pursue his or her object through a process of exploratory adaptation. Within this process, he or she can form and discard, or achieve and move past, many smaller or more proximal objects, all the while knowing (or at least sensing nebulously) that there is some greater object on the horizon.

Another study suggests that during emerging adulthood individuals establish a personal "marriage philosophy" which consists in their attitudes around how much they desire to marry, the ideal age at which they would like to get married, the type of person they would like to marry, and their personal readiness for marriage (Carroll et. al. 224). In order to account for long-lasting romantic partnerships that fall outside of marriage, I will suggest that the

concept of a “marriage philosophy” can be adapted to that of a “partnership philosophy.” A partnership philosophy can be seen to inform the individual’s specific behaviours as he or she progresses through emerging adulthood. For example, an individual whose partnership philosophy involves a more proximal ideal age of committing to long-term partnership is likely to engage in a form of “anticipatory socialization” by which he or she curtails behaviours conceived of as incompatible with adult commitment, such as promiscuous sexual activity or substance abuse (Carroll et. al. 226). In this light, if we conceive of establishing a personal partnership philosophy as an aspect of object formulation, then we must also acknowledge that object pursuit and object formulation can function as co-constructive processes which continuously inform one another.

With these dynamics in mind, I propose the concept of activity directed toward a *future object*. This type of activity is mediated by an extended period of choice and deliberation, and can be understood as an iterative and co-constructive process of formulating and pursuing an object.

9.2 Career and Relationship Dimensions of the Emerging Adult’s Future Object

Prolonged duration of establishment and increased emphasis on choice are reflected in both the career and relationship dimensions of the emerging adult’s future object. I will first address these dimensions discretely, and then suggest how they might relate to one another.

Regarding the career dimension, we can consider this cohort's mass uptake in postsecondary education. When Arnett first articulated the concept of emerging adulthood, he noted that among young Americans, pursuit of postsecondary education had risen from 14% in 1940 to over 60% by the mid 1990's (Arnett, "Emerging Adulthood" 469). The university system places emphasis on choosing what you want to study, and education is framed as a means of achieving greater occupational choice. If attending university is regarded as an aspect of establishing a career, then it extends the duration of this establishment by four or so years. As touched on previously, however, emerging adults are also entering a workforce in which their "university degree" often does not afford them the professional certainty they might have anticipated. Under these conditions, the duration of establishment is further extended.

In the relationship dimension, we see prolonged establishment in the sense that emerging adults are waiting until later in life to develop long-lasting romantic partnerships. Choice, as it relates to romantic partnership, takes on two distinct meanings: first, choice as the ability to decide for oneself; second, choice as the availability of more options. The first meaning of choice stems from a cultural rejection of the arranged marriage, and can be seen to continue in the lessening authority of traditions and norms which once governed intimate relationships (to be discussed further in Chapter 11: Rules). The second meaning can be seen to have proliferated with the advent of online dating, which affords

individuals access to a much greater pool of potential partners (to be discussed further in Chapter 10: Instruments).

9.3 Changes in the Workforce as Driver of Relationship Patterns

We should here recall that Arnett conceives of emerging adulthood as a phenomenon specific to highly industrialized society. As he notes, the displacement of manufacturing jobs by machine automation, and the subsequent shift in demand for a workforce with information- and technology-based skills has increased uptake in post-secondary education, lengthening the period of time people spend developing their skill-set before fully beginning a career (Arnett, 2014). From this line of reasoning, we can understand the emerging adult's subjectivity to be rooted in a particular form of work structure.

Building from this, I will suggest that career- and education-related increases in prolonged establishment and emphasis on choice are what drive these similar shifts in the future object of committed romantic partnership. Consider that the possibility for choice in romantic partner selection is heavily contingent upon women having entered the workforce, and moving away from the dynamic of husband as sole provider. This cultural shift provides an historical example of the causal relationship between changes in the workforce and relationship patterns. To examine what is happening presently, let us return to the previously mentioned study around emerging adults' goal formulation. Here, Shulman and Nurmi identify a prominent group of emerging adults who are able

to describe elaborate work goals, but express confusion or lack of goals in relation to love and establishing a family. Correspondingly, this group reports the lowest ability to be in a mature relationship, characterized by mutuality, reciprocity, and a clear sense of self. It is suggested that these findings reflect a circumstance of the “modern world” in which “young people settle first on studies and profession, and then establish a stable relationship and a family” (Shulman and Nurmi 67).

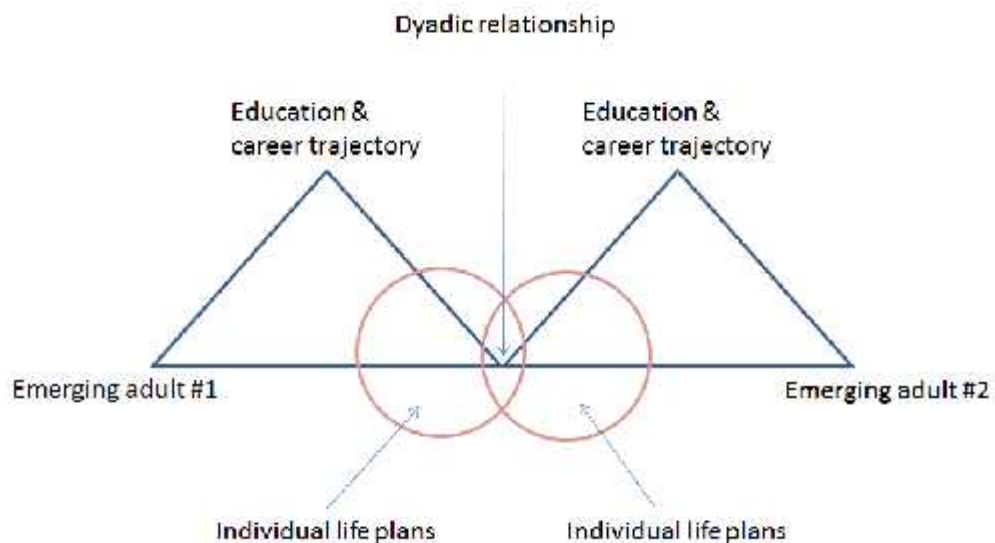


Figure 5: The task of coordinating dyadic commitment with individual life plans as a future object mediated by education and career trajectories

Source: Daly-Buajitti, Melissa. 2016.

We can make sense of “hookup culture” in relation to the finding that emerging adults who prioritize work over love goals are the least able to establish and maintain mature relationships. CSRE’s can be interpreted as

partially symptomatic of this correlated prioritization and inability. These engagements can be understood as transient sources of physical intimacy and emotional companionship that enable the individuals involved to focus their time and attention on the career dimension of their respective future objects without being tied down (Jamison and Proulx 157).

9.4 Prolonging vs. Postponement

What effect does this approach to intimacy have upon the relationship dimension of the emerging adult's future object? Consider the distinction between prolonging and postponing: whereas to prolong means to lengthen in extent, to postpone means to delay until a future time. I will suggest that this approach to intimacy reflects a process of postponing pursuit of the future object rather than prolonging it. With respect to prolonging and postponement, I will note a few points of consideration to keep in mind for the remainder of this project. First, the postponement approach might not necessarily be taken with full cognisance, and could instead indicate either an embryonic or broken version of prolonging. Second, postponement, if not managed properly, poses the threat of morphing into termination, or worse, regression. Finally, we should try to conceive of an approach to prolonging which would provide ideal conditions for formulating and pursuing the future object. What would these conditions be, and how might emerging adults come to embrace such an approach instead?

9.5 Long-Lasting Romantic Partnership

To conclude this section, I will briefly elaborate on the relationship dimension of the future object. Because this object cannot be simply constructed as “to get married,” we should reflect on what it means to develop a long-lasting romantic partnership. Although every individual will develop their own personal partnership philosophy, how can we qualify long-lasting romantic partnership in general terms? First, we might characterize this type of relationship as involving mutual relatedness, which is described as “the capacity to establish and maintain reciprocal, meaningful, and personally satisfying interpersonal relationships” (Blatt 172). Second, we might characterize this type of relationship as involving mutual dedication, as outlined in the following passage.

Personal dedication refers to the desire of an individual to maintain or improve the quality of his or her relationship for the joint benefit of the participants. It is evidenced by a desire (and associated behaviours) not only to continue the relationship, but also to improve it, to sacrifice for it, to invest in it, to link personal goals to it, and to seek the partners welfare, not simply one’s own. (Stanley and Markman 595)

Indeed, the qualities of relatedness and dedication are subjective, but so too is committed romantic partnership unbounded by the legal construct of marriage. The challenge of grappling with this subjectivity is central to the Millennial emerging adult’s pursuit of developing a long-lasting romantic partnership, and highlights the complexity of this activity and future object.

10.0 Instruments: Online Dating Tools

In this section I discuss the role of online dating tools as instruments which mediate the emerging adult's object of establishing a committed romantic relationship. I employ McLuhan's Tetrad of Media Effects to examine the media ecology of these instruments, and focus on Tinder as an example of a mobile dating application. I will examine four forms of technology that occupy the media ecology of mobile dating: the mobile phone, the search filter, satellite dating, and the swipe. The mobile phone and the search filter can be understood as pre-existing tools that inform the particular configurations of mobile dating applications. Satellite dating and swiping can be understood as mediated processes specific to the mobile dating experience.

