



Journal of Couple & Relationship Therapy

Innovations in Clinical and Educational Interventions

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/wcrt20>

“Talking” as a Romantic Interaction: Is There Consensus?

Darcey N. Powell , Gili Freedman , Katherine Jensen & Victoria Preston

To cite this article: Darcey N. Powell , Gili Freedman , Katherine Jensen & Victoria Preston (2021): “Talking” as a Romantic Interaction: Is There Consensus?, Journal of Couple & Relationship Therapy

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15332691.2020.1867684>



Published online: 13 Jan 2021.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



“Talking” as a Romantic Interaction: Is There Consensus?

Darcey N. Powell^a, Gili Freedman^b, Katherine Jensen^a, and Victoria Preston^a

^aDepartment of Psychology, Roanoke College, Salem, Virginia, USA; ^bDepartment of Psychology, Saint Mary's College of Maryland, St Mary's City, Maryland, USA

ABSTRACT

Emerging adults (EAs) use many phrases to refer to their romantic interactions. In two studies ($N_1 = 110$; $N_2 = 222$), EAs' knowledge and perceptions of “talking” were examined. In Study 1, a majority of college students had heard of “talking,” and perceived “talking” as distinct from “friends with benefits” (FWB) and dating. In Study 2, about half of a broader EA sample had heard of “talking” and perceived “talking” as being significantly less emotionally and physically intimate, and less committed than dating; they did, however, perceived “talking” to be similar in some ways to being FWB. Additionally, EAs varied in their agreement regarding the what, why, and how of “talking.” Incorporating these results into youth relationship education programs may be beneficial to promoting healthy relationship development and reducing relational uncertainty.

KEYWORDS

Relationship types; intimacy; dating; commitment; emerging adults; talking

“Hanging out,” “talking,” “hooking up,” “booty call,” “friends with benefits,” “Facebook official,” the list goes on. In Western culture, today's emerging adults (EAs) use a multitude of terms and phrases to describe the status of their romantic relationships, romantic experiences, or sexual engagements (hereto referred to as romantic interactions). To date, though, much of the research on EAs' romantic interactions has focused on those involving sexual intimacy. Specifically, researchers have defined terms such as “hooking up” and being “friends with benefits” (FWB) and have examined the impact of such romantic interactions (e.g., Bisson & Levine, 2009; Bogle, 2008; Claxton & van Dulmen, 2013; Fincham, 2011; Garcia et al., 2012; Kaestle & Halpern, 2007; Lehmiller et al., 2011; Olmstead et al., 2018; Wentland & Reissing, 2014). However, other types of romantic interactions, especially those that may not involve sexual intimacy, have been largely neglected. One term that has received substantially less empirical attention is “talking.” Therefore, this set of studies strives to clarify whether (1) “talking” is simply a label for the relationship initiation stage focused on self-disclosure and (2) how “talking” compares to other romantic

interactions (i.e., FWB and dating) with regard to the relational components of intimacy, passion, and commitment.

Theories of Romantic Interactions

An abundance of theories exists regarding the initiation, as well as the maintenance of, romantic interactions (Berscheid & Regan, 2016). A common component of several classic relationship initiation theories, such as Reiss's (1960) Wheel of Love and Lewis's (1973) Model of Premarital Dyadic Formation, is self-disclosure. Self-disclosure is well documented to be associated with liking and the development of emotional intimacy (Aron et al., 1997; Collins & Miller, 1994; Derlega et al., 2008). To facilitate liking and emotional intimacy, self-disclosure should be personalized, escalate in depth, be reciprocal between partners, and be sustained (Aron et al., 1997). However, self-disclosure can be risky in newly developing relationships (Derlega et al., 2008).

Self-disclosure is also a driver of stability and continuation within long-term romantic relationships (Sprecher, 1987). Sternberg's (1986) Theory of Love argues that the highest quality romantic relationships have high levels of emotional intimacy, passion, and commitment. Emotional intimacy consists of feeling close and connected (Sternberg, 1986), and is facilitated by self-disclosure (Aron et al., 1992). Passion consists of thoughts and behaviors related to arousal and attraction (Sternberg, 1986). Finally, commitment consists of feelings of love and intention to maintain the relationship (Sternberg, 1986). Sternberg (1986) also stated that romantic interactions may not consist of all three of these components. For example, FWB may be a modern-day example of romantic love (i.e., intimacy and passion, but not commitment), whereas a "one-night stand" may be a modern-day example of infatuation (i.e., only passion, no intimacy or commitment).

Emerging Adults' Romantic Interactions

The status of EAs' romantic interactions falls along a continuum with end points of being single and in a committed relationship (Arnett, 2006). Furthermore, relationship status instability is a key tenet of EA (Arnett, 2000, 2006), such that individuals often shift back and forth multiple times along that continuum (Shulman & Connolly, 2013). Moreover, the trajectory from single to committed is not as structured as it was for prior generations (Halpern-Meekin et al., 2013; Stanley et al., 2011). As such, EAs may avoid "the relationship talk" because of concern that the conversation could negatively impact their self-image and the current status of their romantic interaction (Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004).

To avoid the "relationship talk" but progress their romantic interactions, men and women often take different approaches. Specifically, most of the men

reported taking a direct approach to initiating romantic interactions, whereas women were less likely to do so (Clark et al., 1999). Men's reported approach was also associated with their goal for the romantic interaction, such that they were more likely to take a direct approach when desiring emotional intimacy but an indirect approach when predominately desiring physical intimacy (Clark et al., 1999). Recent research has reiterated that men and women tend to take different approaches and differ in their perceptions of acceptable behaviors prior to dating (Taylor et al., 2013).

Research has consistently demonstrated that EAs internalize expectations about romantic and sexual interactions from media sources (e.g., television shows, movies; Gamble & Nelson, 2016; Ward, 2003). Although media has often represented EAs as regularly engaging in sexual interactions (Kunkel et al., 1999), a recent content analysis of EAs' preferred television shows demonstrated that less than a third of the shows included sexual behaviors (Dillman Carpentier et al., 2017). In addition, significantly more of the sexual behaviors identified were coded as being within the context of a romantic relationship than as being a casual sexual interaction (Dillman Carpentier et al., 2017). This shift in media's representation of EAs' sexual interactions aligns with research comparing sexual behaviors of today's EAs to those of prior generations; today's EAs are having longer periods of sexual inactivity than prior cohorts of EAs (Monto & Carey, 2014; Twenge et al., 2017).

