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"Less than a Relationship:" Transitions into an Impactful Romantic Relationship

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“LESS THAN A RELATIONSHIP:” TRANSITIONS INTO AN IMPACTFUL ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP

By

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ABSTRACT

Are we friends, dating partners, significant others, or who are we? To answer this question, the study examined transitions into an impactful romantic relationship using relational turbulence theory (RTT). The goal of this thesis was to investigate communicative behaviors during romantic relationship transitions in association to relational uncertainty and relational satisfaction. Using axial and emergent coding, lay individuals’ definition of the impactful romantic relationship was derived and several types of transitions (most commonly, acquaintances to romantic partners and acquaintances through friends to romantic partners) were identified. Regression analyses revealed the support for half of the theory-driven hypotheses. Taking into consideration all key findings both practical and theoretical implications were derived while addressing future directions and limitations of the study.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Are we friends, dating partners, significant others, or who are we? This question might arise in the minds of individuals who desire to transform their close relationships into romantic partnerships. The title “more than…” hints that a romantic relationship, in which an individual or a couple want(s) to transition, is different from the relationship they started from (i.e., friendship, acquaintanceship). Defining the characteristics that make romantic relationships distinct from other relationships is a challenging process due to a lack of agreement in the scholarship. One traditional definition of a romantic relationship describes it as an involvement between two individuals who have an emotional attachment (Pearson, Child, Carmon, & Miller, 2009), physical desire for each other (Furman & Shaffer, 2011), and commitment to the relationship (Stanley, Markman, & Whitton, 2002). The downside of this definition is that it overlaps with many other types of relationships, such as friends (Mongeau, Sewewicz, Henningsen, & Davis, 2006), “friends with benefits” (Hughes, Morrison, & Asada, 2007), and “hookups” (Hollman & Sillars, 2012). The inability to distinguish one type of the relationship from the other makes it difficult to study the period in between (i.e., the transition) when one relationship type (e.g., cross-sex friendship) has ended and the other (e.g., romantic partnership) has started. However, one theoretical framework has attempted to outline communicative experiences during relationship transitions.

Relational turbulence theory (RTT, Solomon, Knobloch, Theiss, & McLaren, 2016) is a communication theory developed to address the experience of relational transitions. It argues that relational uncertainty affects communication engagement (i.e., openness), which in turn, impacts relational satisfaction. The RTT is the best fit for this project because of its ability to capture the effect of relational uncertainty on satisfaction during a turbulent moment in the relationship’s
history. Previously, this new theory was used to investigate the outcomes of emotional support in dating couples (Solomon & Priem, 2016) and reluctance of military personnel in discussing their deployment during reunion (Knobloch & Theiss, 2016).

The goal of this study was to identify how individuals transition into an impactful romantic relationship and to determine how perceptions of communication openness affect the relationship using the relational turbulence theory (Solomon et al., 2016) as a theoretical framework. Exploring relational transitions facilitates an understanding of relationship initiation and assists in evaluating the communicative behaviors leading to the new relationship status. Because dating romantic relationships establish the bases for future, more committed relationships (Pearson et al., 2009), this study demonstrated how perceptions of openness functions in managing the period of instability between old and new relationship statuses.

This thesis addressed several blind spots in the research about relationship transitions by examining openness in the moments of relational uncertainty. This chapter sets the stage for studying how relationships transition into impactful romantic relationships. The literature review provides a general understanding of relational transitions and impactful romantic relationships, while a discussion of relational turbulence theory (Solomon et al., 2016) maps the path for the analysis of impactful romantic relationships’ initiations. Chapter Two overviews the measures for the dependent and independent variables and procedures used in the online survey of college students. The third chapter describes the data analysis and reports the thesis’ results. Finally, Chapter Four highlights the key findings, establishes the connection between the current study and prior scholarship, and addresses the limitations with future directions.
Impactful Romantic Relationships

The research on romantic relationships examines the relational and communicative processes of long-term committed or married couples (Laurenceau, Barrett, & Rovine, 2005; Weigel & Ballard-Reisch, 2008); in other words, it primarily focuses on romantic relationships that are impactful on individuals. Yet, little is known about what impactful romantic relationships look like before marriage or what individuals experience as the relationships develop. This is problematic because, as the name suggests, romantic relationships leave both positive and negative effects on individuals and can teach them how to behave in future romantic interactions. Because of a lack of research, we have little understanding of what contributes to the improvement in the quality and depth of romantic engagement and what we learn from prior partnerships. This oversight may be due in part to scholars not using the word “impactful” to describe relationships or a lack of shared understanding between lay individuals and scholars about what an impactful romantic relationship may be.

Extant scholarship primarily portrays and investigates romantic relationships in terms of passion, intimacy, commitment, and closeness (Overbeek, Ha, Scholte, de Kemp, & Engels, 2007). These characteristics are descriptive because they reflect both emotional and physical closeness between partners. However, not all four characteristics are essential for building a good romantic partnership. Most romantic interactions were described as intimate and committed with a spark of passion (Overbeek, et al., 2007). The evidence presented below promotes an understanding of impactful romantic relationships.

A romantic relationship is a dyadic partnership that is characterized by passion, intimacy, and commitment (Overbeek et al., 2007). Passion is an affectionate feeling of physical attraction and willingness to engage in sexual activities. Intimacy is a sense of closeness and connection
Commitment is a desire to maintain the relationship by increasing interdependence and growing an emotional attachment (Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998). Individuals who reported the presence of all three elements were found to be more satisfied with their romantic relationships (Madey & Rodgers, 2009). In particular, satisfactory romantic relationships were found to be closely related to the degree of intimacy between the partners (Greeff & Malherbe, 2001; Laurenceau et al., 2005; Laurenceau, Barrett, & Pietromonaco, 1998; Marshall, 2008; Pascoal, Narsico, & Pereira, 2013). The greatest predictors of intimacy are self- and partner openness (Laurenceau et al., 1998; Laurenceau et al., 2005).

Openness refers to the discussion of the nature of the relationships (Canary & Stafford, 1992; Weigel & Ballard-Reisch, 2008) and revealing individual’s personal information (Laurenceau, et al., 2005; Reis & Shaver, 1988). This definition encompasses two major concepts: relationship talk (discussing the nature of the relationship) and self-disclosure (revealing personal information) (Stafford, 2010). Openness is vital to the development and maintenance of romantic relationships (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Hays, 1984; Ruppel, 2015; Yum & Hara, 2005). In particular, openness promotes closeness (e.g., Aron, Melinat, Aron, & Vallone, 1997; Valkenburg & Peter, 2007), enhances relational quality (e.g., Valkenburg & Peter, 2009), and provides sense of certainty in the intimate relationships (Tidwell & Walther, 2002).

Intimate romantic relationships play a significant role in human life (Ogolsky, Lloyd, & Cate, 2013). Romantic relationships are a source of comfort (Theiss, Knobloch, Checton, & Magsamen-Conrad, 2009), support, and affection in dating couples (Levinger & Huston, 1990). Individuals engage in close relationships to satisfy the need for committed and successful personal attachments. Scholarship identified a few benefits of being in close romantic
Individuals who have a romantic partner beside them tend to live longer (Orth-Gomer et al., 2000), have a lesser chance of depression (Whisman, 2001), and have a higher level of life satisfaction (Whisman, Uebelacker, Tolejko, Chatav, & McKelvie, 2006). Also, close relationships contribute to self-expansion. Self-expansion is defined as a means to gain access to new material, spiritual resources, and perspectives provided by a partner (Aron et al., 2004). Aron and colleagues (2004) argued that a close relationship is the primary source for improving the self. In particular, individuals tend to define a romantic relationship that changed them for better or worse as impactful.

An impactful relationship is a meaningful and close romantic relationship. These romantic relationships are meaningful because they impart the principles and behaviors that we value and the attitudes that we want to stay away from. Also, they improve self-esteem and provide room for self-expansion (Aron, Paris, & Aron, 1995). Some impactful relationships are synonymous with satisfactory romantic relationships. Satisfied romantic couples were found to work on their relationships towards commitment (Canary & Stafford, 1992; Rusbult, Olsen, Davis, & Hannon, 2001). In contrast, negative impactful relationships build a scar in our souls. The abusive relationships teach us the human traits that we need to avoid and what human interactions should not be. Despite a lack of a clear definition of impactful romantic relationships, social scientists believe that there is a plethora of reasons of why they deserved to be studied.

Communication scholars identified a few reasons why romantic relationships needed close examination. First, romantic relationships bring satisfaction and joy to our lives (Ogolsky et al., 2013). Humans are social creatures and need company in order to survive. Our close relationships help to expand our identity and give an insight into the world of another person.
(Aron et al., 1995). As the result, by studying the successes and failures in the relationships, we might enlighten people about effective strategies in building a new strong relationship bond or maintain an old one (Berscheid & Graziano, 1979; Clark, Shaver, Abrahams, 1999; Snyder, Berscheid, & Glick, 1985). Second, transitions into romantic relationships challenge traditional view of the relationship development and as the result might assist in extending the scholarship (Guerrero & Mongeau, 2008).

Overall, while there are a variety of reasons to study romantic relationships, there is a lack of scholarship using the term “impactful” in the examination of romantic relationships. However, the same connotation may be implied through the use of “closely connected,” “affectionate,” and “committed” relationship. This suggests an “impactful romantic relationship” is an affectionate, close partnership that demonstrates commitment and intimacy. Yet, it is important to make sure that the individuals within romantic relationships describe and think about their impactful romantic relationships in a similar way. Thus, to develop a universal way to address this type of partnership, the following research question was posed:

**RQ1: How do people define “impactful romantic relationships?”**

**Transitions into an Impactful Romantic Relationship**

One of the questions under examined in communication research is how individuals transition into an impactful romantic relationship, and what their experiences are during that time. Transition was conceptualized as a period between two stable relationship stages (Solomon et al., 2016). During a relational transition, unexpected changes happen in the way partners feel, think, and behave (Knobloch, 2007; 2015), which creates a discrepancy in relationship beliefs and values (Solomon et al., 2016). Solomon and Knobloch (2001) argued that the transition from casual dating to serious involvement is characterized by an increased level of uncertainty and
goal interference from the partner. In other words, potential romantic partners suffer from lack of confidence about their relationship’s status, and they experience either positive or negative influence by partners in achievement of their personal goals.

Transitions were first studied by Baxter and Bullis (1986), where they were called “turning points.” This was the first attempt to make sense of periods in a relationship development when partners experienced doubts about the state of their relationship (Baxter & Bullis, 1986). During transitions individuals experience instability and change of roles within relationships (Solomon et al., 2016). In other words, the behavior of partners is no longer predictable, which creates a “mismatch” of relationship beliefs or routines. The moment starts with a change of attitudes in one or both partners and ends when partners are adapted to new circumstances (Solomon et al., 2016, p. 4). Thus, this moment may stretch over a period of a day, a week or a month depending on what is creating the mismatch between partners. The success of the transition depends on the ability of partners to work together to resolve this tension (Knobloch & Solomon, 2002). Knobloch and Solomon (1999) were interested in testing a multitude of hypotheses related to partners’ adjustment to new circumstances, which resulted from a turning point in their relationship. An example of the turning point would be a kiss that happened between two friends and caused them to question status of their relationship.

Transition into the impactful romantic relationship may occur from different types of starting relationships.

Research discusses romantic relationships that began as acquaintanceships (Eaton & Rose, 2012; Guynn, Brooks, & Sprecher, 2008) and that were transformed from “friends with benefits” (Mongeau, Ramirez, & Vorell, 2003; Paul, Wenzel, & Harvey, 2008). These are instances in which two passionate hearts might meet and fall in “love at first sight” or knew each
other for a little while before they decide to present themselves as a romantic couple to their mutual friends. Other studies have examined couples in the transitional period after a relationship-changing event, such as partner’s depression (Knobloch & Delaney, 2012; Knobloch & Theiss, 2011a), and partner’s deployment (Knobloch & Theiss, 2012; Theiss & Knobloch, 2014), a hurtful event (McLaren, Solomon, & Priem, 2011), or willingness to become something more. Relational transitions within a romantic partnership have been studied extensively, but the research appears not to address transitions into romantic relationships.