First, I use the Tetrad framework to analyse each form of technology separately. Each analysis begins with an illustrated overview of the Tetrad, and then discusses the dynamics of enhancement, obsolescence, reversal, and retrieval. Second, I look for patterns and common themes across these analyses, and discuss Tinder's overall influence as a mediator of relationship formation.

10.1 The Mobile Phone

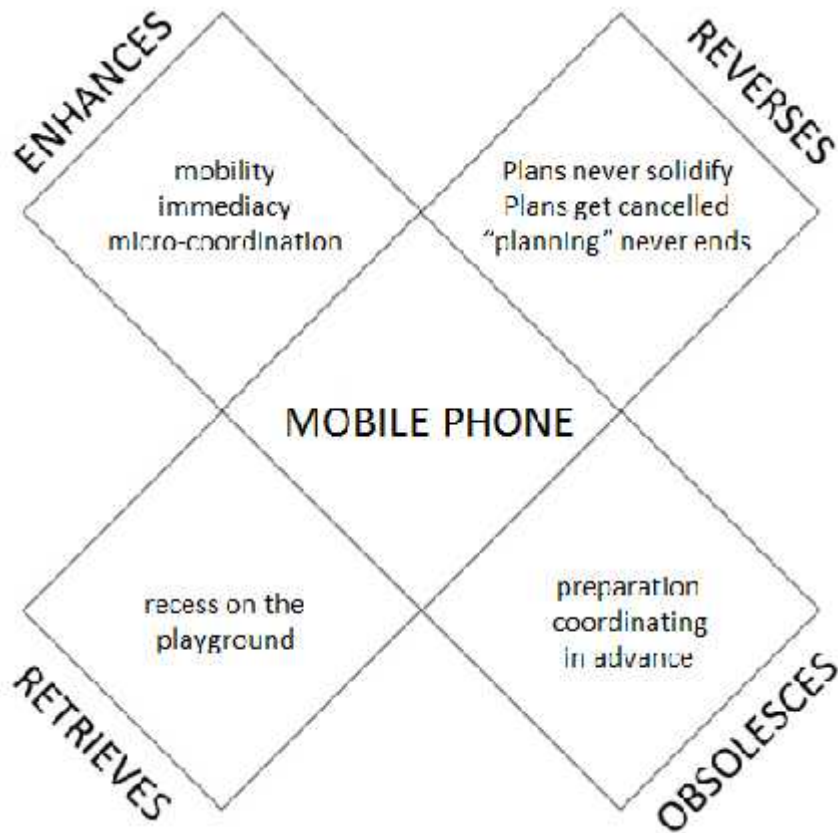


Figure 6. Mobile Phone Tetrad

Source: Daly-Buajitti, Melissa. 2016.

Enhances

As indicated by its name, the mobile phone brings mobility to communication. Being a portable device, it unleashes users from the landline's fixedness. It allows users to send and receive messages wherever they go (so to speak), introducing a sense of freedom and independence to telephone use.

This new affordance changes the way in which users are able to coordinate social

plans. With a mobile phone, coordination can occur on-the-go. Richard Ling has coined the term “micro-coordination” to describe the mobile-driven phenomenon of being able to “contact individuals regardless of where they are and coordinate mundane interactions” (56).

Obsolesces

When a landline telephone is the medium with which to arrange plans, doing so requires preparation, specificity, and commitment. Because you have no way of contacting your peers after leaving the house, details such as time and place need to be coordinated in advance, and then adhered to. In a micro-coordinated mode of sociality, the values of preparation, specificity, and commitment lose their precedence. It is easier to make, alter, and cancel plans at the last minute. In this vein, social plans can be held as tentative or ambiguous for a suspended period of time. This suspension allows people to wait for the best possible option to emerge, or simply to decide in the easiest of conditions.

Reverses

When micro-coordination is pushed to the extreme, users end up with no plans, or the process of planning extends throughout the course of their entire social gathering. With respect to the “no plans” scenario, a friend once told me that she always makes multiple plans for the night, in anticipation of at least one plan falling through. The effect of this precaution is, of course, that it perpetuates a cycle of cancelled plans. With respect to the “endless planning”

scenario, imagine that you and your friends are socializing together, but spend more time and attention trying to meet up with other people, or figuring out where to go next based on what else is happening concurrently. Sometimes this kind of activity can be fun in a scavenger hunt type of way. But it certainly has a paradoxical air to it: planning, which originally intends to facilitate socializing, can now come to permeate the act of socializing itself.

Retrieves

In saying that the mobile phone retrieves “recess on the schoolyard,” what I really mean is that it brings back a spontaneity and freedom to the coordination of social gatherings which is harder to achieve when people are distanced from one another by their respective schedules and geographical locations. Recess is a specific time at which you know that all your friends will be out on the schoolyard. These circumstances provide an immediacy of access, and a corresponding casualness with which you can go about meeting people and deciding what to do.

10.2 The Search Filter

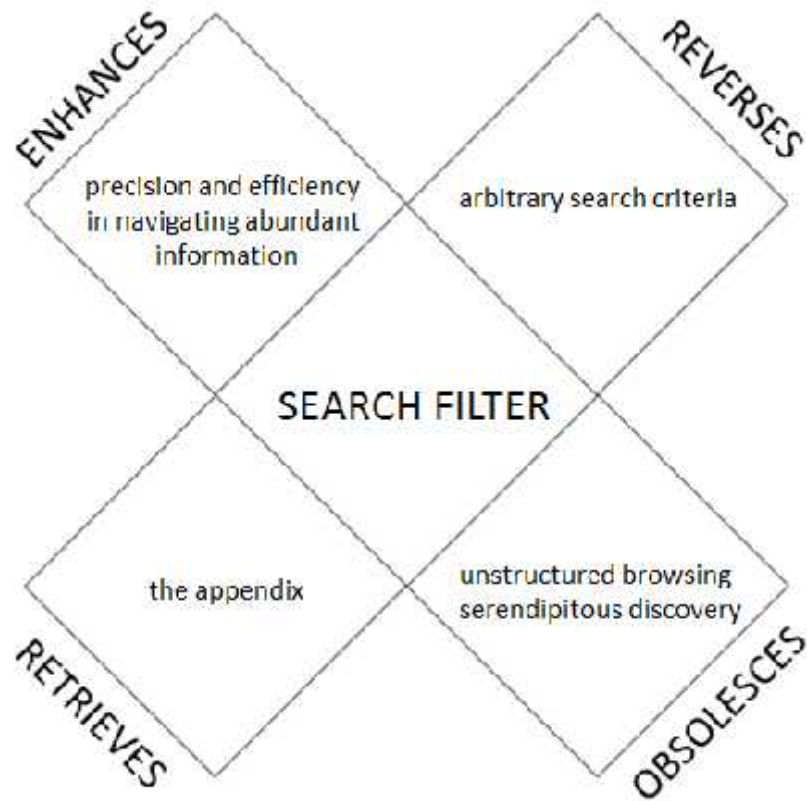


Figure 7: Search Filter Tetrad

Source: Daly-Buajitti, Melissa. 2016.

Enhances

The filter is a tool that helps people to taper their search yield by setting specifications around what they are looking for. Facilitating efficiency and precision in searching, the filter comes at a time when abundant choice stands as an obstacle to finding what we want. It is fitting for online dating, which introduces a novel abundance in partner selection, to leverage this technology.

The experience of deciding in this setting involves an overwhelming quantity of options, pressure to make the ideal choice, and fear of losing what you have not chosen. Filters can make us feel in control by allowing us to eliminate undesirable options, and narrow our focus to that which is desirable. They facilitate the approach of having a focused, pre-conceived vision of what is best for you, and bringing it to your fingertips.

Obsolesces

When we process information in a way that employs a-priori specifications to delimit what we have access to, we move away from a mode of unstructured browsing, and reduce the opportunity for serendipitous discovery.

Reverses

Because the filtering approach to processing information places so much emphasis on the setting of search criteria, we must be wary of our criteria's efficacy. The feelings of mastery and efficiency derived from using a filter can distract from how effective the search has actually been. In certain cases, it could be that the filters offered don't even speak to the primary criteria by which you want to direct your search. The filter presupposes that the searcher has a clear idea of what he or she is looking for. To search with a filter without really knowing what you want to find is to run the risk of subjecting your search to arbitrary criteria.

Retrieves

The filter replicates an approach to gathering information akin to that of an appendix. When using an appendix, you look for a specific word of interest that you are hoping to find in the book at hand, and are then directed to the page(s) in which this word can be found. Appendices can aid in the efficient access of specific content, but also facilitate a “short-cut” method of reading, which runs the risk of missing critical information.

10.3 Satellite Dating

“Satellite dating,” also known as location-based dating, refers to mobile dating applications that make use of GPS technology to connect users within close geographical proximity of one another (Quiroz 182). Popular applications of the “satellite dating” genre include Grindr, Tinder, and Bumble. In the example of Tinder, users are required to set “Discovery Preferences,” which filter the potential partners displayed to them by gender, age, and geographical proximity (shown in Figure 8).

