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# Finding Love in a Hopeless Place: Dating Patterns of American Millennials

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Finding Love in a Hopeless Place: Dating Patterns of American Millennials

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**Table of Contents**

Abstract	3
Introduction	4-6
History of Dating in America	
Up Until Now...	7-15
Understanding Current Dating Definitions	15-18
Marriage Age through History	18-19
Causes of Delayed Marriage	
Hookup Culture	20-23
College Education	23-26
Dating Economics	26-28
Career	28-31
Parental Divorce	31-33
Role of the Advancements in Technology on Dating	33-37
Psychology	
Monogamy	38-39
Emerging Adulthood	39-42
Investment Model Theory	42-43
<i>The Paradox of Choice</i>	44-45
Types of Decision Makers	45-46
Primary Research	
Introduction	47
Hypotheses	47-48
Methods	48-49
Results	49-57
Discussion of Results	57-62
Experimental Limitations	62-63
Conclusion of Primary Research	63
Conclusion	64-68
References	69-73
Appendix A (Survey)	74-79

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**Abstract**

It would prove beneficial to understand the current dating culture and how it came to be, as well as the reason the average age at which Americans are marrying is increasing, and the potential consequences of the evolving dating culture. The different stages of a relationship in American society have been evolving over time; however, the stages seem to have more variables now than ever. Psychological theories such as Arnett's Emerging Adulthood, Le and Agnew's Investment Model Theory, and Barry Schwartz's *Paradox of Choice* help to explain why and how relationships have evolved. Primary research in the form of a survey was conducted to understand Millennials' attitudes toward dating and marriage. Findings of the research showed that many Millennials disagree with the "hookup culture" and prefer more traditional relationships. One reason for this general disagreement may be that Millennials are more career-focused than their predecessors at this stage in life and are focusing on building a stable foundation for later in life. However, interpersonal relationships are still a basic human need, and thus emerged the idea of the hookup culture and less serious romantic relationships. Millennials may be waiting to be in serious relationships headed toward marriage until they feel comfortable in their future as an individual.

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## Introduction

Millennials are considered to be those born between the years 1982 and 2004, according to Howe and Strauss' *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* (2000). The modern relationship style among Millennials is unlike that of previous generations. Collectively, millennials are marrying nearly 3 years later than their baby boomer parents did in the 1980s and about 5.5 years later than their grandparents did in the 1950s (Elliot, Krivickas, Brault, & Kreider, 2012). Ultimately, by examining Millennials' dating psychology, it will become apparent as to why this group of individuals has adopted a new style and it will be easier to predict the long-term effects of the dating revolution.

The first section reviews the history of American dating. Whyte's *Choosing Mates the American Way* provides extensive insight into the multiple dating revolutions that have taken place since the late 1800s. The four recurring themes in Whyte's (1992) article were age of marriage, parental supervision while dating, the occurrence of premarital sex, and which gender had more control of the dating process. Then, definitions and explanations of the stages of a modern relationship and variations of non-committed relationships between Millennials will be provided. This area will address the hookup culture, "talking," open relationships, committed relationships, and the differences between past generations. Then, statistical data from the U.S. Census Bureau shows that marriage age is at a record high in the U.S. since before 1890. The data is accompanied by an explanation of the average marriage age through history.

The second section examines the possible causes of the delay in marriage age and the reasons for the emergence of the hookup culture. The section presents statistics of the numbers of male and female Millennials with a college education and compares this statistic to previous generations. The section then addresses the trends Millennials are following, like attending an

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out-of-state university, and the impact moving onto a college campus has on a young person's outlook and relationships. It is important to look at college relationships and how those differ from high school relationships including characteristics like co-ed residence halls and the lack of parental supervision. The increasing independence of the modern-day woman who is now capable of providing for herself completely is used to explain how perspectives change and how the dynamic of a date has changed. The dating statistics for educated Americans show that more women are receiving degrees than men, which may result in a diminished pool of potential partners for heterosexual women who are more highly educated and seeking a partner with a similarly educated background. Then, the economics of dating compares the income of a full time job against how much a typical date cost in the 1990s and the 2010s to show why alternative gatherings have replaced taking a potential suitor out on an official date. Furthermore, since Millennials experienced the economic downturn of 2008 and the accompanying deficit of jobs, their priorities have shifted toward their career in hopes of eventually feeling financial and job security prior to engaging in relationships that could potentially result in marriage. Following economics, the relationship between parental divorce and millennials' own dating habits will be examined with support from Jefferson (2008) and Amato & Keith (1991). Finally, the effects of the internet and online dating in Millennials are described. Ultimately, this section will provide background to predict possible reasons why Millennials are delaying marriage.

The third topic delves into the psychology of Millennials' dating habits. First, Dow and Eff's (2013) findings are used to look at the reasons so many people have chosen monogamous relationships throughout history in order to speculate why there seems to have been a decrease in committed, monogamous dating relationships in the age demographic. Dow and Eff's theory will be connected with Erik Erikson's (1993) Psychosocial Stages of Development for young

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adults and their search of intimacy versus isolation where they seek love which is tested by the ability to form long term, meaningful relationships. Arnett expands on Erikson's theory in his concept of Emerging Adulthood (Arnett, 2000), a stage between adolescence and young adulthood where individuals explore and experiment with various aspects of their identity in order to choose paths to pursue for the rest of their lives. Afterward, the Investment Model Theory proposed by Le and Agnew (2002) will explain how personal investment in a relationship is subconsciously assessed and what factors determine an individual's choice to stay or leave a relationship. Barry Schwartz's book and TEDTalk, *The Paradox of Choice* argues that when consumers are given more options to choose from, they become more anxious about their choice. This concept will be applied to dating, showing how the use of dating apps and the internet leads a person to be under the impression that they have more options.

The fourth section of my thesis presents my primary research and the results of my survey. My research focuses on Millennial participants aged 18 to 34. The survey asked questions to categorize personality and polled individuals' attitudes toward relationships, personal relationship history, and current relationship status. My survey consists of Likert-scale questions, in addition to open-ended questions about personal attitudes toward relationships. I hope to draw conclusions not only about dating styles and attitudes but about the results of dating, which include engagement and marriage, and then assess my hypothesis to learn if my predictions were supported by the overall results of my survey. Based on this data, I will draw conclusions about whether or not this new dating style will be more likely to end in more successful relationships. I will also attempt to determine if this dating style is sustainable over a long period of time or if the idea will eventually be discarded or revised by generations to follow.

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## History of Dating in America

### Up Until Now...

In order to understand how and why Millennials are going about their romantic relationships differently than their ancestors, and what effects their choices will produce, it is critical to understand the multiple revolutions of American dating by understanding the history of dating. In *Choosing Mates – The American Way*, Martin Whyte (1992) discusses the history of American dating and ultimately seeks to determine whether or not the evolution of the dating process provides helpful experiences that could eventually produce more successful marriages later in life.

According to Whyte (1992), American dating has never paralleled the dating styles of other more traditional countries throughout the world. In America, arranged marriages were never the social norm; marriages were almost always driven by those who were to be married, rather than by their parents. It was common, however, to get parental approval—which typically involved asking the young woman's father for his permission before asking his daughter for her hand in marriage. In the late 1800s, immigrants and visitors from other countries were often shocked at how much freedom single, unmarried women had to meet other people through dances, community, church, and other public places. Because American dating culture is a melting pot of many other cultures' norms, there is little to no dominant cultural tradition to be upheld. As a result, dating has undergone two major transformations—one in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the other in the mid-late 20<sup>th</sup> century (Whyte, 1992).

In the late nineteenth century, dating typically took place in public with community supervision. It often led to romantic explorations, such as walking a young woman home, or holding hands. Couples could potentially meet in various social settings, like a fair through their

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church, or a local dance. These gatherings were attended by young people, accompanied by family, friends, or siblings and were less likely to be attended as partners. The commonality among all of the potential meeting places was that they were chaperoned under adult or community supervision, but it was not uncommon for a potential couple to sneak off alone without supervision. As the relationship evolved and became more romantic, the man would visit the woman at her home if invited, referred to as “calling,” typically done by middle and upper classes. The invitation for a man to visit a woman in her home might be extended by the woman’s mother, but could eventually come from a woman, herself. It was not uncommon for a woman to have multiple eligible bachelors interested in her at once. At this point, the woman might be having multiple men call on her, with the woman’s intention to pick the most compatible mate. If a man was told that a woman was not available to receive him at home, he would leave his calling card in hopes that the woman would return his call. If a man who stopped by a woman’s house to visit her was told that she was unavailable on several occasions, he was expected to assume that he was no longer welcome to visit (Whyte, 1992).

“Initiative and control in regard to calling were in the hands of women” (Whyte, 1992, p.72). The eligible bachelorette and her mother were the ones who decided who could visit. The woman’s mother was expected to supervise when a man was calling on her daughter. On the other hand, a girl’s father had very little involvement in the calling process. The women controlled whether or not the men would be received at the home. With the possibility of multiple men calling on a woman at once, women were in control of deciding which man to marry. Men sought out a woman they liked and strived to woo her, while women were to wait for a man to show interest in her.

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When two people were involved in calling, it was known to all members involved that the reason for doing so was to be wed at a near point in time. After calling, the relationship might progress to “keeping company,” which is equivalent to the 1900s term, “going steady,” where two people were seriously involved with one another, but not yet engaged. Once the relationship moved on to “keeping company,” the couple would still see each other in the woman’s home with parental supervision, but she would only allow calls from one man, and he would visit her regularly. As the couple became more serious, it has often been noted that parents might leave the couple alone, where they could, and often did, give into sexual temptations. Premarital sex, however, was still relatively uncommon while this type of dating was commonplace; almost all women were virgins until their wedding day. Calling was one of the first notable progressions of dating that took place in the United States (Whyte, 1992).

In the 1920s and 1930s, younger people of the upper classes began to reject the calling dating style, and began going on dates as a form of rebellion—the mark of the beginning of the marketplace dating mentality. The trend of going out on dates soon caught on to lower classes. While the gender in control of the date began to shift more to the man, the woman still did possess a considerable amount of control over the relationship, but the woman had less power in the relationship compared to when “calling” was the norm. At this point, the titles of a romantic couple, in order of seriousness were “dating,” “going steady,” “engaged,” and “married.” Young couples often publicized their “steady” relationship when the woman received an article of the man’s clothing to wear, such as a class ring, sweater, or jacket. During these two decades was when dating became more influenced by one’s peers and less influenced by their family (The History of Dating, 2014).