There are three reasons why the transition to romance deserves to be studied. First, friendship, as one of the aforementioned starting points, may serve as a foundation for establishing dating relationships (Guerrero & Mongeau, 2008; Owen & Fincham, 2012). Prior research has confirmed that friendships are vital for overcoming loneliness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Collins & van Dulmen, 2006) and for social support (Connolly, Craig, Goldberg, & Pepler, 1999; Collins & van Dulmen, 2006). Second, studying uncertainty during a relationship’s transition helps to shed light on the communication behavior of individuals (Afifi & Burgoon, 1998; Knobloch & Theiss, 2011b) and health of the potential relationship (Solomon & Knobloch, 2004; Knobloch, 2007). One way to think about transitions is to first consider typical stages in the relationship development process.

Although often and rightly critiqued, Knapp’s (1978) stage model is a useful framework in for examining relational transitions because of its description of the relationship stages. One major critique of the model is that some stages fail to accurately represent different types of romantic relationships prevalent in the contemporary society. In addition, it assumes that relationships move through each of the five stages sequentially. Despite these shortcomings, the
model assists in providing a general understanding of how relationships develop and, therefore, set the boundaries for relational transitions.

The model outlines five steps and the communication behaviors necessary in relationship building towards increased commitment: initiating, experimenting, intensifying, integrating, and bonding (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2005). The initiation stage is the first interaction between two individuals, and it is primarily characterized by social norms and standards for greeting individuals and making a positive first impression (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2005). Due to the absence of reliable and successful approach strategies, potential partners might experience increased levels of uncertainty in relationship initiation (Downey & Feldman, 1996; Knobloch & Miller, 2008; Ogolsky et al., 2013). The second stage, experimenting, is described as the stage of a partner exploration. Individuals ask both direct and indirect questions to gather more information about one another (Berger, 1979; Berger & Calabrese, 1975). Openness is crucial for the experimenting stage because it allows individuals to make judgments about the level of interest in the potential dating partner. Romantic relationships that advance to the next stage enter the intensifying stage. As the relationship continues to escalate, potential partners engage more in openness (Cheng & Chan, 2004; Hays, 1984; Ruppel, 2015; Taylor, Wheeler, & Altman, 1973) and experience greater commitment to the relationship (Sternberg, 1986; Ogolsky et al., 2013). The fourth stage is integrating. Partners perceive each other as best friends and have assumptions about one another’s similarities of attitudes (Welch & Rubin, 2002). Finally, during bonding stage, partners confirm their togetherness by becoming “Facebook official” (Fox, Warber, & Makstaller, 2013; Papp, Danielewicz, & Cayemberg, 2012) or announcing their relationships to the network members (Sprecher & Felmlee, 1992; Tyrell, Wheeler, Gonzales, Dumka, & Millsap, 2014; Young & Schrodt, 2016). While Knapp’s (1978) stage model provides
A general framework for thinking about how romantic relationships develop, recent research suggests contemporary dating practices may not reflect the experiences Knapp initially identified forty years ago.

A growing body of literature investigates new types of relationships, such as “friends with benefits” (Afifi & Faulkner, 2000; Guerrero & Chavez, 2005; Hughes et al., 2005; Owen, Fincham & Polser, 2016) and “hookups” (Holman & Sillars, 2012; Siebenbruner, 2013). “Friends with benefits” (FWB) are characterized by any type of sexual activity with friends (Bisson & Levine, 2009) that does not require commitment or exclusivity (Mongeau et al., 2003). These relationships are prevalent in contemporary society. A study conducted seventeen years ago reported that 54% of participants confessed to having at least one sexual encounter with their friends (Afifi & Faulkner, 2000). In addition, “hookups” differentiate from FWB by describing a sexual encounter that might occur between strangers with no feelings or commitment attached (Holman & Sillars, 2012). Because “hookups” or FWB relationships do not have a precise meaning, they can include a whole spectrum of affectionate activities starting from kissing to any form of sexual interaction (Bogle, 2008).

The foregoing suggests that despite the clear relationship stages presented in the Knapp’s (1978) model, there are exceptions that do not fit the general framework. These intermediary stages might evolve from relational transitions. Thus, it is important to understand relational transitions because they may give rise to new types of relationships. To better understand the transitions individuals in contemporary impactful romantic relationships experience, I asked the following research question:

*RQ2: What are the types of transitions experienced by individuals in contemporary, impactful romantic relationships?*
Relational Turbulence Theory as a Theoretical Framework

Extensive research over 15 years has assisted in the development of the relational turbulence theory (RTT; Solomon et al., 2016), the main goal of which is to examine the communicative response to relational transitions. This section will shed the light on the conceptualization of relational uncertainty during a transition to a romantic partnership. I argue that relational uncertainty affects openness during relational transitions. Unrestrictive communication practices between partners, in turn, will contribute to relational satisfaction. The RTT (Solomon et al., 2016) will assist in arguing that relational uncertainty influences one’s own openness and perceptions of partner openness, and together, relational uncertainty and openness impact the overall perception of relational satisfaction.

The term relational uncertainty encompasses the idea that individuals experience doubts about their own and their partners’ involvement in the relationship (Knobloch & Solomon, 2002). It consists of an individual’s self-uncertainty, perceptions of the partner’s uncertainty, and relationship uncertainty. Self-uncertainty is the level of hesitation a person has with regard to his/her involvement in the relationship (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999). It occurs when a person does not know if the relationship is worth of continuing and what effort is needed for the relationship to prosper (e.g., “Do I want this relationship with this person to last?”). Partner uncertainty deals with an individual’s confidence of the partner’s involvement in the relationship (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999). This captures one’s beliefs about whether the partner seems to think the relationship is worth the effort to continue (e.g., “Does my partner appear to want this relationship to last?”). Relationship uncertainty refers to the extent of ambiguity that a person experiences about the nature of the current relationship as a whole (e.g., “Is this relationship
likely to continue as a friendship?” or “Are we likely to continue dating?”) and is affected by self- and partner uncertainty (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999).

Relational uncertainty has been studied in relation to several communicative phenomena, including: jealousy (Theiss & Solomon, 2006a), intimacy development (Knobloch, 2007), marital communication (Knobloch, 2008), and long-distance dating relationships (Stafford, Merolla, & Castle, 2006). Solomon and Knobloch (2001) also described the transition from casual dating to more serious romantic involvement as a challenging communicative process that involved uncertainty about the relationship’s continued development. The RTT (Solomon et al., 2016) argues that individuals’ understanding and communication about relational transition are determined by their level of relational uncertainty (Solomon et al., 2016). In particular, the theory maintains that individuals who experienced high levels of relational uncertainty make sense of the relational transition and communicate using limited and unreliable information.

According to the RTT, relational uncertainty should influence individuals’ own openness and perceptions of partner openness during relational transitions (Solomon et al., 2016). Openness refers to sharing personal information (Laurenceau et al., 2005; Reis & Shaver, 1988) and discussion of the relationship (Canary & Stafford, 1992; Weigel & Ballard-Reisch, 2008). This encompasses two concepts: self-disclosure and relationship talk (Stafford, 2010). Self-disclosure is a process of voluntarily sharing personal information (Stafford, 2010). Typically, as relationships progress, the breadth and depth of self-disclosures increase (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Knapp, 1978). Mutual disclosure is stimulated by a give-and-take principle: when one partner reveals information, the other feels the need to reciprocate with information of similar breadth and depth (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Derlega, Winstead, & Greene, 2008). Partners exchange various types of information, but it does not necessarily mean that they talk about the
relationship that they are in (Ruppel, 2015). Self-disclosure was one of the most used relational maintenance strategies in romantic relationships (Johnson, Haigh, Becker, Craig, & Wigley, 2008). However, relational uncertainty was associated with less information sharing (Berger, 1997; 2002). Thus, relational transitions may be associated with limited self-disclosure. Open conversation on any topic in the relationship may include not only self-disclosure but a relational talk as well.

Relationship talk, the second subpart of openness, is the discussion of the current relationship (Stafford, 2010). The main goal of relationship talk is to maintain and negotiate the roles in the relationship of interest, which contributes to feelings of closeness (Acitelli, 2001). It was generally considered to be a taboo topic in both romantic relationships and friendships, and was found to have detrimental effects on the relationship well-being (Afifi & Burgoon, 1998). Most research did not separated relationship talk from self-disclosure and combined those two concepts when examining openness in romantic relationships. However, Stafford (2010) found self-disclosure and relationship talk had opposite effects on satisfaction in marital relationships. Self-disclosure had a positive effect on relational satisfaction, but the prevalence of relationship talk resulted in lower relational satisfaction (Stafford, 2010). Other research has found a negative association between relationship talk and relational uncertainty (Hoffman & Stawski, 2009; Knobloch & Solomon, 2005; Knobloch & Theiss, 2011b). Knobloch (2006) examined the role of relational uncertainty in date request voice messages. The study demonstrated that the more hesitant the messenger was (scored high in relational uncertainty) the less likely s/he was to effectively communicate the degree of liking towards partner and a concern about the relationship status. Another research study stated that relational uncertainty was positively associated with topic avoidance (Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004). Despite the distinction
of self-disclosure from relationship talk, the majority of research studies unite both concepts under the “openness” term.

Relational uncertainty sets up the stage for communication to occur (Afifi & Burgoon, 1998; Berger & Gudykunst, 1991; Knobloch, 2006). Whenever individuals experience relational transition, their openness is shaped by relational uncertainty and cognitive appraisals. Both partner openness and self-reported openness play a significant role in managing relational uncertainty. Taking into consideration the prior research, I made the following hypothesis:

**H1**: There is a negative association between relational uncertainty and (a) perceptions of partner openness and (b) self-reported openness when individuals experience relational transitions in impactful romantic relationships.

The RTT (Solomon et al., 2016) represents a useful framework to analyze individuals’ relational satisfaction during their transitions into impactful romantic partnerships. Relational uncertainty is hypothesized to affect openness after a relationship-changing event, which in turn, alters relational satisfaction. Satisfaction refers to a sense of fulfillment and contentment with the romantic relationship (Crystal Jiang & Hancock, 2013; Kar & O’Leary, 2013; Laurenceau et al., 2005). The level of relational satisfaction depends on the extent to which a partner meets an individual’s needs (Rusbult et al., 1998). For example, the more a partner fulfills the need to stay in touch throughout the day, the more individual feels satisfied about the relationship.

Satisfaction provides an insight on the evaluation of the romantic relationship during the relational transition. Relationship stability was found to depend on the reported satisfaction in that romantic partnership (Arriaga, 2001).

Relational satisfaction is closely related to communication behavior. In particular, research found a positive association between partners openness and satisfaction: the more
romantic partners verbalized their thoughts and discussed different topics, the more satisfied they were with the current relationship (Greeff & Malherbe, 2001; Laurenceau et al., 2005; Knobloch & Theiss, 2011a; Weigel & Ballard-Reisch, 2008). In other words, high levels of self-disclosure facilitated individuals being satisfied with their partnership. Prior research discovered that relationship talk was also positively associated with relational satisfaction when one of the spouses was chronically ill (Acitelli & Badr, 2005) or had a lung cancer (Badr, Acitelli, & Taylor, 2008). Given the impact of self-disclosure and relationship talk on relational satisfaction, the following hypothesis was derived:

**H2**: (a) Perceptions of partner openness and (b) self-reported openness in the impactful romantic relationship are positively related to relational satisfaction.

