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## Disrupting the Traditional Dating Discourse: Expanding the Romantic Relationship Narrative

Brooke Wolfe

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DISRUPTING THE TRADITIONAL DATING DISCOURSE: EXPANDING THE  
ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP NARRATIVE

By

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Bachelor of Arts – Communication Studies and Political Science  
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2017

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirement for the

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## **Abstract**

Dating to find a lifelong partner is a priority for many young adults, as the process exists on a socially constructed timeline (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2002). Although, like many other experiences in the public sphere, single women are adversely constrained by societal expectations in regard to their sexuality and use of agency (Dunn & Vik, 2014). This study explores women's dating behaviors in cooperation with societal messages that are navigated as a necessary step in finding a romantic partner. With the framework of Relational Dialectics, the study examines how participants learn the rules of dating, in what ways dating behavior is impacted by the recognition (implicit or explicit) of the dialectical tensions present in dating discourses, and how women navigate these tensions through the potential found in the expansion of their narrative. By examining women's accounts of how they navigate dominant dating discourses, the research study illuminates what tensions women experience when dating and how they resist those discursive tensions to create a more equitable and safe dating process for women.

## Table of Contents

	Page
<b>Abstract</b> .....	iii
<b>Chapter One: Introduction and Rationale</b> .....	1
<b>Chapter Two: Review of the Literature</b> .....	2
<b>Critical Interpersonal Communication Research</b> .....	2
<b>Theoretical Perspective: Relational Dialectics Theory</b> .....	4
<b>Relational Messaging</b> .....	6
<b>Romantic Relationships &amp; Sexual Scripts</b> .....	12
<b>Communication with Social Networks</b> .....	14
<b>Chapter Three: Method</b> .....	16
<b>Procedures</b> .....	16
<b>Participant Demographics</b> .....	17
<b>Data Analysis</b> .....	18
<b>Chapter Four: Findings and Interpretation</b> .....	22
<b>Centripetal Discourse: Dating as a fulfilling and positive process</b> .....	23
<b>Centrifugal Discourse: Dating is restrictive and impeding on true happiness</b> .....	35
<b>Discursive Interplay</b> .....	45
<b>Research Question 1: What messages do young adults receive regarding dating?</b> ..	52
<b>Research Question 2: What are the dialectical tensions women experience?</b> .....	54
<b>Research Question 3: How do women navigate these dialectical tensions?</b> .....	54
<b>Chapter Five: Discussion</b> .....	56
<b>Theoretical Implications</b> .....	56
<b>Practical Implications</b> .....	57

<b>Study Limitations and Directions for Future Research.....</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>Appendix A: IRB Approval Document.....</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>Appendix B: Recruitment Announcement.....</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>Appendix C: Informed Consent Document.....</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>Appendix D: Survey Questions.....</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>References.....</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>Curriculum Vitae.....</b>	<b>76</b>

## **Chapter One:**

### **Introduction and Rationale**

Dating is largely seen as a necessary step to marriage in American culture. Meeting a lifelong partner is understood as a priority in many young adult lives, as the expectation of partnering exists on a societal timeline (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2002). In this study, I approach women's dating experiences as an action existing in a space of inherent contradiction. Women are expected to search for and to find a long-term monogamous partner while simultaneously being constrained with societal expectations in regard to their sexuality and use of agency (Dunn & Vik, 2014). These dating behaviors exist in response to and in cooperation with the dialectical tensions that women navigate as a necessary step in finding a romantic partner. This study's further exploration into the societal messages that women encounter with expectations in the dating process, romantic messaging, and communication with their social network contributes to research focused on the experiences of women at the intersection of sex and power.

The study examines how participants learn the rules of dating, in what ways dating behavior is adjusted by the resistance of the dialectical tensions present in the process of partner selection, and how members of women's social networks share stories, advice, and intimacy rules with them. By examining women's accounts of how they navigate dating and how they communicate about their romantic encounters, this research study illuminates what tensions women experience when dating and how they resist those discursive tensions.

## **Chapter Two:**

### **Review of the Literature**

#### **Critical Interpersonal Communication Research**

Critical interpersonal communication (IPC) research recognizes that the reality within which individuals exist is a socially constructed society and that people's communication practices are in reaction to their experience with "institutional power, ideological power, [and] discursive power" (Moore, 2017, p. 1). Communication practices include the creation of self-identity, positionality, and relationships through the way each is talked about. Critical IPC research is a growing field where contributions have been limited yet impactful in challenging the status quo. The status quo can be understood as not only the macro discourses that contribute to dominant ideology within society but also the saturated language that is found in interpersonal conversations. Both macro and micro discourses are communicative in nature and influential in everyday behavior. Critical IPC theories, like Relational Dialectics Theory (RDT), inform the connection between ideology and behavior in both the self and relationships.

Scholars have theorized on the importance of communication in relationships (see, e.g., Baxter, 2011 for review). Baxter (2004) argued that "a constitutive approach to relationships would find the statement 'relationships in communication' more intelligible than 'communication in relationships'" due to the essential role of communication in the "creating, sustaining, and transforming [of] relationships" (Moore, 2017, p. 8). Foucault argues that it is not simply the romantic partners who consent to and create a relationship, but it is the "regimes of truth that make certain relationships speakable" (Moore, 2017, p. 8). Relationships are not created in a vacuum, and romantic relationships have historically been a space for stability, financial advancement, and societal approval of the partnership. Stories about how and with

whom adults are supposed to be coupled sustain and extend the practice of romantic relating; the power of discourse helps us understand how relationships *should* take place. Miller (2017) calls for IPC scholars to “scrutinize how regimes of truth, specifically about relationships and family formations, come to be” (p. 9). Researching these truths of relationships calls scholars to further investigate the macro discourses that affect individual behavior.

Critical IPC research is supported by social movements focused on challenging the oppressive systems at the intersections of gender, socioeconomic status, citizenship, sexual orientation, and other identity-based concerns. One progressive movement encompassed in that list is feminism. bell hooks (2000) defines feminism as the movement “to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression” (p. viii). Jennifer Freitag (2018) builds on hook’s definition by adding that feminism requires “recognition of inequality, harmful dynamics of power and control, and widespread discrimination based on gender and intersecting systems of oppression” (p.144). From Freitag’s definition of feminism, the concept of ‘recognition’ resonates. A feminist perspective provides a framework for criticism of dominant dynamics of power that systematically affect the lives of women. Communication research provides space for both the analysis of these systems as well as the messages that help communicators reimagine society without the implications of such injustice.

The connection between critical IPC research and feminism informs the framework of the current research study. The dating experiences of women cannot, and should not, be disconnected from their inherent risk of experiencing violence, rape, and abuse while existing in society (Kunkel & Guthrie, 2015). Systematic power is intertwined with gender and sexuality, which informs the choices women make in romantic relationships. To critically investigate the relational messages, behaviors, and experiences of daters, we must first understand the context to

which these women are subjected. Macro discourses of dating are internalized through messages surrounding virginity, sexuality, and marriage that inform the stories that women hear. Dating is a process that exists between the extremes of virginity and marriage, challenging women to exist in a quasi-sexual position between single and in a committed relationship. Feminism is helpful in researching the dating process, as the movement has historically challenged dating norms that have positioned women as passive recipients of romantic attraction as compared to active participants in decisions of romantic partnership. To investigate the dating experiences of women, women must first be recognized as sexual beings before marriage (see, e.g., Dunn & Vik, 2014). Relational Dialectics Theory provides a framework in which to further examine the macro discourses that may potentially influence women's meaning-making regarding dating.

### **Theoretical Perspective: Relational Dialectics Theory**

Relational Dialectics Theory (RDT) is interested in relational meaning-making through language. Within the framework of the theory, language is examined as “surrounding individual and relationship identities” that are constructed through the competing interplay of discourse (Baxter, 2011, p. 2). Social life is seen as an evolving and macro-created dialogue where discourses “struggle against one another to be heard, and in that struggle, they set the stage for future struggles” (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 4). RDT builds on the scholarly work of Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin and is focused on investigating power in discourse through the core premise of dialogism. Power is located in the centripetal-centrifugal struggle that is central to the meaning-making process (Suter & Norwood, 2017, p. 295). Centripetal discourses exist closer to the center, which represents the dominant ideology of society, whereas centrifugal discourses move away from the center and are categorized as increasingly marginal views (Baxter, 2011, p. 11). Similar to discourse, the location of the center is not finalized and should

be understood in the context from which the individual is speaking from at the time of their contribution (Wolfe & Guthrie, 2019, p. 6).

Discourse rarely exists in “a discursive democracy,” as centripetal voices are validated by the social order as normal (Baxter, 2011, p. 12). Dominant discourse is reinforced as representing the center through language imbued with validation. RDT scholars posit communication as a dialogically saturated process that is “always an attempt to persuade,” as the utterance can either support the centripetal center or attempt to move listeners towards the centrifugal margins (Duck, 2011, p. 18). These discursive interactions are considered private by the communicators, yet the talk represents the public dynamic of interactions (Baxter, 2011). While the conversation takes place between two people, intertwined in the speakers’ interaction is the entirety of the textual utterance chain, which is one part of a larger, ongoing dialogue. Baxter (2011) argues that there is “nothing autonomous about a speaker’s utterance,” as it has already been “embedded in the larger utterance chain” of the topic (p. 12). Decentering the individual in communication research makes space for inquiry into the societal discourses that resonate with speakers and normalize discourse surrounding social life.

The social order “is wrought with multivocal negotiations in which different interests, ideologies, and beliefs interact on an ongoing basis” (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2002, p. 95). Discourse becomes meaningful as others participate and understand the messages as a part of a larger societal conversation. Sociocultural discourses can be divided into the distal already-spoken and the distal not-yet-spoken. RDT asks researchers to integrate what is taken for granted in the utterance to make it intelligible to listeners. Baxter and Babbie (2004) discuss the intelligibility of the meaning-making process with the example of examining the meaning of an apple. The various characteristics and understandings that surround an apple are implied in the

meaning of an apple, but those qualities are often not provided in the conversation of an apple because one is expected to have previous knowledge of the fruit. The information of the color, how apples can be prepared, and where apples are grown is all combined to “form a coherent web of meaning – a discourse – ofappleness” (Baxter, 2001, p. 2). Whereas research is unlikely to focus on the meaning of ‘appleness,’ this system of meaning-making is applicable to discourse surrounding all objects and scenarios encountered.

Meaning is dependent on “the interplay of competing discourses that are circulating” at that time (Baxter, 2011, p. 3). RDT assumes that “every interpersonal interaction is contoured by the communicator’s lifetime of experiences” and that the catalog of these experiences affects the communicator’s meaning-making process in its entirety (Ballard & Guthrie, 2017). The context of discourse minimally changes over interactions but more widely varies over the spectrum of time. The dating experiences women have in 2019 vary greatly from the experiences of women in 1999, and as such, the coding of messages should be contextually specific to provide greater understanding of the centripetal-centrifugal struggle present at that time. The focus of RDT research is on the larger discourses circulating through the speaker’s language. This understanding of discourse connects the speaker and their communication to a larger discourse that is not autonomously grounded to that individual but is metaphorically taking place above the individual (Wolfe & Guthrie, 2019, p. 6). The speaker’s utterance is not simply a “representation of their inner state” but is instead “an intertextual utterance chain” that is one piece of the larger discourse of the topic (Baxter, 2011, p. 12). The discourse is culturally embedded, including prior contributions as well as “anticipated responses not yet spoken” within the chain (Baxter, 2011, p. 12).

### **Relational Messaging**

Approaching relationships with a rhetorical approach validates that “words are not idly chosen but express personality, attitudes, and a person’s total view of the nature of the world and their self-identity within culture” (Duck, 1998, p. 29). The way individuals communicate about their relationships and relational partners is public articulation of how relationships should operate, the values of particular relationship couplings, and the larger conceptualization of what constitutes romance (Manning, 2014, p. 311). The discourse surrounding relationships is the space where meaning making takes place. Communicators buy in and articulate the meaning to reflect their vision of reality (Manning, 2014). Duck (2011) defines rhetorical visions as “a depiction of values, preferences, or opinions, whether explicit or implicit” (p. 18). The term rhetorical visions is comparable to a textual utterance with RDT; both understand language as embedded within the culture of the time, which includes the values and dominant ideology. Complementing RDT, the rhetoric of relationships forwards that “all experiences in relationships are located in the more general set of cultural romantic beliefs and expectations” (Duck, 2011, p. 4). Expanding on the discourse of relationships, the behaviors acted out in romantic relationships are influenced by beliefs and expectations in a similar way.