One possible reason for the discrepancy in sexual activity between today's EAs and prior cohorts is that today's EAs may be engaging in different forms of romantic interactions, such as "talking." In a recent presentation, 82.1% of participants agreed that "Everyone has a different definition of 'just talking,'" 85.5% of participants agreed that "'Just talking' can lead to a committed relationship," and 79.4% of participants agreed that "'Just talking' is not dating" (Sibley et al., 2017). These descriptive statistics that demonstrate ambiguity in the definition of and expectations for "talking" are in line with popular press articles on the idea of "talking" (e.g., Gresge, 2016; Reeves, 2015). However, to date, no empirical studies have been published on "talking."

Why "Talking" Matters

Existing research on EAs' romantic interactions has tended to focus on the sexual nature of those dalliances (e.g., Claxton & van Dulmen, 2013; Garcia et al., 2012; Olmstead, 2020; Wentland & Reissing, 2014) and/or the regularity with which interactions are terminated (e.g., Eastwick et al., 2008; Roberson et al., 2017). Less scholarly attention has been directed toward how romantic interactions begin, beyond emphasizing technology's role in initiating

connections between prospective partners (e.g., Olmstead, 2020; Sprecher, 2009). Relationship educators and counselors who work directly with individuals who are not yet in a committed relationship have likely heard their clients say they are “just talking” (Sibley et al., 2015, 2017) to a prospective partner, and their probing questions about the romantic interaction have likely revealed a great deal of discrepancy across clients in what is meant and expected by “talking.” Varying perceptions of what is meant by a romantic interaction label, and explicit avoidance of relationship-focused topics, is indicative of relational uncertainty (Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004). Romantic interactions and relationships that are high in relationship uncertainty are likely to have higher amounts of jealousy and conflict and are more likely to dissolve (Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004; Knobloch & Haunani Solomon, 2002). Therefore, the present set of studies aims to provide descriptive information that relationship educators and counselors can use to acknowledge where there tends to be congruence on the meaning of “talking,” and highlight where there tends to be more incongruity.

Present Research

Two studies were conducted to examine contemporary EAs’ understanding of “talking” as a romantic interaction. Study 1 was an exploratory pilot study in which college students indicated whether or not they had previously heard of “talking,” and reported their intimacy, passion, and commitment when “talking,” FWB, and dating, as well as the seriousness of each romantic interaction. Study 2 was an extension study in which a broader sample of EAs indicated the behaviors that they believe individuals engage in while “talking,” the reasons why individuals “talk,” and the expectations of themselves and of their potential partner when “talking.” Lastly, they rated their physical and emotional intimacy, as well as their commitment, to someone when “talking,” FWB, dating casually, and dating seriously. Prior research has indicated that men and women differed in their romantic interaction actions and expectations (Critelli et al., 1986; Mongeau et al., 2006), and so gender differences were also examined in Study 2. Given the lack of research on “talking” and the exploratory nature of both studies, no a priori hypotheses were posited.

Study 1

Method

Participants

A total of 110 EAs (79.1% female, 20.9% male; 89.1% Caucasian, 6.4% African American, 1.8% Hispanic/Latino, .9% Asian, .9% Other/Multi-racial,

1 person did not answer) from a small liberal arts college in the southeast of the United States, ranging in age from 18 to 23 ($M_{age} = 19.74$ years, $SD = 1.25$) participated in the study. The sample is representative of the departmental subject pool from which they were recruited.

Measures

The measures are described in the order that they were completed. The measures and data are publicly available on the Open Science Framework (OSF; https://osf.io/v4s8p/?view_only=1a7d632075ac48d58021b5785a3ff9f8).

Knowledge of “Talking”. Participants were asked to indicate whether or not they had “ever heard of the term ‘talking’ in regards to a type of relationship.” If they had not heard of “talking” they answered all of the remaining questions except those that pertained to “talking.”

Triangular Love Scale – Revised. Developed and revised by Sternberg (1997), this scale assesses intimacy, passion, and commitment within a particular relationship. For this study, participants were asked to imagine a hypothetical, ideal person that they were (1) “talking” to, (2) FWB with, and (3) dating. FWB and dating were chosen as comparisons to “talking” because of college students’ familiarity with those types of romantic interactions. Participants were permitted to use their own implicit definitions for what it meant to be in each of these romantic interactions. Participants completed the measure three times (i.e., for each romantic interaction). The measure consists of 45 items with 15 items in each subscale (i.e., intimacy, passion, and commitment). All items were answered on a 1 (*Not at all*) to 9 (*Extremely*) scale, and the mean for each subscale was calculated (α 's > .94).

Seriousness of Relationship. With a single item, participants were asked to rate how seriously they perceive each of the romantic interactions to be using a 1 (*Casual*) to 9 (*Serious*) scale. Thus, participants answered this item three times.

Demographics. Participants answered questions about their age, gender, and race.

Procedure

The first author’s institutional review board approved the study’s procedures prior to data collection. After viewing an information sheet, participants proceeded through the survey. Afterwards, they received course credit for their participation.

Results

A majority of the college students had heard of the term “talking” ($n = 97$; 88.2%). Three participants did not answer the question and ten reported that they had not heard of it. Only participants who had heard of “talking” were included in the subsequent analyses.

To compare the college students’ perceptions of “talking” to those of being FWB and dating, a series of repeated measures analyses of variance (RM-ANOVAs) with Bonferroni-corrected estimated marginal mean comparisons were conducted (See Figure 1). There were significant differences in perceptions of intimacy across the types of romantic interactions (Wilk’s $\lambda = .19$, $F(2, 95) = 204.79$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .81$). Specifically, college students perceived there to be more intimacy when “talking” than when FWB ($p < .001$, 95% CI [1.16, 2.17], $d = 1.06$) but less intimacy when “talking” compared to when dating ($p < .001$, 95% CI [−2.33, −1.61], $d = 1.60$). There were also significant differences in perceptions of passion across the types of romantic interactions (Wilk’s $\lambda = .17$, $F(2, 95) = 232.96$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .83$). Once again, college students perceived there to be more passion when “talking” than when FWB ($p < .001$, 95% CI [1.21, 2.12], $d = 1.06$) but less passion when “talking” compared to when dating ($p < .001$, 95% CI [−2.54, −1.75], $d = 1.66$). Additionally, there were significant differences in perceptions of commitment across the types of romantic interactions (Wilk’s $\lambda = .14$, $F(2, 95) = 300.49$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .86$). College students, again, perceived there to be more commitment when “talking” than when FWB ($p < .001$, 95% CI [1.62, 2.75], $d = 1.25$) but less commitment when