The cumulative research suggested that openness might mediate an association between relational uncertainty and relational satisfaction. Relational uncertainty was found to negatively affect self-disclosure (Berger 1997; 2002) and relationship talk (Hoffman & Stawski, 2009; Knobloch & Solomon, 2005; Knobloch & Theiss, 2011b). Thus, openness, as a general construct will be negatively associated with relational uncertainty. In addition, there is a negative association between relational uncertainty and relational satisfaction (Knobloch & Theiss, 2011b). As the result, it is accurate to suggest that there is a negative relationship between relational uncertainty and relational satisfaction that is mediated by openness, which is illustrated in the hypothesis below:

**H3**: (a) Perceptions of partner openness and (b) self-reported openness mediate the negative association between relational uncertainty and relational satisfaction when individuals experience relational transitions in impactful romantic relationships.
Summary

This thesis was designed to address some of the blind spots in the research about relational transitions into impactful romantic relationships using relational turbulence theory (Solomon et al., 2016). In particular, the research questions about the definition of an impactful romantic relationship and of types of relational transitions leading to it laid a foundation for the exploratory study. In addition, using the RTT’s framework (Solomon et al., 2016), I hypothesized the existence of associations between relational uncertainty, self-reported and perceptions of partner openness, and relational satisfaction. Relational uncertainty may be associated with openness and openness may be related to relational satisfaction. Thus, potential role of openness as a mediator in the association between uncertainty and satisfaction was explored in the scope of this research project.
CHAPTER 2: METHOD

This online survey was aimed to assist in the analysis of the role of individuals’ relational uncertainty, self-reported openness, and perceptions of partner openness on relational satisfaction while transitioning into impactful romantic relationships. To answer the research questions and test the posited hypotheses, a survey research design was chosen, which involved three steps. First, the most reliable measures were found for the dependent and independent variables. Second, Qualtrics Survey Software was used to create an online questionnaire that included both open-ended and closed-ended questions and scales. Third, the electronic Qualtrics survey was linked to the Communication Studies research participation system (SONA), which was used to distribute it to the participants. All students who clicked on the link in SONA and completed the survey were included in the sample.

The research protocol was approved by UNLV’s Office of Research Integrity (i.e., Institutional review board, IRB), which helped to ensure that the current study was ethical and the benefits for participation outweigh the risks. The permission to start the data collection process was granted on January 9th, 2017.

Participants

The sample consisted of 215 undergraduate college students from University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Only students aged 18 years old and older who had a prior experience in a romantic involvement were eligible for this study. Two participants did not answer any questions despite providing consent to participate in the study, as the result, they were excluded from the analysis. Participants were aged 18 to 48 years old ($M = 21.81; SD = 5.12$). More than half of students were women ($n = 129, 60\%$, men: $n = 82, 38.1\%$). Fifty-eight (27\%) were freshmen, sixty-three (29.3\%) were sophomore, sixty-two (28.8\%) were juniors, twenty-seven (12.6\%) were seniors,
and three people identified as “other” when reflecting their school year. The sample was represented by 45.5% White/Caucasians (n = 97), 26.8% Hispanic Americans (n = 57), 21.1% Asian Americans (n = 45), 12.7% African Americans (n = 27), 3.3% Pacific Islanders (n = 7), and 5.6% others (n = 12). The percentages will not add up to 100% because participants were allowed to choose more than one option.

**Procedure**

Students were recruited from introductory communication courses (COM 101, COM 102, and COM 216). Instructors announced an opportunity to receive extra credit by participating in the research (or alternatives) and directed students to the SONA website where all the Communication Studies department’s research options were posted (see Appendix B, p. 100). SONA is a recruitment and participant management system that allows students to see all available Communication Studies’ research and helps scholars recruit undergraduate students. On the website, students were informed that this study was going to ask them to reflect on their most impactful romantic relationship. Participants needed to be at least 18 years old and have a prior experience in a romantic involvement. Interested students signed up for the study, which made the weblink to the survey available to the student.

When participants clicked on the link in the Communication Studies’ SONA System, they were taken to the Qualtrics survey. First, participants were presented the informed consent form to read (see Appendix C, p. 101). The informed consent form indicated to participants that (a) they may withdraw at any time without prejudice before reaching the final page, but once they reached the final page, they were no longer able to withdraw from the study; (b) participation was completely voluntary; and, (c) regardless a participant’s completion of the survey, s/he would still earn the research credit. Also, the researcher’s information was listed in
the informed consent, so students were encouraged to contact a researcher if they had any questions. At the end of the informed consent page, participants chose between two options. If they chose “Yes. I read the above information. I am at least 18 years old, and I CONSENT to participate in this study,” they indicated they read and agreed to participate in the study described. These individuals were then taken to the first page of the survey. If students chose “No. I read the above information. I DO NOT CONSENT to participate in this study,” they indicated nonconsent. If students selected nonconsent, a message appeared to thank them for their time.

Upon agreeing to informed consent, the survey started (see Appendix A, pp. 82-99) with the short preview of the study followed by demographic questions (e.g., age, ethnicity, and gender). Questions on the next page asked participants to describe the most impactful romantic relationship (either positive or negative) that they had. Then, a few clarifying closed-ended questions were asked to identify how long that relationship lasted and if it was an exclusive relationship. The final section of the survey included closed-ended questions designed to assess the potential relationship between uncertainty avoidance and openness. At the end of the online survey, students were thanked for participation, presented a copy of the informed consent, and were told to contact the researcher if they desired a copy of the informed consent for their records. Research credit was automatically assigned in the SONA system once students opened the link to the survey.

Measures

**Impactful relationships.**

To address the first research question of defining an impactful romantic relationship an inductive coding method was used. I used an open and axial coding technique (Lindlof & Taylor,
2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994) to examine the responses to two questions: “Please describe your most impactful romantic relationship (either positive or negative)” and “Why do you believe it was impactful.” The responses to the questions were considered as a unit of analysis. First, the process of open coding started with reading through each participant’s responses for two questions several times to become familiar with the responses. Next, I derived initial codes to establish the connection between the responses and to focus on the participants’ explicit meaning. Code is defined as a label of meaning attributed to a part of the data set to make sense of the piece of information (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Each unit of analysis is not limited to only one code, several codes might have been used to accurately reflect the meaning of the response. As the result, the codes were compared against each other across the data set (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Second, axial coding continued to refine the emergent codes into key themes as related to the research question. The related codes were merged with one another to avoid redundancy. In addition, axial coding assisted in a generation of categories (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002) that represent the core ideas in defining the most impactful romantic partnership.

To confirm the codes, a second coder blind to the initial codes created, engaged in open and axial coding with 20% of the data. Although some code labels were worded slightly different, the blind coder identified the same ideas. Any emerged discrepancies were discussed and if the code labels were different, I selected the one that was most reflective of the nature of the idea identified.

**Types of transitions.**

To provide an answer to the second research question about the types of transitions individuals experience in the impactful romantic relationship, a priori coding was implemented. Transitions were coded using Welch and Rubin’s (2002) coding scheme for Knapp’s (1978)
model. Due to the lack of research on identification of different types of transitions, Knapp’s model (Knapp, 1978) provided a general framework in outlining the steps in the romantic relationship development process. The coding scheme (Welch & Rubin, 2002) acknowledged five categories that correspond to five relationship stages describes in the model: initiating, experimenting, intensifying, integrating, and bonding (see Appendix D, p. 103). To recognize the multitude of research dedicated to “friends with benefits” (e.g., Bisson & Levine, 2009; Hughes et al., 2005; Mongeau et al., 2003) and “hookups” (e.g., Holman & Sillars, 2012; Paul et al., 2008; Sienbenbruner, 2013), two corresponding categories were added to the existing coding scheme. “Friends with benefits” were coded as a sexual encounter (Afifi & Faulkner, 2000) between friends without any commitment or exclusivity (Afifi & Burgoon, 1998; Hughes et al., 2005; Mongeau et al., 2003). The “hookup” code was used to identify a kiss or any form of sexual interaction (Bogle, 2008) associated with no feelings or commitment (Glenn & Marquardt, 2001) between acquaintances or strangers (Sienbenbruner, 2013). Participants’ responses to three questions (“Please describe your most impactful romantic relationship (either positive or negative),” “Why do you believe it was impactful,” and “How did that relationship start?”; see Appendix A, pp. 85) were used to identify the types of transitions participants experienced in their impactful romantic relationships. Thus, all three responses were a unit of analysis.

To assess reliability of the coding, a second person used the Knapp’s model coding scheme to code 20% of the data. The initial round of coding produced poor reliability (κ = .25). After discussing the codes in more detail and clarifying their application to several examples, kappa reliability increased to .91.
**Relational uncertainty.**

To measure participants’ relational uncertainty during the most impactful romantic relationship’s transition to a romantic relationship, participants completed three subscales. Knobloch and Solomon’s (1999) uncertainty about self, partner, and the relationship itself scales were used, and when combined these scales assess relational uncertainty. Participants responded to the items on a six-point Likert-type scale to indicate their degree of uncertainty (1 = “completely or almost completely uncertain” to 6 = “completely or almost completely certain.”).

Self-uncertainty was measured using 14 items. Participants were prompted to answer to “How certain were you…” about degree of confidence about the relationship (e.g., “your feelings for your partner,” “how important this relationship was to you,” or “whether you wanted to stay in a relationship with your partner.”) Solomon and Knobloch (2004) found reliability of 0.93 for self-uncertainty scale. Cronbach alpha reliability for the current study was 0.78, and the items were averaged to obtain a single score ($M = 4.82$, $SD = 1.11$).

Perceptions of partner uncertainty was assessed using the same 14 items, but the word “you” was replaced by “your partner.” For example, items asked “How much your partner wants this relationship right now” and “How much your partner is romantically interested in you.” Solomon and Knobloch (2004) found reliability of 0.95 for perceptions of partner uncertainty. Reliability for the current study was 0.97, and the items were averaged to obtain a single score ($M = 4.51$, $SD = 1.32$).

A set of 14 items were used to measure relationship uncertainty. Examples of the questions were: “How certain are you about the norms of this relationship,” “How certain are you about whether or not you and your partner feel the same way about each other,” and “How certain are you about whether or not you and your partner will stay together.” Using slightly
modified version of these scales, Solomon and Knobloch (2004) found reliability of 0.90.
Cronbach alpha reliability for the current study was 0.95, and the items were averaged to create a
single score ($M = 4.31$, $SD = 1.14$). Because hypotheses and research questions in this project
are centered on relational uncertainty, a single variable was created by averaging the three
subscales into a single score ($M = 4.55$, $SD = 0.98$).

**Openness about the transition.**

To assess the degree of openness with which participants disclosed their thoughts to their
partners during transition into the most impactful romantic relationship and perceptions of
partner openness during the transition, two subscales of Stafford’s (2010) Relational
Maintenance measure were used: self-disclosure and relationship talk. The self-disclosure
subscale (Stafford, 2010) consisted of four items that aimed to identify how comfortable a person
felt when discussing vulnerable topics. To evaluate partner’s disclosure, participants were asked
to indicate “the degree to which you agree or disagree with the statements…,” such as “my
partner talked about his/her fears.” In addition, the same set of questions was asked to assess self-
reported disclosure with a substitution of “my partner” to “I” in the statements (see Appendix A,
pp. 94-95). Stafford (2010) found reliability ranged between $\alpha = 0.89$ and $\alpha = 0.92$.

Relationship talk scale (Stafford, 2010) was comprised of three items, which intended to
identify the extent to which individuals talked openly about the relationship. Participants
indicated how much they agreed with the statements about their partners (partner’s relationship
talk, e.g., “My partner discussed the quality of our relationship”) and about the self (self-reported
relationship talk, e.g., I “discussed the quality of our relationship”). Stafford (2010) reported
high reliability for this scale (e.g. $\alpha = 0.89$). Participants recorded their responses on a Likert-
type scale ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree.” (7).
For this thesis, items for each subscale were averaged (self-reported disclosure: $M = 5.77$, $SD = 1.23$, $\alpha = 0.84$; perceptions of partner disclosure: $M = 5.51$, $SD = 1.54$, $\alpha = 0.89$, self-reported relationship talk: $M = 5.53$, $SD = 1.53$, $\alpha = 0.93$, and perceptions of partner’s relationship talk: $M = 5.34$, $SD = 1.55$, $\alpha = 0.92$). Because the hypotheses and research questions focused on global openness of the self and partner, the subscales were then averaged. Self-reported disclosure and self-reported relationship talk were averaged together to obtain a single score of self-reported openness with partner ($M = 5.65$, $SD = 1.25$). To obtain a single score of perceptions of partner openness, participants’ reports of partner self-disclosure and partner relationship talk were averaged ($M = 5.43$, $SD = 1.38$).