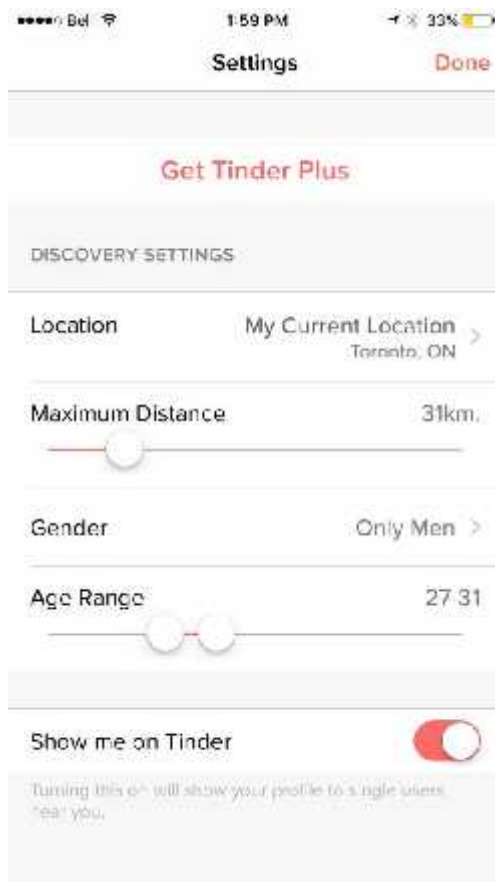


Figure 8: Screenshot of Tinder's Settings page

Source: Daly-Buajitti, Melissa. 2016.

These settings can be altered at any time. Geographical proximity, referred to as “Maximum Distance,” can be set to a minimum radius of 2 kilometers, and a maximum radius of 160 kilometers. In the case that one was to set a maximum distance preference of 2 km, only potential partners within a 2 km radius would be displayed as options.

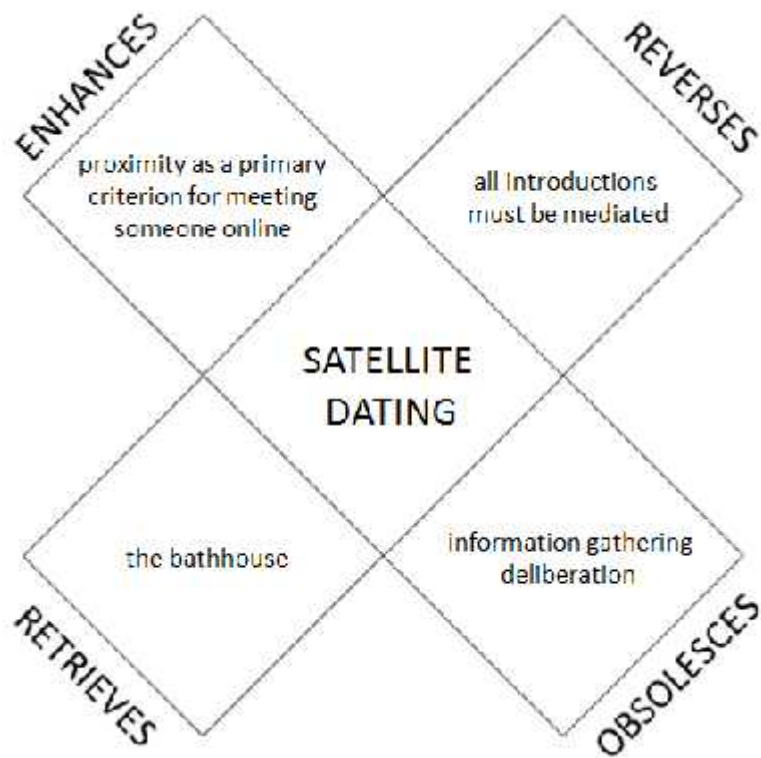


Figure 9: Satellite Dating Tetrad

Source: Daly-Buajitti, Melissa. 2016.

Enhances

Satellite dating heightens the emphasis placed on proximity and immediacy in the online dating experience. Though connecting people who are physically close to one another, it accelerates the process of “dating” nearby strangers. At the same time, it enhances the requisite status of physical proximity to meeting people. It can be argued that, through emphasizing proximity, satellite dating inadvertently promotes convenience as a criterion upon which to evaluate a potential partner’s desirability.

Obsolesces

Through promoting a dating culture of immediacy and proximity, satellite dating subdues the information-gathering and deliberation processes typical of traditional online dating. This effect can be seen to take the form of hasty decision making. In the case of satellite dating, proximity is originally associated with immediacy because those who are within proximity of one another only require a short period of travel time in order to meet up. It so happens that the principal of immediacy can tend to expand beyond this application. It can come to be experienced as a sense of urgency around settling upon a partner, a drive to efficiently browse and evaluate one's selection, a rapid progression from making in-app introductions to meeting in person, or a hasty initiation of sexual activity upon meeting.

Reverses

Online dating began with the premise of connecting people who otherwise would not have had the opportunity to meet. It served to introduce people outside of one another's social circles and environments. Satellite dating contradicts this objective through placing primacy on users' proximity to one another, and brings the mediation of online dating into social situations where people previously might have simply walked up to one another and started talking. In the most extreme case, we might now envision a social climate in

which people only approach one another if their introduction is mediated by a dating app.

Retrieves

The bathhouse can be understood as a commercial space for people – typically gay men – to meet and engage in sexual activity with a sexual partner. The physical venue of the bathhouse provides a social context in which it is implicit that all guests present are interested in pursuing sexual activity with one another. Satellite dating provides this social context without need for a physical venue. Through connecting proximal users, satellite dating apps are able to recreate the bathhouse venue in any location where enough users are present. Sporting events, concerts, clubs and bars, or even busy streets can now all be turned into bathhouses.

10.4 The Swipe

This analysis of the swipe accounts for its pathology as a command gesture in combination with the structure it ascribes to the browsing process. When a user is browsing through potential matches on Tinder, profiles are displayed to them on an individual basis. A single profile appears on their screen and they are given two options: a) express interest in the profile by swiping right, or b) express disinterest by swiping left. Swiping is the gesture of sliding your finger across the screen, which drags the given profile across and eventually off

of the screen. Users must swipe right or left on the profile at hand in order to view the subsequent profile.



Figure 10: Visualization of Tinder's Swipe

Source: "What is Tinder? And Why it's Ridiculous." *Single Steve*, 10 Sept. 2016, <http://www.singlesteve.com/what-is-tinder>.

In March of 2015, Sean Rad – cofounder and CEO of Tinder – participated in an AMA (Ask Me Anything) on Reddit, during which I asked him to elaborate on the design impetus of Tinder's swipe. The response that he and his team provided (shown in Figure 11) helps to illustrate the dynamic of this feature.

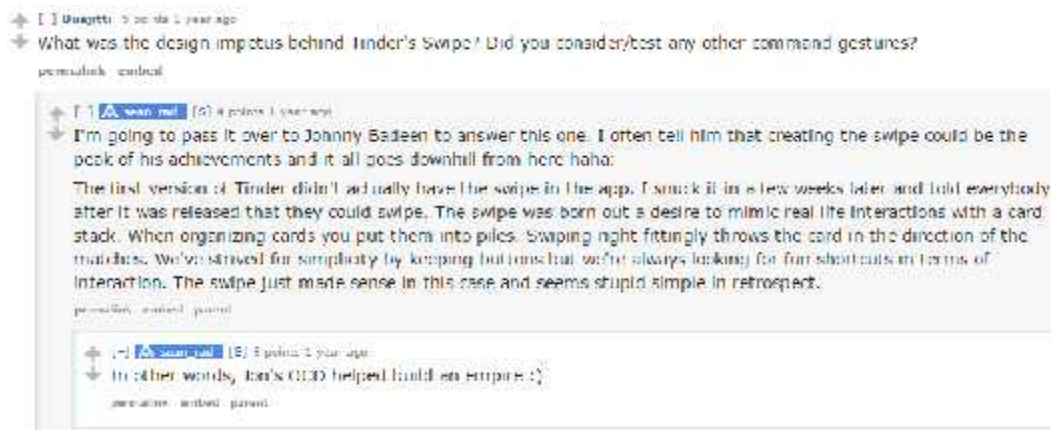


Figure 11: Sean Rad AMA

Source: "IAMA Sean Rad, cofounder & CEO of Tinder. AMA!" *Reddit*, 19 Mar. 2015,
https://www.reddit.com/r/IAmA/comments/2zmms5/iama_sean_rad_cofounder_ceo_of_tinder_ama/.

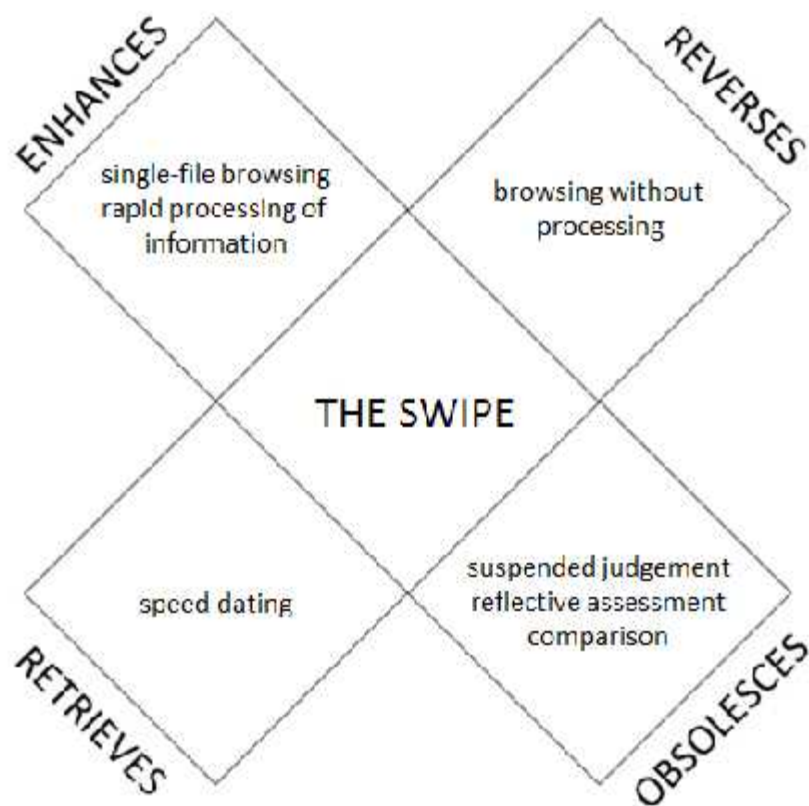


Figure 12: The Swipe Tetrad

Source: Daly-Buajitti, Melissa. 2016.