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During the mid-to-late 20<sup>th</sup> century, the focus of dating became more about pleasure and less about immediate marriage. Table 1 summarizes Whyte's article, which compares calling and the early marketplace mentality of dating. During the mid-to-late 20<sup>th</sup> century, dating was a more informal way of getting to know someone. The man asked a woman out on a date and the man was expected to cover the finances and transportation of the date. The woman's role was to keep a good company and perhaps allow a degree of intimacy, whether it be romantic or physical (Whyte, 1992).

As dating evolved, the amount of women who went into marriage as virgins decreased dramatically from 80-85% in the calling era to about 10% in the 1980s. After the transformation, dating eventually became a popularity contest among men, to see who could get the most or most beautiful women to want to date them. The primary focus of dating was no longer meant as the beginning of marriage, but was the first step in a relationship that might result in a serious relationship ending in marriage (Whyte, 1992).

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**Table 1.** *Comparison of Calling to Marketplace Dating After the First Dating Revolution*

	<b>Calling (late 19<sup>th</sup> century)</b>	<b>Marketplace (mid-end 20<sup>th</sup> century)</b>
<b>Upper-hand gender</b>	Women	Shift towards men, but women still possessed some amount of control in the relationship
<b>Purpose of dating</b>	To initiate marriage in the near future	More about pleasure, less about marriage. Was not meant to be a direct path to marriage, but the first step that might lead to marriage
<b>Parental Supervision</b>	Heavy, but once the couple became exclusive and more serious, the parents would often leave the couple alone	Parents had almost no control of who their children dated and where they went on dates
<b>Where the date took place</b>	In public, with community supervision, then in the woman’s home with parental supervision	Public places, where adults were less likely to be around. In front of peers
<b>Premarital sex</b>	80-85% of women went into marriage as a virgin	Only about 10% of women went into marriage as a virgin.
<b>Average age of first marriage</b>	Women: 23.5 Men: 26.5 (statistics for 1890) (Elliot, 2012)	Women: 22.25 Men: 24 (statistics for 1970) (Elliot, 2012)

In the 1960s, the Women’s Movement, in concurrence with birth control advancements, caused a sexual revolution. This time period is said to mark the beginning of the hookup culture. The advancement of the biomedical technology that produced the birth control pill also generated a more liberal attitude toward sex, which resulted in more sexual encounters among college-aged adults who now replaced date nights with large college parties that involved experimenting with alcohol and psychedelic drugs. As birth control became more readily available, young people were more willing to have sexual encounters outside of committed relationships. During this era, premarital sex became more socially acceptable. The Women’s Movement of the late 1960s promoted the equality of genders, mainly advocating that women

were also human beings who desired sex and should receive pleasure just as men did. During this time, the acceptance of women's sexual desires in conjunction with the liberating nature of drugs and alcohol produced a social environment that was accepting of individuals expressing their sexuality (The History of Dating, 2014). Once the new kind of dating was introduced, parents found themselves less in control of who their children dated and what they did—in fact, dating was often done in public, but in places adults were less likely to be found. Dating was more likely to be done in the sight of peers, and even so, couples found places to sneak away from their peers' supervision with their partners (Whyte, 1992).

Marketplace dating refers to the style of dating where individuals are free to get as much dating experience as they please. The transformation took place as the importance of compatibility and sexual enjoyment became more apparent, and young people wished to test compatibility with a potential partner prior to a lifetime commitment. Marketplace dating meant that single individuals could produce a hypothetical grocery list of qualities and attempt to find the mate who met the most criteria (Whyte, 1992).

Several factors other than compatibility also contributed to the rise of marketplace dating. One such factor was co-ed schooling, where young men and women could get to know each other as friends outside of dating over the course of several years. High schools also arranged events with minimal parental supervision, and college usually involved a complete removal of parental supervision (Whyte, 1992).

Another contributing factor was that young men and women were now able to work after-school jobs where their paychecks were now disposable income, allowing them to spend their earnings on things like makeup, clothing, meals, and entertainment, which also fed into the dating culture. This style of dating contributed greatly to the growth of the entertainment

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industry, as young people used movie theaters, shows, concerts, and other forms of entertainment as settings for dates with the money they earned at their jobs. Cars, which began playing into the dating culture in the 1930s, also contributed to “youth autonomy” by providing a place where dates could travel farther distances and have a private place to be with one another. Marketplace dating was meant to be a way for young people to learn more about getting along with people of the opposite sex and ultimately help with marriage later on in life. This style of dating exposed participants to more partners than calling did, presumably giving their generation a better knowledge base for choosing a lifetime partner (Whyte, 1992).

Based on his research, Whyte made predictions of how co-ed schooling, improving family financial statuses, and the rise of the entertainment industry, would impact marital success later in life. In Whyte’s research marital success was defined by having a happy marriage, agreed on by both parties. The “marketplace” approach of dating ultimately led to fewer couples waiting for marriage to engage in intercourse, in order to test out sexual, as well as interpersonal, compatibility while dating. Whyte speculated how the new style of dating would affect marital success, saying that the culture is based on the idea that the current style of dating provides valuable experience which will ultimately help people select better partners and have happier marriages. In order to provide an answer to his question about marital success, Whyte conducted a retrospective study, surveying women between the ages of 18 and 75 who had been married at least once. The following are the findings of his study:

“Marrying very young tended to produce unsuccessful marriages. Premarital pregnancy was associated with problems in marriage. However, once the age of marriage is taken into account, none of the other measures – dating variety, length of dating, length of courtship or engagement, or degree of premarital intimacy with the future husband or

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others – was clearly related to measures of marital success. ... Women who had dated more partners or who had engaged in premarital sex or cohabited were slightly less likely to have successful marriages.... Individuals who had been living together prior to marriage were significantly less likely to have successful marriages than those who did not... Women who had married their first sweethearts were just as likely to have enduring and satisfying marriages as women who had married only after considering many alternatives. Similarly, women who had married after only a brief acquaintance were no more (nor less) likely to have a successful marriage than those who knew their husbands-to-be for years. And there was no clear difference between the marriages of women who were virgins at marriage and those who had had a variety of sexual partners and who had lived together with their husbands before the wedding” (Whyte, 1992, pp.75-76).

Whyte believes that the marketplace style of dating would lead to slightly less success in marriage due to his findings which showed that if women dated more partners, had premarital sex, or cohabited with a partner, it resulted in a slightly less successful marriage. According to his findings, the most relevant factor was the age at which the couple was married.

Current dating norms have evolved even further from how they were described in the mid-to-late 1900s. In the present day, gender equality is becoming more prevalent, erasing the defining line of gender roles in a relationship. The man is no longer required to ask the woman out first, nor is it expected that he pay. According to a poll done in November 2006 by *essence.com*, only 23% of women expect men to pay for the date (Dyson, 2006). Previously, men were celebrated for entertaining more sexual partners, whereas women were taught to be ashamed for having many sexual partners. The double standard among men and women

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regarding the number of sexual partners one has pursued has weakened due to the marketplace psychology (Whyte, 1992).

Whyte explains that there are two different viewpoints to finding a lifetime partner – one is the marketplace approach, and the other is love. Marketplace dating, as explained before, is considered the more rational approach to marriage and relationships, where individuals date many people throughout the dating process and choose the mate who possesses the most desired qualities and where compatibility is highest. On the other hand, relying on love equates to waiting for the right feeling in the heart (Whyte, 1992). While the approach taken is based on the individual, Millennials are definitely taking advantage of the increased number of options the current marketplace-style atmosphere of dating provides. This may mean dating and getting to know potential mates through dating and various relationships, or simply getting a feeling for someone's personality through a few conversations and using one's gut instinct to judge if that person is a potential life-long partner.

### **Understanding Current Dating Definitions**

Since Whyte's article was published in 1992, dating has continued its evolution from the marketplace dating style into an updated version of the marketplace dating style adopted by Millennials. New York University has their own sociology internet network, GENYU, which is run by Professor Mary Quigley. Her journalism course requires undergraduate students to examine the millennial generation and report on various topics including, but not limited to health, money, and relationships. The relationships section of the GENYU website published an article written by NYU student Carina Wolff. In an effort to improve comprehension of common ambiguous relationship definitions Millennials use, Wolff (2011) defined these terms according to feedback provided by an informal, open-ended, online survey taken by 18 college students

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across the US. Responses were interpreted and consolidated into one clear definition. Among these terms are “hooking up,” “booty call,” “friends with benefits,” “open relationship,” “talking,” “seeing each other,” “dating,” “together,” “boyfriend/girlfriend,” and “going on a break.” “Hooking up” is one of the most vague terms, which can include anything from kissing to sexual intercourse. It is generally agreed upon that the term implies no commitment. A “one-night stand” can be considered hooking up, typically on a single occasion with no intent to continue. A “booty call” is different than a hook up because hookups are often unplanned, whereas a booty call takes place later at night and is initiated by a phone call or text message between a pair of people who already have some sort of friendship or non-romantic relationship. Booty calls are often described as “no strings attached” by nature. Booty calls often happen because of alcohol intake, or simply sexual desires. Next, a “friends with benefits” relationship consists of two friends who “hook up,” or have some level of sexual relationship, but explicitly or implicitly agree not to have an emotional relationship. While both partners agree to leave emotions out of the relationship, the attempt is not always successful. This often results in one or both partner(s) developing a more-than-physical attraction, ultimately causing the relationship to either suffer or transition into a new, more advanced stage. An “open relationship” started to gain traction in the late 1970s and early 80s. This type of relationship consisted of two people who were interested in one another, but who agreed they were free to see other people as well, and is still commonplace. An open relationship is described as “a relationship in which you are allowed to hook up with or date other people” while concurrently dating someone who one has invested emotionally in (Wolff, 2011 para. 15). Another important definition which is not included in Wolff’s article is “talking.” Although Urban Dictionary is not necessarily a sound source for official definitions, it has become a convenient source to keep track of popular slang terms. On

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Urban Dictionary.com, the first definition of “talking” was “when two people are not exclusive with each other nor have established what they are as a couple, but have some sort of relationship” (Urban Dictionary, 2004). “Seeing each other” is described as “casual dating,” but according to various perspectives, it can range from “just hooking up,” to the possibility of a romantic relationship in the future. The definition depends on the couple; one couple described it as “more than hooking up. It was dating without being official to the rest of the world” (Wolff, 2011, para. 12). Following that, “dating” can be interpreted as either being in a committed relationship with one person, or having gone on numerous dates with one person or a few different people. Dating implies that the relationship is based on more than purely sexual desires. When two people are “together,” it means that the two are solely interested in each other, but there is no official title to the relationship yet. This stage lacks the final step of commitment to be in an exclusive relationship. Conversely, some Millennials define being “together” as “hooking up and probably having sex, but not exclusive” or “exclusive, but no love yet” (Wolff, 2011 para. 11). Once the title of “boyfriend/girlfriend” is mutually decided on and used, it implies exclusivity with one person, in which the relationship has a sexual and emotional connection while being committed. “Going on a break” is a common term for temporarily breaking up, which, depending on the individual agreement, may allow individuals to be involved with others. This is often dangerous to the relationship and can be used as an easy way out, or as a means of breaking up with someone gently, without distinctly admitting that the individual wants to break up. Wolff concludes her definitions by explaining that “Ultimately, because of all of this confusion and misunderstanding between couples, Millennials feel as if they are having a harder time finding relationships where they feel comfortable enough in their situation to emotionally connect” (Wolff, 2011, para. 17). What may superficially seem to be a beneficial way to explore

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many different relationships and only decide to commit to the most pleasing person is ultimately backfiring for many young people because of the multitude of the different acceptable labels and expectations of relationships.