**Relational satisfaction.**

A scale was adopted from Investment Model developed by Rusbult, Martz, and Agnew (1998) to measure individuals’ satisfaction level with their most impactful romantic relationship. The scale was comprised of six items, such as “I feel satisfied with our relationship.” Items were responded to on a seven-point Likert-type scale from *strongly agree (1)* to *strongly disagree (7)*. Responses were averaged to create a single score ($M = 5.37$, $SD = 1.56$). Past studies have shown this scale to have high reliability (e.g., $\alpha = 0.92$; Rusbult et al., 1998). Data from this thesis showed reliability to be consistent with past research ($\alpha = 0.91$).
CHAPTER 3: RESULTS

Due to the missing data, two participants were removed from the data. The final sample size was 213.

RQ1: How Do People Define “Impactful Romantic Relationships?”

Open and axial coding method was implemented to generate a definition of “the most impactful romantic relationship” for the current sample. Open coding resulted in creation of 23 codes, such as “identity,” “first romantic relationship,” and “support/care.” I continued with axial coding to categorize codes into four key themes or categories: “learning,” “first,” “feelings,” and “commitment.” All the codes and frequencies are presented in Table 1 (Appendix E, p. 104).

Theme 1: Learning.

Learning was the most common theme used to explain why the described relationship was impactful romantic relationship. This theme represented various acquired skills and traits that participants got from their impactful relationships. The codes that constituted it are negative, experience/life lessons, communication, partner, self-identity, together; and dos and don’ts in RR. The negative learning code was used when participants explicitly mentioned negative experience accumulated from the described relationship. Experience/life lessons indicated primarily the portrayal of for lessons taken from the interaction. The communication label highlighted the communication skills gained in the relationship development process. Three codes (partner, self-identity, dos and don’ts in the RR) reflected the learning about desired traits of the partner, a changed understanding of self, and what healthy romantic relationships should look like. The together code described the experience of growing together, suffering together, and learning new skills together. The other codes could be found in the table 1 (Appendix E, p. 104).
There are two examples that accurately reflect self-expansion of a participant’s identity and identification of desired and disliked traits of a partner.

"Impactful would quite honestly be an understatement. This relationship taught me what it meant to be self-actualizing and decisive while still respectful of differing opinions within a romantic relationship. It pushed me beyond my comfort zones to the point of eventually opening myself up to the criticism of others, whom I love and cherish deeply. It brought a new found understanding and personal evolution in: overcoming insecurities, creating honest dialogues free from public opinion or fear of judgement, resolve to individualism while supporting the ambition of others along with the realization of the impact physical distance can have on relationships.” (Participant 79)

Also, identification of desired traits in future partners and setting the basis for the future romantic encounters was a predominant characteristic of the learning theme:

"I believe it was impactful because he taught me everything I know about relationships now; whether it was things I wanted or did not want out of a significant other. I am with someone else now and I still find myself looking back at my past relationship for guidance in this one.” (Participant 206)

**Theme 2: Commitment.**

The second most prevalent theme in defining impactful romantic partnership was commitment. Participants determined that one of the main reasons for calling certain romantic relationship impactful was because of its longevity and support they received and gave to their partners. Also, the following codes were included under the term of commitment: long-distance,
involvement, trust, long, meaningful, and support/care. One strong example of the commitment theme is reflected in the following statement:

“My most impactful and positive romantic relationship is my current one who is my husband of two and half years. He was with me during my bout of cancer and nursed me back to health. In addition, my husband encouraged me to return to college to pursue my bachelor degree in earnest.” (Participant 197).

Theme 3: Feelings.

The third theme was feelings. Feelings of love and happiness guaranteed a major impact on participants’ memory about the described relationship. Other key words in this theme included fear, hurt, strongest memory, respect, love, best friend. For instance, participant 57 described how “She makes me happy and I her. I couldn't imagine a world without her and she completes the hell out of me. We are two completely opposite people that fit so well together it is insane.”

Theme 4: First.

Last emergent theme was first. There are three codes associated with it: only, virginity, and romantic relationship. The code only was used if a participant indicated that s/he did not have any relationship experience beside the one described. Virginity was coded when a first sexual experience was the reason for the relationship being impactful. Lastly, romantic relationships was used when the most impactful romantic relationship was the first romantic encounter. Participants acquired life lessons about romance which they will continue to use in their future intimate lives:

“I believe it was impactful because for one it was my first love and my first everything. I never had any crushes or any type of feelings towards any girls
before and never had my first kiss or anything like that before her. I’m
generally a sensitive person and had a pretty depressing childhood as it is.
When she came into my life she became my happiness I put everything into
her because I thought she was the one, we talked about getting married. It
hurts because you spent so much time and effort into one person but in one
second it can all just disappear. Nobody is really taught or trained to handle
a thing such as this. So in my experience this was really impactful.”

(Participant 132).

RQ 2: What Are the Types of Transitions Experienced by Individuals in Contemporary, Impactful Romantic Relationships?

The second research question aimed at identifying major transition types experienced in contemporary, impactful romantic relationships using a priori coding. Transitions were coded using Welch and Rubin’s (2002) coding scheme for Knapp’s model in addition to “hookup” and “friends with benefits” stages. Each of the stages had a number associated with it (e.g. 1 = initiating stage, 2 = experimenting stage, see Appendix D, p. 103). The relationship development was traced by attributing numbers to all the stages mentioned in the description of the relationship. For example, the narrative below indicates that the individual transferred from stage one (initiating), associated with the initial attraction, to stage two (the stage of information gathering and self-disclosure breadth), to stage five, which was coded when the participant reported they and their partner agreed that they were in romantic relationships. As a result, the code for this example was 1→2→5:

“In my senior year of high school I sat next to her in a Nursing class. At first
we did not talk much but over time we began to talk and I eventually worked up
the courage to ask her to Senior Prom (Which she said yes to). From that point
our relationship really kicked off.”

The full table with the transitions types is presented in Appendix E (pp. 105-107). The most prevalent transitions were from the stage of the first encounter to officially announcing themselves as a romantic couple (1→5) and from willingness to go on through the experimenting stage, where they took time to become new friends before pronouncing themselves a couple (1→2→5). Table 2 summarizes the frequency of each relationship transition type.

Hypotheses and Research Questions Based on the RTT

IBM SPSS 23.0 was used for analyses of H1 – H3. Alpha level for determining significant results was set at .05; therefore p-values of .05 or smaller were considered significant (i.e., the null hypothesis was rejected, and the alternative hypothesis was supported). Post-hoc power analysis was conducted to determine if the results are significant. For small effect size (0.05), using α = 0.05, 213 participants, and three predictors, a statistical power of 0.80 was found according to GPower (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2007; 2009). For moderate effect size (0.25), holding alpha, number of participants and predictors the same, the statistical power of 0.99 was identified. These results suggests that reported results are significant, and there are strong relationships between variables will be found (Baxter & Babbie, 2004).

Preliminary Analysis

Because age (Hargie, Saunders, & Dickson, 1994; Valkenburg & Peter, 2007) and sex (McNelles & Connolly, 1999; Valkenburg & Peter, 2007) are known factors to influence openness and relational satisfaction, they were tested as covariates. To test age, I conducted bivariate correlations. Results are presented in Table 3 (Appendix F, p.107). Age was significantly correlated with uncertainty avoidance ($r = .21, p < .01$), perceptions of partner
openness ($r = .17, p < .05$), self-reported openness ($r = .19, p < .01$). To check for sex differences, I conducted independent samples $t$-tests. Men ($M = 5.39$, $SD = 1.30$) and women ($M = 5.80$, $SD = 1.19$) were significantly different in self-reported openness ($t = -2.29$, $df = 203$, $p < .02$). Because age and sex appeared to have a significant impact on key variables, I controlled for them in regression analyses by entering them as covariates.

**Primary Analyses**

H1 posited a negative association between relational uncertainty and (a) perceptions of partner openness, and (b) self-reported openness. Hypothesis 2 suggested that both (a) perceptions of partner openness and (b) self-reported openness would be positively related to relational satisfaction. In addition, consistent with RTT (Solomon et al., 2016) openness (H3) was proposed to mediate the relationship between relational uncertainty and both (a) perceptions of partner openness and (b) self-reported openness. SPSS 23.0 Linear Regression option was used to test H1 and H2. H3 was tested using Hayes’ (2013) PROCESS extension application for SPSS, which provided a parsimonious test of all the variables across the three hypotheses.

Hierarchical linear regression was used to test H1. The covariates (age and sex) were controlled for by entering them into the first block, and then the independent variable of interest was entered into the second block. The unstandardized regression results are reported in this chapter. Both standardized and unstandardized results are presented in the tables. As Table 4 and 5 (Appendix G, p. 120) shows, H1a ($B = 0.88$, $se = 0.08$, $p < .01$; BACI: 0.72, 1.03) and H1b ($B = 0.60$, $se = 0.08$, $p < .01$; BACI: 0.45, 0.75) were not supported. Instead, results indicated a positive relationship between relational uncertainty and perceptions of partner openness (H1a) and self-reported openness (H1b) after controlling for age and sex.
H2 predicted a positive relation between (a) perceptions of partner openness, (b) self-reported openness and relational satisfaction. This hypothesis was supported for perceptions of partner openness, even after controlling for sex and age ($B = 0.33$, $se = 0.06$, $p < .01$; BACI: 0.20, 0.45; see Table 6, Appendix G, p. 108). H2b was also supported; self-reported openness was positively related to relational satisfaction holding age, sex, and relational uncertainty constant ($B = 0.14$, $se = 0.07$, $p < .05$; BACI: 0.00, 0.27; see table 7, p. 121).

H3 stated (a) perceptions of partner openness and (b) self-reported openness would mediate the negative relationship between relational uncertainty and relational satisfaction. To test this hypothesis, the Process procedure was used (Hayes, 2013). PROCESS 2.14 is a free extension application for SPSS that allows for more direct inference testing of mediation analyses through use of ordinary least squares regression procedures. Additionally, PROCESS provides bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals, which offers the probable range in which the effect will occur. In other words, it “generate[s] an empirically derived representation of the sampling distribution of the indirect effect…[and] no assumption is made about the shape of the sampling distribution” (Hayes, 2013, p. 106). When interpreting the indirect effect and 95% confidence interval, the effect is considered “significant” when the confidence interval does not include zero. Overall, PROCESS provides rigorous test of indirect effects, especially as compared to the more traditional Sobel test (Hayes, 2013).

Results supported H3a, showing an indirect effect of relational uncertainty through perception of partner openness on relational satisfaction (effect size = 0.29, BACI: 0.16, 0.44). In other words, two individuals who differed by one unit of relational uncertainty are estimated to differ in relational satisfaction as a result of the effect of relational uncertainty on partner openness (which in turn effects relational satisfaction). However, an indirect effect was not
found through self-reported openness (effect size = 0.08, BACI: -0.01, 0.19). Refer to Table 8 and 9 (Appendix G, pp. 109-110) for the results on H3.
CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This thesis aimed to test relational turbulence theory (Solomon et al., 2016) in the context of individuals transitioning into their most impactful romantic relationship. According to my knowledge, there are only two research studies which used this theory: one examined outcomes of emotional support in dating couples (Solomon & Priem, 2016) and one investigated reluctance of military personal in discussing their deployment during reunion (Knobloch & Theiss, 2016). Despite fifteen year-history of studying relational transitions, none of the studies addressed the types of relationships which preceded the formation of the romantic relationships. This thesis aimed to define an impactful romantic relationship in the contemporary society, identify the types of transitions leading to it, and test the associations between relational uncertainty, openness, and relational satisfaction. The findings of the project will be discussed in the following order. First, the key themes used in defining an impactful romantic relationship will be addressed. Second, two most common types of relational transitions preceding an impactful romantic relationship will be explored. Third, theory-driven hypotheses will be presented along with practical implications of the results. Finally, strengths, limitations, and future directions will be discussed.