Relationships are formed by the way partners communicate about them (Duck, 2011, p. 4). The language that the speaker uses to describe the relationship further enforces the expectations and rules of similar relationships. As self-identity is constructed through the interplay of discourse, relationships are constructed through conversation of the relational activity in addition to the relational assumptions that are made by others in the same social order (Duck, 2011, p. 4). The inherently social dynamic of relationships invites societal contributions into private relationships, as the discourse used to communicate relationships is public. Relationships makes sense to others because “society at large speaks the same language” about

such connections, intertwining the public in the relationship (Duck, 2011, p.4). The phrases used to discuss relationships either communicate the implied approval or disapproval of the behavior. This persuasive, public discussion of the relationship recognizes the centripetal-centrifugal struggle that is encoded in discourse. Whereas communicators might not explicitly recognize that their chosen topics (or those avoided) exist within the social order, it is important for researchers to recognize that discourse is affected by its “power functions and . . . organizational rules” (Duck, 2011, p. 29).

Romantic relationships have societal rules (Duck, 2011; Butler, 2004; Dunn, 2010). Rules tell potential partners what “relationships are like, how to do them, what they are, and which ones deserve to be marked and celebrated” (Butler, 2004, p. 31). These rules are communicated through popular media, movies, and stories that illustrate the relationships that are publicly praised. The celebration of these relationships reinforces the “norms of relating in a particular society” (Duck, 2011, p. 31). These rules can be referenced as a roadmap for relationships yet can also impose expectations on the private life of an individual. If one’s relationship does not mirror the norm, that individual can constantly be stuck in a discursive struggle to move their relationship and romantic behaviors towards the center. As society regulates romantic relationships, the dating process is also monitored in regard to sexuality and the trajectory of the relationship.

The dating process involves the selection of potential partners, interactions between the partners, and expectations following the romantic interactions. An area of interest in the dating process is the communication of sexual interest and sexual constraints for those dating. Sex is not simply an act but an action that “is loaded with social significance and symbolism” (Duck, 2011, p. 119). The sexual behavior of individuals is understood as an action that “society at large has a

legitimate interest in” knowing and controlling (Duck, 2011, p. 120). Society’s interest in sexual behavior is not isolated from the rules surrounding dating, because sex is synonymous with *power*.

Sex is regulated to encourage participants to engage in the activity in approved ways. The action of sex is situated as a reward for those who are in love, which transforms the act to a symbol of power that is much more than the physical motion of intercourse itself. Whereas having sex may be a private pursuit, sex as a symbol is connected to the larger discourse defining meaningful relationships and the publicness of intimacy. Since the motions of sex are relatively systematic, differentiating between approved and non-approved sex “must refer to something other than the physical acts alone because the physical activity is the same whether good or bad” (Duck, 2011, p. 122). Therefore, the meaning of the act is more of a sociocultural concern than the action itself. The sexual activity of daters is regulated through the expected norms, which exist in the centripetal discourse that expects sex to be a social requirement of “love and caring, partnership and acceptance, [and] relationship and significance” (Duck, 2011, p. 123). The public regulation of sexual activity is an example of the meaning-making process that defines romantic relationships in the aspect of each partner’s readiness for sex.

Regulation of sexuality disproportionately affects the actions of women, as the social order reproduces a conflicted ideology with regards to women as sexual beings. Perspectives on sexuality and virginity are gendered (Wittig, 2000). When a single woman participates in sexual activity, she is described as *losing* her virginity. This loss is “subject to evaluations based on who she has had sex with, how many partners, [and] what type of sex she has participated in” (Dunn & Vik, 2014, p. 498). In contrast, married women are not subject to the same investigation as “her sexuality remains contained in the private sphere of the home for the purpose of

procreation” (Dunn & Vik, 2014, p. 498). Dating women, who are traditionally unmarried, are not subject to this privilege and often exist in a double bind where they are “subject to negative judgments based on their lack of marriage” yet can be also characterized “as frigid old maids” if they do not participate in sexual activity (Dunn & Vik, 2014, p. 498). Single women occupy an interesting space in the continuum between virgin and sexual being as they have the option to participate in sex, yet this activity is often not approved of outside the institution of marriage.

Ideological and religious beliefs influence how sexual behavior and sexuality is internalized by women. The binary opposition of virgin/whore equates to a dichotomy of pure/impure that is constructed through the discourse used to describe women’s sexual activity (Dunn & Vik, 2014, p. 495). This sort of distinction in women’s sexual activity is rooted in a proposed difference between men and women. The difference is constructed by society as are the categories for biological sex (Wittig, 2000, p. 66). The Christian stories of civilization illustrate a clear divide between men and women that primarily exists as a form of dominance. Even the foundational Bible story describing that Eve was created from Adam’s rib forwards the narrative that man is the default human while woman is the companion. This depiction of Eve is detrimental to the agency of women by making their identities intimately connected to a man. The co-dependency of women’s identities constrains sexuality to the privilege of man (Kristeva, 1982; Traynor, 2000). Given the Christian majority in the U.S., even those who do not identify as a member of the religion are still influenced by the stories told by followers of Christianity (Norris & Inglehart, 2011). These stories validate women as secondary concerns to men, an issue that complicates the position of women in sex and dating.

One prominent tension in the dating behaviors of women is first recognizing women as sexual beings who are in control of their bodies and their romantic decisions. The feminist

framework validates women as sexually capable, which better highlights the tensions “among women, money, sex, and power in American society” (Dunn & Vik, 2014, p. 488). Even with research that encourages a feminist framework, the internalized sexism of American culture infiltrates language, which in turn creates gendered cultural expectations that impact how sex and sexuality are discussed. As mentioned, the reliance on childbearing as the legitimate form of sexual activity supports a heterosexual economy ideology that prescribes how partners should “exchange goods and security for the reproduction of the species” (Dunn & Vik, 2014, p. 495). This heterosexual mold assigns men and women roles within the institution of marriage that are directly tied to their gender (or biological sex). And most importantly, this partnership is “the only legitimate site of sexuality, childbearing, the care of individual’s physical and emotional needs, the maintenance of a household, and the creation of kinship bonds” (Calhoun, 2003, p.348). When a woman deviates from this role, she risks her position in the social order.

Dating is seen as an investment, as the process provides the opportunity to find a long-term partner. In American society, successful dating stories are connected to fairytale ideas of marriage and *the one*. Romantic messages construct marriage as a lifetime accomplishment and a milestone to strive towards. Society is invested in both sex and marriage, which complicates the process of dating. If women are only fully understood as sexual beings when married, they occupy a complex space when dating other singles in search of a potential partner. Scholars have described marriage as “both a private emotional site of self-expression, intimacy, gratification, and a public institution embedded in the broader social order” (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2002, p. 101). In this sense, marriage is a cultural expectation and accomplishment that is as much a concern of the relational partners as of society at large. This investment in marriage reflects the regulation of sexuality that constrains daters, as sexuality is understood as a marital privilege.

When sexual activity takes place outside of marriage, the sociocultural control greatly diminishes. As the social order exists with “multiple, often competing, conflictual perspectives,” the tensions between marriage, dating, and sexuality signal a multivocal negotiation that women navigate through on an ongoing basis” (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2002, p. 95). Navigating these competing discourses becomes a mainstream process as approved behaviors take the form of dating scripts that serve as a reference point for daters.

### **Romantic Relationships & Sexual Scripts**

As daters seek romantic relationships, the formation of relationships is largely influenced by the intent, communication, and behaviors of the partners (Serewicz & Gale, 2007). Romantic scripts are influenced by the internalized messages of virginity, sexuality, marriage that converge to provide approved timelines for romantic relationships. These scripts can include personal disclosure, concern for monogamy, and negotiation of the progress of the relationship. Ultimately, the scripts provide a basis for what the relationship should look like and how the relational partners should act given the cultural context of the individuals (Emmers-Sommer, 2014). In US culture, a relationships value is largely contextualized within its potential for marriage (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2002). When referencing the dating spectrum, the seriousness of a romantic relationships correlates with its ability to be long lasting.

Romantic scripts are normalized through the stories shared about relationships. Scripts build on the romantic messaging of relationships as an additional tool to constrain the activities of partners. While relationships may begin organically between two people, the behavior of the partners is “strongly influenced by the prevailing cultural-level sexual script, particularly early in relationships” (Metts & Spitzberg, 1996, p. 50). Whereas sex is only one measurement of dating progress, this script is especially important given society’s interest in regulating the sexual

activity of women (Morgan & Zurbgriggen, 2007). The time commitment of a relationship increases the likelihood for societal support of sexual activity as the relationship has moved past an initial meeting and is moving towards a more serious commitment such as marriage. Although millennials and Gen Z have seen the pressure for marriage decrease with the rise of the hook-up culture, the timeline for marriage still exists (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2002). The creation of new dating scripts still validates the power of relational messages and the desire to adhere to the current scripts.

Larson (2010) argued that dating scripts for college students have changed with the widespread acceptance of more casual dating relationships. The hook-up script exists on the dating continuum but could be categorized “as much less formal than traditional dating,” which can be observed through uncertainties about “who ought to pay for expenses” when the relational partners are on dates (Larson, 2010, p. 13; Bogle, 2007). The change of scripts that Larson (2010) describes does reflect a change in the timeline of relationships, yet the continuum of dating seems to stay relatively static. The response of labeling the hook-up script a casual dating tactic positions the script as a response that is contrary to the expected behavior. Romantic dating scripts, whether traditional or contemporary, are positioned in relation to the discursive center that RDT theorizes. The way in which relational partners discuss their dating is saturated with the perceptions of dating—whether hearing the stories of daters who religiously follow the approved scripts and those who do not, as both groups have internalized the romantic messaging of approved behaviors. The approved behaviors of dating are communicated, and individuals have the agency to act out such romantic behaviors or operate in opposition to such acts.

Both acts are valuable to RDT research, as investigating the saturation of language and language’s effect on behavior is a dynamic process. The argument that the feminist movement

has allowed for daters to reconstruct their dating scripts is persuasive and is worth researching further because even with women's increased agency in the dating world, the romantic relationships are contextualized in societal messages of sex, virginity, and marriage that remain a constraint for women. The process of finding romantic partners should not be examined without listening to the stories that daters have been told and tell about their romantic relationships. These stories are constructed by language that exists as both sites of the distal-already-spoken and distal-not-yet-spoken (Baxter, 2011). Each retelling of the dating script will highlight how daters make sense of the important moments in their romantic relationships and whether this timeline mirrored the societally approved script. Dialectical tensions can be examined in both approved and oppositional romantic scripts, as both accounts recognize the implicit, supported dating timeline.

### **Communication with Social Networks**

Social networks provide support in a variety of areas, one of which is for romantic relationships. Friends serve "as a critical judgement of society" and help disseminate social rules, expectations, and scripts to daters (Duck, 2011, p. 5). Because romantic relations operate within a complex web of friends and family, the relationship information shared within the network can provide insights into the dialectical tensions that partners face when discussing their relationship. Friends can reinforce relationship norms by frequently serving "as sources of information both about the romantic relationships and other areas of life" (Jensen & Rauer, 2014, p. 453). Whereas social support is a rhetorical process that involves "seeking, giving, and receiving" support (Goldsmith & Fitch, 1997, p. 455), communication with one's social network could also be more broadly categorized.

With the social network's ability to reflect the critical judgment of society, any communication with a dater's friends and/or other members of their network can serve as a site integrated with societal discourses. Similar to the romantic scripts, the details that daters choose to disclose to their network create a space of discursive meaning-making. While research has focused on the interpretations of the support given (Albrecht & Adelman, 1987; Knoblock & Donovan-Kicken, 2006; Sarason & Sarason, 2009), RDT provides a theoretical framework to observe the interplay of competing discourses present as information about the romantic relationship is disclosed. Examining the competing discourses that the social network contributes to the dating process helps fill a gap in the research about the connection between competing discourses and individual action. As romantic scripts and approved behaviors are normalized by fellow daters and their social network, the power of the centripetal center is validated.

Given the previous RDT research on romantic messages, the rhetoric of relationships, and communication with dater's social network, the following study proposes the following guiding research questions:

RQ1: What messages do young adults receive regarding dating?

RQ2: What are the dialectical tensions that women experience in dating?

RQ3: How do women navigate these dialectical tensions when dating?

## **Chapter Three:**

### **Method**

#### **Procedures**

The first step in preparation for the research study was obtaining approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix A). With IRB approval, I recruited participants from eligible courses who were at least eighteen years of age. An announcement was disseminated to students in Communication Studies courses including COM 101: Oral Communication, COM 102: Introduction to Interpersonal Communication, and COM 104: Critical Thinking in Public Argument via both email and Canvas; specifically, students were notified in a course announcement located in Canvas and through a weekly scheduled class announcement sent to their student emails. The announcement advised students that research credit for their basic Communication Studies course may be awarded after participation in the study. (See Appendix B for recruitment script.)