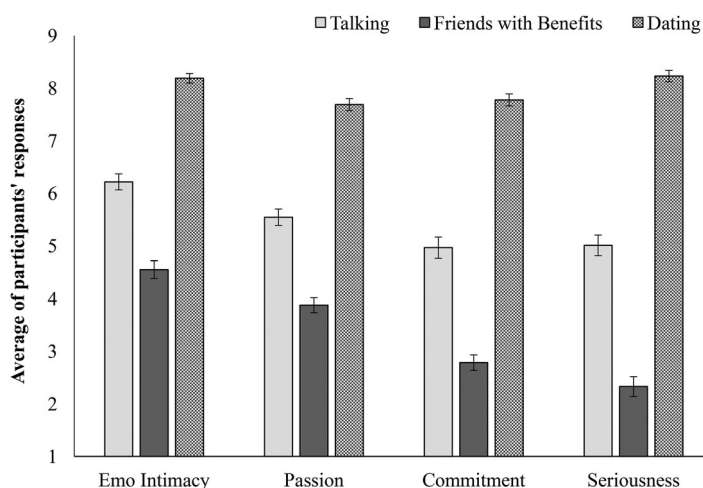


Figure 1. Average of college students’ perceptions of intimacy, passion, commitment, and seriousness in different types of romantic relationships. All constructs were measured on a 1 (*Not at all*) to 9 (*Extremely*) scale; higher scores are indicative of higher averages. Error bars denote standard error.

“talking” compared to when dating ($p < .001$, 95% $CI [-3.32, -2.30]$, $d = 1.74$). Finally, there were significant differences in perceptions of seriousness across the types of romantic interactions (Wilk’s $\lambda = .09$, $F(2, 95) = 464.50$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .91$). Following the trend above, college students perceived there to be more seriousness when “talking” than when FWB ($p < .001$, 95% $CI [2.01, 3.35]$, $d = 1.46$) but less seriousness when “talking” compared to when dating ($p < .001$, 95% $CI [-3.71, -2.72]$, $d = 2.09$). Although not the focus on these analyses, the students also perceived there to be less emotional intimacy, passion, and commitment when FWB than when dating (p ’s $< .001$). In sum, this sample of college students perceived there to be more emotional intimacy, passion, commitment, and seriousness when “talking” than when FWB, and less of each of those relational components when dating.

Discussion

This study was an initial pilot study conducted to examine EAs’ perception of “talking” and how it compared to other romantic interactions. Our analyses revealed that a majority of the sampled college students had heard of “talking” as a type of romantic interaction. Moreover, “talking” fell between FWB and dating when it came to perceptions of intimacy, passion, commitment, and seriousness. Although serving as a first step into empirically examining “talking,” this study had a relatively small and homogenous group of participants and did not examine EAs’ impressions of “talking” such as their expectations, intentions, and reasoning for “talking.” Based on the results and limitations of Study 1, Study 2 took a more micro-level approach to exploring EAs’ impressions of “talking.”

Study 2

Method

Participants

Data for these analyses are from a larger study on behaviors in romantic interactions (Freedman et al., 2019). A total of 559 adults completed the study, but 5 failed the attention check and were excluded from the analyses. Additionally, because we wanted to restrict the focus of this manuscript to emerging adulthood, all participants over the age of 29 ($n = 332$) were excluded from these analyses. Therefore, the analytic sample consisted of 222 participants (44.6% women, 53.6% men, 1.4% transgender, .5% did not disclose; $M_{\text{age}} = 24.69$ years, $SD = 2.77$; 70.7% Caucasian, 10.8% Asian, 8.6% Latinx, 5.9% African American, 3.6% “other,” and .4% did not disclose; 90.1% heterosexual, 9.9% bisexual). Participants varied in their current relationship status: 19.4% identified as married or in a long-term committed

relationship, 5.4% as engaged, 36.9% as dating, 7.2% as “talking,” and 31.1% as single. Additionally, 36.5% stated that they had previously “talked” to someone. Of those that had “talked,” a majority reported that they did so for a relatively short period of time: more than a week but less than a month (28.4%), more than a month but less than three months (23.5%), more than three months but less than six months (21%).

Measures

The measures are described in the order that they were completed. The measures and dataset are publicly available on OSF (https://osf.io/v4s8p/?view_only=1a7d632075ac48d58021b5785a3ff9f8).

Knowledge of “Talking”. Participants were asked whether they had “heard of ‘talking’ as a new term for describing a phase in romantic relationships.” If they had heard of “talking” they were asked to answer the questions described below while reflecting on “when ‘talking.’” If they had not heard of “talking” they were asked to answer the following questions reflecting on “when you are first communicating with a potential partner.” Additionally, participants were asked if they “would describe ‘talking’ as a distinct initial phase of a romantic relationship?” using a scale of 1 (*Definitely not*) to 7 (*Definitely yes*).

Impressions of “Talking”. First, participants were asked to select the way they or their friends converse when “talking” or first communicating. Then, participants were asked to select all behaviors that they believed occurred when “talking” or first communicating. Next, participants were asked to select all the things they thought are important to learn when “talking” or first communicating. Only those participants who had heard of “talking” were asked to select the reasons why they thought someone would engage in “talking.” See Table 1 for phrasing of each statement; responses were binary (Selected = Yes, Unselected = No).

Comparison to Other Romantic Interactions. Participants were asked to respond to a series of questions based on their past experiences when “talking,” FWB, casually dating, or seriously dating. Participants were permitted to use their own implicit definitions for what it meant to be in each of these romantic interactions. For all items, they had the option of indicating if they had never had that type of romantic interaction. If they indicated that they had not had a type of romantic interaction, then they were not asked their perceptions about that romantic interaction. To assess emotional intimacy, participants were asked “how much do you share about your past life, current experiences, and future plans?” Participants responded on a scale

from 1 (*None*) to 7 (*Everything*). To assess physical intimacy, participants were asked “how frequently do you engage in physical intimacy?” Participants responded on a scale from 1 (*Very rarely*) to 7 (*Very frequently*). To assess commitment, participants were asked “how committed are you?” Participants responded on a scale from 1 (*Not at all*) to 7 (*Very*).

Prior Experiences “Talking”. Participants indicated whether they were currently or had previously “talked” to someone and how long they had “talked” if no longer “talking” to them.

Demographics. Participants answered questions about their age, gender, race, education level, and sexuality.

Procedure

The first author’s institutional review board approved the study’s procedures prior to data collection. Participants were recruited from Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (MTurk) if they had a prior task approval above 98% (Peer et al., 2014). After reading information about the study on MTurk, interested participants opted to participate and immediately began answering the questions. After completing the study, participants were compensated with fifty cents. Only those questions that examined the phenomenon of “talking” with a potential romantic partner from the larger study are described here.