Lay Meanings of “Impactful Romantic Relationship”

Mixed method research design of this study helped in exploring the nature of the romantic relationships. Participants were asked to describe why their romantic relationships were impactful and how they started. The results revealed participants’ high evaluation of personal growth through self-expansion and the need for receiving support from their significant others in the impactful romantic relationships. The impactful partnerships were found to be initiated from
either casual acquaintanceship or friendships. This section will articulate the key findings from the exploratory questions and suggest practical and theoretical implications.

One goal of this project was to identify the meaning that contemporary individuals attributed to their impactful romantic relationships. The emergent coding revealed four key themes: learning, commitment, first, and feelings. These overarching ideas conveyed that individuals valued personal growth in their first romantic experience, the feelings of happiness, and support received in the committed partnership. One of the key takeaways from the impactful romantic involvement included the identification of desired traits that individuals wanted in future romantic partners, establishing a foundation for future romantic involvements and learning about self-identity. This outcome reflects self-expansion theory (Aron et al., 2004) and its assumption that close relationships are the primary source of self-expansion. Self-expansion is a process of improving the sense of self with a help of partner’s resources and perspectives (Aron et al., 2004). For example, an individual may learn more about personal cultural background when interacting with individuals from a different culture or by identifying the traits that s/he cannot tolerate. This was reflected in participants’ statements like “it is extremely difficult or near impossible for me to date someone with Mormon beliefs” and “We had differing religious beliefs, which is one of the reasons why it ended.” Individuals broadened their horizons by being introduced to new things in those relationships, which either changed their self-identity completely, or put a significant stamp on it. For instance, one participant noted “It taught me what kind of a woman I want to have a relationship with, someone who's not sexually conservative and who you can just share past experiences with without any drama or judgement. (sic).” Another stated, “We’ve challenged each other to do things outside of our comfort zones, we’ve encouraged each other to chase dreams, we’ve grounded each other back to reality.” These
findings are consistent with prior research finding college students’ romantic relationships can be particularly important for self-exploration through meeting new people (Dys-Steenbergen, Wright, & Aron, 2016) and falling in love (Aron et al., 1995). In addition to the personal growth, individuals received tremendous support and affection from their partners.

Commitment was the second predominant factor in defining romantic relationships as impactful. It was described by using words “trust,” “support,” “care,” and “involvement.” These findings support prior research which identified trust as the key player in the romantic relationship well-being (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006; Canary & Cupach, 1988). Another study concluded that support and care for a significant other promote relational well-being (Campbell, Simpson, Boldry, & Kashy, 2005). In addition, active involvement in the romantic relationship was found to be one important maintenance strategy in impactful romantic relationships. Because the use of different maintenance strategies benefits relationship development, such experience early in life might potentially contribute to healthy, long and committed relationships in the adulthood life.

The key ideas that construct the definition of impactful romantic partnership reflected the qualities that individuals in the contemporary society value. Individuals believe that impactful partnerships are the ones that provide a room for self-improvement, are filled with strong positive or negative emotions, and help in overcoming various troubles in life. Two of the emergent themes (commitment and feelings) are consistent with a definition of the romantic relationship, which states that a partnership involves passion, intimacy and commitment (Overbeek et al., 2007). As the result, the other two themes (learning and first) were found to be unique to the impactful relationship. This research question not only addressed the research purpose but also challenged participants to analyze their past relationship experience. Some of
them even mentioned in the open-ended responses that the survey made them re-evaluate their opinions about those relationships. Despite the gratification in assisting subjects to manage their romantic relationships, the current study’s primary focus was on the transitions into the impactful relationship.

**Types of Transitions into Impactful Romantic Relationships**

The diversity of transition types was captured in the sample, and two of the most common ones were acquaintances directly to romantic partners and acquaintances through friends to romantic partners. The research suggests that romantic relationships could develop from casual acquaintanceships (Eaton & Rose, 2012; Guynn et al., 2008). Two passionate hearts might meet and fall in love at first sight or knew each other for a little while before they decide to officially pronounce themselves as a couple. This path may be more familiar as “love at the first sight.”

“Love at the first sight” is a prevalent issue among college students (Aron et al., 2008; Riela, Rodriguez, Aron, Xu, & Acevedo, 2010; Sunnafrank & Ramirez, 2004). This study supports the prior research (Barelts & Barelts-Dijkstra, 2007; Riela et al., 2010) in demonstrating that that one of the most common starting points for a romantic partnership is acquaintanceship. Most individuals described the start of their romantic relationship by strong initial attraction and willingness to continue interactions with the partner. Because a decent percentage of participants also defined their impactful romantic relationship as their first romantic interactions, physical attraction facilitated making a first step towards the development of that partnership. Physical attractiveness was found to be a strong motivator in making an initial move towards approaching a desired individual (Sangrador & Yela, 2000). Despite the
prevalence of the relationships that started due to the physical attraction, some individuals preferred to talk their way into romantic relationships.

The second most common transition type originated from a friendship. Some individuals were more comfortable at becoming familiar with the partner first before pronouncing themselves as a couple. Both platonic (Bleske-Rechek & Buss, 2001) and non-platonic friendships (Mongeau et al., 2003; Paul et al., 2008) can serve as a starting point in the relationship development process. Because friendship is such an abstract term, it was classified into “new friends,” “good friends,” and “best friends” based on the level of openness. New friends were conceptualized as two individuals who knew each other for some time, but their self-reports in the survey did not reveal engagement in deep self-disclosure. However, they spent time discussing different topics and searching for commonalities. Responses were coded as reflecting “good friends” when the description referred to active participation in each other’s lives and deeper disclosure, while best friends knew each other for a long time, preferred spending time together and supporting each other. The research suggests that when partners consider themselves close friends, their romantic relationships tend to last longer and couples are happier (Metts, Sprecher & Regan, 1998). A few individuals even stated that the romantic relationship was impactful because their significant other was his/her best friend.

The findings of the qualitative part of this study provided both theoretical and practical implications. First, a clear understanding of attributions individuals have for their most impactful romantic relationships extends scholarship. Because two of the key themes derived from the emergent coding are consistent with prior research, a follow-up study might articulate the traits that individuals desire and value in the close partnerships. Second, the classification of transition types contributes to a better understanding of nuances of romantic relationship development. In
particular, future research might examine the association between the starting relationship (i.e. new friends, close friends, or acquaintances) and relational satisfaction in the romantic relationship to identify the best way to start a successful romantic partnership. Finally, raising awareness about the traits that constitute to an impactful romantic relationship might encourage individuals to work on their close partnerships. To determine how relational uncertainty affected relational satisfaction through communicative engagement, the hypotheses were tested.

**Examining Relational Turbulence Theory**

This study highlighted the associations between relational uncertainty, openness, and relational satisfaction derived from the RTT (Solomon et al., 2016). Relational uncertainty was found to be positively associated with self-reported openness, perceptions of partner openness, and relational satisfaction. In particular, the perception of partner openness was found to mediate the association between relational uncertainty and relational satisfaction. I will discuss these findings, directions for future research, and some practical implications.

The first hypothesis, which postulated a negative association between relational uncertainty and openness, was not supported. Openness was conceptualized as self-reported openness and perceptions of partner openness. Surprisingly, a positive association was found between relational uncertainty and (a) self-reported openness and (b) perceptions of partner openness. The more uncertain individuals felt, the more likely they were to talk to their partners and the more likely they perceived their partners to communicate openly with them. It contradicts prior research which demonstrated that relational uncertainty was associated with topic avoidance (Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004), negative perceptions of relationship talk (Knobloch & Solomon, 2005), and inefficient message production (Knobloch, 2006). The reason
could be based on the uniqueness of this relationship transition and communication behavior in contemporary couples.

Transition into an impactful romantic relationship represents a unique context for a close examination of the relationship between relational uncertainty and openness. Initiation of romantic relationships is described as a period of high relational uncertainty (Knobloch & Miller, 2008). Acquaintances who decided to make a step towards a dating relationship start with limited knowledge about partner’s personal beliefs and values. Communication facilitates a process of getting to know the partner and decreases some uncertainty pertaining to him/her. As the result, an individual’s desire to increase openness when there are more unknowns than knows about the partner is reasonable (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Berger & Calabrese, 1975). Thus, the results indicated high self-reported openness and perceptions of partner openness in the moments of high uncertainty. The type of transition was not thoroughly incorporated into the analyses, and this gives only a glimpse onto what is happening during the relational development to romantic partnerships.

Different starting points might influence the communication within the relationships. Because a substantial number of the participants were friends prior to the initiation of the partnership, they might be more comfortable speaking their mind to the partners. Friendship is characterized by high level of openness (Afifi, Guerrero, & Egland, 1994; Guerrero & Chavez, 2005) and breadth of the topics discussed (Buote, Wood, & Pratt, 2009; Hays, 1984; Park & Floyd, 1996). The ground rule of the friendship might require partners to share private information. Thus, instead of waiting around and conducting mental battles taking into consideration all the potential answer options to a simple question, a friend just asks. In addition
to identifying a positive association between relational uncertainty and openness, the relationship between openness and relational satisfaction was tested.

I investigated if perceptions of partner openness and self-reported openness in the impactful romantic relationships were positively related to relational satisfaction (H2), and this was supported. An individual who lacked openness in the partnership was more likely to report relational dissatisfaction. Communication is the key to success in relationship maintenance (Dainton & Stafford, 1993; Weigel & Ballard-Reisch, 2008). If partners are encouraged to openly discuss any relational or personal concerns, there is less room for interpretation and guessing. In addition, reciprocal openness is expected because significant positive associations were established between both partners and self-reported openness in regards to relational satisfaction. Some relationships were described as impactful because partners made each other happy. Happiness may be an indicator of satisfactory romantic relationships. If that is the case, then openness might be positively associated with feelings of happiness.

Despite the uniqueness of transitions into impactful romantic relationships, the association between openness and relational satisfaction is significant. This finding adds to the literature by highlighting the importance of open communication in an impactful partnership. Also, the research suggests that partners who consider themselves to be close friends are happier (Metts et al., 1998). One of the aspects of a close friendship is depth of self-disclosure (Afifi et al., 1994; Guerrero & Chavez, 2005). Partners who have high levels of openness may call themselves friends, and romantic relationships with friends are found to be satisfactory (Metts et al., 1998). This argument speaks back to the challenge in articulating the differences between different types of relationships. In addition to the established connections between relational uncertainty and openness as well as openness and relational satisfaction, the potential role of
openness as a mediator in the association between relational uncertainty and relational satisfaction was explored.

Findings for hypothesis three were partially supported indicating the effect of relational uncertainty on relational satisfaction occurred through perceptions of partner openness (H3a), and a marginal indirect effect of self-reported openness of the association between relational uncertainty and relational satisfaction was found (H3b). In other words, perceptions of partner openness explained the association between relational uncertainty and relational satisfaction. Even when an individual experienced high relational uncertainty, relational satisfaction was high because of a perception that partner was open for dialog. This outcome highlighted the key role that openness played in the relational satisfaction. Individuals who felt their partner was there and would talk about the relationship were more satisfied with the relationship even during a period of high relational uncertainty. Other research supports this finding by indicating that perceptions of partner openness promote relational satisfaction over the course of the relationship, which in turn facilitates relationship stability (Arriaga, 2001). Thus, to build satisfactory and stable romantic relationships, partners may benefit from communicating their readiness in addressing relational uncertainties. Despite perceptions of partner openness mediating the relationship between uncertainty and satisfaction, self-reported openness was not a significant mediator in that relationship.

There was a marginally significant indirect effect of relational uncertainty on relational satisfaction through self-reported openness (H3b). Participants’ self-reported openness was less robust as a mediator of the association between their relational uncertainty and relational satisfaction. In other words, even though they lacked information about the relationship during the relational transition, which did contribute directly to higher levels of satisfaction, their own
disclosures and relationship talk did not play a part in how participants’ uncertainty influenced relational satisfaction. Because there is a lack of research examining a transition into romantic relationship, it is hard to speculate about the findings. However, I may argue that an individual is not going to be satisfied in reducing relational uncertainty by being the only one open to communicate. Additionally, given that the p-value was .05 but the confidence interval included 0, the result may be due to a small indirect effect size and a sample size that was not quite sufficient to establish the result with greater certainty.