The participants were recruited by convenience sample through basic courses in the Communication Studies Department. The survey was offered through the Communication Studies Research Participation System (SONA). (See Appendix C for the survey consent form.) SONA asks students to create an account if they are a new user or log in with a previously created account if they have participated in department research before. Additionally, SONA notifies instructors of the students who participated in a research study (or an alternative assignment) during the semester so that instructors can assign research credit accordingly.

Participation in the survey portion was available to any student who was at least 18 years of age or older, which allowed for a high qualification rate. The survey consisted of 22 open-ended questions that included eight demographic questions, 13 questions about messages young

adults receive about dating, and one question asking if the participant would be interested in completing a follow-up interview. (See Appendix D for survey protocol.) In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the interviews for the study were delayed as the southwestern university where the interviews were scheduled transitioned to remote instruction, which necessitated the closure of the research lab. To support the health and well-being of all parties, only survey data was collected, and the interview portion included in the original study design was eliminated. For the timing of this study, 49 people opened the survey, and 45 of the participants completed the survey.

### **Participant Demographics**

In an effort to collect accurate and complete information regarding participant demographics, participants were asked to answer open-ended questions regarding their identities that allowed participants to self-identify. Specifically, these questions collected information about participants' age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity/race, religion, dating status, and school standing. On average, participants were 19.9 years old with an age range of 18-44. The majority of participants were women (n=36) who identified as heterosexual (n=39). Regarding race and ethnicity, nearly half of the participants identified as white (n=17), while the remainder identified as Asian (n=14), Hispanic/Latino (n=5), African American (n=3), and multiple/mixed race (n=6). Participants were also asked if they (a) considered themselves religious and (b) if so, what religion they identified with. The majority of participants did not say if they considered themselves religious or not (n=24). Of the remaining participants, the majority said that they did not consider themselves religious (n=16), and less than 15% of the full sample said that they did (n=5). Nevertheless, many participants answered part (b) regarding religion, and more than 40% identified agnostic/not religious (n=17), while almost 30% identified broadly as Christian (n=13)

and the remainder as Catholic (n=8), Mormon (n=1), Buddhist (n=1), or spiritual (n=3). Two participants did not answer the question. Additionally, the majority of participants reported that they were actively dating (n=25) or sometimes dating (n=3) although some participants also indicated that they were not currently dating (n=17).

### **Data Analysis**

The survey data was coded using contrapuntal analysis. Contrapuntal analysis is a method rooted in the critical study of language, and in this study the survey responses comprised the text that was closely studied. Scholars using RDT garner meaning from texts by identifying contrasting discourses in relation to the speaker's systems of meaning, point of view, and worldview (Baxter, 2011). The analysis process begins with identifying societal discourses in the text, finding contrasting tensions, and observing the interplay of discourses, which is the locus at which meaning-making takes place (Suter & Norwood, 2017; Wenzel & Poynter, 2014). The data is read through several times to locate the discourses, which can be found through identification of "thematic themes" in the beginning stages of analysis (Wenzel & Poynter, 2014, p. 152). Once multiple themes are identified, a researcher is able to combine themes through a process of "folding" or separating texts in individual sets.

Subsequently, the interplay of discourses is examined to see if the messages are consistent across individuals or if the messages "are in competition with one another" (Baxter, 2011, p. 152). Synchronic interplay, or discourses in competition with one another within a single utterance, can be identified through the observation of discourse markers including "negating, countering, and entertaining" dialectical contrasts (Baxter, 2011, p. 152). Negating occurs when the speaker's communication denies the validity of the centripetal discourse. This strategy both validates the centripetal discourse by recognizing the existence of that dominant

discourse and simultaneously counters the hegemonic dialogue by forwarding an alternative. Scharp and Hall (2019) illustrated negating by providing an example of a mother who is experiencing post-partum depression exclaiming, “I’m not a bad mother!” (p. 67). This utterance challenges popular discourse that includes expectations of women after childbirth as being able to care for their children without struggling with health disparities that might temporarily impact their ability to operate in a traditional, and often, maternal way.

The other two strategies that scholars use to identify synchronic interplay are countering and entertaining. A speaker is using a countering strategy when “one discourse replaces another discourse, often marked by words like ‘but’ or ‘even’” (Scharp & Hall, 2019, p. 67). Extending upon the previous example, a mother might say, “I love being a mother, even though I have an independent identity separate from my children.” Here, the discourse of family connectivity is countered with a discourse of independence as a mother states that she can be a good mother while also having an identity that exists outside of her family unit. Finally, entertaining occurs when “one discourse acknowledges the possibility of another” (Scharp & Hall, 2019, p. 68). Entertaining recognizes multiple discourses, and the speaker often does not determine the hierarchy of discourses, allowing for both discourses to be a possibility. Scharp and Hall’s (2019) example of entertaining illustrated the predominance of modal verbs and language related to probability and possibility, as “He might be a good dad one day.” This sentence highlights discourses of both good and bad parenting, stating that while an individual might not be exhibiting positive parenting actions at this time, they might adopt an improved system in the future in order to more closely enact the discourse of good parenting.

Within texts, the site of discursive meaning-making is found where discourses compete with each other, allowing observation into the interplay and ultimate dominance of centripetal

communication. To identify the competing discourses, I followed the preliminary steps of Braun and Clarke's (2006) steps for thematic analysis. The phases of thematic analysis include (a) familiarizing yourself with your data, (b) generating initial codes, (c) searching for themes, (d) reviewing themes, (e) defining and naming themes, and (f) producing the report (Braun and Clarke, 2006). An adaptation of this process for RDT research includes "(e) inductively categorizing themes into overarching discourses and naming those discourses" and "(f) identifying resonant exemplars" for the final steps of analysis (Scharp et al., 2020, under review).

In an effort to closely analyze discourse at individual and group levels, I downloaded the data from Qualtrics into an Excel document as sets of ten surveys were completed, repeating the process five times until I had downloaded and analyzed all 45 completed responses. After downloading the data, I read through each participant's complete survey before focusing question-by-question on collective themes and responses. During the first pass of reading through the data, I took detailed notes of my observations, including repeated phrases, patterns, and initial codes. Following my original read through, I created a separate Word document that included every survey question and each participant's response to that question. The themes were created from reviewing both the data set as a whole (i.e., both men's and women's responses) and then again with just the data set of women's responses (n=36). I color-coded recurrent themes as I read through all responses to each question, which allowed me to begin to visually organize the data. On a subsequent read-through, I highlighted themes present in the responses with their corresponding colors.

Next, I created a codebook wherein themes could be reviewed. The left-hand columns were labeled with the initial codes and then subsequent themes. Following the completion of the codebook, I discussed the sections of the data, the initial codes, and the preliminary themes

several times with my advisor multiple times. She independently coded the data, and we conferenced to inductively categorize the identified themes into overarching discourses and to name those discourses. After the centripetal and centrifugal discourses were named, each interrelated theme within each discourse was tagged and defined. These themes were then further developed with resonant exemplars chosen from the participant's responses. We both agreed that saturation in the data was reached, as categories and discourses became clear patterns (Tracy, 2020).

## **Chapter Four:**

### **Findings and Interpretation**

This research study was focused on identifying the ideologies surrounding the dating process and how women navigate the dominant discourses embedded in partner selection. This chapter details both discourses present in the data set along with resonant examples of the supporting tensions that originated as themes. The tensions are defined and further detailed with examples provided by the participants in their survey responses. Each participant exemplar is written in italics and is included as their original response from the survey. The survey responses were not edited and were transferred directly from the survey website; given that participants did not include any identifying information in their responses, the data did not have to be adapted for privacy. Each participant was assigned a number and a corresponding pseudonym to humanize the responses.

The data analyzed included 49 survey responses although only 45 participants completed the survey by answering each question. The other 4 participants opened the survey but did not answer any questions; ultimately, they were removed from the data set as their blank responses did not contribute to the findings. The contrapuntal analysis of the data illuminated two competing discourses across the responses: the centripetal discourse that dating is a fulfilling and positive process (DFPP) and the centrifugal discourse that dating is resistive and impeding true happiness (DRITH). The complete data set contributed to the findings of the centripetal discourse of DFPP while the women's survey responses (n=36) were isolated for the analysis of the centrifugal discourse of DRITH. Both discourses and the supporting tensions are defined, discussed, and further depicted with responses that illustrate the discursive interplay. Following

the discussion of the discourses, the strategies of entertaining, negating, countering were unfolded with exemplars that include the corresponding discourse makers for each strategy.

### **Centripetal Discourse: Dating as a fulfilling and positive process**

The discourse that dating is a fulfilling and positive process (DFPP) includes the culturally taken-for-granted assumptions about the rituals for partner selection, the timeline of romantic relationships, and the sexual scripts that individuals should align their behavior with. Participants often referenced and validated the dating process throughout their surveys when responding to questions regarding important milestones, intimacy rules, gender roles, and the trajectory of romantic relationships. The DFPP forwards the dating process as an experience by which individuals should generally seek to find a partner that will bring happiness and contentment to their life. The discourse is supported by four themes that build on each other to construct the hegemonic values and beliefs of the dating process.

**Dating is predictable.** In the DFPP, participants spoke about the predictability of the dating process. One factor that led to its predictability is that daters learned about the process at such a young age that they learned about how to date years, or even a decade, before they actually began looking for potential partners. Tonya said that, “*I learned about it [dating] when I was very young. Possibly even before elementary school. To be honest, it feels as though I've always known (that's how early I learned about it)*” (Participant #2). Tonya expresses that she feels she has always known about dating, highlighting the intensity of the dating discourse and distal-already-spoken that provides participants detailed instructions on what the process of partner selection should look like. Daters repeatedly talked about learning how to date throughout their childhood. Camille remembered, “*I first learned about dating was when I was in middle school, my best friend started to date a boy from her class*” (Participant #24). Similarly,

Tamara stated, *“I first learned about dating in junior high when I watched my oldest brother go on his first date with a girl he liked while he was in high school”* (Participant #42). The ingrained nature of knowledge about dating allowed participants to learn how others participated in the process before they were ready to look for a partner.

Daters described that when they were ready to begin looking for a partner, the process they had learned was so well explained that they had expectations for how the interactions should unfold. Alicia said that she knew, *“He should initiate the approach and ask the women out on a date. It is polite for him to pay for the date but not always necessary. Especially when a woman wants to pay for herself”* (Participant #8). In her account, Alicia explains that men should initiate the date and be the first person to show interest in the relationship. This supports the cultural assumptions around gender roles and sexual scripts when starting a relationship. These distal-already-spoken assumptions position men as the date initiator while women are the reactive actor who waits for suitors to show interest in her. Alicia’s response also touches on presumptions of financial mobility and the belief that men should pay for the date as traditional occupational opportunities have positioned them as the more economically prosperous gender. While Alicia includes that women can also pay for the date, she leads with the idea that it is polite for men to continue paying for the date even if the economic assumptions of dating continue to evolve.

The predictability of gender roles in dating provided a roadmap of gendered expectations. Tanner described that men should be, *“paying for the meals, protecting her at all times, being a positive influence”* (Participant #1). This description of men as the provider of the relationship was common and yet was explained with few direct details. Megan said, *“A man is seen as a provider in a relationship”* (Participant #10). This brief response provides little tangible

information about the actions of men and instead provides an overarching term that supports the narrative of men as the dominant actor in heterosexual relationships. While the categorization of the expected roles of men in romantic relationships included the brief but expansive term of “provider,” women’s roles were less concise, which will be further discussed with the DRITH.

In addition to the gendered expectations of daters, the activities and timeline involved in dating were centered around the initial ‘firsts’ in a relationship and the progress of a successful relationship moving from casual dating to a more serious partnership. Participants described important milestones in dating as:

*Kaitlyn: First date - First kiss - Saying "I love you" - Moving in (Participant #45)*

*Freddy: Saying, I love you for the first time. First kiss. Opening up to each other. Becoming best friends. Meeting family (Participant #37)*

*Chelsea: Important milestones in dating would include every 'firsts'--first kiss, first date, etc.-and the eventual marriage. (Participant #11)*

*Hailey: Important milestones in dating are all the "firsts." For example the first kiss, first date, holding hands for the first time, saying I love you for the first time, and meeting each other's parents. But as time passes by, getting engaged and moving in together are also important milestones. (Participant #9)*

Kaitlyn, Freddy, Chelsea, and Hailey include important physical and emotional milestones in their responses that speak to the attraction and intimacy aspects of romance. Even with the predictability of these occasions, daters still speak to the importance of the early rituals in a relationship as impactful moments for the couple. The dating process involves moments that serve as individual and social network tests for long-term partner compatibility. While the first kiss is an important moment for a dater to gauge initial attraction to a current or potential partner,

meeting the family is a social test where the partner is vetted by important members of the dater's life to provide feedback on the preferred trajectory of the relationship. Jeremy discusses this transition when he said, "*I think some important milestones in dating include meeting parents, meeting families, and being able to communicate on a level past just "general dating"*" (Participant #41). In this response, Jeremy does not include preliminary milestones like the first date or the first kiss; instead, he only includes meeting the parents, meeting the family, and moving past an introductory level of dating. Jeremy's milestones include the foundational components of the dating timeline though each aspect targets a more serious step in a relationship signaling the predictable nature of the preliminary stages of dating as well as the transition to a long-term relationship.