**Marriage Age Through History**

When examining the differences in dating styles from century to century in the United States, it is important to understand the trends of the age at which the population decided to wed.

*Figure 1: Median Age of First Marriage by Sex from 1890 to 2010*

Adapted from: Elliott, Krivickas, Brault, & Kreider (2012, May 5). *Historical Marriage Trends from 1890-2010: A Focus on Race Differences* (The United States of America, Bureau of the Census). Retrieved October 21, 2015.

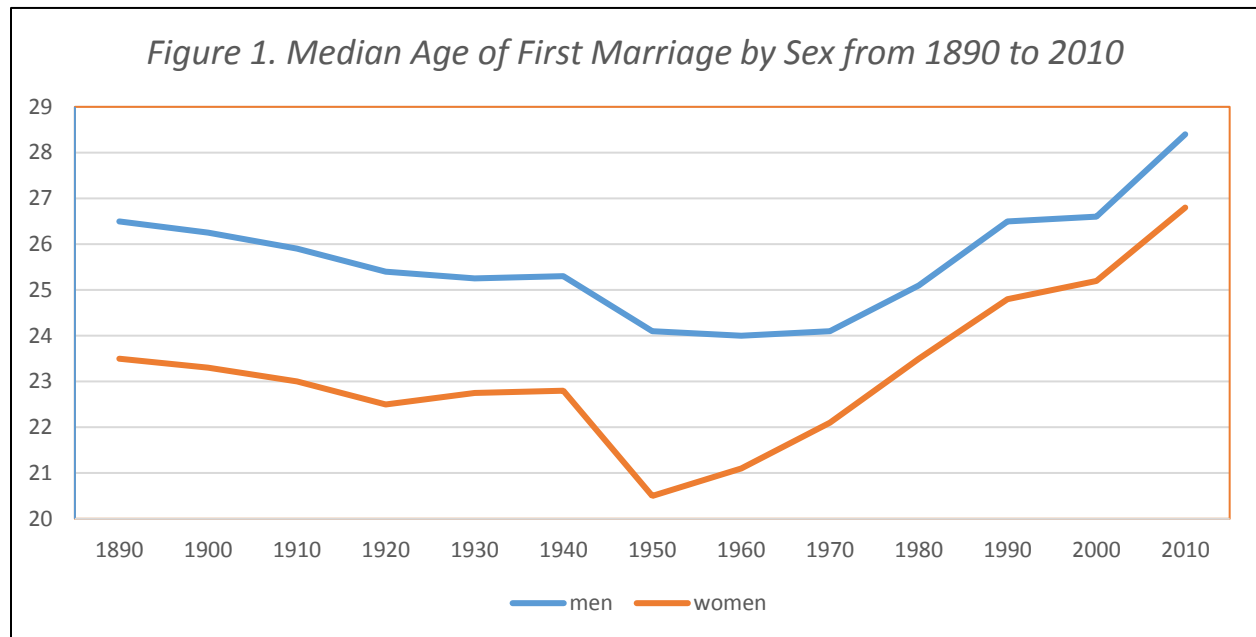


Figure 1 shows the median age at first marriage by sex from the years 1890 to 2010. Between 1890 and 1940, the marriage age steadily, but slowly declined. Over this 50 year period, the median marriage age decreased by about a year and a quarter for men (from 26.5 to 25.3 years). For women, the age also slowly and steadily declined; the median age was 23.5 years in 1890, and then there was a dip in the 1920s down to 22.5 years, followed by a slow rise until reaching 22.8 in the 1940s. This resulted in an overall decrease in median marriage age of

about three-quarters of a year for women. Between the 1940s and 1950s, marriage age dropped for men by over a full year and decreased even more dramatically for women by about two and a half years. For men, it then remained steady for the next three decades, but consistently rose for women in this time. From 1970 on, marriage age rose at a steady pace until the 1990s, when it was about 26.5 for men and 24.8 for women. The age of first marriage seemed to level off between 1990 and 2000, but then increased again from 2000 to 2010, eventually reaching a historical high of 28.4 for men and 26.8 for women in 2010 (Elliott, Krivickas, Brault, & Kreider, 2012).

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## Causes of Delayed Marriage

### Hookup Culture

The ambiguity of terms used to describe relationships causes confusion and discomfort among Millennials. “The Emptiness of College Dating Culture” (Lara, 2007) is an essay written by a Harvard student, which, though anecdotal, provides some possible explanations for the hookup culture. Lara states that college students often feel empty without an emotional and sexual relationship in their lives, so these students remain in unhappy relationships, or give in to the hookup culture. It explains the mentality of current college students’ aspirations, which is in favor of women becoming business professionals, with motherhood as the less-desirable alternative. Ultimately, these women put work and their careers before their future of a family. The women who are a part of the sexual revolution feel that they are equal to men, proving themselves capable of the same degrees, jobs, and professional potential as men. According to Lara, women are trying to distance themselves from the idea that they need to be dependent on a man in a relationship; women now hope to have gender equality, where gender roles no longer exist and sexism is abolished. The article takes a feminist stance such that women are equal to men in their casual relationships and can “hook-up” with a man, remain emotionless, and then move on as men have seemed to be doing for a long time. Within the gender-equal outlook, through multiple sexual encounters, women can now get to know their bodies better, which is ultimately the physical aspect of the marketplace dating attitude. However, Lara points out, the hookup culture can only go on for so long because the participants soon discover that the hookup culture is ultimately unfulfilling. Lara claims that getting to know and understand another person with an interest in romantic involvement no longer exists among Millennials. If it is socially

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acceptable for men to participate in the hookup culture, the article suggests, what incentive do they have to settle down and be with one partner?

“The sexual revolution has so corrupted the dating culture that no one dates anymore. After having so many different experiences, marriage, long-postponed, becomes an anti-climax when it should naturally play a more prominent role. While the hookup culture seems to preach independence, underneath it all, we find ourselves to be even more dependent on ‘lower passions’” (Lara, 2007, p. 5).

The tone of Lara’s article suggests that the hookup culture, which minimizes commitment and emotional connection, can only endure for so long, as it is well-understood that meaningful human connection and interaction is a basic human need (Maslow, 1954).

Gender, education, and socioeconomic status are leading reasons as to why the hookup culture exists in the first place, one expert explains. “Why The Dating Game is Rigged – Against Women” is an essay published in *Time Magazine* by Jon Birger (2015). It explains why Millennial women seem to feel as though many of the men who are on their intelligence level are either already in a relationship or simply do not exist. Currently, female college graduates outnumber their male counterparts, by almost 4:3. Birger, also the author of *Date-onomics: How Dating Became a Lopsided Numbers Game*, believes that this is one of the causes of the hookup culture now, since men have more options and can play the field, delaying marriage to a later time in their life (Birger, 2015).

Up until 1981, more American men had undergraduate degrees than women. In 1981, women with undergraduate degrees outnumbered men with similar degrees for the first time in history. Of those who graduated with an associate’s degree in 1981, 54.7% of the graduates were women, leaving 45.3% of the graduating class as men; based on 2014-2015 statistics, 60.7% of

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those graduating with associate's degrees are women; therefore, 39.3% of the graduates were men (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). During the 2014-15 academic year, 57.4% of the population who graduated with master's degrees were women, and 51.1% of doctoral degree recipients were women (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). This data further supports Birger's argument that women may struggle to find a man who has a similar level of education, which may make finding the right man seem impossible for the current population of women, thus causing women to hold out until they feel as though the right person comes along. In the meantime, women still seem to want to date and have relationships with men, but may not want a serious relationship. On the other hand, college-educated men and those with graduate degrees are taking advantage of dating supply and demand. Because women want equally-educated partners, those men who come from higher education have the upper hand and feel as though they can more easily find another partner. This leads to men being able to explore the dating world more than in the past, and push off settling down, thus delaying marriage, ultimately leading to the formation of the hookup culture.

From ages 18-22, Erikson (1993) theorizes, individuals are between adolescence and young adulthood. In adolescence, the focus is on identity versus identity diffusion, and in young adulthood, individuals focus on intimacy vs. isolation. In plain terms, adolescence is where individuals feel that they need to stand out from the crowd; in young adulthood an individual's goal is to find meaningful relationships. Between these two stages is the point at which most individuals attend undergraduate programs where they might experience living on their own in dormitories and take on more responsibilities than they were accountable for previously.

Living together in co-ed dormitories allows college-age individuals to get a better understanding of how the opposite sex behaves in their own living space, rather than only when

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out in public, or at school. This includes the candid way they maintain their living space, leisure activities, leisure attire, and behavior in the absence of adults. Co-ed dormitories at colleges are a more private place for young people to interact. What was once parental supervision in high school relationships is replaced by resident assistants who are not responsible to supervise interactions the way parents do for many high school students. Instead, interactions take place in public, in front of peers, or alone in living spaces such as dormitories and first apartments. Since more individuals are going to college now than in previous generations, this leads to more unsupervised interactions in dormitories, which could ultimately lead to individuals having more opportunities to engage in sexual activities due to the lack of supervision, as opposed to the lack of privacy received by couples in high school relationships that live with their parents. The increase in opportunities for privacy, in combination with the relaxing of social norms inspired by the sexual revolution of the 1960s, has led young adults away from traditional dating styles, increasing the prevalence of the casual relationship and shifting the focus of college-age students to becoming more career-focused rather than relationship-focused.