Enhances

Because Tinder displays profiles in a single-file order, it is only by swiping the profile at hand that you are able to view the next one. The desire to see what's next fuels a pressure to decide "yes" or "no" about what is in front of you. In this arrangement, to reflect on what you have and to see what else you could have are positioned as obstacles to one another. Swiping hovers at the bridge of this tension, a twofold command by which you both declare your

interest (or lack thereof) in a person, and proceed to the next candidate.

Conflating these two actions means that even if you are swiping right, it is still partially a dismissal – you are pushing that person off the screen so that you can see who is next in line.

This pressure to rapidly assess and sort profiles is augmented by the efficient command-gesture of swiping. The sliding fingertip conveys effortless control; being able to physically manipulate what is in front of you with just the touch of a finger has an air of casual benevolence. Consider the kinetics of scrolling through a camera roll: you look at a photo, and when you are finished looking, you flick it out of the way for the next photo in line. The gesture is seamless – sometimes even subconscious – much unlike thumbing through a stack of physical photos, perhaps taking care not to leave fingerprints. We can imagine how the ease and convenience of this gesture might mask or placate the abrupt and frenetic effects of the browsing experience it is tied to.

Obsolesces

In a browsing system whereby one must make a decision about the current profile in order to see the subsequent profile, the possibility of informing one's decision by means of comparison is obfuscated, if not nullified. The impetus to suspend judgement is subdued by a pressure to decide and move on. Correspondingly, the approach to reflective assessment is not encouraged.

Reverses

In most extreme cases, browsing becomes a compulsive procedure of swiping through profiles without really looking at them. I have watched friends swipe through at least fifty profiles in a row, allotting only an approximate second each to most of the profiles. In these situations, the processing and assessment aspects of browsing are lost, and the act of browsing is reduced to its gesture.

Retrieves

The swipe approach to browsing reintroduces the speed-dating format, by which participants rotate through a series of short dates with one another, each lasting only a few minutes. Primary differences between these methods are that with swiping the process is accelerated, time restrictions are self-imposed, and participants most often make decisions about people's desirability in terms of physical attraction.

10.5 Summary of Tetrads

Using McLuhan's Tetrad of Media Effects as a guiding framework, I have analyzed four different forms of technology relevant to the media ecology of online dating. I would now like to consider the combined effect these technologies have as mediating instruments in the activity system of progressing through a series of intimate relationships.

A common theme across these four analyses is the overpowering force of immediacy. The immediacy of coordinating plans afforded by the mobile phone

fuels a lack of inclination to coordinate in advance and commit to what has been planned. The immediacy of navigating abundant information afforded by the search filter fuels a lack of inclination to browse without an agenda. The immediacy of meeting people in close proximity afforded by satellite dating fuels a lack of inclination to deliberate or learn about who you are meeting up with. The immediacy of processing profiles afforded by the swipe browsing system fuels a lack of inclination to suspend judgement.

With each form of enhanced immediacy outlined here, we see a corresponding decrease in consideration. Micro-coordination embodies a lack of consideration for others' schedules. Browsing with a search filter fosters a lack of consideration for that which falls outside of one's agenda. Satellite dating promotes a lack of consideration about who you are involving yourself with. Swiping perpetuates a lack of consideration for that which is present, in favour of seeing that which comes next.

As demonstrated through these examples, consideration can be understood as a multi-faceted mode of thoughtfulness that requires empathy, open-mindedness, self-reflection, and respect. We can imagine how neglecting these social qualities in the process of meeting an intimate partner might set a dysfunctional precedent for any ensuing relationship. When immediacy is prioritized over consideration, there is some kind of implicit suggestion that the relationship isn't very serious. This logic can be elucidated with the example of

fast fashion. Fast fashion enables consumers to purchase inexpensive on-trend clothing of cheap quality, with the understanding that this clothing will deteriorate at a pace synchronized with the trend's duration of relevance. The dynamic here is of opting to pursue something easy that is of poorer quality, and not really caring about the quality because it's not meant to last anyway.

10.6 Instruments as Corporate Subjects

With this dynamic in mind, I would like to make a comment on the nature of instruments as corporate entities. When we examine online dating services as instruments, we must account for their subjectivity as corporations. When an instrument is also a corporation, it simultaneously functions as its own subject with its own objects. Ultimately, the corporate instrument's object is to generate more revenue. Generally, this object is achieved through maximizing user activity. From this perspective, we can see that in the case of online dating the user's object and the instruments object inherently contradict one another. The user's object is to form a mature relationship, which they pursue through engaging in a series of intimate relationships mediated by the online dating instrument. Theoretically, once they achieve this object, they will cease to use the instrument. "You do it right and the customers leave. In pairs no less!," writes OkCupid founder, Christian Rudder, on the "irony" of working in online dating (83). It seems, however, that there may be a new way to "do it right" in which the customer, in fact, does not leave.

The instrument's object is to generate revenue, through maximizing user activity. If users are unable to achieve their object, they will theoretically continue to engage in activity mediated by the instrument – that is, as long as they don't give up on the activity or the instrument. Thus, it is in the instrument's best interest for users to not achieve their object, but in a way that preserves their faith in the instrument's efficacy. I illustrate the dynamic of these contradicting objects in Figure 13.

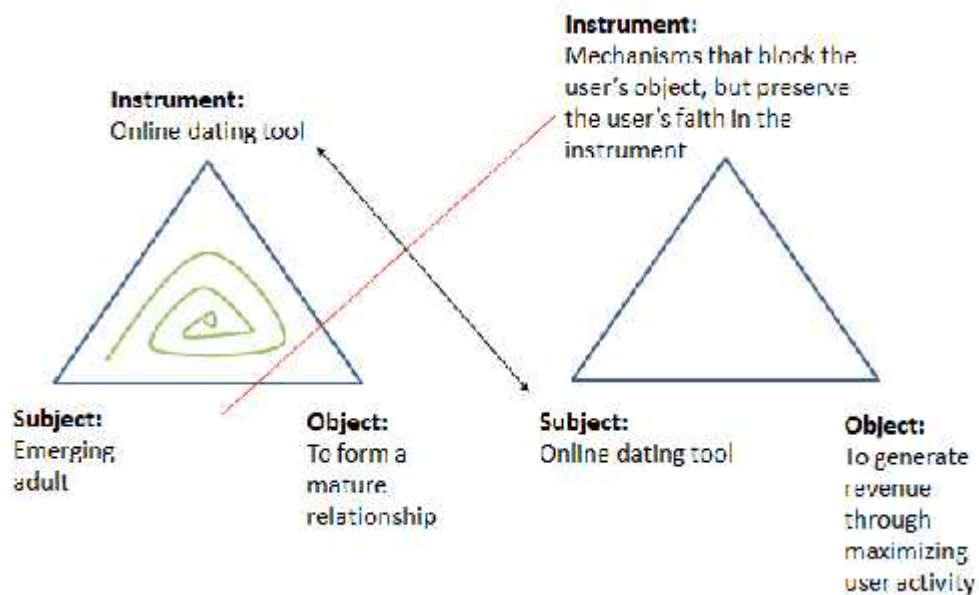


Figure 13: The contradicting objects of users and online dating tools as corporate instruments

Source: Daly-Buajitti, Melissa. 2016.

Why would it be in Tinder's interest for its users to meet, fall in love, settle down, and stop using the service? Yes, they love to broadcast the occasional fairy-tale ending of users who met through the app and are now

getting married. This type of success story functions in a manner akin to showcasing lottery winners: it preserves users' faith in the instrument, and motivates their continued engagement. But of course it is to Tinder's benefit for their users to be cycling through an extensive series of CSRE's. It is beneficial to have a large body of users engaged in a high level of in-app activity (that is: searching for someone new, someone else). The longer this process lasts, the better. The shorter each CSRE within this process lasts, the better. The easier it is to move on quickly, the better.



Figure 14: Collage: Tinder logo and scene from *The Little Mermaid*

Source: Daly-Buajitti, Melissa. 2016.

10.7 A Note on Alternative Models

In response to the observations I have made around the dating approach encouraged by Tinder's design, one might ask: "what alternative models can we produce so as to ameliorate these effects?" Such is the impetus of innovation. Indeed, other post-Tinder mobile dating apps frame their mandate by pointing to a deficit in Tinder, and promising to offer a rectifying alternative that will vastly improve the online dating experience.