The transition to a long-term relationship was described by participants with as much detail as the first stages of relationships. Andrew said that important dating milestones to him include:

*The first would be the butterflies in the stomach. When one is giddy thinking about the other, then I would consider that the first milestone. The next would be a night together. Nothing has to happen, but you want to gauge if you're comfortable and trusting of the individual while you rest next to them. The third milestone would be introduction to friends and family before the last milestone being proposal and marriage* (Participant #21)

This response highlights the continuation of milestones throughout the span of the relationship, from initial attraction through the couple getting married. The long-lasting continuum of this timeline provides daters predictable steps throughout their relationship, highlighting important milestones and steps for the relationship to meet in order for the couple to be viable for a long

period of time. This timeline is discussed and observed at such an early age that daters begin dating with an overwhelming number of messages about the expected gender roles of partners, the physical expectations of each date, and general advice to promote the longevity of the relationship. When each dater has these messages at their disposal, their focus of the relationship is centered on specific moments that are generally consistent across romantic relationships.

**Dating is a path to permanency.** Daters frequently talked about dating as a process that assisted them in finding a long-term romantic partner. The rituals involved in dating were conceptualized as steps in a timeline that concluded with securing a permanent companion. For example, Hailey explained that, “*I think the purpose of dating is to marry and to look for someone that you're willing to settle down with for the rest of your life*” (Participant #8). In this example, Hailey explained her understanding of dating as a task that involves searching for a person that she would be interested in being romantically connected with for rest of her life. This sentiment was shared frequently with other answers, including:

Tamara: *To get to know the other person to see if they could be someone you potentially could end up with for the rest of your life* (Participant #42).

Andrew: *To find someone you would like to spend the rest of your life with* (Participant #21).

Jackie: *To find someone who you love romantically, makes you happy and loves you back as well as someone who you want to be with for the rest of your life* (Participant #36).

John: *To find your best friend for the rest of your life* (Participant #20).

Freddy: *I believe the purpose of dating is to find a partner that you will spend the rest of your life with* (Participant #35).

Tamara, Andrew, Jackie, John and Freddy each ended their response with the conclusion that dating should result in finding a person that they can be in a relationship with for the rest of their life. For Tamara, the dating process is an opportunity to test partner compatibility and evaluate the individual for a permanent position in her life. This utterance speaks to the culturally taken-for-granted assumption that successful romantic partnerships are long-term, and commitment is a positive and permanent requirement of romantic relationships.

Relationship permanency was also communicated through the timeline of marriage, the metaphor of growing with your partner, and eventually even dying alongside your spouse. Lisa described that the purpose of dating is, *“To get married and to have a strong connection with your partner to spend the rest of your life with”* (Participant #40). Lisa discusses marriage as a milestone that facilitates couples being in a life-long relationship. This example supports the discourse of DFPP, as the process is validated with the reward of having a romantic partner for the rest of your life. While dating itself might be a daunting process, the reward—a strong connection, marriage, and partner for the rest of your life—can be an inviting offer. Kourtney speaks to the positive side that accompanies dating to find a permanent partner. She reflects that the purpose of dating is, *“to have fun and to learn how to be in a relationship and ultimately to find the person you want to grow old with”* (Participant #27). Kourtney both mentions the excitement of the process for partner selection and the conclusion of dating, which she states is finding the one person that you can grow old with. As such, the dating process is assumed to end when the dater finds a viable candidate for long-term partnership, further supporting the system of monogamy which impacts the expectations, purposes, and timeline of dating.

In addition to the messages that speak to spending the rest of your life with someone and finding a partner to marry, dating was discussed as a pathway to relational permanency as a way

to find a person that will be present through multiple phases of life. Casey described the purpose of dating as, “*To grow old with another person. to learn everything about them. to start a family*” (Participant #7). Casey communicates a multiphase development that illustrates that important steps in a relationship including growing old together. This phrase is generally adaptable and speaks to infinite trajectory of the relationship; since the couple can grow old together for the rest of their lives, the dating timeline is no longer applicable, as the relationship is spoken about as if it is no end. Chelsea also touches on this lifelong permanency as she writes, “*The purpose of dating is to find a partner whom you would like to one day marry and die with*” (Participant #11). Chelsea’s statement offers an ending to the relationship as when the partners die together, further supporting the opportunity for longstanding commitment after participating in the dating process.

Finally, participants also communicated that dating was a pathway to relational permanency through the discussion of accomplishments that the couple could complete together over the span of their relationship. Melinda stated that the purpose of dating is, “*To find a man I want to have a family with*” (Participant #33). In this example, Melinda focuses on the future relational milestones that are important to her instead of the commitment of the relationship independently. Specifically, Melinda is focused on one action that was frequently described as an important part of committed relationships. Finding a partner to start a family with is a step that is embedded with cultural assumptions about commitment, stability, and security. While Melinda does not fully unpack those details in this statement, this utterance is part of a larger conversation involving the expectations of American family units and the privileging of households with two parents who are married to each other.

**Dating facilitates monogamy.** The next theme supports the cultural assumption that monogamous romantic relationships are a positive and productive structure for partners to expect of each other. Monogamous relationships are centered on partner exclusivity, originating in the practice of marriage although the term is now more broadly used to describe relationships that exist outside of the institution (Overall, 1998, p. 3). Scientifically speaking, monogamy is defined as a “unique social relationship between one adult female and one adult male for the purpose of reproduction” (Reichard, & Boesch, 2004, p. 29). This definition of monogamy is especially present in the participants who identify as heterosexual. Jess conveyed, “*There should be [intimacy] rules because you should save yourself for the person you are going to marry. There should not be intimacy until you get married to that person*” (Participant #37). Jess’s response constrains sexual acts to the institution of marriage as she denies the existence of physical intimacy without a monogamous partnership. For Jess, dating is a process that does not include physical experimentation: instead, dating assists individuals in finding a person whom they can marry and experience intimacy with.

Other participants spoke to the importance of monogamy and relational commitment as the physical aspect of dating was described as a special component for one partner. Susie echoed Jess, explaining “*intimacy comes after marriage*” (Participant #7). This thread supports the assumption that pre-marriage relationships should be fulfilling without sexual interaction and that dating is a process that is centered around the search for monogamy as the coupling is more meaningful when exclusive. Paul said, “*To me, intimacy is a commitment*” (Participant #24). This response suggests that intimacy, commitment, and monogamy are all salient aspects of seeking a romantic partner.

Commitment is a term that is also used to describe the negotiation that partners have in order to make their relationship official. Andrew reports, “*Nowadays, there aren't many intimacy rules. One main rule, however, is if both people decide to be exclusive, it is a commitment to one another and no one else from there on*” (Participant #23). In this example, Andrew illustrates the transition that takes place during the dating process, from casual dating to both members of the partnership deciding to be exclusive. Once that conversation takes place, the commitment is both to the relationship as well as to monogamy as a structure that the couple is operating within. Katie continues saying, “*...dating helps you build a relationship with someone to possibly have a long term, happy marriage with them*” (Participant #16). Katie’s comment connects the theme of monogamy that is practiced in dating to the second theme of permanency, allowing for daters to test their partners and relationships for the long-term monogamy expected with marriage.

Additionally, the dating process further facilitates monogamy as participants’ involvement in the process was affected by their current relationship status. When asked if dating was important to her, Tamara replied, “*Dating isn't really important to me right now because I'm in a serious relationship with someone so we are past the dating stage and I no longer see myself being with anybody else*” (Participant #42). Tamara’s response highlights two cultural assumptions about dating: first, that dating takes place at the beginning of the relationship but after the couple becomes more serious and second, that once more committed, the couple moves into a different stage of the process where the couple is still participating in the timeline but is not searching for other potential partners as each individual has selected the person she hopes to continue being with for the foreseeable future.

Building on the relationship statuses that can disqualify people from the dating pool, when asked if dating was important to her, Kourtney said that, “*No. I'm married. Ask me again in*

*7 years when my daughter turns 16'* (Participant #27). Kourtney speaks about marriage as the reason that she is not currently dating, further supporting the narrative that serious relationships limit participants' ability or desire to date. For Kourtney, looking for a new romantic partner was not important to her at this time because she is married. Nevertheless, she invites the question to be asked again after her child is a teenager, possibly suggesting that Jenna might be looking for a new partner after her child is older (or, that dating will only be important again once her daughter is of the age to date). This speaks to a distal-already-spoken that relationships are predictable, permanent, and monogamous as she is married, committed, and has a child in this family unit, although her presumption that dating might increase in importance to her entertains a distal-not-yet-spoken that relationships can end and no longer be fulfilling for the partner, even after the relationship has transitioned to marriage and the couple has had children.

**Dating consists of pleasing an important other through sacrifice.** In the DFPP, participants perceived that their involvement in a romantic relationship would include making a sacrifice for their partner at some point in the relationship. The sacrifice was discussed in regards to different aspects of a relationship, ranging from the allocation of time to the decision to have children. Their discussion of the sacrifice included an expectation that at some point in the relationship a loss would take place, although the loss was defined differently by participants. Jackie described how her current goals helped shape her views on the importance of dating at present:

*No, because I think getting my degree and a good job is more important right now. And having to focus on school, work and other people in my life, I would not be able to give my significant other the attention and love they deserve. (Participant #36)*

For Jackie, her academic and professional goals are her focus, so her personal priorities do not include looking for a partner because she would not be able to sacrifice time in her schedule to ensure the relationship was successful at this time. In this example, Jackie recognizes the sacrifice of time a relationship would require of her schedule and removes herself from the dating pool, given that she would rather prioritize other aspects of her life at this time. Jackie concludes that a significant other deserves attention and love, which defines the time expectation involved in the sacrifice. Jackie is legitimizing the time commitments required in romantic relationships and deciding that working towards her college degree and future employment opportunities are more important focuses for her time at this stage in her life.

Another feature of sacrifice in a romantic relationship includes life decisions, such as whether or not to have children. Savannah spoke to this topic saying that the purpose of dating is, *“To eventually find someone to marry and have children with or if someone does not want children, just someone to share life with, have fun with, etc”* (Participant #4). Savannah speaks to a personal flexibility that allows for her decision on the topic of whether or not to have children to be a cooperative resolution. The agency of making the decision to have children is given to her future partner without hesitation, as Savannah offers an alternative plan for relational fulfillment if the couple decided not to have children. In this response, Savannah concludes that even without having children, the couple would still have fun sharing their life together as a couple in a serious, committed relationship. Additionally, connecting Savannah’s response to the second theme that dating is a path to permanency, Savannah includes an option similar to Melinda’s in that she hopes to marry someone and have children, but she also offers an additional scenario that if her partner does not want children, she would be satisfied in having a long-term partnership without children. Savannah’s distinction centers the permanency of the relationship

as the important aspect of her life, although she remains flexible to the options that the couple has as to the decision to create a family unit together.

The relational expectations and sacrifices were frequently communicated through members of their social network, almost exclusively from parents. Megan said, “*My parents want me to focus on my school and first learn to love myself and wait till I find the right person*” (Participant #10). Megan centers on the pressure from her parents to focus on herself before prioritizing dating or searching for a potential partner, likely in relation to the time commitment required. In this example, the sacrifices that are embedded in the process of dating are not communicated as worth the reward of finding a partner at this point in her life. The most common sacrifice that participants referenced was the time commitment of romantic partnerships. The potential of a person can be measured by their willingness to create (or adjust) time in their life for the individual they are dating. Rachel reflected:

*I know my father would want a man to essentially obsess over me and my every need. He is very old-school in that he wants me to be spoiled. He wants me to be in a romantic relationship where I am prioritized over everything else in my man's life, which I find unrealistic and unreasonable. But I just take it as my dad saying he loves me* (Participant #19)

In this example, Rachel indicates that her father expects her future partner to prioritize her over everything else in his life. This expectation of extreme time allocation was communicated to Rachel as a signal of a partner’s love and commitment to their relationship. Although Rachel indicates she thinks that those expectations are unrealistic for a relationship, the messaging of intense sacrifice is still communicated to her by an important member of her social network. That expectation is framed as a condition for fulfilling commitment and, even if the expectation is

eased, the assumption that romantic partners must prioritize their romantic partner in their life remains.