### **College Education**

Millennials may also be marrying later than their predecessors because more Millennials are pursuing higher education degrees. Data from the U.S. Census Bureau indicates an increase over time in the percentage of the population aged 25-29 with college degrees. For example, Baby Boomers are considered to be those born between 1946 and 1964 (“Baby Boomers”, 2010, para. 1), and thus, would reach the age of 25 to 29 between 1971 and 1993. In 1971, about 12% of U.S. women had a bachelor’s degree or higher and about 20% of US men had obtained a bachelor’s degree or higher. By 1993, the number of women with a bachelor’s degree or higher

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surpassed the number of men with a bachelor's degree or higher—about 23% of women and about 21% of men had bachelor's degrees (Ryan & Bauman, 2016).

For Millennials' baby boomer parents, in 1971, when 12% of women and 20% of men between the ages of 25 and 29 had an undergraduate degree, the median marriage age was about 22.25 for women and 24 for men. In the 1990s, women were married at about 24.75 years old and men were getting married at 26.5 years old. On average, from 1971 to 1990, the average age of marriage was postponed by approximately two and a half years. For Millennials themselves, by 2010, the median marriage age for women was a little below 27 years old and about 28.5 years old for men (Elliott, Krivickas, Brault, & Kreider, 2012). Attending a university and obtaining at least a bachelor's degree has increased by 24% for women and 12% for men since 1971 for the age range of 25 to 29 years old. Since the data indicates that there was an increase in college education, while there was an increase in median marriage age, one possible explanation for this correlation is that it may be due at least in part to people waiting longer to get married, perhaps to obtain all of their desired degrees or attain stability in their jobs before settling down and getting married.

Data from 2013 show that as education level increases, so does the age of first marriage. Among those who have ever been married, below the age of 46, those with less than a high school diploma were married at, on average, 22.7 years old. Of those who completed a college degree, the age rose to 23.6 years old. Adults who completed "Some college or associates degree" were married, on average, at age 24.2, and those who completed a Bachelor's degree or higher were married at age 27.2, on average (United States Department of Labor, 2013).

Therefore, since more American individuals pursue a college degree than ever before, and those

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who have higher education degrees are more likely to be married later, the marriage age has risen since previous generations.

As time progressed, it became more common for students to attend out-of-state colleges and universities, allowing students the freedom to be choosier in the programs they decide to apply for and enroll in. After the stock market dip of 2008, colleges and universities began accepting more students from out of state in order to create a better academic reputation and generate more revenue by means of the increased tuition rate for out-of-state students (Powell, 2016). This ultimately leads to college students becoming more independent, as they are provided with the opportunity to move to another area of the country during their early twenties. This may also lead to young adults becoming more comfortable moving to a new city with better early career opportunities. When these recent college graduates move to new cities, it is assumed they will need to start working towards an entirely new social circle, slowly distancing themselves from their old relationships, while concurrently forming new friendships and exploring new romantic options.

Once the new romantic options are explored, the average couple dates for approximately 3.6 years before committing (Springer, 2012). The average engagement length is 13.8 months before a couple officially becomes married (Goldberg, 2012). Hypothetically, if a young adult moves to a new city at 22, right after graduating college, and finds the person they will end up marrying immediately, following these averages, they will be about 25 or 26 years old when they get engaged and about 26 or 27 years old at their wedding, falling in accordance with the Census Bureau data discussed earlier.

As a result of women becoming more independent and not relying on a husband to provide for them, more women earned a college education and began their own careers. This has

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led to the amount of women with college degrees surpassing the amount of men with similar degrees. Additionally, with the increase in out-of-state attendance, young adults have become increasingly more comfortable with moving to a new area—a practice that can be applied to finding a stable career in the job market that would cause them to make a new social circle, delaying the point in their life when they find a mate. The college atmosphere of living on campus causes college underclassmen to constantly be in view of their peers, providing a more candid insight to their potential mates. Further, the lack of adult supervision in dormitories and on campus in general leads to an increase in more casual settings and the opportunity for more sexual behaviors, contributing to the decrease in the prevalence of a traditional date. Overall, as education level increases, so does the age of first marriage. An increase in college education in conjunction with an increasingly career-driven young adult population may have contributed to the delayed marriage age that has taken place over the past few decades.

### **Dating Economics**

The U.S. Department of Commerce tracks the relative incomes of various age groups over time, and periodically publishes data showing differences between young adults “then and now.” Compared to a baseline of what the average 19-34-year old earned at a full time job in the 1980s, data indicates that in the 1990s, young adults in this age range earned about \$900 more per year compared to those in the 1980s. In the 2000s, the age group earned about \$1,500 more per year than the average full-time working young adult did in the 1980s. Between the years 2009-2013, the 19-34 year old population working a full time job earned about \$2,000 less per year than those in the 1980s, accounting for a net decrease in salary of about \$3,500 from the salaries earned by full-timers in 2000 (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2015). Similar to the way in which those who lived during the Great Depression learned to save money and made it a part

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of their lifestyle, due to the decrease in pay and deficit of jobs, Millennials may be prioritizing their career and financial status before their committed romantic relationships.

Similarly, the rise in cost of many consumer goods due to inflation may contribute to a decrease in traditional dating. For example, the average price of one movie ticket in 2015 was \$8.43. This means that for one person paying for a date, it costs, on average, \$16.86 plus tax (National Association of Theater Owners, 2016). As mentioned previously, Millennials do not earn nearly as much as those their age did in the 1980s or 1990s. In 1992, a movie ticket cost \$4.14, or \$8.28 for couples, plus tax (National Association of Theater Owners, 2016). Between 1992 and 2015, the cost of a movie ticket doubled, but full-time working young people earned \$2,000 less per year.

The rising costs of a date ultimately may have resulted in an increase in the activity “Netflix and Chill,” a phrase that epitomizes hook-up culture. “Netflix and Chill” is generally defined as when two people who have some sort of interest in one another spend time together in one’s home and watch Netflix while participating in some variation of sexual behavior. “Netflix and Chill” is not only for those who are involved in a “friends with benefits” relationship, or a “booty call,” but can also be applied to those in a monogamous relationship, and those who are dating non-exclusively. In order to understand why this practice has become more prevalent, it is imperative to look at economics. A one-month Netflix streaming subscription costs an individual \$7.99 per month (O’toole, 2014). It can be used as often or as little as desired, and does not cost money based on the number of people who view the same screen, or how often media is viewed. The cost of a one-month subscription to Netflix is less costly than one movie ticket in 2016 (National Association of Theater Owners, 2016). While staying in and watching a movie has always been a common practice, it is important to note that the behavior is not new. Previously,

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staying in and watching a movie most likely meant that one or both people would visit the movie rental store and pick out a movie to take home and watch. Not having to leave home to acquire a movie makes Netflix a more convenient and less costly alternative. The convenience of watching Netflix at home may be a major contributor to the hookup culture, which may be caused by the increase in the cost of entertainment and the average price of a date compared to the income of young adults who work a full time job.

The average annual income of young adults working full time jobs in 2009-2013 was \$2,000 less than in the 1980s (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2015). However, because the cost of a date and living expenses has increased significantly since the 1980s due to economic inflation, it has become more expensive for young people to date. Ultimately, this has led to the increase of popularity of less formal dates, such as staying at home to watch a movie, i.e. “Netflix and Chill” or going out in a larger group where all people in attendance pay for themselves. In addition, it has become more common for two interested people to go out and spend time together, without the pressure of the label of a date where it is implied that whoever asked for the meeting would pay and that the gathering is of romantic nature. It is also becoming increasingly common for young couples to share economic responsibilities as many young women work and are economically independent. As the costs of dating are becoming more difficult to manage, Millennials shy away from more traditional dating styles and seek options that are less costly, or choose to wait longer until they find one individual they wish to invest their time and resources on.

### **Career**

Millennials, along with the rest of the nation, experienced the stock market crash of 2008. Among the Millennials affected by the crash, the older portion of the Millennial generation has

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struggled with finding fulfilling, long-term jobs and continues to struggle with job security through lay-offs. These young adults put an extensive amount of time, money, and effort into a college degree, offered with the promise of a higher, valuable position in a company which would provide job security. Millennials are dissatisfied with the results of their costly education, which causes them to work harder to achieve some of their career goals prior to finding a serious romantic relationship and getting married. This dissatisfaction and frustration in the job economy was demonstrated through protests, such as the Occupy Wall Street movement of 2011 (Milkman, 2014). Since the 2008 market crash, Millennials have been experiencing unemployment, underemployment, and substantial debt after they were promised prosperous jobs that would follow completion of various college degrees (Milkman, 2014).

Bentley University has a website, PreparedU Project, dedicated to investigating common dilemmas faced by Millennials in the workplace, the companies that employ Millennials, and the higher education institutions that prepare Millennials for the workplace. An article on their project site indicates that about 70% of Millennials wish to get married, but those who have lower education backgrounds and lower income levels see it as nearly impossible. Millennials who see marriage as an unlikely future attribute their doubts to a lack of a stable fiscal foundation, which is viewed as a required prerequisite to marriage (Murphy, n.d.). In a study by The National Marriage Project at The University of Virginia, the researchers compared the annual personal income of women with various educations and the ages at which they married for the first time. Those married under 20 years old who eventually obtained a college degree made 176.9% more income per year than their counterparts who were also married under 20, but only possessed a high school diploma. Those with a graduate degree who married when they were over 30 years old made 226.2% more than those with some college who married when they

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were older than 30. Those married under 20 made significantly less income than those married over 30 (Hymowitz, Carroll, Wilcox, Kaye, Raye, n.d.). Those who wish to marry but first require a stable income for themselves would need to get married after completing all of their schooling and have established themselves as professionals. Since the research showed that women who were married under 20 made significantly less than those married after age 30, it shows that the best income is found when an individual marries at a later age, post-graduation from higher education institutions. This makes it more difficult for those who were married earlier in life and without degrees to earn a higher income, which provides less financial security, and less of a feeling that they can afford to be married and have the wedding they desire.