Loveflutter, for example, launched as a mobile dating app in 2014, and spun for itself the media narrative of being more "quirky" Tinder. Loveflutter's co-founder, David Standen, says the following of his platform's novelty:

We admire the simplicity of Tinder but in arguably over-gamifying things, they've missed some crucial steps needed to get people on actual dates. By focusing simply on looks you're risking a date with awkward silence, we've all been there! Loveflutter's focus on two types of attraction, reading an interesting fact first before revealing a photo, gives you an insight into personality before looks. (qtd. in O'Hear)

Here, Tinder is criticized for its emphasis on physical attraction, and Loveflutter is promoted as an alternative that highlights "personality" as a means of enhancing the depth and longevity of connection between users. The objective they outline is perhaps appealing. In terms of functionality, however, Loveflutter is essentially a replica of Tinder - its only notable difference being that the user bio, framed as a "140-character fact," is displayed prior to photographs. To give credit,

Loveflutter's iteration does force its users to read one another's bios.

Undoubtedly, though, the app still advances the Tinder model of mobile dating.

Are there ways to model alternative mobile dating apps that are more genuinely distinct in design from Tinder? Surely. But what I have tried to demonstrate through my Tetrad analyses is that the effects I have outlined do not just stem from Tinder's design. They emerge from the complex media ecology within which mobile dating as a whole is situated. As such, truly valuable innovation in mobile dating design should be regarded as a much more complex task than contributing some reactionary iteration upon Tinder. It must consider, for example, the overall sociality of smart phone use.

This specific focus of problem solving is not the priority of this project, although I admittedly thought it would be when I began my research. Online dating is only one element in the overall activity system of millennial emerging adults and CSRE's. As discussed, this methodology considers the activity system as a whole in order to identify systemic contradictions towards which innovative intervention might be directed. Future studies could further examine the apparent contradiction between mobile dating design and the object of establishing a long-lasting romantic partnership. But as I will progress to demonstrate, there are other contradictions within this system that I believe should be addressed first.

11.0 Rules: Disintegration of Dating Norms

As discussed in relation to Twenge's characterization of Millennials, the social and institutional norms which once structured intimate relationships are disintegrating amongst this generation. Marriage is being postponed, premarital sex is commonly accepted, social codes around appropriate relationship behaviour have loosened, gender roles are being challenged, and the notion of a standard relationship trajectory progressing from dating to marriage is growing increasingly obsolete.

With this landscape of weakening social and institutional norms in mind, I will return to examining the particular types of involvements categorized as CSRE's. As mentioned, the structure attributed to CSRE's in scholarly discourse is much more definitive and overt than in the actual social contexts of CSRE's. When emerging adults experience CSRE's and discuss these experiences, the same taxonomy and rigorous sense-making is not present. Relationship statuses are often ambiguous, and the vocabulary available to describe these experiences, in addition to being limited, is used inconsistently and ambiguously. To illustrate these conditions, I will focus on the constructs of "hooking up" and "friends with benefits." First, I will demonstrate how these concepts embody a range of flexible meanings which are applied inconsistently. Second, I will outline three possible reasons for which these concepts might circulate with intentional

ambiguity. Finally, I will discuss the detrimental effects of describing and conceptualizing relationships with this linguistic approach.

11.1 “Hooking up” and “Friends with Benefits”: Flexible Meanings

The term “hook up” is both socially and academically ambiguous. In a study which sought to examine if men share the same definition of “hooking up,” it was found that many men tend to use the term “hook-up” to describe a range of their experiences, and that what they mean by “hook-up” varies depending on the experience they have applied it to (Epstein, et al. 418). For example, one man may describe two totally different experiences both as “hooking up:”

-) **Experience #1:** John drunkenly meets a girl at a party. Even though he doesn’t really like her, he goes back to her place after the party and has sex with her. After they finish having sex, he goes back home, and never sees or speaks to her again. The next day, when his friends ask him where he ended up going, he replies, “Oh, I hooked up with Sarah.”
-) **Experience #2:** John’s ex-girlfriend comes over to watch a movie, and they start holding hands and cuddling during the movie. Eventually, they end up having sex, after which she sleeps over. The next morning, they hug goodbye when she leaves, and later in the day he texts her asking if she wants to hang out again. His friends notice that he’s been texting a lot lately and ask him if this has to do with a girl, by any chance. He replies, “Well, Christina and I hooked up last weekend.”

Although these experiences can both be described as hooking up, they differ in various regards, including the activities leading up to sexual involvement, the relationship history and emotional attachment between partners, and the prospect of future involvement between the partners. As we can see from this example, hooking up is not only defined inconsistently between individuals, but can also be used flexibly by the same individual.

Similar dynamics of inconsistent and ambiguous meaning occupy the “friends with benefits” construct. In a study examining variation within this relationship type, Mongeau and colleagues identify seven distinct forms of friends with benefits. These forms are distinguished by factors including the extent to which partners engage in nonsexual activities, the level of friendship prior to sexual involvement, romantic history between partners, and desire or intention to pursue a romantic relationship between partners (Mongeau, et al. 42).

- 1) **“True Friends”** = close friends who have sex on multiple occasions.
- 2) **“Just Sex”** = partners who interact almost exclusively to carry out sexual interaction.
- 3) **“Network Opportunism”** = sexual interaction between friends who aren’t particularly close, but share a social network which allows them to interact on a frequent basis, often while consuming alcohol. Partners

engage in sexual activity if neither has found a different sexual partner for the night.

- 4) **“Successful Transition into a Romantic Relationship”** = intentionally and effectively using a FWBR to initiate a romantic relationship.
- 5) **“Unintentional Transition into a Romantic Relationship”** = a romantic relationship, which was not originally desired or intended, that develops out of a FWBR.
- 6) **“Failed Transition into a Romantic Relationship”** = a relationship in which one (or both) partner has unsuccessfully attempted to make the FWBR transition into a romantic relationship, and continues sexual interaction.
- 7) **“Transition out of a Romantic Relationship”** = sexual interactions between partners from a terminated romantic relationship.

11.2 Incentives for Linguistic Ambiguity

At this point, I have established that the terms “hook up” and “friends with benefits” can describe various experiences and convey various meanings. Now I will outline three reasons for which these terms might be used with such inconsistency and flexibility: to cope with uncertainty, to downplay emotional involvement, and to manage one’s reputation.

Coping with Uncertainty

One suggested reason for using “hook up” as an ambiguous label is that it may help in dealing with the uncertainty that is often present during the initial stages of dating. Epstein and colleagues point out that the initial stages of dating often do resemble hooking up, in that both experiences often entail sexual involvement between people who do not know one another very well. For this reason, they propose that “the term hookup may be especially suited to equivocating about the extent of sexual involvement, relational intent in pursuing a hookup, or ‘saving face’ if rejected” (422). Similarly, the term “friends with benefits” can serve as a place-holder for describing a relationship that is difficult to define or assess the prospects of, such as an on-again-off-again relationship in which the couple might at times not explicitly establish whether they are together or not (Mongeau, et al. 40).

Downplaying Emotional Involvement

It has observed that the term “hook up” might also be used to downplay one’s emotional investment in a relationship (Epstein, et al. 419). The desire to do so can stem from various factors. Perhaps you are developing romantic feelings for a person with whom you are sexually active, and want to be in a committed romantic relationship with them, but are uncertain about how they feel towards you. Perhaps you have been sexually active with a person, and are starting to feel some form of emotional attachment to them, but you are

uncertain about how much you truly like this person, and aren't sure if you would really want to be in a committed romantic relationship with them. Perhaps you are essentially dating someone, but refer to the relationship as "hooking up," out of fear that your friends might disapprove of you becoming romantically involved with them. As we can see, the downplaying of emotional involvement is very much tied to the previously discussed motivator of coping with uncertainty.

Reputation Management

The ambiguity of "friends with benefits" in particular has been seen to serve the function of managing one's reputation. It has been suggested that labelling a relationship as "friends with benefits" can sometimes save the embarrassment of admitting that you tried to date a person but it didn't work out (Mongeau, et al. 45). For example, imagine a couple that has broken up – Laura and Paul. Laura, in hopes of getting back together, initiates sexual activity. Following this initiation, Laura and Paul begin sleeping together on a frequent basis. One night, Laura suggests that they go to a movie together, to which Paul replies "listen, just to be clear – I don't want to be your boyfriend anymore." They continue sleeping together, but otherwise don't really spend time with one another. When describing this relationship to her peers, Laura says "we're friends with benefits now." Another case of using the "friends with benefits" label for reputational purposes is to euphemize repeatedly having sex with a

stranger, in cases where such activity is looked down upon by one's peers or network (Mongeau, et al. 41).

11.3 The Detrimental Effects of Ambiguous Terminology

Despite the aforementioned utility of using flexibly ambiguous terms such as “friends with benefits” and “hook up,” there are certainly repercussions to describing and conceiving of relationships in this manner. First, consider that using ambiguous terminology to label uncertain relationships is closely tied to the impetus of avoiding discussion (Mongeau, et al. 41). This avoidance perpetuates lack of clarity between partners regarding the nature of their relationship, and also makes it difficult for people in uncertain relationships to seek support and guidance from their peers. Second, consider that when partners conceive of their relationship differently, or hold different desires for the relationship's future, ambiguous labelling can obscure these discrepancies. As Mongeau and colleagues explain, “Although two people explicitly agree to the [friends with benefits] label and appear to be on the same page, they might actually think about the relationship in fundamentally different ways” (41). In these types of situations, it is usually the partner who wants more of a romantic or committed relationship who is most disadvantaged by the ambiguous labelling. To speak generally, these repercussions can be understood as a breakdown of communication, a loss of collective understanding, and a rise of alienating subjectivity.