While some parents discouraged their children from dating during a time when they could be focused on themselves, other parents embraced the uncertainty of the process. Olivia stated:

*My mother told me that although you will find someone who you think you will be with for the rest of your life. You will probably find a few of those in different stages of your life as you grow and develop and learn what you like. Until you think you have reached your fullest self and then someone comes in and raises that bar even higher. That's your forever man. (Participant #31)*

Olivia's response speaks to the uncertainty that is expected when dating as well as the ultimate sacrifice that accompanies the person that her mother terms the "forever man." This expectation of loss connects the development of the relationship with the individual deduction that should be anticipated. This hierarchical understanding of adapting to meet the needs of your romantic partner and your relationship with that partner support the previous themes of predictability, permanency, and monogamy in the DFPP. As the relationship becomes more likely to be permanent, there is a common expectation that the couple is willing to adapt to create a lifestyle that supports both partners, and in Olivia's case, this adaption can be rising to meet the standards of the *forever man* so he can be a long-term fixture in her life.

### **Centrifugal Discourse: Dating is restrictive and impeding on true happiness**

In contrast to the DFPP, the discourse that dating is restrictive and impeding true happiness (DRITH) constructed women as actors who were empowered through adjusting the dating process to meet their current relationship needs. The centrifugal discourse was examined

with only women's survey responses for two reasons. First, the centrifugal discourse is inherently constructed from marginal viewpoints; meaning that participants whose views replicate the dominant discourse cannot be included in the creation of resistance to that central discourse. Second, men's responses in this study repeatedly validated the centripetal discourse further supporting the observation that their position is validated in the dominant discourse and that they have more privilege to exist there; in other words, their privilege within the status quo provides no motivation to resist the dominant discourse, which excludes their responses from the creation of a centrifugal discourse. Therefore, this portion of the results focuses only on women participants' responses (n=36).

The DRITH included women's concerns and alterations to the dating process to make the course for partner selection a safer and equitable process. Daters focused on challenging dating norms through the factors that were in their control including setting boundaries corresponding to their independent personal and professional timelines, recognizing the risks involved in the process in order to help mitigate them, and seeking partners that were interested in more equal partnerships. Through the discourse of DRITH, the women positioned themselves as active agents in the partner selection process instead of reactive participants in romance.

**Traditional timing is unrealistic for having personal independence.** In the DRITH, women described themselves as deciding not to date at certain times in their life because the process was too time consuming for their concurrent commitments. Jenna explained:

*Dating is not as important to me as of right now because I am more focused on my academics rather than romance. I feel that having a significant other would distract me from my current goals since I am easily distracted (although having a significant other to depend on would be nice) (Participant #39).*

Jenna speaks to how she is prioritizing her schooling over looking for or being in a romantic relationship at this time. Jenna elaborates, writing that being in a relationship at this time would take time away from her current goals. In this response, Jenna predicts that the distraction of a partner would directly impact the personal goals she is focused on; she recognizes that having a significant other would require an adjustment to her commitments that she is unwilling to accommodate at this time. Focusing on academics was a frequent reason for why single participants were not currently dating. While the narrative of falling in love includes an assumption that young adults are searching for a partner during their early 20s, women were challenging the DFPP by referencing their independent goals as important life accomplishments before finding a serious partner.

Cultivating independence through personal goals was a common theme in participant responses. When asked if dating is important to her now, Jackie stated:

*No, because I think getting my degree and a good job is more important right now. And having to focus on school, work and other people in my life, I would not be able to give my significant other the attention and love they deserve (Participant #36).*

In this example, Jackie explains that her focus right now is on the goals for her professional future and the other (non-romantic) commitments she currently has. Jackie's response entertains the possibility of having a romantic partner at some point in her life, but she recognizes that the timing is not right for that commitment at this point in her personal development. Melinda shared this sentiment, explaining, *"I'm mainly focused on my studies, however I do want to have a family at some point"* (Participant #34). Melinda's response includes much of the same information as Jackie's, affirming that her priorities include finishing her degree; however, after that accomplishment, she hopes to find a partner and start a family. Both women's responses

acknowledge the positive and fulfilling process of dating while also expanding the discourse around their participation the process by focusing on their independent aspirations first.

Whereas participants communicated that serious dating while in college was not conducive to their personal success, after their independent goals were completed, the search for a romantic partner could continue. Sarah discussed her dating timeline with the explanation that:

*before I did not date (in high school, middle school, etc) because I knew most likely the relationship would not last, and I wanted to make sure I am focused on schoolwork, etc. But now that I have things more figured out I was ready to date especially after meeting the right person it only felt a natural step to do. Dating was never something essential to me because my family always has given me the love and attention I needed therefore I did not feel lonely in order to start looking for a partner. but now since I am older I want to date. (Participant #38)*

Sarah talks about the independence she had throughout her time as a young adult as she focused on school and other activities until she reached a point where she was ready to start looking for a partner. Once Sarah was older and had already focused on accomplishing her own goals, she felt like she was ready to find a partner as a natural next step.

Daters created boundaries around their identity as an aspect of independence that would promote self-development before settling in with a romantic partner. Megan shared that, “*My parents want me to focus on my school and first learn to love myself and wait till I find the right person*” (Participant #10). Megan discusses the messages from her parents that she has received that encourage her to focus on her academics and self-love before finding a partner. Megan’s focus on these areas delay the search for a romantic partner in order for Megan to work towards personal achievements. Lucy similarly wrote that, “*DATING IS NOT IMPORTANT TO ME*

*NOW, BECAUSE I AM REALLY FOCUSED ON MY INDIVIDUAL GROWTH AT THE MOMENT*” (Participant #16). The participants position dating and personal growth as activities that cannot coexist at the same time in their life: Either the individual needs to focus on herself, which delays her involvement in the dating process, or the dater has already experienced personal development and is ready to date.

When asked if dating was important to her now, Lisa explained, *“Yes because everybody always dreams of being with their "perfect" partner and right now, I'm ready to date...I have worked on myself to become a better person and that's the most important relationship, with yourself”* (Participant #40). In this response, Lisa positions herself at the end of her personal growth timeline; that is, she is ready to date because she has spent time working on herself in preparation to re-enter the dating pool. The daters prioritize their independence both for the betterment of themselves and their future partner. Instead of passively participating in the search for a romantic partner, the women adapt the timeline to provide space for their professional training and ambition. This alteration to the dating timeline resists the DFPP as the sole source of fulfillment in a woman’s life and provides messaging to encourage women that their independence can be just as fulfilling and positive as a romantic partner.

**Dating can be unsafe.** An additional theme in the DRITH was concern for personal safety. Daters recounted that the process of dating was vulnerable for women and that finding a partner who valued consent was important for their well-being. For example, Hailey reflected:

*Yes, I think there should be rules about intimacy in relationships. An example of an intimacy rule is to not do anything unless given consent to do so. If a couple ever decides to have sex for the first time, both partners would have to be okay doing that* (Participant #9).

Participants often included consent as an important intimacy rule and foundational aspect of a prosperous relationship. While the reward of finding a romantic partner was a worthwhile exploration for women, concerns regarding the risk associated with the process were present during their interactions with potential companions. The uncertainty of safety led daters to discuss and define consent as a crucial aspect of romantic interactions. Olivia added, “*Intimacy is feeling safe and allowing the other person full vulnerability with your body*” (Participant #31). Megan continued, “*I think some rules is definitely having consent and making sure both party [parties] are conformable with everything occurring*” (Participant #10).

While the term consent was often used with regards to sexual acts, the concept was also applied more broadly to the negotiation of a healthy relationship. Bailee explained, “*Yes, an intimacy rule would be that if one of them were to say no or stop, that it would cease to continue*” (Participant #28). Whether the participants included the word in their response or worked to define the term in their utterance, the expectation of safety was communicated as a relationship expectation. Maggie wrote, “*I mean an obvious one to me is that if the feeling to be intimate at any given point is not reciprocated by both parties then there should no problem for it no[t] to occur in that time. Other than that I see no rules*” (Participant #31). In this example, Maggie describes an appropriate reaction to not receiving consent during intimacy, which is to stop whatever action is taking place. Katie’s responds similarly, “*The rule is to make sure they consent about what they want to do or not to do*” (Participant #14). Katie’s description involves a more active consent process that where both partners share their boundaries and expectations, leaving little room for either partner to be unsure about what activities might make the other feel unsafe or uncomfortable. These women’s prioritizing of safety precautions responds to the

DFPP, which is centered on predictability, monogamy, and sacrifice without the communication of consent.

Women repeatedly spoke about the importance of consent in their romantic relationship, highlighting the agreement as an increasingly important aspect of romantic relationships. Lisa detailed that important intimacy rules include, “*Consent and being comfortable. If one person is intimate and ready but the other partner isn't, it's not that healthy of a relationship*” (Participant #40). In this response, Lisa explains that healthy romantic relationships include consent and comfortability, which extends the conversation about consent past the initial first dates and conceptualizes consent as an ongoing process in a romantic partnership. The more expansive understanding of consent invites partners to recognize consent as an ongoing aspect of their relationship, or time with potential partners that could transition into a relationship. Carly responded that the most important intimacy rule is to, “*...respect each other. Don't do something without asking*” (Participant #5). Carly's statement builds on the more expansive definition of consent that can be integrated into relationships to encourage more safe and equitable practices. With the recognition that dating can be unsafe, women's requirement of consent communication with partners supports the DRITH by displaying the dangerous dating norms that exist when the DFPP goes unchallenged.

Women's frequent discussion of consent resist the DFPP by disrupting the traditional dating discourse with a call for safer practices for daters. Vanessa explained that dating is not as important to her now, saying:

*Not as much as it used to be. I am divorced and have a child. So I already got the things I wanted when I was younger. My marriage was very violent. My peace and quiet is worth*

*more to me now than trying to date and possibly inviting drama back into my life*

(Participant #19)

Vanessa's utterance recognizes that she has previously accomplished relational milestones like getting married and having a child while it also speaks to her evaluation that the risk to her safety is not currently worth participating in finding a partner. By removing herself from the dating process, Vanessa reduces her risk of experiencing unsafe behaviors that are intertwined in process of finding a romantic partner. The increased conversation about consent interjects women's concern for their safety in the DFPP. Hailey continues:

*My parents would want to date a good guy that respects me and my family. They would also want me to be with a person that always asks for permission/consent. They would also want me to be with someone that is committed, and also someone that I am going to marry. To summarize, they would want to me to have a serious romantic relationship*

(Participant #9).

This example illustrates the way in which consent can be included as a foundational element of a romantic relationship. Hailey's response speaks to the predictability, permanency, and monogamous nature of long-term relationships while also including the negotiation of expectations and permission as key activities for partners to participate in. Additionally, Hailey signals that her social network would want her partner to ask for consent at all points in their relationship, further expanding the consent conversation to relational aspects besides sex. Dater's recognition and resistance of dating as an unsafe practice emphasizes the practical impact that women experience from circulating the DRITH by resisting harmful and often unchallenged dating norms.

**Women need equal partners.** The final theme in the DRITH discourse is that women need partners who are willing to share the responsibilities, support, and financial expectations of a relationship. The desire for women to be equal partners resists the historical restraints that women have experienced when involved in traditional, heterosexual relationships. The participants identified a need to share power in their relationship to support their personal independence and the health of their relationship. Women described their ideal relationship as one in which they were matching the contributions of their partner. Melinda responded that her parents wanted her to be in “*a relationship where I’m treated as an equal. No one is bossing me around. No abuse. Financially stable. They just want me to be happy*” (Participant #33). With this exemplar, the practice of being in an equal relationship updates the general expectations of the partnership. Melinda lists that her parents would want her to be treated as an equal, have the agency to make her own decisions, be safe, and be in a financially stable environment. Seeking equal partnerships positively impacts multiple aspects of the relationship including, including but not limited to, safety and partner independence.

While women discussed needing equal partners, they did not always have examples that allowed for them to see what these relationships could look like before they were looking for a partner. Kourtney explained that:

*I already have the type of romantic relationship my parents could have ever asked for for me. They were terrible examples - examples of what NOT to do. My spouse is incredible: he is there for me when I need him emotionally, physically, and financially. He provides for our family. He tries really hard to do better when he messes up. We are an awesome team (Participant #27).*

Kourtney's metaphor that she and her husband are a team exemplifies the partnership that women described as the ideal romantic relationship. In this sense, the couple was better as a team because they shared the responsibilities of their relationship, household, and their family unit.