Results

Knowledge

About half of the EAs had heard of “talking” ($n = 125$; 56.3%). A higher proportion of women had heard of “talking” than men, $X^2(1) = 6.92$, $p = .009$. Of those who had heard of talking, they tended to believe that talking was a distinct initial phase of a romantic relationship ($M = 5.26$, $SD = 1.39$); men and women did not differ in whether they thought “talking” was a distinct initial phase, $t(120) = .20$, $p = .845$, 95% $CI [-.46, .56]$, $g = .04$. Given that a larger proportion of college students had heard of “talking” in Study 1, an independent samples t -test was conducted to explore whether there was a difference in knowledge of “talking” based on education level; however, there was not a significant difference, $t(218) = .57$, $p = .567$, 95% $CI [-.23, .42]$, $g = .08$. Additionally, the correlation between EAs’ perception of “talking” as a distinct initial phase of a romantic relationship and their education level was not significant, $r(121) = .14$, $p = .120$.

Table 1. Perceptions of “talking” and differences based on knowledge of constructW.

Perception of “talking”	% Endorsed	Likelihood ratio CI		Knowledge differences (χ^2)
<i>Expected behaviors</i>				
Hang out during the day	74.3%	.77	1.37	2.49
Hang out at night	64.4%	.32	.87	.49
Getting to know friends	41.0%	−.63	−.10	.24
Meeting family members	9.9%	−2.68	−1.79	1.40
Going on group dates	33.8%	−.96	−.40	2.73
Having one-on-one dates	62.6%	.25	.79	3.07
Engaging in physical intimacy	27.5%	−1.27	−.68	1.99
Sexting	18.9%	−1.80	−1.13	3.42
<i>Methods of communicating</i>				
Meeting face-to-face	74.8%	.79	1.40	.23
Text messaging	91.4%	1.93	2.87	1.18
Talking on the phone	52.3%	−.17	.35	8.38**
Video chatting	32.4%	−1.02	−.46	4.65*
Group chatting	16.7%	−1.98	−1.27	1.06
Liking social media posts	53.6%	−.12	.41	.02
Chatting publicly on social media	37.8%	−.77	−.23	7.33**
Chatting privately on social media	70.3%	.58	1.15	15.18***
Chatting through dating applications	31.1%	−1.09	−.52	.06
<i>Why “talk”</i>				
Because there is no commitment	37.8%	.35	1.10	
Because it's efficient	17.1%	−1.22	−.46	
To “test the waters”	51.8%	1.85	3.16	
Because it is a safe way to see if interested	43.7%	.84	1.68	
Because you lack romantic experience	11.3%	−1.85	−.97	
To avoid the “relationship talk”	12.6%	−1.68	−.84	
To hookup	25.7%	−.53	.18	
<i>Hope to learn</i>				
If you have common interests	89.6%	1.75	2.62	.18
If you have similar values	83.8%	1.30	2.02	.40
About their personality	79.3%	1.03	1.68	.09
If they are funny	71.6%	.64	1.22	11.86**
If they are intelligent	69.8%	.56	1.13	3.93*
If they are kind	77.5%	.93	1.56	.14
If they would help you grow as a person	44.6%	−.48	.05	2.90
Their goals for the future	56.8%	.01	.54	.70
The type of relationship they are looking for	68.9%	.52	1.09	.29
If they are physically attractive	54.1%	−.10	.43	4.22*
If they are attracted to you	68.9%	.52	1.09	.40
If you are sexually compatible	40.5%	−.65	−.12	.21
Their relationship history	33.3%	−.98	−.42	12.53***
About their family	25.2%	−1.40	−.79	1.94
If you have friends in common	27.9%	−1.25	−.66	11.19**

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Impressions

For the following set of analyses described below, the average number of endorsements within each set (i.e., behaviors, methods of communicating, reasons for, and what one hopes to learn when “talking”) was first calculated. Then, the percentage of endorsement for each item was calculated. Additionally, likelihood ratio confidence intervals were calculated for each item by specifying binary logistic, intercept-only generalized linear models with zero (i.e., no endorsement) as the reference category. Lastly, chi-squared analyses were conducted to examine whether participants with

a prior knowledge of “talking” differed in their endorsements from participants without prior knowledge (i.e., those who answered the questions based on their thoughts when “first communicating with a potential partner”). This last set of analyses was conducted to examine how similar “talking” is perceived to be in comparison to romantic interaction initiation among individuals who had not heard of the term. If perceived similarly, then “talking” may simply be a new phrase for an existing set of behaviors and expectations before dating a romantic partner. If perceived differently, then “talking” may represent a new stage in the path toward dating a romantic partner or a new and different romantic interaction.

When asked about behaviors that the EAs thought individuals engaged in when “talking,” they endorsed an average of 3.31 ($SD = 1.69$) of the 8 behaviors; men and women did not differ in their number of endorsements, $t(216) = -.23$, $p = .817$, 95% $CI [-.51, .40]$, $g = .03$. As depicted in [Table 1](#), EAs agreed that certain behaviors occur when “talking” to a potential romantic partner (i.e., hanging out during the day, not meeting family members, and not sexting). However, the endorsement of other behaviors was more ambiguous (i.e., confidence intervals were closer to zero). Additionally, there were no differences in EAs’ endorsement of what behaviors occur based on their knowledge of “talking.”

When asked how EAs believe that individuals communicate when “talking,” they endorsed an average of 4.60 methods ($SD = 2.09$) of the 9 methods; men and women, once again, did not differ in their number of endorsements, $t(216) = 1.16$, $p = .249$, 95% $CI [-.23, .89]$, $g = .16$. There was some ambiguity among EAs in their endorsement of how individuals communicate when “talking” (see [Table 1](#)). Predominately, they agreed that individuals send text messages to communicate and do not engage in group-chats. Chi-squared analyses revealed that knowledge of “talking” was associated with several of the ways that EAs believe that individuals communicate. Specifically, those that had heard of “talking” were more likely to indicate that individuals communicate via phone conversations, video chat, and privately on social media. However, those that had not heard of “talking” were more likely to indicate that individuals communicate publicly on social media.

When asked why individuals “talk,” EAs endorsed an average of 2.0 reasons ($SD = 2.14$) of the 7 reasons; women endorsed significantly more behaviors ($M = 2.43$, $SD = 2.21$) than men ($M = 1.62$, $SD = 2.02$), $t(216) = 2.83$, $p = .005$, 95% $CI [.25, 1.38]$, $g = .39$. There was once again, some inconsistency in participants’ endorsement of why individuals “talk,” but EAs tended to agree that individuals do not “talk” to avoid the relationship talk, because it is efficient, or because they lack romantic experience (see [Table 1](#)). EAs who had not heard of “talking” were not asked

these questions, so differences in endorsement based on knowledge could not be assessed.