Overall, the results of the mediation require a follow-up study for accurate interpretation. In the case of perceptions of partner openness, a participant might feel relieved only because there is a partner to talk if or when needed. In the case of self-openness, a person feels the need for reciprocity in working on the relationships. A few research studies indicated the importance of partner responsiveness, or a demonstration of understanding and caring, in maintaining intimate romantic relationships between marital partners (Koenig Kellas, Trees, Schrodt, LeClair-Underberg, & Willer, 2010; Laurenceau et al., 2005; Weigel & Ballard-Reisch, 2008), but none of the studies examined transitions into dating relationships. Also, a person’s attachment style may be a factor in prioritizing the role of partner openness in mediation of the relationship between uncertainty and satisfaction (Bradford, Feeney, & Campbell, 2002; Tan, Overall, & Taylor, 2012). This finding requires further exploration, so follow-up studies might reveal an interesting association.

**Strengths and Limitations**

There are a several methodological strengths and limitations. Despite ease of convenience sampling, it is challenging to provide many generalizations based on the results of this thesis. College students were asked to participate, and their experience in dealing with relational
uncertainty might be drastically different based on social class, level of income, and age. Also, the sample mostly included heterosexual couples diminishing the ability to provide insight on the communicative behavior of homosexual couples. A large number of cases and use of standardized measurements facilitated high explanatory power of the results. On the other hand, standardized questions and answer options prevent participants from providing more information and clarifying some ideas. To proactively address this potential limitation, four open ended questions were asked to give participants an opportunity to describe their experience more accurately.

The mixed methodology of combining quantitative and qualitative approaches promoted a deeper understanding of the experience of relational uncertainty without decreasing the explanatory power of the study. However, there might be at least two examples of internal validity threats. First, because this study pertains to the field of communication studies, participants might be tempted to provide socially accepted answers. I noticed that a few participants mentioned a big positive impact of communication on the level of relational satisfaction. Second, the last question of the survey asking about the level of satisfaction in their impactful relationship might have been misunderstood. A few participants answered this question as if it asked about satisfaction with the completed survey. Also, positivity bias might have influenced the responses to the scales. The willingness to remember only positive moments of the relationships might have influenced the results. Finally, majority of participants might have described their desired level of uncertainty in the relationship instead of reporting the actual situation. Taking into consideration both strengths and weaknesses of the study, a few important research directions are advised.
Future Directions

Future research needs to explore the effects of cultural background, attachment style, and media influence on the openness. According to the RTT (Solomon et al., 2016), relational uncertainty influences the development of cognitive biases, which directly affect communicative openness. Cognitive appraisals are the inaccurate assessments of a situation based on the relationship climate preceding a communication event (Solomon et al., 2016). For example, perceived severity of irritations in the relationship, one type of cognitive assessment, was positively associated with self-reported direct communication behavior (Theiss & Solomon, 2006b). Another example of cognitive appraisals are the romanticized illusions of the life after deployment in a study about returning service members. Relational uncertainty was found to influence depression after deployment, which affected military personal reporting relational dissatisfaction (Knobloch & Theiss, 2011a). Thus, cognitive appraisals, such as cultural background, the attachment style, and media impact might help to explain the association between relational uncertainty and openness.

Cultural background was explored as a type of cognitive biases in the scope of this thesis. It can be thought of as a type of cognitive appraisal because culture is a tool one has for understanding and making sense of situations and for shaping one’s communication behaviors. Hofstede’s (1979) uncertainty avoidance dimension was tested to fit into the RTT framework. Uncertainty avoidance dimension distinguishes cultures according to their tolerance for ambiguity and doubt versus confidence and assurance (Gudykunst & Lee, 2002). High uncertainty avoidant cultures have low tolerance for doubt and ambiguity (Hofstede, 1991). Individuals raised in these cultures prefer formal rules, have a need for knowing the absolute truth, and seem to have higher anxiety during relational transition. They believe that “what is
different, is dangerous” (Hofstede, 1991, p. 119). On the other hand, members of low uncertainty avoidant culture have lower stress levels, are more prone to take risks, and are less in need of consensus. They believe “what is different, is curious” (Hofstede, 1991, p. 119). Members of high avoidant culture are likely to represent collectivistic community, while low uncertainty avoidant culture was associated with individualistic society (Gudykunst & Lee, 2002).

The RTT maintains that cognitive appraisals are affected by relational uncertainty (Solomon et al., 2016). Theiss and Nagy (2012) found cultural background, as assessed by individualism-collectivism, was associated with relational uncertainty. However, due to its focus on personal goal-orientation and globalization’s potential obscuring of cultural distinctions in goal achievement, the uncertainty avoidance dimension thought to be more informative for the RTT. Uncertainty avoidance addresses the cultural differences individuals might have in relation to uncertainty in impactful romantic relationships. However, this study demonstrated the poor fit of uncertainty avoidance dimension into relational turbulence theory’s framework. In particular, no significant associations were established between relational uncertainty and uncertainty avoidance, and between uncertainty avoidance and openness. There are at least two possible reasons for it. First, the uncertainty avoidance dimension may not be adequate in accurately capturing the effect of cultural background. Although the reliability of the scale was high, the responses to the questions of “preference of unstructured situations over structured ones” may not contribute to the understanding of the individuals’ experience of uncertainty during relational transitions into impactful partnerships. Second, the cross-cultural differences that may be prevalent between the geographically distant societies might be blurred due to the prolonged interactions between the romantic partners. As the result of nonsignificant findings, I believe future research need to explore the role of cultural background as a type of cognitive appraisal.
In addition to cultural background, an individual’s attachment style and impact of the media may be described as cognitive biases.

Prior research studies demonstrated the impact of attachment style on openness and relational satisfaction (Bradford et al., 2002; Tan et al., 2012), thus the exploration of the RTT may benefit by examining attachment style as a form of a cognitive bias. Greater level of attachment anxiety was associated with more relationship talk; and the more partners were engaged in relationship talk, the more likely they were to report improvement in the relationship quality (Bradford et al., 2002). In addition to attachment style, the current study failed to address the influence of media on the standards of openness in the romantic relationships and media might mediate a positive relationship between relational uncertainty and openness.

In addition, the future studies might explore both an individual’s and partner’s perspectives on relational transitions, as well as investigate the role of age and sex. This study was limited in determining a partner’s perspective on a relational transition. I believe that future research should explore the dyadic data to arrive at more accurate conclusions about the associations between relational uncertainty, openness, and relational satisfaction. Both partners’ accounts are important in drawing conclusions about communicative openness in the romantic relationships. Finally, because age and sex were found to explain some relational uncertainty and communication behavior, exploring those factors would help to further extend the scholarship.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis examined transitions into impactful romantic relationships using the relational turbulence theory (Solomon et al., 2016). An impactful romantic partnership was defined as a close relationship between two individuals that facilitates personal growth, involves support for each other and affection. The two most common ways participants developed those
relationship are from “love at the first sight” or friendship. Friendship was discussed as a continuum ranging from a little disclosure to full engagement in each other’s lives. The practical implications of these results include an opportunity to work on improving the current relationship or re-evaluating the failure of the impactful partnership. In addition, the findings extend the scholarship by introducing different starting points of the impactful romantic relationships and a follow-up research might examine how difference in initiation might affect relationships in a long run. After a definition and a starting point of the impactful romantic relationship were identified, the study investigated the associations between relational uncertainty, openness, and relational satisfaction.

The RTT (Solomon et al., 2016) argued that relational uncertainty influences communication engagement, which in turn altered the perception of relational satisfaction. Theory-driven hypotheses were tested in the scope of a relational transition into an impactful partnership. High relational uncertainty was associated high openness, and high openness was related to high relational satisfaction. In addition, perceptions of partner openness mediated the relationship between relational uncertainty and relational satisfaction. Half of the hypotheses’ results were consistent with RTT, while the other half of the results introduced a new perspective on the experience of relational uncertainty during the transition. In particular, a positive association between relational uncertainty and openness can be explained by the uniqueness of the transition or disparities in the starting points. Results of the mediation hypothesis were consistent with the theory but explained an indirect effect only for perceptions of partner openness.

Individuals benefitted from the study by analyzing past romantic experiences and coming up with key traits they desired in future partnerships. This enlightenment echoed with the
effectiveness of open communication between partners. Those who reported high level of openness described their romantic relationship as more satisfactory. The scholarship was extended by the analysis of impact of cultural background on the experience of uncertainty during relational transitions. Despite nonsignificant results, future research might operationalize cultural background differently to examine its influence of relational uncertainty. In addition, although sex and age were tested as covariates, the future study might explore the effect that it has on relational uncertainty and relational satisfaction for both an actor and his/her relational partner.
APPENDIX A: SURVEY IN QUALTRICS

Transitions in Romantic Relationships

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Informed consent

Department of Communication Studies

Title of Study: Transitions in Romantic Relationships

Student Investigator: Yuliya Yurashevich

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Tara G McManus

**Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this study is to learn how people communicate to their romantic partners about the status of their romantic involvement as the relationship transitions from the initiation stage to a more serious or committed stage and the role culture plays in shaping those communication behaviors.

**Participants:** You are being asked to participate in the study because you fit these criteria: You are at least 18 years old, a student at UNLV, and you had a prior experience in a romantic involvement. About 400 people will participate in this study.

**Procedures:** If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete an online survey. Questions will ask you to think of the most impactful romantic relationship you have had. You will be asked to answer a series of questions regarding the transition into your most impactful romantic relationship.

**Benefits of Participation:** There may be direct benefits to you as a participant in this study. By recalling a transition in a current or past relationship, it may help you to make smoother transitions in your future relationships. We hope to learn more about (1) how college students
manage uncertainty that they experience when transitioning into romantic involvement and (2) the role their cultural beliefs play in building a romantic relationship.

**Risks of Participation:** There are risks involved in all research studies. This study may include only minimal risks because some of the questions are personal and might cause discomfort. Also, there might be a potential danger to your current dating relationships. However, the risks should be no different than those you experience in everyday life. You may skip the questions that you feel uncomfortable responding to. If you have any questions about your own physical or mental health, contact the Student Wellness Center (Phone: 702-774-7100).

**Cost/Compensation:** There will not be any financial cost to you to participate in this study. The study will take about 20 minutes of your time. You will be compensated for your time with 1 Communication Studies Research Participation credit. Within about one week after submitting your response, your research credit will be updated in the Communication Studies Research Participation System for you and your instructor to view.

**Contact Information:** If you have any questions of concerns about the study, you may contact Yuliya Yurashevich at yurashev@unlv.nevada.edu or 702-895-0026. For questions about the rights of research subjects, any complains or comments regarding the manner in which the study is being conducted you may contact the UNLV Office of Research Integrity – Human Subjects at 702-895-2794 or toll free at 877-895-2794 or via email at IRB@unlv.edu

**Confidentiality:** This survey is anonymous. Your personal information is not connected to the responses you provide. All information gathered in this study will be kept as private as possible. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could link you to this study. Any identifiable data provided in the written responses will be removed and pseudonyms will be used before reporting results. All records will be stored on a flash drive in a locked facility at
UNLV for two years after completion of the study. After the storage time the information
gathered will be destroyed.

**Voluntary Participation:** Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to
participate in this study or in any part of this study. You may withdraw at any time without
prejudice to your relations with UNLV before reach the final page and submitting your responses
by contacting Ms. Yurashevich. And, you will receive a research credit even if you withdraw.

**Participant Consent** (*If you wish to get a copy of the informed consent, please contact a
researcher at yurashev@unlv.nevada.edu)

Would you like to participate in this study?

- □ Yes, I have read the above information. I am at least 18 years old, and I CONSENT to
  participate in this study. (1)

- □ No, I have read the above information. I DO NOT CONSENT to participate in this study. (2)
Thank you for your interest in this study! The questionnaire will ask you about your thoughts and experiences. Please answer the questions based on your initial reaction. Please do not overthink the questions. If you do not feel comfortable answering a question, you may skip it. Remember all information is confidential. Your information will not be revealed. At the bottom of each page, you will find double arrow (>>, which will take you to the next page of the survey and save your answers. There is also double arrow pointing to the left (<<), which will take you to the previous page in case you want to change your answer. Also, you will be able to see the progress bar at the bottom of your screen. If you exit the survey, your participation is ended. You will NOT be able to re-enter your survey. If you have any questions about this survey, please email Yulia Yurashevich (yurashev@unlv.nevada.edu). Your help is greatly appreciated!