Kourtney continued:

*I think that men and women share mostly the same role, and if one partner is lacking a little in their role, they can help their partner learn how to do it better. For example, sharing feelings, or initiating sex (Participant #27).*

The daters discussed how equality in romantic relationships benefitted both partners, as the focus of each person could be on how to better support their significant other instead of how they could conform to rigid gender roles that they did not support. Sarah explained, "*again, not a strong believer of gender roles, therefore, both partners should partake in supporting each other, planning dates or occasions, paying, etc*" (Participant #38). Sarah clarifies that she does not believe in conforming to gender roles and is instead focusing on how both partners can support each other through alternating shared tasks and relationship duties. Sarah continued, "*I do not necessarily believe there are separate roles depending on the gender of the partner, but if thought traditionally, perhaps, supporting and being the #1 fan of your partner's accomplishments and hobbies, work, etc.*" (Participant #38). In this response, Sarah clarifies that were she thinking with a traditional mindset, she would describe a woman's role in a relationship to be supporting the partner's professional and personal accomplishments. This utterance both validates the distal-already-spoken that constructs women as the primary caregivers and providers of support while also pivoting away from that discourse as she acknowledges that gender roles are not as realistic as they once were.

Women regularly referenced gender roles in their survey answers while also working to counter the usefulness of their construction. Natasha said, *“I believe that the role of both genders should be equal. Both should have respect and consideration for each other”* (Participant #5). Natasha includes the phrase “gender roles” but defines what that means by including that the roles are equal and the behaviors in a relationship should not differ based on the gender of each individual. This new definition is more expansive than the stringent guidelines expected in traditional gender roles. The more expansive imagining of gender roles was further discussed by participants such as Jackie, who wrote, *“I believe the roles of a man should be the same as a woman. That is to be there for your significant other, give them my love and support, contribute to their happiness, keep them safe and sound”* (Participant #36). Jackie’s response touches on all three centrifugal themes speaking to the need for support and happiness, which often comes from a partner harnessing their independence, the focus on keeping a partner safe, and finally, the call for equality of partner or gender roles in the relationship. To conclude, Jackie’s contribution ties together the ways in which women resistance the discourse of DRITH by adjusting the dating process to be a more safe, equitable, and productive process in their own lives.

Women need equal partners in order for dating to be a less restrictive practice that can negatively affect their lives. The resistance of the DFPP centers on the practices of resistance that allow for women to operate as active participants in their romantic lives. Navigating questions of monogamy, long-term capability, attraction, and intimacy is only made more intense by the concern for independence, safety, and partner equality. Women’s desire to adjust the dating timeline to better fit their lives is an act of resistance that entertains, counters, and negates the dominant discourse that dating is a fulfilling and positive process without adjustments.

### **Discursive Interplay**

Following the contrapuntal analysis of the data, I then examined how the centripetal and centrifugal discourses compete with each other. The analysis of the discursive interplay was focused on how women adjusted and expanded discourse of the dating process to better support their personal needs (e.g. safety, independence, and relational equality) when looking for a romantic partner. When using RDT, after the discourse(s) are identified, the next step is illuminating how “discourses that are in competition, [as the discourses] struggle to gain dominance” (Scharp & Thomas, 2016). As Baxter (2011) argued, the meaning-making occurs as discourses clash, or conflict, with each other either directly in the utterance chain or as the discourse evolves over time.

As discourses compete, the struggle is unbalanced as the centripetal and centrifugal discourses are assigned varying degrees of power. Centripetal discourses reflect the dominant ideology of the social system and often exist without challenge because the discourse supports the status quo. In opposition, centrifugal discourses resist the dominant discourse as incomplete, unchanging, or harmful to people who are on the margins of society and are not fully represented within the dominant discourse. As a centripetal and centrifugal discourse(s) compete, the interplay looks different depending on whether the struggle takes place directly in the utterance or as an evolving process over time (Scharp & Thomas, 2016). In the discourses of DFPP and DRITH, synchronic interplay took place, as two or more discourses competed within an utterance (Baxter, 2011; Scharp and Hall, 2019). Entertaining, countering, and negating were all present in the discourse.

### **Entertaining**

The discourses of DFPP and DRITH competed synchronically through the entertaining form of interplay. This form of interplay is present in the competing discourses when “one

discourse acknowledges the possibility of another” (Scharp and Hall, 2019, p. 68). When participants entertain the centrifugal discourse, some resistance of the centripetal discourse is taking place, but the ideology of the status quo is still present. When participants were entertaining both discourses in their communication, the liberation from the dominant discourse is relatively low. With this data set, entertaining took place when women acknowledged that the traditional timing for dating is unrealistic for having personal independence, although they still hoped to participate in partner selection soon after successfully completing their goals. For example, Jenna expressed:

*Dating is not as important to me as of right now because I am more focused on my academics rather than romance. I feel that having a significant other would distract me from my current goals since I am easily distracted (although having a significant other to depend on would be nice).* (Participant #39)

Jenna defines that dating is not important to her now because she is currently focused on pursuing other goals. In this response, Jenna simply delays the timeline for when she wants a romantic partner as she prioritizes the goal of graduating college before looking for a significant other. The discourse of DFPP is still intertwined in the utterance and Jenna explains that having the support of a partner would be a positive addition to her life after she finishes her current accomplishment.

Melinda’s response shared a similar sentiment that having a partner and starting a family will be important milestones to her eventually. Melinda shared, “*I’m mainly focused on my studies, however I do want to have a family at some point*” (Participant #33). Both Jenna and Melinda entertain the DRITH by resisting the traditional timing of dating by delaying their involvement in the process to focus on personal achievements, and they speak to the importance

of ultimately finding a fulfilling relationship once their schooling is completed. Entertaining both the discourses of DRITH and DFPP allows for the women to make adjustments to the dominant discourse (by delaying their involvement in dating process) while also conforming to the ideology that dating is a positive path to permanency and fulfillment. Alyssa was more open to dating while focusing on her independent accomplishments when she stated, *“I think it would rank equally as important as a successful strong career to have a strong relationship to build a future with someone”* (Participant #32). In this reply, Alyssa speaks to her performance in both the personal and professional areas as equally important to her future. This response does relatively little to challenge the dominant DFPP discourse and greatly acknowledges the viability of both the centripetal and centrifugal discourses.

When discourses compete at the level of entertaining interplay, the process is relatively low in the resistant potential of the utterance because both discourses are present in the communication. The participants’ entertaining of the DRITH still supported and expanded the ideology of DFPP as the women continued to include that they hoped to participate in the dating process soon after the completion of their individual goals. Entertaining both the centripetal and centrifugal discourses is an act of adjustment to the discourse of DFPP but does little to counter the restrictive nature of the process. The speaker is able to take pieces of the DRITH that assist them in delaying their participation in the dating process, but they ultimately become full participants, further expanding the DFPP’s hegemonic reach.

### **Countering**

Countering takes place “when one discourse replaces another discourse, often marked by the words like ‘but’ or ‘even’” (Scharp & Hall, 2019, p. 67). This form of discursive interplay is more expansive in the transformative potential as more than one discourse is acknowledged in

the utterance, but the speaker prioritizes the DRITH. There were multiple examples of countering throughout the responses; for example, Olivia stated:

*Some people think the purpose of dating is to marry and that may be true as you are becoming an adult but for me, there is no set purpose. Some relationships are just for fun, some are dating to marry, and some are cause your bond is so close you feel like dating makes sense (Participant #31).*

Olivia acknowledges that while certain people look to date to find a long-term partner as they transition into adulthood, she does not have a set purpose for dating like others do. With this statement, Olivia both references the distal-already-spoken about dating that is centered in the DFPP while also replacing that discourse with her own reality that she enters romantic relationships for a variety of reasons that are not limited to her desire to get married. Christina also countered the dominant discourse around intimacy in relationships, countering that connection includes, “*sex, but also just sharing each others deepest parts of one another, meaning insecurities, secrets, fears, etc*” (Participant #44). Both Olivia and Christina acknowledge the expectations of a romantic relationship that are explained with the centripetal discourse while also countering those forms of relating with options that better support the relationships they want to participate in.

Countering also occurred in discussion of intimacy rules and safety in romantic relationships. Lisa explained that, “*Consent and being comfortable. If one person is intimate and ready but the other partner isn't, it's not that healthy of a relationship*” (Participant #40).

Distinguishing consent as a factor between a healthy and unhealthy relationship responds to DFPP and the lack of discussion about safety in the dominant discourse. Women, including Lisa,

responded to the DFPP with the addition that dating can be an unsafe practice, which can put daters at risk for intimate partner violence. Hailey added:

*Yes, I think there should be rules about intimacy in relationships. An example of an intimacy rule is to not do anything unless given consent to do so. If a couple ever decides to have sex for the first time, both partners would have to be okay doing that (Participant #9).*

When countering takes place, the discursive competition is more resistant to the centripetal discourse because that ideology is replaced with a new, more expansive account of what can take place. While the dominant ideology forwards that dating is a positive and fulfilling process, women are able to counter that narrative by communicating that dating can take many different forms that do not follow a path to permanency, monogamy, or include sacrifice. Replacing the discourse of DFPP with the centrifugal discourse of DRITH illuminates the challenges that women have to navigate when participating in the traditional dating process and works to mitigate women's experience navigating these dialectical tensions with the creation of a more equitable dating process.

### **Negating**

The third form of discursive interplay is when the centrifugal discourse directly cancels out the centripetal discourse. In this study, negating took place when the women denied any involvement with the expectations of dating or relationship behavior that was outlined in the discourse of DFPP. Most frequently, women used the strategy of negating when discussing the need for them to have equal romantic partners in a relationship. Melinda explained that members of her social network would want her to have, "*A relationship where I'm treated as an equal. No one is bossing me around. No abuse. Financially stable. They just want me to be happy*"

(Participant #33). Melinda emphasized the boundaries that are important to her in a relationship as she states that she needs to be treated an equal, not be given directions by her partner, and be in a relationship without abuse or control. The answer opposes the possibility that these qualities are a part of a healthy or fulfilling relationship, further supporting the discourse of DRITH that includes the harmful realities that women can experience in a romantic relationship.

Negating also took place around other factors in relationship including partner compatibility and consent. Christina shared that she learned that a person should, “*never to change yourself to fit someone else's desires*” (Participant #44). Christina’s statement directly negates the DFPP theme that dating consists of pleasing an important other through sacrifice. Christina directly challenges this notion by responding with the advice that an individual should not change themselves to fit a partner’s expectations. This advice negates the discourse of DFPP that details personal sacrifice as an aspect of participating in the dating process and finding a romantic partner.

Vanessa’s response included another example of negating when she said, “*Also, there should be NO sex or touching unless both people want it*” (Participant #17). When synchronic interplay takes place, as it does in Vanessa’s utterance, researchers use the strategy of unfolding to ask what this utterance is responding to, which is a process that conceptualizes the utterance as a part of a larger conversation that is happening about the topic (Baxter, 2011). Within this response, the utterance is responding to a breach of safety and a situation where consent is not respected. While the need for partners to participate in consent conversations was included in the DRITH, the DFPP discourse did not directly address safety or consent, which positions the response as negating a concern that is included in the dominant discourse while being talked about indirectly. With this negating, women’s concern for safety is one piece of the large DFPP

that positions romantic relationships as a positive environment for women while the DRITH discourse reveals that the positivity does not fully consider the risks that women are exposed to in romantic partnerships.

### **Research Question 1: What messages do young adults receive regarding dating?**

Overall, the illumination of the discourses additionally answered the research questions for this study. Young adults receive messages about dating that illustrate the process as a fulfilling and positive occurrence for those involved. Participants frequently referenced the distal-already-spoken(s) about the operation of partner selection including the sexual script that allows for dating to be predictable, encourages relationships to be long-term and monogamous, and consists of pleasing an important other through sacrifice. The young adults received the messages throughout elementary and middle school, before many of them had begun dating themselves. Hannah shared that she learned about dating, *“In middle school, some of my older peers were dating and would share their stories”* (Participant #34). The stories and advice that daters heard from their social network informed their expectations of the dating process and how to start a romantic relationship. The shared knowledge of the practice allowed for daters to feel like they knew the process so well that they understood what the interactions would look like, even on their first date. The predictability of the interaction resulted in daters responding that the gendered expectations, the activities for dates, and the general timeline of relationships was communicated before the interactions took place.

Participants elaborated that the messages they received about dating created an agenda that included the notion that successful couples eventually got married. As Jackie responded, the purpose of dating is, *“To find someone who you love romantically, makes you happy and loves you back as well as someone who you want to be with for the rest of your life”* (Participant #36).