12.0 Community: Lack of Demographic Normativity

Important to note is that there is no standard trajectory to emerging adulthood. Although emerging adults collectively experience similar conditions of flux, each individual progresses toward adulthood at a different pace, and with different degrees of instability and exploration. Pointing to the lack of consistency amongst emerging adults' educational, marital, and residential circumstances, Arnett highlights "demographic variability" as one of the defining characteristics of this life stage, and attests that "emerging adulthood is the only period of life in which nothing is normative demographically" ("Emerging Adulthood" 471). This variance contributes to a lack in sense of community, and a difficulty to draw guidance from one's surrounding cohort.

We can also imagine this lack in community in terms of a generational circumstance. The breakdown of communication, loss of collective understanding, and rise of alienating subjectivity outlined in Chapter 11 closely resemble conditions of the cultural eras Strauss and Howe refer to as The Unravelling and The Crisis. Pioneers of generational analysis, this duo anticipated that Millennials would in fact rise as heroes to save society from these conditions. By their model of generational analysis, history repeats itself in a cycle of four approximately 20-year-long eras, or "turnings." The Unravelling, understood as the third turning, is characterized by disintegrating and distrusted social institutions, coupled with extreme attitudes of individualism. They

associate the most recent Unravelling with the American Culture War. The Crisis, understood as the fourth turning, follows the Unravelling, and is characterized as an era of “maximum darkness, in which the supply of social order is still falling but the demand for order is now rising” (255). The Crisis is triggered by a startling event that abruptly shifts the cultural mood. Society reacts with a reinvestment in civic life, culminating in the establishment of a new social order. Strauss and Howe proposed these ideas in anticipation of an impending Crisis, and predicted that Millennials would be the generation to spearhead this new order.

Those who employ the Strauss-Howe model have pointed to crisis-like events including 9/11, hurricane Katrina, and the stock market crashes of 2001 and 2008. It can also easily be interpreted that the crisis is still upon us, with events such as the 2016 Orlando nightclub shooting, ongoing protests against police brutality, and the rising prominence of ISIS. I do not intend to dwell on what this Crisis’s “startling event” might be, nor will I try to predict when this new social order might fully take hold. For this project, the precision with which historical events align to Strauss and Howe’s predictions is not of great concern. What I do find to be a productive (and hopeful) take-away is the idea that the social entropy of alienating individualism and hyper-subjectivity can only reach a certain extreme before widespread reactive desire for order and cohesion begins to generate new modes of community and social unity. Consider this idea in

relation to the previously discussed disintegration of social norms characteristic of millennial relationship patterns. Strauss and Howe do not pay much heed to the role or nature of intimate relationships throughout the turnings of history (although they do briefly suggest in passing that emphasis on family and commitment is high following a Crisis), but a clear parallel can be drawn between what they describe as the imminence of a new social order, and what this project identifies as a need for reinvestment in communication, collective understanding, and community.

13.0 Division of Labour: CSRE's vs. Mature Relationships

Recall that within Engeström's model, contradictions stemming from the division of labour can be conceived of as a clash between individual actions and the total activity system. Here, we can consider short-lived CSRE's as actions that clash with the future object of establishing a long-term committed partnership. Recall the suggestion that a CSRE might function as a lightweight source of physical and emotional intimacy for emerging adults as they postpone the relationship dimension of their future object in order to focus on studies and career. In this sense, we can conceive of engaging in a CSRE as a highly-specialized action that produces aspects of a relationship, but is ultimately alienated from the future object of a mature relationship.

What is the nature of this alienation, and how does it affect the emerging adult's relation to the future object? I will suggest that CSRE's do not demand or develop the same skills as are needed in a mature relationship. First, we must consider what skills are required in a mature relationship. Here, we can recall the suggestion that emerging adulthood entails a distinct stage of romantic development, in which the central task is "coordinating dyadic commitment with individual life plans" (Shulman and Connolly 30-31). This task involves learning to reflect upon personal needs in relation to those of one's partner, and to navigate compromise – both in the form of personal sacrifice, and as a cooperative exercise involving open communication. The requirements of this task

correspond with the values attributed to “mature relatedness:” mutuality, reciprocity, and a clear sense of self (Shulman and Nurmi 64). With these contributions in mind, I propose that emerging adults, throughout their various intimate engagements, should ideally be exercising and developing skills in self-reflection, open communication, reciprocity, and compromise. To demonstrate how engaging in CSRE’s can hinder the development of these skills, I will return to considering the linguistic practices discussed in the “Rules” section.

As discussed, CSRE’s are closely intertwined with linguistic practices geared toward avoiding discussion, which involve ambiguous terminology that embodies flexible meanings and is inconsistently applied. Most evidently, this practice can be seen to undermine the emerging adult’s task of learning to engage in open communication. Recall how adopting ambiguous terminology can function as a mechanism for coping with uncertainty in a relationship. The act of open communication seeks to cope with uncertainty in the opposite manner: through addressing it directly, and establishing a sense of certainty through a process of discussion.

Perhaps less obvious is that this practice also detracts from the emerging adult’s ability to self-reflect. When the communication within a relationship is convoluted, it can be difficult to make sense of what you are experiencing. Furthermore, because this convolution is often directed toward downplaying emotional involvement, it can be understood as a form of repression. Emotional

repression is inherently opposed to self-reflection, which ideally would involve examining one's feelings, desires, and behaviours with depth and honesty.

Finally, consider that compromise is a process of settling differences, in which each of the parties involved must make concessions. In the case of compromise directed toward establishing a mutually beneficial relationship, the settling of differences would need to address how both partners view the relationship, and how they want it to progress. Now recall how the use of ambiguous language can obscure discrepancies between partners' understandings of a relationship. Terminology that masks disagreements and misunderstandings between partners challenges their ability to navigate compromise.

I have now demonstrated how the linguistic practices affiliated with CSRE's can hinder the emerging adult's development of skills needed to establish a long-lasting romantic partnership. My intent here has been to illustrate how emerging adults can become alienated from their future object. With this alienation in mind, recall my warning around postponement morphing into stagnation or regression. The threat here is that the alienation can persist to a degree in which the emerging adult becomes unable to formulate or pursue his or her future object.

14.0 Contradictions: Developmental Obstacles within the Activity System

This analysis began by proposing that CSRE's might be conceived of as commitment-free and emotionally uninvolved sources of intimacy for emerging adults to engage in as they focus on personal career-related goals, and postpone the future object of establishing a long-term committed relationship. In Chapter 10, I suggested that it is in the best interest of mobile apps, such as Tinder, to encourage this approach to dating. Here, I outlined how the media ecology surrounding Tinder fosters a fast-fashion dating mentality, well-suited to engaging in a series of short-lived CSRE's. This mentality is not well-suited to formulation of pursuit of the future object, nor does it intend to be. Through my discussion of linguistic practices within CSRE's, I further demonstrated how these involvements can alienate the emerging adult from his or her future object. I focused on how certain CSRE-related behaviour can hinder one from developing the skills needed to establish a long-lasting romantic partnership. The insights I highlight here can be understood as some of the primary contradictions within the activity system of progressing through a series of relational instabilities during emerging adulthood.

Now that I have painted a generally bleak picture of hookup culture, I would like to say that there is still hope. Consider Arnett's comment on the nature of emerging adult romantic relationships:

Explorations in love in emerging adulthood tend to involve a deeper level of intimacy, and the implicit question is more identity focused: Given the kind of person I am, what kind of person do I wish to have as a partner in life? (“Emerging Adulthood” 473)

If progressing through a series of intimate relationships in emerging adulthood were to consist primarily in the relationships that Arnett describes here, this activity could conceivably support the pursuit and formation of a long-lasting romantic partnership. But this account of explorative relationships in emerging adulthood does not align with many of the dysfunctions I have outlined throughout my analysis.

We might try to understand these dysfunctions in relation to the historical novelty of emerging adulthood. It could be said that this stage of life is so new that normative relationship behaviours haven’t fully developed, nor have guidelines around socially acceptable conduct. Recall my suggestion that postponement of the future object may represent an embryonic form of prolonging. What I mean by this is that perhaps Millennial emerging adults are in the early stages of adjusting to the task of coordinating dyadic commitment with individual life plans. Perhaps we are paving the way for future generations of emerging adults. If so, there is plenty of work to be done.

At the beginning of my analysis, I encouraged us to conceive of an approach to prolonging which would provide ideal conditions for formulating and pursuing the future object. If CSRE’s are to continue being a component of

this prolonging (which I do believe to be the case), then we must imagine a way for emerging adults to engage in them without being alienated from their future object.

Now I will clarify that I don't see CSRE's as posing an inherent contradiction to the future object of establishing a long-lasting romantic partnership. Rather, it is the manner in which they are currently enacted that I take issue with. First, opting to engage in CSRE's for the sake of avoiding commitment and not wanting to compromise one's personal goals embodies an inhumane conception of what it means to be in a relationship. Second, apps like Tinder encourage objectifying and inconsiderate mentalities within the realm of dating. They are oppressive, and we should hold higher standards to the services which mediate our pursuit of intimacy. Third, linguistic practices that promote lack of a discussion and transparency within relationships are immature and regressive. It is important to understand that all CSRE's – even those classified as "experiences" – are relationships. They constitute instances of people being involved with one another intimately, and there is a certain relational integrity, requiring compassion, investment, and openness, which should be upheld in all such encounters.