When Millennials find a place of employment, one can assume that their goal is to establish themselves financially in order to improve the outcomes of their future. In an explanation of what drives Millennials to work hard in the workplace, another article published by the PreparedU Project explains that “The reason they want to earn money, however, is to provide long-term financial security for their families” (Adams, n.d., para. 6). Ultimately, Millennials are looking for a solid work-life balance because many Millennials were raised with parents who were involved in their childhood, and want the same for their children. A survey done by Bentley’s Center for Women and Business indicated that 48% of respondents said that ideally, they would like to work at only one or two companies throughout their career. Millennials want a second home at work where they feel comfortable with their superiors and colleagues. Millennials desire bosses who are more compassionate toward their home life and provide opportunities for growth in their career. Millennials, after doing high-level internships and obtaining degrees, are looking to continuous improvement in their workplace (Adams, n.d.).

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Forbes published an article titled “Millennials Work for Purpose, Not Paycheck” in which Karl Moore, a leadership writer, teaches companies how to keep their Millennials within the company and keep the population content by explaining their motivation to come to work. “They [Millennials] are on an endless search for happiness. If an organization is unable to map out a road plan, a purpose of employment, it will unfortunately notice a high 0-2 year turnover” (Moore, 2014, para. 4). Millennials are graduating college and looking for their dream jobs—it is no doubt that once they find a job they find contentment with, they want to put their time into the beginning of their careers before shifting their focus to a relationship. Eventually, Millennials want the company to return the favor once they start a family, with bonuses like a raise and a better work-life balance, including the ability to be more involved with their children’s lives, as well as the ability to spend more time with their spouse to improve their marriage and more time to participate in pastimes they enjoy.

Millennials were taught the American dream—hard work pays off in the end. Millennials work to put themselves through schooling, in hopes of earning a better job that provides a stable income. The stable income will allow them to start a family with more comfort and less anxiety, and the dedication they put into their early careers will pay off later on, allowing them to live comfortably and have an exceptional relationship with their employers nurtured with mutual respect, and in return, Millennials will have the luxury of an improved work-life balance once established in a career.

### **Parental Divorce**

Another possible reason that the marriage age among Millennials has risen from their Baby Boomer parents’ average marriage age may be because of the result of their parents’ marriages and high rate of divorce. Millennials may be postponing marriage in an attempt to

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prevent their own divorce. Parental divorce has been found to lower a child's well-being, in terms of academic achievement, conduct, psychological adjustment, emotional and social adjustment, and relations between the child and each parent, but its effects are relatively minor for most children (Amato & Keith, 1991). Amato and Keith also found that after a parental divorce, boys had a more difficult time adjusting socially than girls did. In previous studies, conduct problems were also greater for boys, but the two studies ultimately show that divorce affects boys and girls similarly. The difference in outcomes between children of divorce and children whose parents stayed together is apparent, but not large. For the children of divorce, their adjustment after divorce depends on several different factors, which include the conflict between parents before and after the separation, how well the parent in custody cares for the child, and the amount of other psychological stressors the child will be exposed to, like changing schools, or moving neighborhoods (Amato & Keith, 2001).

In a personal account, David Jefferson's (2008) article, "The Divorce Generation Grows Up," follows his high school's graduating class of 1982, when divorce rates were on the rise in America. Those who graduated high school in 1982 were born around 1964, making them on the border of Baby Boomers and Generation X. The article explains what impact parental divorce has on a generation's own marriages. While this article looks at Baby Boomers/Gen X, referred to by Jefferson as "the divorce generation," and Baby Boomers' and Gen Xs' parents, the Silent Generation, it is an important stepping stone to understanding what impact a baby boomer parent's divorce would have on a Millennial's relationship and relationship outlook.

Jefferson recounts, "The change had begun in the '60s as the myth of the nuclear family exploded, and my generation was caught in the fallout" (Jefferson, 2008, para. 5). He explains that the Women's Rights Movement ended up allowing a lot of mothers to go to work, making

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divorce a feasible option to free themselves of unsatisfying marriages, since they would now be able to economically support themselves and their children if they so wished.

Statistics presented in “The Divorce Generation Grows Up” point out that those who have divorced parents are twice as likely to get a divorce themselves (Jefferson, 2008). If both partners in a relationship come from families with divorced parents, the risk of divorce more than triples (Hawkins, Fackrell, & Higginbotham, 2016). Children of divorce are also more likely to have mental health issues. As divorce rates have decreased in recent years, marriage numbers have also dwindled. “Sociologists decry a growing ‘marriage gap’ in which the well-educated and better paid are staying married, while the poor are still getting divorced (people with college degrees are half as likely to be divorced or separated as their less-educated peers)” (Jefferson, 2008, para. 8). In addition, as stated previously in Whyte’s article, the younger one is married, the more likely the marriage is to end in divorce (Jefferson, 2008 para. 8). By getting married at a later age, Millennials are helping decrease the divorce rate slowly. Since 2000 alone, the divorce rate per 1,000 people in the U.S. has decreased from 4.0 to 3.2 in the year 2012 (CDC/National Vital Statistics System, 2015).

### **Role of the Advancements in Technology on Dating**

Since the invention of the internet and online dating, the dating game has changed. Online dating websites evolved into dating apps, each of which has its own style. With the infinite opportunities the internet allows, there is a dating website or app for every personality and interest. Many dating apps are targeted at Millennials, with different reputations for each app, from casual relationships and “hookups” to apps aimed at those who are looking for serious committed relationships that seek marriage as the end goal. The advancement in dating technology, from finding a mate, to the way text messages have altered how and how often

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communication takes place is an important factor to understand in order to comprehend the current-day relationships Millennials take part in.

Helen Fisher, a biological anthropologist at Rutgers University, was interviewed in Laura Stampler's "The New Dating Game" (2015). Stampler recounts her own experience when she first began using the Tinder app. After a while of using the app and going on a few dates, Stampler explains that the amount of potential matches was overwhelming and eventually delayed a meet-up between two matches. "The more opportunities you have, the less likely you are to meet any of them," Fisher explains (Stampler, 2015, para. 18). Studies have demonstrated that when people are given more options to choose from, they are more likely not to choose anything at all (Schwartz, 2005). "Fisher doesn't rule out these apps' ability to help people find love. Picture selection can indicate a lot about a person, and physical attraction has always been a key determining factor in mating," as many people have successfully found dates, relationships, and marriage via the use of dating apps (Stampler, 2015, para. 20).

"Love The One You're Near" is an article written by Jennifer Bleyer (2014), which explains the brief history of mobile dating apps. Online dating eventually transformed from the use of dating websites to the use of dating apps instead. Dating apps began with people looking for casual sex, displaying a photo of the person, their age, and their distance from the user. Bleyer explains that Grindr was the first app people used, with an intended audience of gay men looking for hookups. With the few photos and information provided, experts suggest that users are looking for a perfect appearance and general figure to fit all of their hopeful criteria, and the users will accept nothing less. When swiping quickly, or "playing" on Tinder (since many users define it as a game), people look for the highest level of attraction, yet miss out on someone who

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does not have the best physical appearance, but might have exactly the personality the user is seeking. Ken Page is a therapist and author, who claims that,

“Meeting through a vast and dehumanizing virtual marketplace encourages people to see each other more as products and less as people, and to not afford each other common courtesy, let alone the focused attention it takes to forge a real, intimate connection” (Bleyer, 2014 para. 7).

There may be a big difference between one’s internet personality and personality in person, which can lead to a big let-down when potential “perfect” matches finally meet in real life. Generally, people are less charming and witty in person, as they do not have time to craft the perfect response. Experts, like Eli Finkel, a social psychology professor at Northwestern University, explain that it is best to meet in person as soon as possible to minimize lost time to find out if there is a real connection. Finkel also suggests using apps at places like a music festival or a conference as a better use for the apps, where the user and their potential matches have commonalities and can meet right away (Bleyer, 2014).

Sharon Jayson is a journalist and former *USA Today* reporter who publishes articles about behavior and relationships. Jayson wrote “The End of ‘Online Dating,’” which suggests that online dating from a desktop is now being replaced by smartphone apps, which usually take into account the current location of the user. These smartphone apps allow users to find one another based on location, ultimately making it easier for people to meet up by eliminating the need to travel, or delay meeting in person until a trip can be planned. Other factors, like ease of use, play into the perceived preference for mobile app users, allowing them to use the app in their spare time throughout the day, with more privacy due to the size difference between a laptop or computer screen and a mobile phone screen. Jayson explains that there are so many different

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websites used for different types of people, that there is a dating website for everyone. Some apps listed include FarmersOnly.com (based on occupation), VeggieDate.com (for eating preference), JDate (based on the Jewish religion), as well as Grindr (marketed toward gay men). While previously, online dating was thought to be used by middle-aged adults, now, the largest user demographic is the 18-29 age group, followed by those 30 to 49 years old. Jayson predicts the online dating industry will grow for those over 50 years old once the Baby Boomer population becomes more accustomed to the ways of online dating, since over one-third of Baby Boomers are not married. Previously, there was a stigma surrounding online dating which has faded and become nearly obsolete. Jayson also provides a brief overview of research done by sociologist Michael Rosenfeld at Stanford University, which found that couples who met each other online were twice as likely to get married as those who met each other elsewhere (Jayson, 2013b).

In another one of Jayson's articles, "How Texting Has Blown Up The Dating Culture," Jayson interviewed Millennials about dating practices, and reported that people who are involved in dating now tend to text more than call because it is more casual (2013a). One expert, Naomi Baron, a professor of linguistics at American University, explains that people do not call now because they do not wish to disturb the other person, but texting is an ongoing conversation where participants respond at their convenience. She reports that when asking for a first date, a dinner date seems too serious and may be too much of an investment of time should the date be unsuccessful. When interviewed, one participant said that she prefers to meet for drinks, so if the date does not work out, she does not feel bad that the man paid for dinner. The interviewee also explained that when meeting for drinks, only an hour of time was used, rather than a longer period of time, like how long it takes for dinner and a movie (Jayson, 2013a).

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In conclusion, online dating has allowed Millennials to have more dating options available while putting in less effort to find a date, with the possibility of rejection in the cyber world rather than face to face. A downside of the vast opportunities provided by dating apps and websites is that having so many options can lead to delaying or not meeting with a person who could have been a perfect match. Dating apps also result in the removal of the human aspect of dating, which generates the mentality that dating is synonymous with shopping for the perfect product that meets all of the characteristics desired. The variations of dating apps that tailor to specific interests allow users the convenience of narrowing down prospective options to those who have at least one major commonality. Text messaging has played into the dating culture as it decreased how often couples call each other, which is replaced by messaging. Messaging is more convenient and does not require both parties to coordinate their availabilities. On a similar note, this style of casual communication during dating can also be applied to the way Millennials go on first dates, as “going for drinks” is replacing the more traditional dinner or a movie date. The advancement in technology allows Millennials’ relationships to become more casual, leading to the introduction of a few of the new dating types, like “talking.” The advancement also leads to more options of people to date, but fewer dates since people have the opportunity to be more choosy in who they wish to spend their valuable time with.