The messages that young adults received about dating supported the ideology of monogamy and long-term partnerships that have traditionally been the heteronormative structure for family units. Embedded in these messages are expectations that romantic relationships should be permanent commitments to one partner. The serious trajectory of these relationships amplifies the social and relational obligation that daters encounter as they are looking for relationship. This obligation to prioritize a romantic relationship as a building block for one's future contributes to the final theme of the DFPP discourse which was that dating consists of pleasing an important other through sacrifice.

Daters discussed that members of their social network, including their parents and close friends, talked about the sacrifices they had previously made for their partners to support the relationship and/or the sacrifices that would likely be expected of them once entering a relationship. These sacrifices centered on the negotiation of partner independence and external time commitments. Participants spoke about the time allocation that romantic relationships require as a commitment that was expected of romantic partner; meaning that once someone was in a relationship, the relationship should be a priority for them regardless of any other accomplishments or goals that are happening in their life. Allocating time to one's partner was communicated as a positive expectation of a relationship because having a partner was a long-term investment that would help the individual be successful in their personal life. Messaging about how to date, when to date, and what the process should look like was communicated often and early to participants to the point where the centripetal discourse consisted of clear expectations including the predictability of the process, the long-term and monogamous nature of romantic relationships, and the presumption that partners would need to be open to adjustments to their life if they were no longer single.

**Research Question 2: What are the dialectical tensions women experience? & Research Question 3: How do women navigate these dialectical tensions?**

Women experience dialectical tensions involving concerns for independence, safety, and relationship structure. These dialectical tensions were highlighted in the discourse that dating is restrictive and impeding true happiness (DRITH). Beginning with women's concern for their independence, daters acknowledged that the traditional timeline for dating was currently unrealistic for being able to accomplish their professional goals. As Jenna explained:

*Dating is not as important to me as of right now because I am more focused on my academics rather than romance. I feel that having a significant other would distract me from my current goals since I am easily distracted (although having a significant other to depend on would be nice) (Participant #39).*

Women described their experience delaying their involvement in the dating process because their priority was to focus on completing their schooling and finding a job before looking for a romantic partner. With this theme, women navigated the dialectical tension of achieving professional and personal independence by entertaining the discourse of DRITH while conceding that they will ultimately seek fulfillment from finding a romantic partner. One form of navigating the dialectical tensions was for women to support both discourses by adjusting their behavior to be resistant at one point in their life (when they are working on professional goals) and then supporting the dominant discourse (by seeking a romantic partner and following the hegemonic dating patterns after completing their professional goals).

A second dialectical tension that women experienced centered around their realization that dating can be unsafe. Daters spoke about the types of intimacy that are common in romantic relationships, including emotional and physical connection between partners as well as the risk

that partners experience if they feel uncomfortable in these situations. Women responded that consent was an important aspect of romantic interactions so that they could ensure that they felt safe if the intimacy progressed to a physical stage. Olivia shared that, “*Intimacy is feeling safe and allowing the other person full vulnerability with your body*” (Participant #31). Additional daters shared this sentiment and spoke about the importance of safety, consent, and communication in their relationships. The women navigated the dialectical tension of staying safe while participating in the dating process by countering the discourse of DFPP and creating their own relationship priority that included consent as a foundational part of their romantic relationship.

The third dialectical tension that women experienced involved the preferred structure of relationships. While the traditional structure of a heterosexual relationship included rigid gender roles that informed the division of labor and responsibilities in a household, women spoke about their desire to find a partner who was amenable to building an equal relationship where both individuals had shared contributions to the unit. Women navigated this dialectical tension through the negation of the DFPP discourse that provided women less mobility in relationships. Daters discussed the importance of finding an equal partner who would support their independence and safety in a relationship as they replaced the dominant discourse that portrayed partners as statically unequal. The dialectical tensions that women experienced varied both in topic and in the way in which they navigated those tension, which resulted in a hierarchy of resistant practices ranging from entertaining to completely negating the dominant discourse. All these responses contributed to challenging the hegemonic position of women in romantic relationships by either entertaining, countering or negating the discourse of DFPP.

## **Chapter Five:**

### **Discussion**

#### **Theoretical Implications**

The findings in this study produced multiple theoretical implications. From an early age, young adults learn that dating is a personally fulfilling and positive process that exists on a socially constructed timeline that includes the distal-already spoken(s) that successful involvement in the partner selection results in marriage. The stories and advice that daters repeatedly referenced illustrated their understanding of the dating process as a chain of interactions that were communicated by their social network often years before the individuals were searching for a potential mate. An important advancement included recognition that the communication of dating norms adversely impacted women's dating experience as they described concerns to protect their independence and personal safety through the discourse that dating is restrictive and impeding true happiness (DRITH).

To investigate the dialectical tensions that women experience while dating, a contrapuntal analysis was conducted that produced two discourses: the centripetal discourse that dating is a fulfilling process (DFPP) and the centrifugal discourse that dating is resistive and impeding true happiness. Identifying these discourses informed the conditions that women encounter when dating including the themes of (a) predictability, (b) permanency, (c) monogamy, (d) and pleasing an important other through sacrifice. Further validating these supports the taken-for-granted ideas about how individuals should date and what the process of partner selection should look like. In response to the DFPP, women spoke about their experiences reclaiming their agency while dating by voicing that (a) the traditional timeline of dating is unrealistic for having personal independence, (b) dating can be unsafe, and (C) women need equal partners.

Highlighting women's experiences while dating contributes to scholars' understanding of the limitation of the current dating script and the resistive practices that women use to better exist within the dating process.

Additionally, this study contributes to RDT research with a group that is marginalized by a set of actions instead of specific relation structure. While previous RDT research has studied adoptive parents (Baxter et al, 2014; Baxter et al, 2012), step parents (Braithwaite & Baxter, 2006), and children who are estranged from their parents (Scharp & Thomas, 2016), there has not been an RDT study on the dating process, and furthermore, how women make adjustments to the dating process to produce a more safe and equal way to find a partner. This contribution advances the theoretical potential to include not only established relationships but also the ways in which relationships develop as an additional measure of behavior informed by hegemonic ideology. Future research can further investigate how people navigate dating norms at the intersection of multiple identities in addition to gender including sexuality, ability status, and race. As the centripetal discourse validates the position of individuals who hold societal privilege, examining the experiences of individuals who hold marginalized identities further contributes to our understanding of their experience in romantic relationships and resistance of the status quo.

### **Practical Implications**

In addition to the theoretical implications of the study, there are multiple practical implications from the research. At an interpersonal level, supporting women in the designing of their relationships is a positive way to encourage daters to move through the partner selection process on their own terms. When stories about dating continue to be repeated without criticism, the information can be translated as advice that encourages daters to exist within the parameters

of how relationships have historically been expected to exist. Women were able to construct relationships on their own terms when people in their social network prioritized their needs as an individual before encouraging them to be looking for a partner. Even a relatively simple adjustment in communication can promote women entering the dating process on their own terms with an understanding that their independence, safety, and preferred relational structure are valid foundations for their dating practices.

On a societal level, women's resistance of the dominant discourse is taking place because, at least in part, the traditional dating process is not completely representative of women's experiences while looking for a partner. While the centripetal discourse is supported by the distal-already-spoken(s) including the traditional sexual script (Metts & Spitzberg, 1996; Larson, 2010; Serewicz & Gale, 2007), these aspects of relationships do not have to be the only way that romantic couples can relate. Expanding the way in which we talk about romance, relationships, and partners allows for romance to be a more individualized process where each person searches for the type of partner and relationship that they are best suited for. Expanding the relational options that individuals can engage with more evenly divides the labor of opposition among all daters instead of placing the responsibility with those who deviate from the traditional script.

### **Study Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

The research study had limitations including the sample, survey questions, and reduction of the data set. Even with the student diversity at the large, southwest university from which the study recruited its participants, the participants were mostly white, heterosexual women. While the research study was focused on women's experiences while dating, a more diverse sample in regard to race/ethnicity and sexuality would have positively contributed to the study's findings.

Critical, RDT research is especially productive when highlighting marginalized voices whose positionality is not represented in the dominant discourse around any given topic. Making space for more intersectional research will increase scholarly understanding on how women of color and queer women navigate and resist dating practices. Future studies should include the isolation of particular identity groups to compare the centrifugal discourses of a variety of marginalized groups to analyze overarching discursive resistance. An example for future research would be focusing on bisexual and pansexual women's experiences dating people of different gender identities to highlight the unique messages these women hear and the dialectical tensions they navigate while looking for a romantic partner.

Another limitation of the study was the wide range of questions asked in the survey. Since this research study was one of the first studies to examine the dating process using RDT and a contrapuntal analysis, the survey questions were largely exploratory. For future studies, including fewer survey questions but requesting longer response answers would be helpful in collecting longer, narrative answers. The questions that were most helpful in receiving story-like responses included the questions about what dating advice they had received, if there were intimacy rules in romantic relationships, and what type of relationships they thought their parents and best friends would want them to be in. Additional questions that would be valuable to the study would include directly asking about their use of monogamy in romantic relationships and inquiring about how their views on relationships have changed since they first learned about dating. Also, in the current research study, each survey question included a text box where participants could type in their answers, but some participants answered the questions more completely than others. To encourage longer responses, having a minimum text limit would be

helpful so that participants could not answer with a one word response, which happened in this study.

Finally, collecting only survey data for the study greatly reduced the number of women's narrative data that was available for analysis. Survey data is more productive in capturing frequency and the occurrence of a phenomenon, which better supported the centripetal discourse. After the Covid-19 pandemic is addressed and the research lab at the large, southwest university is re-opened, I hope to conduct interviews with women who are actively dating to increase the data set and support for the centrifugal discourses including the themes that the traditional timing is unrealistic for women creating personal independence, dating can be unsafe, and women need equal partners in romantic relationships. Hearing additional women's stories about their experiences in the dating process will increase the richness of the qualitative data and contribute to the future research on how women adjust and resist the traditional dating process.

The contributions of the current study include highlighting the dialectical tensions that women still experience when looking for a romantic partner and how women navigate these tensions by expanding the discourse around the dating process through discursive entertaining and/or resisting the dominant monologue through countering or negating practices. While RDT research primarily looked at interpersonal relationships, expanding the scholarship to examine how women challenge a process broadens the future contributions of the theory. The findings from this study expand the topics that scholars can use RDT to investigate and further highlight the ways in which hegemonic discourse impacts the lives and increases the social labor of women.

**Appendix A: IRB Approval Document**



**UNLV Social/Behavioral IRB – Non-Committee Review Approval Notice**

DATE:

TO: FROM:

PROTOCOL TITLE: SUBMISSION TYPE:

ACTION: APPROVAL DATE: NEXT REPORT DUE: REVIEW TYPE:

February 25, 2020

Jennifer Guthrie, PhD  
UNLV Social/Behavioral IRB

[1521578- 3 & 4] Societal Messages about Dating Experiences Revision

APPROVED  
February 25, 2020  
February 24, 2023  
Non-Committee Review, Expedited #6/#7

Interview Participant Compensation (15 allowable participants): \$20 Amazon gift card raffle, 1/15 chance.

This study was reviewed with the Flexibility Policy (SOP 3.08). This is done for studies that are no greater than minimal risk and for studies with no federal funding or plans for submitting for federal funding. If either of these stipulations change, the researcher will be required to submit a new protocol for review without the flexibility policy in place.

PLEASE NOTE:

Upon approval, the research team is responsible for conducting the research as stated in the protocol most recently reviewed and approved, which shall include using the most recently submitted Informed Consent/Assent forms and recruitment materials.

Should there be any change to the protocol, it will be necessary to submit a Modification Form through ORI – Human Subjects. No changes may be made to the existing protocol until modifications have been approved.

ALL UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risk to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NONCOMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this protocol must be reported promptly to this office.

Due to the revision of the regulations at 45CFR46, Continuing Review for Expedited studies has now been removed. Therefore, the 1 year expiration date has been eliminated. Instead, you will notice a "Next Report Due" date, which will now be completed with a 3 year period. You will be notified prior to the 3 year "Next Report Due" date to submit a "Continuing Review/Progress Report" if you wish to continue with your study or if your study is complete.

- 1 -

Generated on IRBNet

All approvals from appropriate UNLV offices regarding this research must be obtained prior to initiation of this study (e.g., IBC, COI, Export Control, OSP, Radiation Safety, Clinical Trials Office, etc.).

If you have questions, please contact the Office of Research Integrity – Human Subjects at IRB@unlv.edu or call 702-895-2794. Please include your protocol title and IRBNet ID in all correspondence.