First, I would like to know a little about you. Please respond as honestly as possible based on your initial reaction.

Based on the number of credit hours you have earned, what year in school are you?

☐ Freshman (1)

☐ Sophomore (2)

☐ Junior (3)

☐ Senior (4)

☐ MA student (5)

☐ PhD student (6)

☐ Other (7) ____________________

What is your age (in number of years old)?

[ ]

What is your ethnicity? (Multiple answers are possible)
☐ White/Caucasian (1)
☐ African American (2)
☐ Hispanic American (3)
☐ Asian American (4)
☐ Pacific Islander (5)
☐ Other (please describe) (6) ____________________

Which sex do you mostly identify with?
☐ Male (1)
☐ Female (2)
☐ Other (please describe) (3) ____________________
☐ Prefer not to say (4)

What is your sexual orientation?
☐ Heterosexual (1)
☐ Homosexual (2)
☐ Bisexual (3)
☐ Other (please describe) (4) ____________________
☐ Prefer not to say (5)

In this next series of questions, I would like you to recall your most impactful romantic relationship. "Impactful" may indicate that you had either a positive or negative experience in that relationship. Please keep this relationship in mind as you complete all questions in this survey.
Please describe your most impactful romantic relationship (either positive or negative).

Why do you believe it was impactful?

How did that relationship start? (For example: "We were best friends and after knowing each other for 7 years. But, I realized I wanted to be more just friends...." or maybe "I met this person when grabbing coffee after class...")

Was this romantic relationship exclusive?

☐ Yes (1)
☐ No (2)

Q41 Please describe what do you mean by exclusive romantic relationships.

Are you still together?

☐ Yes (1)
☐ No (2)

How long have you been together? (in months or years)

How long did this relationship last?

How long ago did you break up?

As you answer the following questions, think about the transition period that you experienced before starting the relationship described on the previous page. By transition period, I mean the
period when you were not in your most impactful romantic relationship yet, but you desired to make a step towards it (in other words, you knew each other, but you desired to get romantically involved with this person).

Please indicate the degree to which you disagree or agree with each of the following statements.

When I was in my most impactful relationship...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly disagree (1)</th>
<th>Disagree (2)</th>
<th>Slightly disagree (3)</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree (4)</th>
<th>Slightly agree (5)</th>
<th>Agree (6)</th>
<th>Strongly agree (7)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I preferred structured situations to unstructured situations in my relationship.</td>
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<td>I preferred specific instructions to broad guidelines in my relationship.</td>
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<td>I tended to get anxious easily when I don’t know an outcome in my relationship.</td>
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<td>I felt stressful when I could not predict consequences in my relationship.</td>
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<td>I would not take risks when an outcome could not be predicted in my relationship.</td>
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<td>I believed that rules should not be broken for mere pragmatic reasons in my relationship.</td>
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<td>I didn't like unclear situations</td>
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In the next series of questions, continue thinking about the transition period that you experienced before starting the relationship described on the previous page. By transition period, I mean the period when you were not in your most impactful romantic relationship yet, but you desired to make a step towards it (in other words, you knew each other, but you desired to get romantically involved with this person).

How certain were you about...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Your feelings for your partner? (1)</th>
<th>Completely or almost completely uncertain (1)</th>
<th>Mostly uncertain (2)</th>
<th>Slightly more uncertain than certain (3)</th>
<th>Slightly more certain than uncertain (4)</th>
<th>Mostly certain (5)</th>
<th>Completely certain or almost completely certain (6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whether you wanted this relationship to last? (2)</td>
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<td>How much you liked your partner? (3)</td>
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<td>How important this relationship was to you? (4)</td>
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<td>How you felt about the relationship? (5)</td>
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<td>How much you were romantically interested in your partner? (6)</td>
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<td>Whether you would want to be with your partner in the long run? (7)</td>
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<td>Your goals for the future of the relationship? (8)</td>
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<td>How ready you were to get involved with</td>
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In the next series of questions, continue thinking about the transition period that you experienced before starting the relationship described on the previous page. By transition period, I mean the period when you were not in your most impactful romantic relationship yet, but you desired to make a step towards it (in other words, you knew each other, but you desired to get romantically involved with this person).

How certain were you about...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Completely or almost completely uncertain (1)</th>
<th>Mostly uncertain (2)</th>
<th>Slightly more uncertain than certain (3)</th>
<th>Slightly more certain than uncertain (4)</th>
<th>Mostly certain (5)</th>
<th>Completely certain or almost completely certain (6)</th>
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<tr>
<td>How committed your partner was to the relationship? (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Whether your partner wanted this relationship to work out in the long run? (2)</td>
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<td>How much your</td>
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<td>1.</td>
<td>partner liked you? (3)</td>
<td>How much your partner wanted this relationship right now? (4)</td>
<td>How your partner felt about the relationship? (5)</td>
<td>How much your partner was romantically interested in you? (6)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Whether your partner would want to be with you in the long run? (7)</td>
<td>How much your partner wanted to pursue this relationship? (8)</td>
<td>Your partner's goals for the future of the relationship? (9)</td>
<td>How ready your partner was to get involved with you? (10)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Whether your partner wanted a romantic relationship with you (as opposed to be just friends)? (11)</td>
<td>Whether your partner wanted to maintain your relationship? (12)</td>
<td>Your partner's view of this relationship? (13)</td>
<td>Where your partner wanted this relationship to go? (14)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the next series of questions, continue thinking about the transition period that you experienced before starting the relationship described on the previous page. By transition period, I mean the period when you were not in your most impactful romantic relationship yet, but you desired to make a step towards it (in other words, you knew each other, but you desired to get romantically involved with this person).

How certain were you about…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The definition of this relationship?</th>
<th>Mostly or almost completely uncertain (1)</th>
<th>Mostly uncertain (2)</th>
<th>Slightly more uncertain than certain (3)</th>
<th>Slightly more certain than uncertain (4)</th>
<th>Mostly certain (5)</th>
<th>Completely or almost completely certain (6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whether you and your partner felt the same way about each other?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whether you and your partner would stay together?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How you and your partner would describe this relationship?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The future of the relationship?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What you could or could not say to each other in this relationship?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The boundaries for appropriate and/or inappropriate behavior in this relationship?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How you and your partner viewed this</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the next series of questions, continue thinking about the transition period that you experienced before starting the relationship described on the previous page. By transition period, I mean the period when you were not in your most impactful romantic relationship yet, but you desired to make a step towards it (in other words, you knew each other, but you desired to get romantically involved with this person).

Please indicate the degree to which you disagree or agree with the following statements in regard to which your partner performed the following behaviors at the time you wanted to transition into a romantic relationship. My partner...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree (1)</th>
<th>Disagree (2)</th>
<th>Slightly Disagree (3)</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree (4)</th>
<th>Slightly Agree (5)</th>
<th>Agree (6)</th>
<th>Strongly Agree (7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Talked about his/her fears. (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was open about his/her feelings. (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Encouraged me to share my thoughts. (3)
Encouraged me to share my feelings with him/her. (4)

Now, please indicate the degree to which you disagree or agree with the following statements in regard to which you performed the following behaviors at the time you wanted to transition into a romantic relationship.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree (1)</th>
<th>Disagree (2)</th>
<th>Slightly Disagree (3)</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree (4)</th>
<th>Slightly Agree (5)</th>
<th>Agree (6)</th>
<th>Strongly Agree (7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I talked about my fears. (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was open about my feelings. (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I encouraged my partner to share his/her thoughts. (3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I encouraged my partner to share his/her feelings with me. (4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continue thinking about the most impactful romantic relationship you described earlier in this survey. Please indicate the degree to which you disagree or agree with the following statements in regard to which your partner performed the following behaviors at the time you wanted to transition into a romantic relationship. My partner...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree (1)</th>
<th>Disagree (2)</th>
<th>Slightly Disagree (3)</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree (4)</th>
<th>Slightly Agree (5)</th>
<th>Agree (6)</th>
<th>Strongly Agree (7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discussed the quality of our relationship. (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Told me how he/she felt about the relationship. (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had talks about our relationship.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Please indicate the degree to which you disagree or agree with the following statements in regard to which you performed the following behaviors at the time you wanted to transition into a romantic relationship.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree (1)</th>
<th>Disagree (2)</th>
<th>Slightly Disagree (3)</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree (4)</th>
<th>Slightly Agree (5)</th>
<th>Agree (6)</th>
<th>Strongly Agree (7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I discussed the quality of our relationship.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I told my partner how I felt about the relationship.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I had talks about our relationship.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the next series of questions, continue thinking about the transition period that you experienced before starting the relationship described on the previous page. By transition period, I mean the period when you were not in your most impactful romantic relationship yet, but you desired to make a step towards it (in other words, you knew each other, but you desired to get romantically involved with this person). Please indicate the degree to which you disagree or agree with each of the following statements. As you respond to these items, think about transition into the romantic relationship.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt satisfied with our relationship.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My relationship was much better than others’ relationships.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My relationship was close to ideal.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Our relationship made me very happy. (4)
Our relationship did a good job of fulfilling my needs for intimacy. (5)
I loved my partner. (6)

Briefly explain your level of satisfaction as you indicated in the set of questions above.

Dear participant,

Thank you for your assistance in this study! Your contribution is greatly appreciated! If you chose "No. I read the above information. I DO NOT CONSENT to participate in this study", this will be indicated in the informed consent form, and you will not receive credit for participating in this study. You will need to complete alternative assignment to earn research credits. Please contact research coordinator Dr. Tara McManus at tara.mcmanus@unlv.edu. If you chose "Yes. I read the above information. I am at least 18 years old, and I CONSENT to participate in this study", you have earned 1 research participation credit and you instructor will be informed about your participation.

Please see the informed consent below and if you have any questions about the survey or the study, do not hesitate to contact Yulia Yurashevich at yurashev@unlv.nevada.edu
APPENDIX B: SONA

Transitions in Romantic Relationships
(1 Credit) (Time slots Available) (Online Study) (Research Alternative) The purpose of this study is to learn how people communicate to their romantic partners about the phases of their romantic involvements as the relationship transitions from a more serious or committed stage and the role culture plays in shaping communication.

Participants viewing this page will see restrictions listed with each study, when applicable, except for prescreen and course restrictions, which are always hidden from participants. They will also see studies listed in random order. Inactive studies that are approved will not appear on the list of available studies, but may be viewed when participants are checking their progress or after actions related to that study.

Email questions to: com.research@unlv.edu
Copyright © 1997-2017 Apka Systems, Inc.
Human Subjects/Privacy Policy
(12:15 PM)
APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT

Informed consent
Department of Communication Studies
Title of Study: Transitions in Romantic Relationships
Student Investigator: Yuliya Yurashevich
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Tara G McManus

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to learn how people communicate to their romantic partners about the status of their romantic involvement as the relationship transitions from the initiation stage to a more serious or committed stage and the role culture plays in shaping those communication behaviors.

Participants

You are being asked to participate in the study because you fit these criteria: You are at least 18 years old and you are a student at UNLV. About 400 people will participate in this study.

Procedures

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete an online survey. Questions will ask you to think of the most impactful romantic relationship. You will be asked to answer series of questions regarding the transition into your most impactful romantic relationship.

Benefits of Participation

There may be direct benefits to you as a participant in this study. By recalling a transition in a current or past relationship, it may help you make similar transitions in future relationships smoother. We hope to learn more about (1) how college students manage uncertainty that they
experience transitioning into romantic involvement and (2) the role their cultural beliefs play in building a romantic relationship.

**Risks of Participation**

There are risks involved in all research studies. This study may include only minimal risks because some of the questions are personal and might cause discomfort. But, the risks should be no different than those you experience in everyday life. You may skip the questions that you feel uncomfortable responding to. If you have any questions about your own physical or mental health, contact the Student Wellness Center (Phone: 702-774-7100).