Lastly, when asked what individuals hope to learn when “talking,” EAs endorsed an average of 8.92 options ($SD = 3.53$) of the 15 options; women, once again, endorsed significantly more items ($M = 9.53$, $SD = 3.33$) than men ($M = 8.29$, $SD = 3.58$), $t(216) = 2.61$, $p = .010$, 95% CI [.30, 2.16], $g = .35$. A few options were strongly endorsed by participants (i.e., learning if you have common interests, if you have similar values, about their personality, and if they are kind), but many of the options were inconsistently endorsed (see Table 1). Chi-squared analyses revealed that knowledge of “talking” was associated with several aspects that EAs believed were important to learn. Specifically, those that had heard of “talking” were more likely to endorse that it is important to learn if the other person is funny, is intelligent, learn about their relationship history, and whether they have friends in common. On the other hand, those that had not heard of “talking” were more likely to endorse that it is important to learn whether the individual is attractive.

Romantic interaction comparisons

To compare EAs’ perceptions of “talking” to those of being FWB, casually dating, or seriously dating, a series of RM-ANOVAs with Bonferroni-corrected estimated marginal mean comparisons were conducted (See Figure 2). There were significant differences in perceptions of emotional intimacy across the types of romantic interactions (Wilk’s $\lambda = .33$, $F(3,165) = 112.85$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .67$). Specifically, EAs reported there to

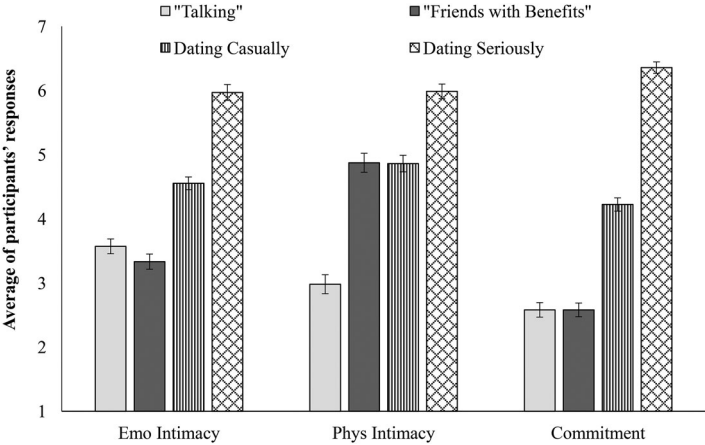


Figure 2. Average of emerging adults’ perceptions of emotional intimacy, physical intimacy, and commitment. All constructs were measured on a 1 to 7 scale (Emotional intimacy: *None to Everything*; Physical intimacy: *Very rarely to Very frequently*; Commitment: *Not at all to Very*), higher scores are indicative of perceiving more of that construct. Error bars denote standard error.

be similar amounts of emotional intimacy when “talking” as when FWB ($p = .403$, 95% *CI* $[-.11, .58]$, $d = .16$), but less emotional intimacy when “talking” compared to when casually dating ($p < .001$, 95% *CI* $[-1.28, .69]$, $d = .71$) or seriously dating ($p < .001$, 95% *CI* $[-2.81, -1.99]$, $d = 1.55$). There were also significant differences in perceptions of physical intimacy across the types of romantic interactions (Wilk’s $\lambda = .36$, $F(3, 156) = 93.94$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .64$). EAs reported there to be significantly less physical intimacy when “talking” than when FWB ($p < .001$, 95% *CI* $[-2.34, -1.45]$, $d = 1.01$), casually dating ($p < .001$, 95% *CI* $[-2.29, -1.47]$, $d = 1.07$), and seriously dating ($p < .001$, 95% *CI* $[-3.48, -2.53]$, $d = 1.80$). Lastly, there were also significant differences in perceptions of commitment across the types of romantic interactions (Wilk’s $\lambda = .18$, $F(3, 176) = 261.78$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .82$). Matching the results for emotional intimacy, EAs reported there to be similar levels of commitment when “talking” as when FWB ($p = 1.00$, 95% *CI* $[-.31, .31]$, $d < 0.001$), but less commitment when “talking” compared to when casually dating ($p < .001$, 95% *CI* $[-1.97, -1.32]$, $d = 1.13$) and seriously dating ($p < .001$, 95% *CI* $[-4.19, -3.36]$, $d = 2.77$). Although not the focus of these analyses, participants also perceived there to be significantly less emotional intimacy, physical intimacy, and commitment when FWB than when dating seriously (p ’s $< .001$). And, they perceived there to be significantly less emotional intimacy and commitment when FWB than when casually dating (p ’s $< .001$; physical intimacy $p = 1.00$). In sum, this sample of EAs reported there to be similar amounts of emotional intimacy and commitment when “talking” as when FWB, more physical intimacy when FWB than when “talking,” and less of each of the relational components when casually and seriously dating.

To examine whether there were differences EAs’ perceptions of “talking” based on their gender, a 3 (relational components) X 2 (gender) RM-ANOVA was conducted. Replicating the results described above, there were differences between the relational components (Wilk’s $\lambda = .64$, $F(2, 177) = 48.88$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .36$). However, the interaction with participant gender was not significant (Wilk’s $\lambda = .97$, $F(2, 177) = 2.80$, $p = .063$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$).

Discussion

This study was a follow-up, exploratory study on a broader sample of EAs’ knowledge and impression of “talking.” Our analyses revealed that a slight majority of them, and especially women participants, had heard of “talking” as a new term for describing a phase in romantic relationships. Moreover, there was both agreement and ambiguity among EAs when it came to their impressions of the behaviors, communication methods, reasons for engaging in “talking,” and what individuals hope to learn when “talking.” Our

analyses revealed that the behaviors are similar whether an EA is “talking” or first communicating with a potential romantic partner. However, there were a few differences in their endorsements of communication methods and what individuals hope to learn based on their prior knowledge of “talking.” We also found that women were more likely to endorse reasons for why individuals “talk” and what one hopes to learn when “talking.” It has been noted that women are more likely to discuss relationship-oriented topics with their friends than men (Barbee et al., 1990), which may be contributing to the gender difference in knowledge and impressions of “talking.”

Additionally, we replicated a subset of the results from Study 1, by finding that “talking” was perceived to have less emotional intimacy, physical intimacy, and commitment than dating, either casually or seriously. However, we did not fully replicate Study 1: this sample of EAs reported “talking” to be similar to FWB as it pertained to emotional intimacy and commitment, and reported there to be less physical intimacy when “talking” than when FWB. The differences found for “friends with benefits” between Study 1 and Study 2 may be because Study 1 relied on possible perceptions (i.e., participants answered questions about all romantic interactions regardless of past experience in that type of romantic interaction) whereas Study 2 relied on experience-based perceptions (i.e., participants answered questions about a romantic interaction only if they had past experience with that type of romantic interaction).