Office of Research Integrity – Human Subjects  
4505 Maryland Parkway . Box 451047 . Las Vegas, Nevada 89154-1047 (702) 895-2794 . FAX: (702) 895-0805 . IRB@unlv.edu

## **Appendix B: Recruitment Announcement**

The UNLV Communication Studies department and researcher Brooke Wolfe invite you to participate in a research study regarding romantic messages in dating and communication of romantic behaviors with friends and family. The title of the study is Societal Messages about Dating Experiences. The purpose of the study is to examine how societal messages are reflected in people's, and specifically women's, experiences with dating and romantic relationships. Participants will complete an online survey that will take 15 to 30 minutes to finish. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are at least 18 years of age or older and you are enrolled in a course that is eligible to participate in the study. If at any time during the study you wish to withdraw your participation, you are able to do so without penalty. To sign up to participate in the study, please go to <https://unlv-comm.sona-systems.com> on a laptop or desktop computer to request an account or sign into the system using your established account information.

After completing the online survey, you will be asked if you are interested in participating in a follow-up interview. If you are interested, please click the link provided on the last question of the survey and provide your contact information to show your interest in participating. The follow-up interview will take approximately 30 to 60 minutes to complete. Participants will be asked to complete an interview if they are at least 18 years of age or older, are enrolled in a course that is eligible to participate in this study, identify as a woman, and are actively dating. Interviews will take place at the UNLV Maryland campus and qualified participants will be randomly selected to complete a follow-up interview.

Research credit for your introductory Communication Studies course may be awarded for your participation in the study. Additionally, participants who are invited and complete an

interview will be given a chance to win an Amazon gift card worth \$20. You will have a chance of approximately 1 in 15 to win the gift card. The drawing for the gift card will take place within one week of the last interview and by May 1<sup>st</sup>. Brooke Wolfe will notify the winner of the gift card via email that they can pick up the gift card at the Communication Studies Front Office in Greenspun Hall (GUA 4150). If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please contact Brooke Wolfe (the student researcher) at [wolfeb1@unlv.nevada.edu](mailto:wolfeb1@unlv.nevada.edu) for more information. You are also able to contact Dr. Jennifer Guthrie (Principal Investigator) at [jennifer.guthrie@unlv.edu](mailto:jennifer.guthrie@unlv.edu).

## Appendix C: Informed Consent Document



### INFORMED CONSENT

Department of Communication Studies

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**TITLE OF STUDY:** Societal Messages about Dating Experiences

**INVESTIGATOR(S):** Dr. Jennifer Guthrie (Principal), Brooke Wolfe

For questions or concerns about the study, you may contact Dr. Jennifer Guthrie at [Jennifer.guthrie@unlv.edu](mailto:Jennifer.guthrie@unlv.edu) and Brooke Wolfe at [wolfeb1@unlv.nevada.edu](mailto:wolfeb1@unlv.nevada.edu).

For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, any complaints or comments regarding the manner in which the study is being conducted, contact **the UNLV Office of Research Integrity – Human Subjects at 702-895-2794, toll free at 888-581-2794 or via email at [IRB@unlv.edu](mailto:IRB@unlv.edu)**.

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#### Purpose of the Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to examine how societal messages are reflected in people's, and specifically women's, experiences with dating and romantic relationships. The study focuses on the stories that are told about dating, the advice that daters receive when dating, and how daters talk about their experiences with friends and family.

#### Participants

You are being asked to participate in the study because you fit this criteria: you are least 18 years of age or older and you are enrolled in a course that is eligible to participate in this study.

#### Procedures

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following: complete an online survey. The survey will take about 15 to 30 minutes to complete. Questions and entries will focus on stories and advice you have heard about romantic relationships and how you talk about romantic relationships with your friends and family. A follow up interview will be available for qualified participants but is not a requirement to receive full research credit for the study.

### **Benefits of Participation**

There may be no direct benefits to you as a participant in the study, but you might find it rewarding to reflect on dating in general.

### **TITLE OF STUDY: Societal Messages about Dating Experiences**

### **Risks of Participation**

There are risks involved in all research studies. This study may include only minimal risks, such as psychological distress and discomfort. To minimize distress and discomfort, you will have the opportunity to not answer any survey or interview question you would not like to answer. You are in control of your disclosure and do not need to disclose any information that could be upsetting to you.

### **Cost /Compensation**

There will be no financial cost to you to participate in this study.

If you are participating in this study for a Communication Studies course that offers opportunities to earn research credit, you will be compensated for your time with research credit from your course instructor. Your research credit will be updated in the Communication Studies Research Participation System within 1 week of participation.

If you are not enrolled in a course that offers opportunities to earn research credit by participating in a Communication Studies research study, no compensation is available.

### **Confidentiality**

All information gathered in this study will be kept as confidential as possible. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could link you to this study. All records will be stored in a locked facility at UNLV for 5 years after completion of the study. After the storage time, the information gathered will be deleted from electronic files and papers will be shredded and confidentially recycled.

### **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. You are encouraged to ask questions about this study at the beginning or any time during the research study.

### **Participant Consent:**

I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study. I have been able to ask questions about the research study. I am at least 18 years of age or older.

\*Participants will click that they consent in the survey to proceed: Either “Agree: Continue with Survey” or “No, thanks: Exit Survey”

## Appendix D: Survey Questions

20. What is your age?
2. What is your year in school (e.g., freshman, senior, second-year Ph.D. student)?
- Freshman
  - Sophomore
  - Junior
  - Senior
  - Other Undergraduate Student (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
3. How do you describe your gender?
4. How do you describe your sexual orientation?
5. What is your ethnicity/race?
6. Would you consider yourself religious?
- If so, what religion do you identify with?
6. Are you currently dating?
- A. Yes
  - B. Sometimes
  - C. No
7. Please describe how you first learned about dating.
8. What is an important story or piece of advice that you have been told about dating?
9. What do you think the purpose of dating is?
12. What are important milestones in dating?
13. What are examples of a women's role in a romantic relationship?
14. What are examples of a man's role in a romantic relationship?
15. When should a romantic couple become intimate with each other?
16. What does that intimacy mean to you?
17. Do you think there are rules about intimacy in relationships? If yes, what is an example of intimacy rules?

18. Is dating important to you now? Why or why not?
17. Please describe the type of relationship you think your parent would want you to have.
18. Please describe the type of relationship you think your best friend would want you to have.
19. Is there anything we haven't covered today that you'd like to add?
20. Would you be willing to participate in a follow-up interview?

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- Wolfe, B. & Guthrie. (2019). Paper from OSCLG ’19: “Let’s stop complaining”: A contrapuntal analysis of an (anti)feminist Facebook Post. Cincinnati, Ohio.

## Curriculum Vitae

Brooke Wolfe  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas  
Department of Communication Studies  
4505 Maryland Parkway, Box 454052  
Las Vegas, NV 89154-4052  
brookehwolfe@gmail.com

### EDUCATION

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- M.A.** 2020 University of Nevada, Las Vegas (expected)  
Department of Communication Studies  
Major Area: Interpersonal Communication  
Thesis: Dialectical Tensions in Women's Dating Experiences  
Advisor: Dr. Jennifer Guthrie  
GPA: 3.96
- B.A.** 2017 *Cum Laude; with honors*, Pacific Lutheran University, Tacoma, WA  
Department of Communication  
Capstone: Georgetown University: Slavery, Legacy, and Reconciliation  
Major GPA: 3.91

### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

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- 2019-present **Graduate Research Assistant:** Department of Housing & Residential Life  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
- Fall 2019 **Graduate Teaching Assistant:** Department of Communication Studies  
COM 432: Qualitative Research Methods  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
- 2018-2019 **Graduate Teaching Assistant:** Department of Communication Studies  
COM 104: Critical Thinking & Public Argument  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
- Fall 2018 **Graduate Teaching Assistant:** Department of Communication Studies  
COM 217: Argumentation & Debate  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
- 2018-2019 **Diversity Education Intern:** Department of Housing & Residential Life  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

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### ADDITIONAL TEACHING EXPERIENCE

- Summer 2019      **Lab Leader for the Rebel Debate Institute.** Department of Communication Studies, University of Nevada, Las Vegas
- Spring 2019      **COM 104 Online Curriculum Development Committee.** Served on the development committee for an online and hybrid 100-level introduction course to critical thinking and argumentation in Communication Studies, University of Nevada, Las Vegas
- 2017-2018      **Assistant Debate Coach:** T.O.H. Karl Forensics Forum. Department of Communication, Pacific Lutheran University (2017 – 2018).

## RESEARCH

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### COMPETITIVELY SELECTED CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

- Wolfe, B.** (2019, Nov.). Unifying the message: The empty signification of Dr. Ford as a feminist symbol for survival. Paper presented at the National Communication Association Conference, Baltimore, MD.
- Wolfe, B.** & Guthrie, J. (2019, Oct.). “Let’s Stop Complaining”: A Contrapuntal analysis of an(anti)feminist Facebook post. Paper presented at the Organization for the Study of Communication, Language, and Gender Conference, Cincinnati, OH.
- Guthrie, J., **Wolfe, B.**, & Morris, C. (2019, Oct.). Empowerment through empathy: An examination of why people do not report their gender-based violence experiences. Panel discussion presented at the Organization for the Study of Communication, Language, and Gender Conference, Cincinnati, OH.
- Wolfe, B.**, & Cook, O. (2017, Feb.). Georgetown University: Slavery, legacy, and reconciliation. Paper presented at the Western Communication Association Conference, Salt Lake City, UT.
- Wolfe, B.** (2017, April). Fear of the other’s news: What the death of Martin McGuinness means for legacy politics. Paper presented at the Western Political Science Association Conference, Vancouver, BC.

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### RESEARCH GRANTS

- Student Caucus Travel Grant, 2019, (\$150).* National Communication Association.
- Graduate and Professional Student Association Travel Grant, 2019, (\$500).* University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Research grant competitively awarded to graduate students presenting original research at a regional or national conference.

*Graduate Student Travel Grant, 2019, (\$750).* University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Department of Communication Studies. Department grant awarded to graduate students presenting original research at a regional or national conference.

*Graduate Student Travel Grant, 2018, (\$750).* University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Department of Communication Studies. Department grant awarded for assistance with graduate student recruiting at the National Communication Association.

*Diversity, Justice, and Sustainability Grants, 2017, (\$5,500).* Pacific Lutheran University. Research grant awarded by the university's Diversity Center to support undergraduate capstone research focused on a topic of diversity, justice, and/or sustainability. Grant awarded for field research at Georgetown University for my Communication Studies capstone.

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## RESEARCH & PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

2019- present     *Research Assistant to Dr. Jennifer Guthrie*, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Assisted in study design, drafting interview questions, and entering data from the Nevada Equal Rights Commission for her study on reporting gender-based harassment in the workplace.

Fall 2019            *Research Assistant to Dr. Emma Frances Bloomfield*, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Coded New York Times articles for her research on agency and artificial intelligence.

## SERVICE

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### DEPARTMENT & UNIVERSITY

Representative, Department of Communication Studies, Graduate & Professional Student Association, Fall 2019-present.

Member, Campus and Fiscal Affairs Committee, Faculty Senate, Fall 2019-present.

Member, Faculty and Student Support Committee, Graduate College, Fall 2019-present.

Member, Activities and Community Service Committee, Graduate College, Fall 2019-present.

Invited Speaker, Staying Organized: Advice and Stories, Graduate Student Orientation, August 2019.

Member, Student Conduct and Academic Hearing Board, Spring 2019-present.

Member, Graduate Assistant Experience, Division of Campus Life, Spring 2019-present.

Graduate Student Recruiter, Department of Communication Studies, Fall 2018.

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### NATIONAL SERVICE

Student Volunteer, *National Communication Association*, November 2019  
Student Reviewer, *NCA Activism and Social Justice Division*, Spring 2019 [Conference:  
November 14-17, 2019]  
Graduate Student Council Member, *NCA Activism and Social Justice Division*, Spring  
2019-present

## **HONORS, AWARDS, AND CERTIFICATIONS**

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*UNLV Graduate College Medallion Receipt, 2020*

The Graduate College Medallion Program will honor exceptionally involved and high-achieving students.

*Leadership in Collaboration, Pacific Lutheran University, 2017*

This award honors a student who, through collaborative leadership and enthusiasm for cross-campus connections, has challenged others and the PLU community to live up to the ideals embedded in the university's mission.

*Rieke Leadership Scholar, Pacific Lutheran University, 2017*

Recipients of the award demonstrate leadership in promoting social justice, equity, and racial and ethnic diversity at Pacific Lutheran University.

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## **MEMBERSHIPS**

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2019-present	Organization for the Study of Communication, Language, and Gender
2016-present	National Communication Association
2016-present	Western Communication Association