**Cost /Compensation**

There will not be any financial cost to you to participate in this study. The study will take about 20 minutes of your time. You will be compensated for your time with 1 Communication Studies Research Participation credit. About one week after submitting your response, your research credit will be updated in the Communication Studies Research Participation System for you and your instructor to view.

**Contact Information**

If you have any questions of concerns about the study, you may contact **Yuliya Yurashevich at vurashev@unlv.nevada.edu** or 702-302-7781. For questions about the rights of research subjects, any complaints or comments regarding the manner, in which the study is being conducted you may contact the **UNLV Office of Research Integrity – Human Subjects at 702-895-2794 or toll free at 877-895-2794 or via email at IRB@unlv.edu**

**Confidentiality**

This survey is anonymous. Your personal information is not connected to the responses you provide. All information gathered in this study will be kept as private as possible. No reference
will be made in written or oral materials that could link you to this study. Any identifiable data provided in the written responses will be removed and pseudonyms will be used before reporting results. All records will be stored on a flash drive in a locked facility at UNLV for two years after completion of the study. After the storage time the information gathered will be destroyed.

**Voluntary Participation**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study or in any part of this study. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice to your relations with UNLV before reach the final page and submitting your responses by contacting Ms. Yurasheivich. And, you will receive a research credit even if you withdraw.

**Participant Consent**

(If you want a copy of this informed consent please email a researcher at yurashev@unlv.nevada.edu)

Would you like to participate in this study?

Yes. I read the above information. I am at least 18 years old, and I CONSENT to participate in this study.

No. I read the above information. I DO NOT CONSENT to participate in this study.
APPENDIX D: CODING SCHEME

Coding Scheme for Knapp’s Model by (Welch & Rubin, 2002) alpha =0.94

1. Initiating
   a. This is the stage when participants express uncertainty, have initial attraction and willingness to go on, had initial spark

2. Experimenting
   a. Acquaintances, new friends
   b. Partners do some talking (self-disclosure breadth), search for commonalities

3. Intensifying (good friends)
   a. Close friends, self-disclosure depth
   b. Active participation (frequently met), talk a lot, support & care

4. Integrating (this is true only if they used “best friend” in the description)
   a. Best friends
   b. Assumption of similarities (attitudes, friends)

5. Bonding
   a. Public commitment, shared identity, end result of the initiation, existence of romantic relationships

6. Hookup
   a. No relationships, sexual encounter, no feelings, no commitment, involve acquaintances or strangers, kissing, and any form of sexual interaction, no exclusivity

7. Friends with Benefits
   a. Any type of sexual interaction or kissing, friends, no commitment, no exclusivity
Transitions:

1-5 had an initial spark and started dating

1-2-5 initial spark, talked, and then started dating

2-5 knew each other before, started dating

3-5 were close friends, talked a lot and then started dating

4-5 pronounced themselves to be best friends and then started dating
APPENDIX E: QUALITATIVE RESULTS

Table 1. Definition of “Impactful Romantic Relationships” (RQ1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Frequency count</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experience/life lessons</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partner</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>6.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-identity</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>19.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Together</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dos &amp; Don’ts in romantic relationships</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>9.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>49.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>Long-distance</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Involvement</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Long</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meaningful</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Support/care</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>7.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>19.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings</td>
<td>Hurt</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strongest memory</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Happy</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Love</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>8.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Best friend</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>18.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>Only</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Virginity</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>RR</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>10.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>12.53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. n = 455; 215 participants completed the survey, 209 completed the open-ended questions.*
### Table 2. Types of Relational Transitions in Impactful Romantic Relationships (RQ2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transition type</th>
<th>Frequency count</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1→5</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>32.2</td>
<td>“I was going to a local bar to have a drink and he was handing out cd’s for his band to people entering the club. I instantly though he was cute and later in the evening I made the initial move and gave him my phone number. He waited and used the “3 day” rule before calling me. But after our first date we stayed together thereafter for 16 years.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1→2→5</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>“Me and my girlfriend met in high school sophomore year in Spanish class. She was moved seats for talking when realistically it wasn’t her talking it was the other girl next to her. Nevertheless, the teacher decided to move my girlfriend next to me because I didn’t talk as much so the teacher fel she wouldn’t either. After getting to know my girlfriend more I decided to ask her if she wanted to be my girlfriend after 3 months or so.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2→5</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>“We grew up together and were neighbors for about three years. I didn’t see him for about seven years, and I ran into him when I was out with friends. We had an instant connection and started dating.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4→5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6.78</td>
<td>“Our relationship started like any other boy-girl best friend fairytale. We grew up together and stayed very close throughout the years, sharing our deepest secrets and gossips, trading relationship advice, hanging out whenever we could. As we got older, we kind of always knew that our friendship ran deeper, although we never expressed it explicitly, there was always those feelings hidden from each other that we weren’t yet ready to express. Then finally junior year came and I was kind of a rough place and he was there for me, like he'd always been, but this time it was different because then I wanted him to be there for me, more than just as friends. Finally, being the dominant person that I am, I demanded that he tell me how he felt about me, obviously hoping that what I was feeling, he was feeling too since I believed that all this time we had hidden feelings for each other. So just as he was about to speak I specifically said, &quot;Well I like you and if you don't like me then you need to tell me right now because I'm not going to be waiting around for you to feel something for me if there isn't anything---&quot; and then he kissed me. And just like that, our friendship unraveled and we talked and talked and talked about becoming a couple and then finally Junior prom came...&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
around and the day after that, he asked me to be his girlfriend. So I said yes.”

“"We grew up together and were family friends. We were always around one another and had crushes on one another. In high school we finally started dating after we went to a dance together.”

“My cousin and his brother went to high school together and were best friends so we were introduced to each other and pretty much forced to be around each other at first and then started going to school together and became close friends. I started to like him first and then it was a on and off talking relationship and then the summer i graduated he asked me to be his girlfriend.”

“We had met at a strip club. She had walked up to me given me a lap dance and we had hit it off after that.”

“We met a few times while he was in a relationship and I thought he was cute. We met again a year later since I joined a Jewish organization that he had also been a part of. He was still in a relationship. We became best friends. she dump him because of many reasons, one of which she said she could tell he had a little crush on me. A few months later, we began dating.”

“We had both just started at her first job/ my second, and I knew when I first saw her that she was the woman I wanted to spend the rest of my life with. Unfortunately, she was dating someone at the time so I had to do something about that. So, I introduced myself and we became friends and then we got really close in a matter of month. Soon after, she broke things off with her ex-boyfriend because she was having feelings for me, the same feelings I had.”

“I had known her all through high school, she was a year below me and always talked to me. My junior year after my best friend died she was the only person who treated me normal after returning to school after missing nearly a month. So when she reached out to me and helped ease my pain through regular treatment and school help I began to slowly gain these deep gut wrenching feelings for her. Nothing ever happened that year because she was run off by someone who thought she had bad intentions being so involved, but the following fall we met yet again and she was out to get me. After months of talking I took her on a few dates and then I took a step like I’d never known and made us official.”

“We knew each other since fourth grade and we were pretty good acquaintances in middle school but it wasn't
until the start of our Freshman year in high school when we became best friends because we ended up in the same class together, and little did we know that we would end up together.”

| 1→2→7→5 | 1 | 0.56 | “He asked me for my number over Facebook. We hung out as “friends” for a long period of time although we acted like we were more than friends.” |
| 1→2→6→5 | 1 | 0.56 | “We had math class together and had talked a few times, and then we high out at a music festival and danced for hours together and then kissed for the first time the last night of the festival.” |
| 1→2→4→5 | 1 | 0.56 | “I met him at the wake celebration after the funeral and gave him a ride to our mutual friends hour after, where there was an after part. On the drive over, it was apparent that we had a similar views on art, life, family, friends, and ideas about our future.” |
| 6→2→7→5 | 1 | 0.56 | “We hooked up at a party then became friends over the next six months. After that we started hooking up for a couple more months then I asked her to be my girlfriend.” |

*Note. n =177, 215 participants completed the survey; 209 completed the open-ended questions.*
### APPENDIX F: PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

Table 3. Bivariate Correlations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Age</td>
<td>—</td>
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<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
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<td>—</td>
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<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Self-uncertainty</td>
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Note. PU = partner uncertainty; RU = relationship uncertainty; RelU = relational uncertainty; PPD = perceptions of partner disclosure; SRD = self-reported disclosure; PPRT = perceptions of partner relationship talk; SRRT = self-reported relationship talk; PO = partner openness; SRO = self-reported openness.

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
APPENDIX G: PRIMARY ANALYSIS

Table 4. The Association between Relational Uncertainty and Perceptions of Partner Openness (H1a).

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Note. Sex was recoded so that female was coded as 0 and male was coded as 1. ** p ≤ 0.01 level (2-tailed); * p ≤ 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 5. The Association between Relational Uncertainty and Self-Reported Openness (H1b).

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Note. Sex was recoded so that female was coded as 0 and male was coded as 1. ** p ≤ 0.01 level (2-tailed); * p ≤ 0.05 level (2-tailed).
Table 6. The Association between Relational Satisfaction and Perceptions of Partner Openness (H2a).

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Note. Sex was recoded so that female was coded as 0 and male was coded as 1. ** $p \leq 0.01$ level (2-tailed); * $p \leq 0.05$ level (2-tailed).

Table 7. The Association between Relational Satisfaction and Self-Reported Openness (H2b).

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Note. Sex was recoded so that female was coded as 0 and male was coded as 1. ** $p \leq 0.01$ level (2-tailed); * $p \leq 0.05$ level (2-tailed).
Table 8. The Association between Relational Uncertainty and Relational Satisfaction through Perceptions of Partner Openness (H3a).

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Note. ** $p \leq 0.01$ level (2-tailed), * $p \leq 0.05$ level (2-tailed).
Table 9. The Association between Relational Uncertainty and Relational Satisfaction through Self-Reported Openness (H3b).

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Note. ** $p$ ≤ 0.01 level (2-tailed); * $p$ ≤ 0.05 level (2-tailed).
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**CURRICULUM VITAE**

**Yuliya Yurashevich**  
yuliayurashevich@gmail.com

### Education

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<tr>
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### Accomplishments

- **2016**: Graduate Teaching Certificate Program  
  University of Nevada, Las Vegas
- **2015 - 2017**: Three of my students were finalists of Public Speaking contest
- **2014**: Certificate of Graduation, Women’s leadership development program, Nazarbayev University
- **2013**: Certificate of achievement in recognition of outstanding service to Nazarbayev University Community
- **2013**: Certificate of Assiduity in learning French
Research Experience

Conferences.


Manuscripts in progress.


**Teaching Experience**

- **Summer Session III Instructor of Record**
  - (2016) Department of Communication Studies, University of Nevada, Las Vegas (USA)
- **Fall 2015, Spring 2016, Graduate Teaching Assistant**
- **Fall 2016, Spring 2017** Department of Communication Studies, University of Nevada, Las Vegas (USA)

**Work Experience**

- **2014 - 2015 Research Assistant**
  - Communication program, Nazarbayev University (Kazakhstan)
- **2011 - 2014 Tutor for English and Math**
  - Taught high school and middle school students

**Volunteer Experience and Outreach**

- **2016** Participant of Three minute thesis completion
- **2016 - present** Student Conduct Hearing Board member
  - University of Nevada, Las Vegas
- **2016 – present** A member of Lambda Pi Eta Honor society
- **2015 - present** Judge, Public Speaking Competition
  - University of Nevada, Las Vegas
- **2014 – 2015** Communication/PR Coordinator for NU WomenLead Association
- **2014 – 2015** Interpreter
  - Russian – English, English – Russian
- **2014** Volunteer at the U.S. Embassy Education Fair in Astana
- **2014** Volunteer at Education UK Exhibition
- **2012 - 2015** President of Ladies Health and Beauty Club
Nazarbayev University, Kazakhstan

Language Skills

Russian (Native speaker, fluent)
Kazakh (fluent)
English (fluent)
French (conversational)