How, then, can CSRE's be held to a higher standard of relational integrity? Here are my suggestions:

- 1) Through encouraging open communication, both within relationships and amongst one's network of peers.
- 2) Through facilitating consideration. Thoughtful reflection should be directed towards others, as a practice of empathy, and directed towards oneself, as a practice of self-awareness.

I believe that if these practices are consistently exercised within the culture of CSRE's, then CSRE's might begin to function as actions that support the future object of establishing a long-lasting romantic partnership.

15.0 Expansive Potential within the Activity System: Memes

Through analyzing the Millennial emerging adult's progression through a series of intimate relationships as an activity system, I have identified CSRE's as actions which come into conflict with the future object of establishing a mature, long-term committed romantic partnership. I have also suggested that CSRE's aren't inherently detrimental, and that they can potentially be oriented toward supporting pursuit and formation of this future object. I propose that this orientation can be nurtured through fostering practices of communication and consideration within the culture of CSRE's.

With this proposition in mind, I will focus on another instrument operating within the given activity system, which I believe has the potential to foster the called-for practices of communication and consideration. This instrument is the meme. Memes have been defined as "cultural information that passes along from person to person, yet gradually scales into a shared social phenomenon" (Schifman qtd. in Marwick 12). There are various forms of memes, but the specific genre I have in mind for this project is that which juxtaposes pictures and text to describe experiences or feelings. The meme in Figure 14 exemplifies this genre. I will examine this type of meme as a template for articulating relationship experiences, and collectively constructing shared cognitive models with which to make sense of contemporary CSRE experiences.

When you thought you were sleeping
over but he says your uber is outside.



Figure 15: Kim Kardashian Uber meme

Source: Parker, Aidan. "Memes." Message to Melissa Daly-Buajitti. 7 Aug. 2016.

Email.

15.1 The Feeling When: Meme as Template

A template can be understood as a distinct format which functions as an example of how to do something. As a system, memes comprise a collection of templates for self-expression. The format-like elements at play within the overall system of memes include recognizable configurations of text and pictures, as well as commonly-used phrases and images. These elements provide a base structure for meme production. For example, it is common to see memes that involve a "reaction image" (a picture that conveys an emotional response)

captioned or titled with a phrase in plain text that begins with “the feeling when,” (alternatively: “tfw” and “when”) and proceeds to describe an experience.

when u like love someone who doesn't
even like u



Figure 16: Spencer Pratt with crystals reaction image meme

Source: Schneider, Brook (opal_palms). “#dankmeme.” 8 February 2016.

Instagram.

When he says "sorry" but u had more arguing in you



Figure 17: Oprah Winfrey spinning reaction image meme

Source: Grates, Bryce (bryces.feed). "Omg @clairesmight." 16 July 2016.

Instagram.

Figures 16 and 17 exemplify how this type of meme template can help people to articulate relationship experiences and their associated emotions.

Both memes combine a brief description of a situation or circumstance pertaining to dynamics within an intimate relationship with an expressive reaction image. The textual component describes a circumstance that elicits an emotion. The reaction image conveys an emotion. Through pairing text and reaction image, this meme template facilitates articulation of a situational emotion.

15.2 The Starter Pack: Meme as Archetype

Another distinct and popular meme template is the “starter pack.” The concept of this template is to display of the basic elements needed to create a particular thing. The following account is outlined on Know Your Meme:

Starter packs, sometimes known as starter kits, are a series of multi-panel photo sets meant to illustrate the archetype of a celebrity, company or subculture through a recommended selection of fashion articles, multimedia and other consumer products, much similar to steal her look fashion guides.

Figure 17 provides a typical example of how the starter pack template is used to poke fun at the trope-like or predictable signifiers of a given subculture. Here, the starter pack can be seen to model the archetypal wardrobe of a trendy art-school girl through compiling her staple clothing items.

Back to School: Art School Starter Pack



Figure 18: Back to School: Art School Starter Pack

Source: Debbie, Binny (scariest_bug_ever). "meme by @ko_fabric I can't breathe" 24 August 2016. Instagram.

Depicting archetypal characters with fashion-related images is among the more common applications of the starter pack. This template has, however, also been applied to depict archetypal relationship experiences. Figure 19 exemplifies this application. Through compiling a set of generic, disengaged text messages, this meme models the archetypal experience of texting someone who is barely responsive.

the "I'm not interested" starter pack



Figure 19: The "I'm not interested" starter pack

Source: "The 'I'm not interested' starter pack." *Sizzle*, 19 May 2016,

<https://onsizzle.com/i/the-im-not-interested-starter-pack-starterpacks-only-maybe-hahah-453106>.

Through producing and sharing archetypal models derived from their particular relationship experiences, people are able to garner a sense of universality and solidarity in situations which are often otherwise felt as subjective and alienating. The starter pack is one straightforward example of how memes can be used to generate archetypes. In general, though, there is a common impetus across many forms of memes to capture and depict the essence of an experience or thing in a highly generalized way that enhances

relatability and seeks to produce a common ground. Facilitating and encouraging this process is arguably one of the meme's most powerful attributes.

15.3 Netflix and Chill: Meme as Script

The "Netflix and chill" meme, which may have, in fact, gained its initial traction via the starter pack template, provides us with an example of how memes can facilitate co-construction of contemporary relationship scripts. I will first provide context around the significance of Netflix and chill, then outline the concept of a relationship script, and finally discuss the potential of memes in this respect.

"Netflix and chill" describes the experience of initiating sexual activity with someone under the guise of watching TV and hanging out. In such an experience, one person invites the other over to watch Netflix and chill. This type of invitation has implicit sexual intent. Although the experience might legitimately begin with watching Netflix, it quickly progresses into sexual activity. Discussion around the sexual implications of "Netflix and chill" is thought to have originated within Black Twitter in late 2014. The following starter pack tweet marks an increase in its spread as a meme:



Figure 20: The "Netflix and chill" starter pack

Source: "Netflix and Chill" *Know Your Meme*, 7 May 2016.

<http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/netflix-and-chill>

A popular meme template evolving from this concept involves text along the lines of "20 minutes into Netflix and chill and he gives you this look" combined with an image of a face conveying the expression of explicit sexual intent.

30 minutes into netflix and chill
and he gives you this look



Figure 21: 30 minutes into netflix and chill and he gives you this look

Source: "Netflix and Chill - Shrektastic" *Know Your Meme*, 21 August 2015.

<http://knowyourmeme.com/photos/1008377-netflix-and-chill>

This meme depicts the moment at which the sexual intent behind watching Netflix with someone progresses from being implicit to explicit. It is in relation to this template that I will discuss the meme's potential to generate relationship scripts.

Script theory is commonly referenced in literature regarding young people's sense-making around relationships and sexual experiences (Mongeau et al, Epstein et al, Holmberg and MacKenzie). A script can be understood as a mental model that reflects commonly-held conceptions of how a particular

action or event is to progress. The following passage articulates the nature and function of a relationship script:

Relationship scripts are cognitive structures that contain information regarding the key events that take place in a romantic relationship, as well as the order in which those events typically occur. Individuals might possess scripts regarding the progression of particular relationship events (e.g. the typical progression of a first date), or broader scripts outlining the overall development of a relationship. These scripts are generally regarded as consensually shared, culture-specific notions of normative relationship development (Holmberg and MacKenzie 778)

Similarly, sexual scripts function as mental models that guide individuals around how to behave, and which sequences of events to expect, within given sexual experiences. Epstein and colleague's previously-discussed study examines men's definitions of "hooking up," and "friends with benefits" from a script theory perspective, and suggests that "nonrelational scripts" have developed around these experiences (414). Men in the study were initially able to provide generally consistent accounts of the standard hook-up and friends with benefits scripts. Through deeper discussions around their own personal experiences, however, they began to adjust these accounts by "adding additional contingencies or their own interpretations" (418). This finding challenges the function of scripts within CSRE's, and can be interpreted as indicating a need for different cognitive models or tools to guide sense-making in such experiences.

I will now suggest that the meme constellation surrounding Netflix and chill be considered as such a cognitive model. Specifically, I will discuss how this

constellation exemplifies potential for co-constructive generation of reflexive and iterative scripts around CSRE's. First, I will outline how Netflix and chill constitutes a CSRE script. Second, I will discuss the co-constructive, reflexive, and iterative dynamics of Netflix and chill as script.

To consider Netflix and chill's basic script-like properties, we can consider the example provided in figure 23. From the text "30 minutes into Netflix and chill and he gives you this look," we can derive a simple sequence of events. First, the participants watch Netflix together for approximately 30 minutes (possibly the duration of an episode). Second, one participant initiates sexual activity with the other through exchanging a seductive facial expression. Evidenced through Netflix and chill's widespread proliferation, the experience of watching TV with a potential partner as a tacit prelude to engaging in sexual activity is shared by many. Through producing and disseminating a sharable depiction of this experience, the meme can be understood to externalize and make widely available a new mental model with which to make sense of a particular type of CSRE.

The potential to gradually scale into a shared social phenomenon through a process of being passed between people makes the meme a particularly salient tool for generating consensually-shared cognitive structures, amongst which relationship and sexual scripts are included. Beyond this, the meme's participatory and mutable form allows for these cognitive structures to be

played with and dynamically altered as they are shared. Marwick speaks to this attribute:

While some memes are just trendy pictures or videos that get passed around verbatim, others encourage a type of iteration, imitation, parody, and satire that can spawn literally thousands of variants (13).