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## The Psychology of Millennial Dating

### Monogamy

Monogamy is defined as the practice or state of being married to only one person or having only one sexual partner at a time (Mirriam-Webster, n.d.). There are two different theories as to why monogamy is so prevalent in human society—one perspective suggests that monogamy is common because monogamy is adaptive biologically, and the other suggests that monogamy is a learned behavior handed down through generations because of social norms (Dow & Eff, 2013). Ultimately, the disagreement in theories boils down to the debate of whether or not monogamous relationships are learned or instinctual.

According to Dow and Eff (2013), while procreation and protection may be a man's primal instinct, procreation is a higher priority to men than protection is. Procreation is the most basic human duty, and therefore the unconscious intrinsic goal of each person in humanity in order to continue the human race. At the same time, protection for survival is the secondary goal for humanity in terms of fundamental goals. In terms of survival, monogamy was preferred because it is difficult for one man to protect more than one mate. From a primitive perspective, it was a man's job to keep a woman safe, and women felt that this duty could not be carried out efficiently if a man had more than one mate to protect. The main theory behind this viewpoint is that monogamy is chosen as a means of protection against disease, environmental factors, and other external threats.

The other theory suggests that "monogamy has spread though borrowing and descent, such that societies that practice monogamy do so because ancestral and neighboring societies do so—not because the practice is necessarily adaptive" (Dow & Eff, 2013, p. 233). This view stems from common descent and physical neighbors, but does not necessarily have roots in

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religion (Dow & Eff, 2013). Essentially, those who support this perspective believe that monogamy is a learned behavior because it is common in many societies (Dow & Eff, 2013).

Following the second viewpoint, the “physical neighbors” hypothesis can lead to the idea that monogamy is a learned behavior from those surrounding the process of growing up, as well as the fact that it is the cultural norm around the couple. In contrast, the common descent hypothesis may lead one to believe that a monogamous-mindset is inherited in genes passed from parent to child. However, Dow and Eff agree that the choice for monogamy most likely stems from the fact that monogamy was the norm, and was most likely practiced by an individual’s parents, thus making it a learned behavior, or tradition. The transmission of cultural traits was one of the most important determining factors of monogamy (Dow & Eff, 2013).

In any case, monogamy is still the norm in the United States, so most Millennials eventually continue to choose monogamy as their preferred method for long-term relationships. Although avoiding disease seems like an outdated reason for monogamy, it is still prevalent, though decreased, through the advancement of medical technology, improved sanitation methods, and more advanced safe sex practices. Tradition and learned behaviors are also still prevalent, however; during the exploration of early adulthood, individuals often find themselves straying from what they have been taught in order to learn about what works best for themselves as an individual. Millennials have appeared to reject the idea of a monogamous serious relationship in their younger stages of early adulthood, but most Millennials still seem to eventually rely on monogamous relationships as their long-term style of relationships.

### **Emerging Adulthood**

In contrast to Erikson’s theory, which suggests people who are in their late teens and early twenties are either adolescents or young adults, Arnett (2000) suggests a new

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developmental category, referred to as “emerging adulthood,” which best describes American Millennials in this age group. “Emerging adulthood is proposed as a new conception of development for the period from the late teens through the twenties, with a focus on ages 18-25” (Arnett, 2000, p. 469). Arnett explains that this stage of development is between adolescence and young adulthood, and is distinct from both. During this stage, Arnett explains, there are many opportunities of where to go in life, but because of this, there is little certainty about the future. The theory behind emerging adulthood began with Erik Erikson’s contributions of the developmental stages of life, which did not include a stage that might correspond with emerging adulthood. Emerging adulthood also pulls from Daniel Levinson’s 1978 theory, which was developed after interviewing men in mid-life, asking about their earlier years. Eventually, Levinson concluded that between the ages of 17 and 33, individuals were in the “novice phase” where they were expected to become adults and build a stable life. “During this process, according to Levinson, the young person experiences a considerable amount of change and instability while sorting through various possibilities in love and work in the course of establishing a life structure” (Arnett, 2000, p.470). Arnett also references Kenneth Keniston’s 1971 theory that the late teens and twenties are a time to experiment with different roles. These theories combined to create the concept of emerging adulthood, which seems to be becoming more prevalent in modern day American society. The increasing prevalence of emerging adulthood explains why young adults are experimenting more with dating-relationship types, and are getting married later. Young people are exploring their options during this stage of life in order to try to find something that brings contentment and is sustainable for the remainder of their lives.

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Emerging adulthood, however, is not prevalent across all cultures. In 1991, a study of 186 traditional non-Western cultures found that adolescence occurred in all of the cultures, but only 20% of the cultures had a period between adolescence and adulthood (Arnett, 2000). The studies found that adulthood was thought to begin once an individual got married, which was between 16-18 for women and 18-20 for men, and did not allow for any time for emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000).

“Emerging adulthood, then, is not a universal period but a period that exists only in cultures that postpone the entry into adult roles and responsibilities until well past the late teens. Thus, emerging adulthood would be most likely to be found in countries that are highly industrialized or postindustrial. Such countries require a high level of education and training for entry into the information-based professions that are the most prestigious and lucrative....” (Arnett, 2000, p. 478).

Since marriage and the beginning of family life is postponed due to the time spent earning higher education degrees, the individuals in these cultures have more time for experimenting in the emerging adulthood stage. It is important to note that even if individuals live in an industrial society, they may not use emerging adulthood to explore their opportunities, as they may be denied the opportunity, may decide against it or certain parts of it, or may come from a very traditional culture they are expected to uphold.

Since emerging adulthood is a time where the future is uncertain and individuals have the opportunity to explore possible options for the future to see what fits them best, the current style of dating suits the need to test out multiple different options, using the marketplace style of dating to find a partner who fits each person and their chosen lifestyle best. In order to determine

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the most suitably fitted partner, an individual must determine when a partner is worthy of a continued relationship, and when to abandon the possibility of a future with that individual.

### **Investment Model Theory**

The Investment Model describes three primary factors used to determine commitment; these are satisfaction, quality of alternatives, and investment size (Tuten & Sleeth, 2002). The theory was originally devised in reference to an employer/employee relationship, but can be applied to all other types of interpersonal relationships as well. Satisfaction is how content one is with the relationship in question. Satisfaction is correlated with the individuals' quality of alternatives, which would take into account the other possible relationships that could be pursued rather than the relationship the individual is already a part of. Investment size refers to an individual's contributions to the relationship, which can include friendships with co-workers, retirement funds, and length of employment (Tuten & Sleeth, 2002). Therefore, the model predicts that if satisfaction is high, the quality of alternatives is low, and investment size is high, a person is more likely to be committed to a relationship, whether it be a business relationship or a romantic relationship. There are no significant differences in the prediction of commitment based on sex or ethnicity, but there does appear to be differences in the prediction of commitment based on the length and exclusivity of relationships (Le & Agnew, 2002). For example, for couples who were engaged, cohabiting, or married, there was a stronger correlation between commitment and alternatives than there was for couples who were non-exclusively dating, or exclusively dating. However, the correlations between commitment and satisfaction levels were similar among all 3 groups (non-exclusive daters, exclusive daters, engaged/cohabiting/married). Another notable difference is that investment was shown to be more strongly correlated with commitment for exclusive and non-exclusive couples, compared to

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those who were engaged, married, or cohabiting. Similarly, those who were in a relationship for less than 18 months had a stronger feeling of investment in the relationship than those who were in the relationship for longer than 18 months (Le & Agnew, 2002). This shows that investment is an important factor for those who are in newer relationships, or less serious relationships, but may be less of a predictor of commitment when compared to the satisfaction and the quality of alternatives. This also shows that the relative strength of the factors predicting commitment vary based on the type of relationship one is in.

In terms of the way Millennials date, the quality of alternatives may be the biggest factor in whether or not Millennials decide to remain in a relationship. The introduction to online dating increases the amount of alternatives that seem to be available, as many apps now use geographic location to present a host of romantic options, making it easier to begin a conversation with and potentially start dating a new person. In addition to online dating, due to the “hookup culture,” it is becoming more appealing for Millennials to be without a partner, and engage in hook-ups, without the commitment, making it seem as though they are narrowing down their search for their perfect match while spending less time than if they were to date each person. Satisfaction may be decreasing in average millennial relationships due to the comparison of how they see their own relationships and how their peers portray their relationships through social media. In addition, with the introduction of more choice, Millennials expect to find a perfect match, making it more challenging to find a partner who satisfies all of their desired romantic criteria. With a predicted increase in romantic alternatives and a decrease in satisfaction as compared to their peers, the Investment Model theory would seem to suggest that the marketplace style of dating is a natural fit for the Millennial generation.

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### *The Paradox of Choice*

As mentioned previously, the more choices one is presented with, the less likely one is to make a definite decision. In a TEDTalk summarizing his book, *The Paradox of Choice*, Barry Schwartz (2005) explains that modern day society provides people with too many options. Having options is thought to maximize freedom of the individual, in an attempt to ultimately give individuals the best outcomes because the decision is up to the individuals themselves. Schwartz provides examples of his grocery store which provides 175 salad dressings, 285 kinds of cookies, and 230 soups, which makes choosing just one of these even more agonizing to the consumer. Another example he gives is that when a patient sees a doctor, the doctor explains to the patient their options, and the benefits and costs of each option and then allows the patient to decide what to do. This puts patients in the drivers' seat to determine what they want their care to be, though this may lead to unintended consequences.

“...patient autonomy, which makes it sound like a good thing, but what it really is, is a shifting of the burden and the responsibility from decision making from someone who knows something, namely the doctor, to someone who knows nothing, namely the patient” (Schwartz, 2005, 4:00).

In terms of marriage, before, it was expected that Americans would marry and procreate as soon as they could. Who they chose for their spouse was the only decision that needed to be made. This is no longer true. Now, every aspect of marriage and family is a decision to be made- individuals choose if and when to marry, which they should have first or at all – a career or children, as well as who to get married to – there are simply more options. Schwartz explains that too many options leads to paralysis rather than autonomy, and that individuals are less likely to make a choice when they are presented with an excessive amount of options. “Schwartz’s

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research... shows that when we have more options, we are actually less satisfied and sometimes even have a harder time making a choice at all” (Ansari & Klinenberg, 2015, p. 127). Schwartz explains that this dissatisfaction leads humans to imagine what could have been if they had made a different choice, leading to regret of the decision. When there are a multitude of options, there is an escalation of expectations. This leads to people expecting to find perfection, which is ultimately unattainable, leading to less satisfaction. When fewer options were available, expectations were lower and people were more satisfied when they were pleasantly surprised when a situation turned out better than they originally thought (Schwartz, 2005).