General discussion

Prior research on “hooking up” and FWB may have been motivated by the relative casualness and potential risk within these sexual engagements. However, those romantic interactions may regularly occur in only a minority of EAs (Monto & Carey, 2014; Roberson et al., 2017), and, therefore, research should not focus exclusively on them as characteristic of most EA romantic interactions. Therefore, we sought to examine the romantic interaction of “talking” between EAs. To our knowledge, the present two studies are the first quantitative analyses of the phenomenon of “talking.” These studies aimed to examine EAs’ prior knowledge and perceptions of “talking” so that we could situate it among other romantic interactions.

With regard to prior knowledge, in both studies, more than half of the sample had heard of “talking.” Additionally, both studies suggested that when individuals are “talking” there is less information shared, fewer physical acts of intimacy, and less commitment to the partner than when dating. However, EAs across the two studies differed in their perceptions of how “talking” compared to FWB. In Study 2, EAs reported that partners do not “talk”

simply to sext or “hook up,” and that physical acts of intimacy are less frequent than when FWB, but Study 1 EAs did not perceive physical passion to be lower when “talking” than when FWB. Our findings also align with Sibley et al.’s (2017) presentation that participants split into thirds regarding whether they agreed, disagreed, or were neutral in response to the statement that individuals hookup when “just talking.” As such, despite some agreement in how individuals “talk” and what they hope to learn when “talking,” there seems to be a great deal of relational uncertainty (Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004; Knobloch & Haunani Solomon, 2002) for what it means to be “talking” during emerging adulthood.

It could be that contemporary EAs have simply relabeled the stages to a long-term, committed romantic relationship. Specifically, prior generations’ “going steady” (Bailey, 1988) could be today’s dating and prior generations’ dating could be today’s “talking.” Supporting this assertion, our analyses revealed that there were more similarities than differences in how participants responded to the what, why, and how questions in Study 2 for those who had heard of “talking” before and those who had not (i.e., were answering those questions with regard to when first communicating with a potential partner). Critelli et al. (1986) posited that “communicative intimacy” (p. 368) would become a highly desired aspect of romantic relationships in later generations. In our analyses, the data suggest that self-disclosure about certain domains of the prospective partners’ lives do seem to be a common component of “talking,” particularly as it relates to the individuals’ similarities. However, the data also suggest that there are some topics that tend not to be discussed while “talking.” This finding aligns with Derlega et al.’s (2008) assertion that it might be strategic to constrain what individuals share in their self-disclosure, especially during relationship initiation. Taken together, “talking” may be a re-named stage within relationship initiation models.

Given that age at first marriage has been pushed into individuals’ late twenties (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019), individuals may label a romantic interaction as “talking” to reduce the expectation of eventual marriage to that partner. As such, “talking” may be particularly prevalent on college campuses because the EAs feel mature enough to commit to a romantic partner but also feel like they are finding their way and striving for educational, occupational, and financial goals. Specifically, the desire to have a romantic partner may be superseded by their desire to reach other goals. When other goals (i.e., non-romantic relationship goals) are perceived as more important, EAs are less likely to explicitly commit to a specific partner, which leads to ambiguity and instability in their romantic interactions (Arnett, 2000, 2006; Halpern-Meehin et al., 2013; Roberson et al., 2017; Shulman & Connolly, 2013; Stanley et al., 2011). It may be that EAs may “talk” to a romantic partner for a set period of time, choose not to label their romantic interactions as

a relationship (i.e., dating), ultimately dissolve the partnership due to role or goal conflict, pursue the desired role or goal for a period of time, and then begin “talking” to a new romantic partner – thereby demonstrating serial monogamy (Regnerus & Uecker, 2011). However, the data gathered by these exploratory studies do not permit empirically testing this progression and so we encourage future researchers to do so.

Implications for practitioners

As mentioned above, relationship educators and counselors have likely heard their clients say they are “just talking” (Sibley et al., 2015, 2017) to a prospective partner, and the practitioner’s probing questions about the romantic interaction may have revealed a great deal of discrepancy across clients in what is meant and expected by “talking.” Hopefully, the information provided in this paper can be used to encourage their clients’ engagement in open communication about preferences and expectations in an effort to reduce the relational uncertainty their client possesses and facilitate healthy relationship development with the person(s) to whom they are “talking.”

The Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980) posits that individuals’ attitudes and subjective norms contribute to their intentions and engagement in specific behaviors. Specifically, individuals’ perceptions as to how common “talking” is among individuals, as well as their perceptions of the methods of “talking,” the typical behaviors of “talking,” and the reasons for “talking” likely impact their behaviors when “talking” to a romantic partner. As such, information reported in this paper could be useful to relationship educators and counselors in conversations about descriptive norms of “talking” (Gelfand & Harrington, 2015), comparing their clients’ perceptions to the perceptions of the present studies’ participants, and managing expectations associated with “talking.”

Additionally, the information from these studies could be incorporated into youth relationship education programs (Hawkins, 2018; Simpson et al., 2018). For example, the *Healthy Relationship Educators Toolkit* (<https://www.loveisrespect.org/educators-toolkits/>) currently provides several scenarios that youth might experience in their ongoing romantic relationships but does not currently include scenarios associated with the initiation of a romantic interaction (e.g., “talking”). The inclusion of such a scenario and promoting conversations among youth may be useful in modifying inaccurate descriptive norms and reducing the relational uncertainty experienced by partners when “talking.”

Limitations and future directions

One limitation of these studies is that they asked whether participants had heard of talking in slightly different ways. The questions (i.e., “a type of

relationship” versus “phase in romantic relationships”) could be perceived differently by participants and partially explain the difference in proportion of participants who knew of the term in Studies 1 and 2. Another potential limitation is that participants were not asked to provide their own definition of “talking” before proceeding to the quantitative items. However, such information has been provided by Sibley et al. (2015, 2017) via conference presentations. A third potential limitation is that, in Study 2, participants were limited to a binary endorsement of perceived behaviors, methods of communication, reasons why, what they hope to learn, and exclusivity when “talking.” Future research could expand upon these exploratory studies by having participants indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with questions examining their impressions of, attitudes toward, and expectations when “talking.” Doing so could also permit greater exploration into specific facets of relational uncertainty (Knobloch & Haunani Solomon, 2002), as well as whether, and if so how, EAs seek to reduce uncertainty in their romantic interactions. Future research could also expand upon these studies by asking EAs to sort romantic interactions into labeled categories (e.g., “talking,” casually dating) and rate the interactions along various continuums (see Forgas & Dobosz, 1980 for similar methodology), or by longitudinally following EAs to examine their progression into, length of, and the dissolution of various romantic interactions. Lastly, future research should explore impressions of and expectations when “talking” between LGBTQ+ individuals, as well as extend the relational components examined (e.g., monogamy, interdependence, jealousy).