This iterative potential is exemplified by the wide array of Netflix and chill memes that have come to circulate.

When he start kissing the neck before
Netflix even load



Figure 22: Netflix and chill iteration #1

Source: "When he start kissing the neck before Netflix even load." *Sizzle*, 27 Sept.

2015, <https://onsizzle.com/i/netflix-and-chill-twitter-when-he-start-kissing-the-neck-1792>

when you're a whole 2hr 25mins into Netflix and Chill and you plotting your next move while she's in the bathroom



Figure 23: Netflix and chill iteration #2

Source: "The Most Epic 'Netflix & Chill' Story Told Via 'Crying Carlton' Memes."

The Roosevelts, 30 Oct. 2015, <http://www.rsvlts.com/2015/10/30/netflix-and-chill-gone-wrong/>

#GrowingUpUgly not relating to any of the netflix and chill tweets because nobody wanna chill with you



Figure 24: Netflix and chill iteration #3

Source: "Funniest Netflix and Chill Memes." *No Way Girl*, 19 Aug. 2015,
<https://nowaygirl.com/memes/netflix-and-chill-memes/>

Each of the memes in Figures 22-24 can be seen as responding with an experience that relates to but varies from the classic Netflix and chill experience. In this sense, they illustrate the co-constructive, reflexive and iterative potential of memes.

Consider this dynamic in relation to the study around hook up and friends with benefits scripts. Participants first outlined consistent standard hook up

scripts, but progressed to alter these scripts with personal amendments. In a similar way, Netflix and chill begins as a consensually shared script, but responsive memes elaborate around how this script can vary from experience to experience. In the case of Netflix and chill, however, these variations contribute to the collectively-held script, rather than existing as private, subjective discrepancies.

In summary, Netflix and chill offers an example of how memes can produce and disseminate new relationship or sexual scripts modelling contemporary CSRE experiences, around which a collective understanding might not have fully solidified. We can also see how the dissemination of a script via meme invites people to reflect upon their related but divergent experiences, and channel these variations toward a more diversified and flexible collective understanding.

15.4 The Expansive Potential of Memes

At this point, I have demonstrated how memes can help people to articulate relationship experiences, and collectively construct shared cognitive models with which to make sense of contemporary CSRE experiences. To conclude, I would like to make clear how these processes might help to overcome the obstacles currently challenging millennial emerging adults' prospects of establishing long-lasting romantic partnerships, as identified through this project. Through my analysis of mobile dating apps, I suggested that

CSRE's are being mediated by tools that discourage taking a reflective and considerate approach to relationship formation. In my discussion around the linguistic practices associated with CSRE's, I identified a tendency to avoid conversation that serves to impede developing skills in open communication, self-reflection and compromise. Memes are multifaceted tools that serve to counter these obstacles in several ways. They are vehicles for articulating personal relationship experience that encourage people to express themselves in relatable terms, and in turn function as highly sharable packages of information. They are windows into the relationship experiences of others, encouraging empathy and solidarity. They are communal drawing boards at which to iteratively co-construct shared cognitive models around emerging, underdeveloped, and inconsistently understood relationship experiences. It is through this co-constructive dynamic that people may begin to produce a common ground from their subjective experiences. Correspondingly, this common ground can help people to make sense of and constructively reflect upon their subjective experiences.

The emphasis I place on the communal and the common in this discussion of memes should bring to mind Strauss and Howe's concept of imminent reinvestment in social order. As discussed throughout this project, the culture of CSRE's among millennial emerging adults is characterized by a high degree of subjectivity and inconsistent meaning, which can be interpreted as

relating to a generational disintegration of social norms around traditional dating and marriage. These conditions reflect what Strauss and Howe would describe as a climate of social entropy, inherent to which is an ensuing return to community and establishment of a new social order. The meme can be seen as a communal tool with which to establish this new social order.

It is not my intent here to over-idealize memes or paint them as an ultimate solution to the dysfunction amidst millennial intimacy. I am merely pointing to an instrument which exhibits collaborative and expressive potential relevant to the contradictions identified within the CSRE activity system. In this sense, my discussion of memes has been an exercise in using the triangular model of activity to identify and frame possible opportunities for evoking expansive change.

16.0 Conclusion

I began this project seeking to examine the detrimental impact that mobile dating apps such as Tinder have upon people's ability to form and sustain romantic relationships. One of the earlier realizations I came to through my research is that it is reductive and unproductive to analyze behavioural phenomena with an approach that blames technology. The reasoning is too linear, and the scope is too narrow.

Instead of examining mobile dating as the cause of emerging relationship patterns, I shifted my focus to examining these emerging relationship patterns (CSRE's) as a behavioural change in population over time. I expanded the scope of my research to investigate the culture surrounding CSRE's through the lenses of generational analysis and life stage theory. Doing so helped me to develop a greater understanding of the cultural historical conditions informing this emergent behaviour. It also lead my project toward its first major finding: behaviours attributed to the Millennial generation's individualistic value system and disregard for social institutions can alternately be understood as a self-focused and exploratory lifestyle specific to the historically novel developmental stage of emerging adulthood.

The tension between these perspectives has provided me with a dynamic context in which to make sense of hookup culture, while also helping to orient my research and analysis toward an extrapolative and forward-looking agenda.

As a project of foresight, my research and analysis has sought to imagine how the shifting relationship patterns observed within hookup culture might impact Millennials' ability to establish long-lasting romantic partnerships as they develop into adulthood. In generic terms, it has sought to investigate how a behavioural shift might play out across a cohort's life course.

To support this investigation, I adopted and modified Engeström's triangular model of activity as my primary analytical framework. The systemic approach to conceptualizing activity taken by this model helped me to integrate various disparate factors and perspectives relating to the topic of hookup culture amongst millennial emerging adults. Because Engeström's model is more typically used to explore activity directed toward proximal and explicit objectives, it was not perfectly suited to my inquiry, which sought to account for the interdependent development and pursuit of a distant, abstract goal. For this reason, I introduced the concept of a future object, which has served as a bridge between cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) and foresight. The marriage of CHAT and foresight that my project has introduced is methodologically compelling, mutually beneficial to the respective disciplines, and worthy of further development.

With this analytical framework, I have been able to map the relations between diverse and highly specialized data points, producing a systemic overview of various conditions related to millennial emerging adult's

engagement in hookup culture without reducing my findings into a constrictive narrative. I addressed each node of the model as its own chapter:

-) In the **Subject** chapter, I outlined characteristics of the millennial emerging adult.
-) In the **(Future) Object** chapter, I addressed the interdependence of career and relationship goals in relation to the emerging adult's prolonged, deliberative process of forming and pursuing such goals.
-) In the **Instrument** chapter, I examined mobile dating apps as tools that mediate relationship formation, and addressed their role in intensifying and perpetuating certain dynamics of hookup culture.
-) In the **Community** chapter, I highlighted the lack of demographic normativity amongst emerging adults, and touched on Strauss and Howe's ideas around rising social entropy and the imminence of reinvesting in social order.
-) In the **Rules** chapter, I discussed the disintegration of social norms amongst Millennials in relation to linguistic practices of ambiguity and inconsistency within CSRE's.
-) In the **Division of Labour** chapter, I made an argument for how engaging in CSRE's while postponing romantic commitment might

hinder individuals from developing the skills needed to establish and sustain long-lasting romantic partnerships.

This structure has allowed me to identify contradictions within the activity system which conceivably challenge or convolute the subject's pursuit of his or her object. The three primary contradictions identified are as follows:

- 1) Emerging adults may be postponing rather than prolonging the pursuit of their relationship goals as they focus on career-related ambitions.
- 2) The corporate motives of online dating services (i.e. to generate revenue through maximizing user activity) are in conflict with the emerging adult's object of establishing a long-lasting romantic partnership.
- 3) The linguistic practices associated with CSRE's contradict the skills and maturity required to establish a long-lasting romantic partnership.

Identifying these contradictions has served to highlight developmental potential and opportunities for innovative intervention within the activity system. To this end, I have proposed that the culture of CSRE's may be reoriented to align with the future object of establishing a long-lasting romantic partnership through:

- 1) Encouraging open communication, both within relationships and amongst one's network of peers.

- 2) Facilitating consideration. Thoughtful reflection should be directed towards others, as a practice of empathy, and directed towards oneself, as a practice of self-awareness.

In relation to this proposition, I discussed the meme as a potential instrument through which to facilitate open discussion, self-reflection, and co-construction of a collective understanding around CSRE's. Further research could apply these ideas to explore the meme's role as an instrument in greater depth. In addition to proposing new structures with which to conceive of memes, my discussion here has also been an exercise in using the triangular model of activity to identify and frame possible opportunities for evoking expansive change.

Overall, this project has synthesized various topics and perspectives relevant to the shifting relationship patterns experienced by Millennials in their emerging adult stage of life. Doing so, it has established a rich interdisciplinary foundation from which to pursue further research on the topic, ideally involving ethnographical fieldwork in its next stages. It has also begun to develop a novel approach to foresight, which incorporates generational analysis, life-stage theory, media ecology, and cultural historical activity theory. Further work in this area could push to integrate McLuhan's Tetrad with Engeström's model, or elaborate on how generational analysis might be applied to facilitating the cultural historical research component of CHAT.

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