When Schwartz’s theory is applied to dating and marriage, it explains why Millennials are getting married later in life. Online dating and dating apps open users up to even more potential mates, and may lead individuals to commit less. When there are more options available in such a convenient way, people are more likely to try to find perfection in a mate. Relating back to the Investment Model Theory, *The Paradox of Choice* explains that people are presented with too many options, overwhelming them. Furthermore, increasing the quality (as well as the quantity) of alternatives will overall decrease commitment in a relationship. Ultimately, perfection in a mate is highly unlikely to be found, causing dissatisfaction, and prolonging the dating process.

### **Types of Decision Makers**

Aziz Ansari is a writer, actor, and stand-up comedian. His fame stemmed from making a parody of modern dating culture, but his book, *Modern Romance*, looks at the topic through a more serious, sociological standpoint, as Ansari collaborated with a sociologist from New York University. The book explains the nature of contemporary relationships and evaluates the impact of technology on modern relationships. It takes into account the changes in dating in the present

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and the past. Ansari explains Barry Schwartz's (2002) idea of the two personality types that may present when an individual is faced with a choice: "maximizers" and "satisficers" (a cross between the words satisfy and suffice). Maximizers are those who seek "the best" potential option, but this is often too difficult, so people end up being "satisficers" who dream about having the best, but are content with having a "good enough" option. Due to the widespread use of dating apps, the Millennial generation has so many dating opportunities available, making these individuals believe that their "ideal person" exists somewhere. However, they may be left disappointed when they are unable to find the imaginary ideal person who exists in their head. Ansari related this choice to being in a relationship in New York City, where every corner has potential dating partners, which made Ansari question if he really wanted to be tied down when so many options were available. Ansari would see other potential mates when commuting to work by foot, or on public transportation. However, in a different setting, in Los Angeles, where the population is more likely to use their own methods of automobile transportation, and there is less walking to work and taking public transportation, he explained, he could not wait to get home to see his girlfriend. On the other hand, thirty years ago, the amount of alternatives were essentially limited to people in one's immediate community, co-workers, or a friend of a friend, which limited alternatives to maybe 2 or 3 options who a person found attractive at work, or a few people a friend may think is suitable to set their friend up with. According to Ansari, "you do so much to cultivate that person because there may be a long drought after that person. That's what it used to be like. But now, in principle, the world is available to you" (Ansari, 2015, p. 132). Schwartz's concept of maximizers and satisficers comes into play when examining Millennial dating culture. The introduction of dating apps creates the illusion of virtually infinite dating options, which may encourage Millennials to take a maximizer perspective in dating.

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## Primary Research

### Introduction

In order to gather additional data and explore the reasons Millennials are delaying marriage, I chose to conduct a survey to get feedback from Millennials about their outlooks on the current dating style and the way they conduct their own dating lives. The purpose of this survey research was to understand Millennials' perceptions about the current dating culture, as well as gain information about Millennials' actual dating habits.

### Hypotheses

I believe that the introduction of dating apps and websites during the time when Millennials began dating produced a larger number of maximizers than satisficers among the Millennial population. As the quality of alternatives increases, this allows Millennials to become more selective in choosing their mates. The first hypothesis was that the prevalence of maximizers will be especially elevated in those who use dating apps or websites, in that there will be more maximizers who use dating apps than satisficers who use these apps. I also predict that due to the increased availability of alternatives that Millennials grew up becoming accustomed to due to the internet, there will be more maximizers than satisficers among those surveyed.

For the second main hypothesis, I also predict that the amount of Millennials who are not in monogamous relationships, that is, "single," will be greater than those in monogamous relationships, due to the fact that those within the age range are now more focused on achieving an education, establishing a career, etc. I predict that this may be due to the fact that individuals are not necessarily concerned about having serious relationships at this point in their life

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because, as statistics show, they are more likely to get married at a later age in life, and do not see the point in trying to begin a relationship in a younger age with the likelihood that it will fail.

Finally, from my previous experience, my third hypothesis was that Millennials are generally unsatisfied with the current dating culture, but lack the courage to refuse it, as they might be ridiculed by their peers, or risk not finding a partner with the same beliefs.

Perhaps one of the reasons Millennials are attempting to gravitate away from strict dating monogamy and are more accepting of nontraditional relationships in their young-adult lives is due to the shift in gender control of the relationship (Whyte, 1992). As men are more likely to be the gender in control of the relationship, due to the deficit of educated men playing on dating economics, it may be possible that in their young-adult lives, men are further exploring the phenomenon of dating or engaging sexually with different women. However, with the advances in the feminist movement, women are breaking the stereotype that only men can engage in sexual relationships with more than one person for recreational purposes.

## **Methods**

To examine these hypotheses, an online survey was conducted using Survey Monkey. We posted the survey to my Facebook page and asked friends to take the survey and share it with their friends. We invited American Millennials aged 18-34 to participate in the survey. Those who were participating were asked to read and agree to a consent form that outlined the purpose and the terms of the study. We asked participants for their age, gender, state of primary residence, and sexual orientation, but did not record any identifying information such as names.

We then asked a series of questions to classify participants as maximizers or satisficers using the questions from *Maximizing Versus Satisficing: Happiness Is a Matter of Choice* to determine a maximizing score which would then classify each respondent as a “maximizer,”

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“satisficer,” or “neutral” (Schwartz, Ward, Monterosso, Lyubomisky, White, & Lehman, 2002).

We also asked a series of questions about the age at which they believed they would feel comfortable getting engaged/married, as well as the age at which they believed they actually would get engaged/married. Additional questions asked for information about current and previous relationship history. Finally, there were several open-ended questions about participants’ outlook on dating culture, as well as dating app/website use. A copy of the survey can be found in Appendix A.

## **Results**

After making the survey available for two weeks, we were able to collect 74 usable responses from an initial 88 participants. Of the original 88, 14 respondents began the survey but did not complete it, so their responses were excluded. The average age of our participants was 20.98 years. Of the 74 respondents, 50 identified as female and 24 identified as male. When asked about sexual orientation, 68 respondents identified as straight, 1 identified as bisexual, 2 identified as gay, 1 identified as lesbian, and 2 respondents wrote in that they were pansexual. When asked about dating app use, 40 of the 73 respondents who answered that question said they did use dating apps and 33 said that they did not use dating apps.

We sorted participants in three groups based on their average scores on the Maximizing/Satisficing scale. This scale asked a series of questions to identify the decision-making style of respondents – higher scores on the 1-7 scale indicated a greater tendency to be a maximizer. For the purpose of comparison, we assigned the label of “Satisficers” to people who scored between 1- 3.5; in our sample there were 8 people in this range (10.8%). We assigned the label of “Neutrals” for persons who scored between 3.51- 4.49, because their scores indicated that in some situations they engaged in maximizing behavior and in others satisficing behavior.

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In our sample, there were 27 people who we classified as a neutral (36.5%). Finally, Maximizers were persons with average scores between 4.5- 7; of our sample, 39 of persons were classified as Maximizers (52.7%). Thus, our sample included many more persons who we classified as Maximizers than Satisficers

To test hypothesis 1, we conducted a Chi-squared test of independence to assess if one category (maximizers, neutrals, or satisficers) were more likely to use dating apps or websites. There were no significant associations among decision-making style and use of dating apps/websites. A *t*-test was also conducted to compare average maximizing/satisficing scores between those who use dating apps/websites and those who do not. There was no significant difference between these groups in terms of their maximizing/satisficing scores.

Contrary to the second hypothesis, 41 of our 74 respondents (55.4%) indicated that they were in a monogamous relationship, suggesting that in fact, there was a greater proportion of Millennials in monogamous relationships compared to those who reported other types of relationships.

Because neither of these hypotheses were supported by the data, we conducted various *t*-tests to compare the age at which participants thought they would be ready to get engaged or married versus when they thought they would actually be engaged or married. The majority of the differences were insignificant. However, the average age at which people thought they would be ready to get married (26.6 years) differed significantly ( $t = -2.82, p < .01$ ) from the age at which they thought they would actually get married (27.9 years).

Next, we broke the same data down by sex. Most of the differences between male and female participants were non-significant, but there was a notable difference in the average age at when each sex stated they would feel ready for marriage. Women reported, on average, that they

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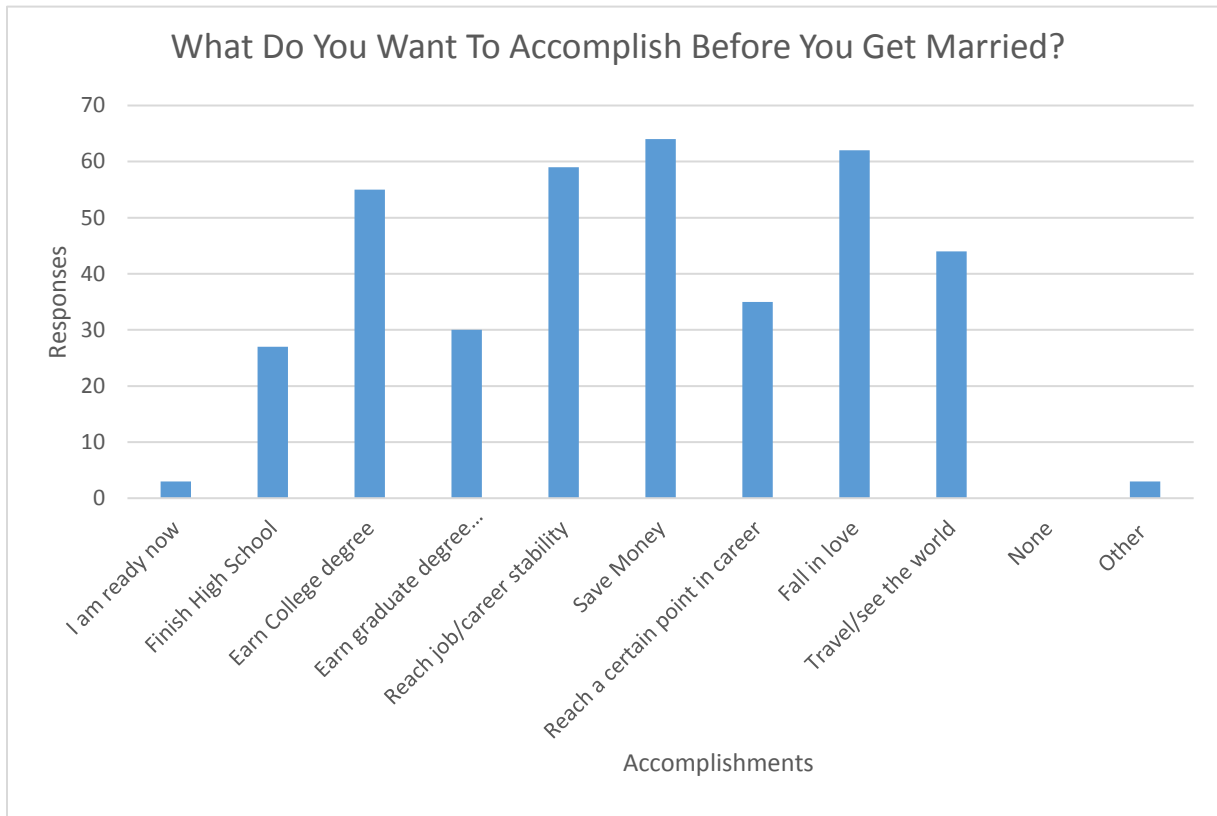
think they would be ready for marriage at 26.2 years old, whereas men felt that they would be ready for marriage at age 27.5, which represented a significant differences ( $t = -2.26, p < .05$ ).