Conclusion

The present research is the first to quantitatively examine the phenomenon of “talking” as a romantic interaction between EAs. The two studies demonstrated that EAs tend to have heard of the term “talking,” particularly on the sampled college campus. Additionally, the studies demonstrated that there are aspects of agreement, but also ambiguity, among EAs when it comes to their perceptions and impressions of “talking” as it relates to its what, why, and how, as well as how “talking” compares to other romantic interactions. Together, these studies provide useful descriptive information that should be incorporated into youth and emerging adult relationship education programs or that could be shared by relationship educators during conversations with clients.

Author note

Darcey N. Powell, Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, Roanoke College, ORCID: 0000-0001-6076-9741; Gili Freedman, Department of Psychology, Roanoke

College, ORCID: 0000-0002-7006-9674; Katherine Jensen, Department of Psychology, Roanoke College; Victoria Preston, Department of Psychology, Roanoke College.

Gili Freedman is now an Assistant Professor at St. Mary's College of Maryland. Katherine Jensen graduated from Roanoke College in May 2017. Victoria Preston graduated from Roanoke College in December 2017.

The authors have no conflicts of interest to disclose. The authors are grateful to Benjamin Le and Kipling Williams for their feedback on and assistance with the second study.

References

- Ajzen, I., & Fishbein, M. (1980). *Understanding attitudes and predicting social behavior*. Prentice-Hall.
- Arnett, J. J. (2000). Emerging adulthood: A theory of development from the late teens through the twenties. *American Psychologist*, 55(5), 469–480. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.5.469>
- Arnett, J. J. (2006). Emerging adulthood: Understanding the new way of coming of age. In J. J. Arnett & J. L. Tanner (Eds.), *Emerging adults in America: Coming of age in the 21st century* (pp. 3–19). American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/11381-001>
- Aron, A., Aron, E. N., & Smollan, D. (1992). Inclusion of other in the self scale and the structure of interpersonal closeness. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 63(4), 596–612. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.63.4.596>
- Aron, A., Melinat, E., Aron, E. N., Vallone, D., Bator, R., & J, R. (1997). The experimental generation of interpersonal closeness: A procedure and some preliminary findings. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 23(4), 363–377. 297234003 <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167>
- Bailey, B. L. (1988). The economy of dating. In *From the front porch to the back seat* (pp. 25–56). The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Barbee, A. P., Gulley, M. R., & Cunningham, M. R. (1990). Support seeking in personal relationships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 7(4), 531–540. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407590074009>
- Berscheid, E., & Regan, P. (2016). Relationship growth and maintenance. In *The psychology of interpersonal relationships* (pp. 191–224). Routledge.
- Bisson, M. A., & Levine, T. R. (2009). Negotiating a friends with benefits relationship. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 38(1), 66–73. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-007-9211-2>
- Bogle, K. A. (2008). *Hooking up: Sex, dating, and relationships on campus*. New York University Press.
- Clark, C. L., Shaver, P. R., & Abrahams, M. F. (1999). Strategic behaviors in romantic relationship initiation. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 25(6), 709–722. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167299025006006>
- Claxton, S. E., & van Dulmen, M. H. M. (2013). Casual sexual relationships and experiences in emerging adulthood. *Emerging Adulthood*, 1(2), 138–150. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2167696813487181>
- Collins, N. L., & Miller, L. C. (1994). Self-disclosure and liking: A meta-analytic review. *Psychological Bulletin*, 116(3), 457–475. <https://psycnet.apa.org/fulltext/1995-09363-001.pdf> <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.116.3.457>
- Critelli, J. W., Myers, E. J., & Loos, V. E. (1986). The components of love: Romantic attraction and sex role orientation. *Journal of Personality*, 54(2), 354–370. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.1986.tb00399.x>

- Derlega, V. J., Winstead, B. A., & Green, K. (2008). Self-disclosure and starting a close relationship. In S. Sprecher, A. Wenzel, & J. Harvey (Eds.), *Handbook of relationship initiation* (pp. 153–174). Psychology Press.
- Dillman Carpentier, F. R., Stevens, E. M., Wu, L., & Seely, N. (2017). Sex, love, and risk-n-responsibility: A content analysis of entertainment television. *Mass Communication & Society*, 20(5), 686–624. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2017.1298807>
- Eastwick, P. W., Finkel, E. J., Krishnamurti, T., & Loewenstein, G. (2008). Mispredicting distress following romantic breakup: Revealing the time course of the affective forecasting error. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 44(3), 800–807. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2007.07.001>
- Fincham, F. D. (2011). Challenges in charting the course of romantic relationships in adolescence and emerging adulthood. In A. Booth, S. L. Brown, N. S. Landale, W. D. Manning & S. M. McHale (Eds.), *Early adulthood in a family context* (pp. 165–172). Springer Science + Business Media.
- Forgas, J. P., & Dobosz, B. (1980). Dimensions of romantic involvement: Towards a taxonomy of heterosexual relationships. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 43(3), 290–300. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3033731>
- Freedman, G., Powell, D. N., Le, B., & Williams, K. D. (2019). Ghosting and destiny: Implicit theories of relationships predict beliefs about ghosting. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 36(3), 905–924. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407517748791>
- Gamble, H., & Nelson, L. R. (2016). Sex in college relationships: The role television plays in emerging adults' sexual expectations in relationships. *Communication Monographs*, 83(1), 145–161. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03637751.2015.1049635>
- Garcia, J. R., Reiber, C., Massey, S. G., & Merriwether, A. M. (2012). Sexual hookup culture: A review. *Review of General Psychology : Journal of Division 1, of the American Psychological Association*, 16(2), 161–176. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0027911>
- Gelfand, M. J., & Harrington, J. R. (2015). The motivational force of descriptive norms: For whom and when are descriptive norms most predictive of behavior? *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 46(10), 1273–1278. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022115600796>
- Gresge, G. (2016, October 12). 7 Millennials try to define what “talking” means in the dating world. *Brit + Co*. Retrieved from <https://www.brit.co/7-millennials-define-talking-in-the-dating-world/>
- Halpern-Meekin, S., Manning, W. D., Giordano, P. C., & Longmore, M. A. (2013). Relationship churning in emerging adulthood: On/off relationships and sex with an ex. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 28(2), 166–188. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0743558412464524>
- Hawkins, A. J. (2018). Shifting the relationship education field to prioritize youth relationship education. *Journal of Couple & Relationship Therapy*, 17(3), 165–180. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15332691.2017.1341355>
- Kaestle, C. E., & Halpern, C. T. (2007). What's love got to do with it? Sexual behaviors of opposite-sex couples through emerging adulthood. *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, 39(3), 134–140. <https://doi.org/10.1363/3913407>
- Knobloch, L. K., & Carpenter-Theune, K. E. (2004). Topic avoidance in developing romantic relationships: Associations with intimacy and relational uncertainty. *Communication Research*, 31(2), 173–205. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650203261516>
- Knobloch, L. K., & Haunani Solomon, D. (2002). Information seeking beyond initial interaction: Negotiation relational uncertainty within close relationships. *Human Communication Research*, 28(2), 243–257. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3813434> <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2958.2002.tb00806.x>

- Kunkel, D., Cope, K. M., & Biely, E. (1999). Sexual messages on television: Comparing findings from three studies. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 36(3), 230–236. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499909551993>
- Lehmiller, J. L., VanderDrift, L. E., & Kelly, J. R. (2011). Sex differences in approaching friends with benefits relationships. *Journal of sSex Research*, 48(2–3), 275–284. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224491003721694>
- Lewis, R. A. (1973). A longitudinal test of a developmental framework for premarital dyadic formation. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 35(1), 16–25. <http://www.jstor.com/stable/351092> <https://doi.org/10.2307/351092>
- Mongeau, P. A., Serewicz, M. C. M., Henningsen, M. L. M., & Davis, K. L. (2006). Sex differences in the transition to a heterosexual romantic relationship. In K. Dindia & D. J. Canary (Eds.), *Sex differences and similarities in communication* (Vol. 2, pp. 337–358). Lawrence Erlbaum Associations, Inc.
- Monto, M. A., & Carey, A. G. (2014). A new standard of sexual behavior? Are claims associated with the “hookup culture” supported by general social survey data? *Journal of Sex Research*, 51(6), 605–615. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2014.906031>
- Olmstead, S. B. (2020). A decade review of sex and partnering in adolescence and young adulthood. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 82(2), 769–795. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12670>
- Olmstead, S. B., Conrad, K. A., & Anders, K. M. (2018). First semester college students’ definitions of and expectations for engaging in hookups. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 33(3), 275–305. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0743558417698571>
- Peer, E., Vosgerau, J., & Acquisti, A. (2014). Reputation as a sufficient condition for data quality on Amazon Mechanical Turk. *Behavior Research Methods*, 46(4), 1023–1031. <https://doi.org/10.3758/s13428-013-0434-y>
- Reeves, A. (2015, October 13). Dating, talking, being in a relationship: What’s the difference? *The Odyssey*. <https://www.theodysseyonline.com/dating-talking-relationshipwhats-difference>
- Regnerus, M., & Uecker, J. (2011). *Premarital sex in America: How young Americans meet, mate, and think about marrying*. Oxford University Press.
- Reiss, I. L. (1960). Toward a sociology of heterosexual love relationship. *Marriage and Family Living*, 22(2), 139–145. <https://doi.org/10.2307/347330>
- Roberson, P. N. E., Norona, J. C., Fish, J. N., Olmstead, S. B., & Fincham, F. (2017). Do differences matter? A typology of emerging adult romantic relationships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 34(3), 334–355. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407516661589>
- Shulman, S., & Connolly, J. (2013). The challenge of romantic relationships in emerging adulthood: Reconceptualization of the field. *Emerging Adulthood*, 1(1), 27–39. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2167696812467330>
- Sibley, S. D., Knapp, D., Brown, C., Busk, P., Mallory, A. B., & Vennum, A. (2015, October). “We’re just talking”: Constructing a new trend in emerging adulthood romantic relationship formation. Paper presented at the 7th Conference on Emerging Adulthood.,
- Sibley, S. D., Kahovec, A., Schraufnagel, H., & Stoffel, H. (2017, November). Proceed with caution: How emerging adults are testing the water in just talking romantic relationships. Paper presented at the 8th Conference on Emerging Adulthood.,
- Simpson, D. M., Leonhardt, N. D., & Hawkins, A. J. (2018). Learning about love: A meta-analytic study of individually-oriented relationship education programs for adolescents

- and emerging adults. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 47(3), 477–489. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-017-0725-1>
- Sprecher, S. (1987). The effects of self-disclosure given and received on affection for an intimate partner and stability of the relationship. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 4(2), 115–127. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407587042001>
- Sprecher, S. (2009). Relationship initiation and formation on the internet. *Marriage & Family Review*, 45(6–8), 761–782. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01494920903224350>
- Stanley, S. M., Rhoades, G. K., & Fincham, F. D. (2011). Understanding romantic relationships among emerging adults: The significant roles of cohabitation and ambiguity. In F. D. Fincham & M. Cui (Eds.), *Romantic relationships in emerging adulthood* (pp. 234–251). Cambridge University Press.
- Sternberg, R. J. (1986). A triangular theory of love. *Psychological Review*, 93(2), 119–135. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.93.2.119>
- Sternberg, R. J. (1997). Construct validation of a triangular love scale. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 27, 313–335. <http://vivanautics.com/pdf/Sternberg1997.pdf>
- Taylor, A. C., Rappleyea, D. L., Fang, X., & Cannon, D. (2013). Emerging adults' perceptions of acceptable behaviors prior to forming a committed, dating relationship. *Journal of Adult Development*, 20(4), 173–184. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10804-013-9169-3>
- Twenge, J. M., Sherman, R. A., & Wells, B. E. (2017). Sexual inactivity during young adulthood is more common among U.S. Millennials and iGen: Age, period, and cohort effects on having no sexual partners after age 18. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 46(2), 433–440. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-016-0798-z>
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2019, November). *Media age at first marriage: 1890 to present [Figure MS-2]*. <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/visualizations/time-series/demo/families-and-households/ms-2.pdf>
- Ward, L. M. (2003). Understanding the role of entertainment media in the sexual socialization of American youth: A review of empirical research. *Developmental Review*, 23(3), 347–388. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0273-2297\(03\)00013-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0273-2297(03)00013-3)
- Wentland, J. J., & Reissing, E. (2014). Casual sexual relationships: Identifying definitions for one night stands, booty calls, fuck buddies, and friends with benefits. *The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality*, 23(3), 167–177. <https://doi.org/10.3138/cjhs.2744>