Finally, we conducted an ANOVA comparing the three categories of people (maximizers, satisficers, and neutrals) and when they felt that they would be ready to get engaged or married and when they felt that they would actually get married. There were no significant differences between any of the groups on the ages at which they felt they would be ready to get engaged or married.

Then, we asked participants if they were interested in marriage. For those who responded that they would be interested in getting married, they were asked what they wanted to accomplish before they got married, and were directed to select options from a list (e.g., finish school, save money, see the world). “Save money” was the most common response, with 64 participants selecting that option, followed by “fall in love” ( $n = 62$ ). Three people said they were ready now, and had already accomplished everything they wanted prior to marriage; one of these respondents was 20 years old; the other two chose not to identify their age. Write-in responses that were characterized as “other” included responses such as, “When I’m ready to settle down,” “parental approval,” and “know enough to make sure I am with the right person.” The results of this question are in Chart 1 on the following page.

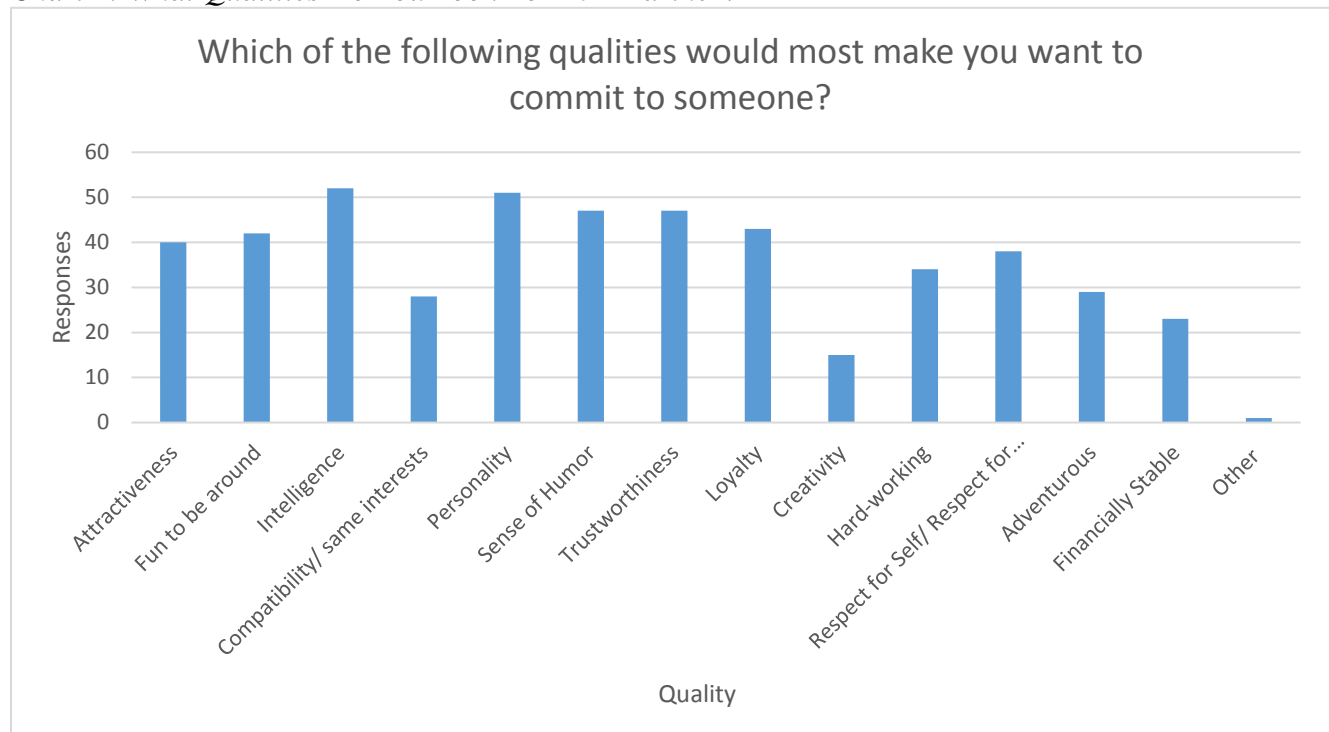
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Chart 1: What Do You Want To Accomplish Before You Get Married?



Next, we asked participants to select which characteristics would most make them want to commit to someone (e.g., attractive, intelligent, hard-working). We asked participants to choose up to 5 qualities; however many participants ignored the request and chose as many as all 13 qualities; two respondents chose not to answer the question. The results are shown in Chart 2 on the following page. “Intelligence” was the most commonly chosen response ( $n=52$ ), followed by personality ( $n= 51$ ). The least commonly chosen quality was creativity ( $n= 15$ ). The 1 respondent who chose “other” wrote in “loves me for me”.

Chart 2: *What Qualities Do You Look For In A Partner?*

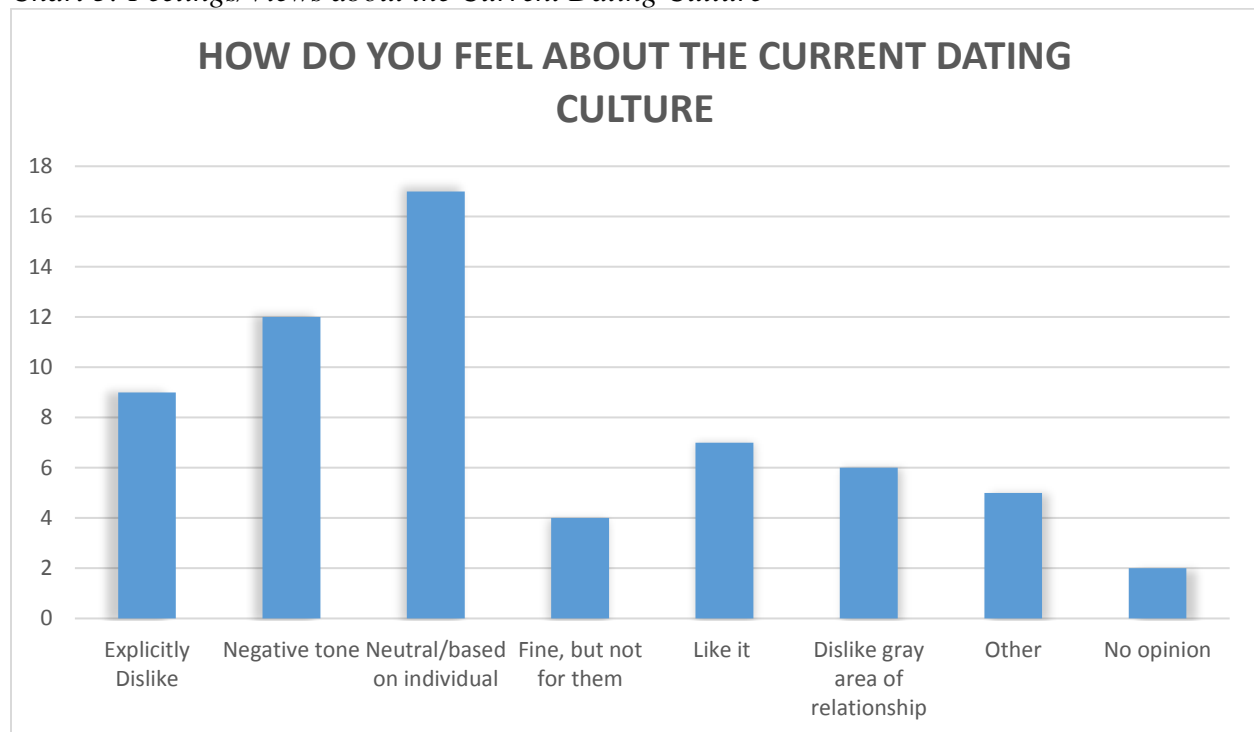


To examine the third hypothesis, we asked an open-ended question about personal feelings and views on the current dating culture in our survey; 62 people responded to this question. Frequent common themes among responses enabled us to categorize their responses into eight categories (explicitly dislike, negative tone, neutral/based on individual, fine but not for them, like it, dislike gray area of relationships, other, and no opinion). Four of the respondents (categorized as fine but not for them) said that the culture seemed to have nothing wrong with it, but it simply was not the style they preferred to adapt in their own lives. Those whose responses were categorized as “dislike gray area of relationship” referred to the multiple possible relationship titles that people use today and regarded them negatively. One example of a response that fell into this category is, “They are very frustrating. I think you should either be interested in someone[,] and try for a relationship, or don’t bother with it.” Overall, the most common theme expressed was that the respondent is neutral about the culture and expressed that

the decision is based on the individual’s preferences. The next most common theme was a negative tone, where respondents expressed significant problems with the culture, but did not explicitly state that they dislike it. Of the 63 respondents, 9 specifically said that they disliked the current dating culture. Only 2 people said that they had no opinion of the current dating culture.

Refer to Chart 3 for a visual representation of the data.

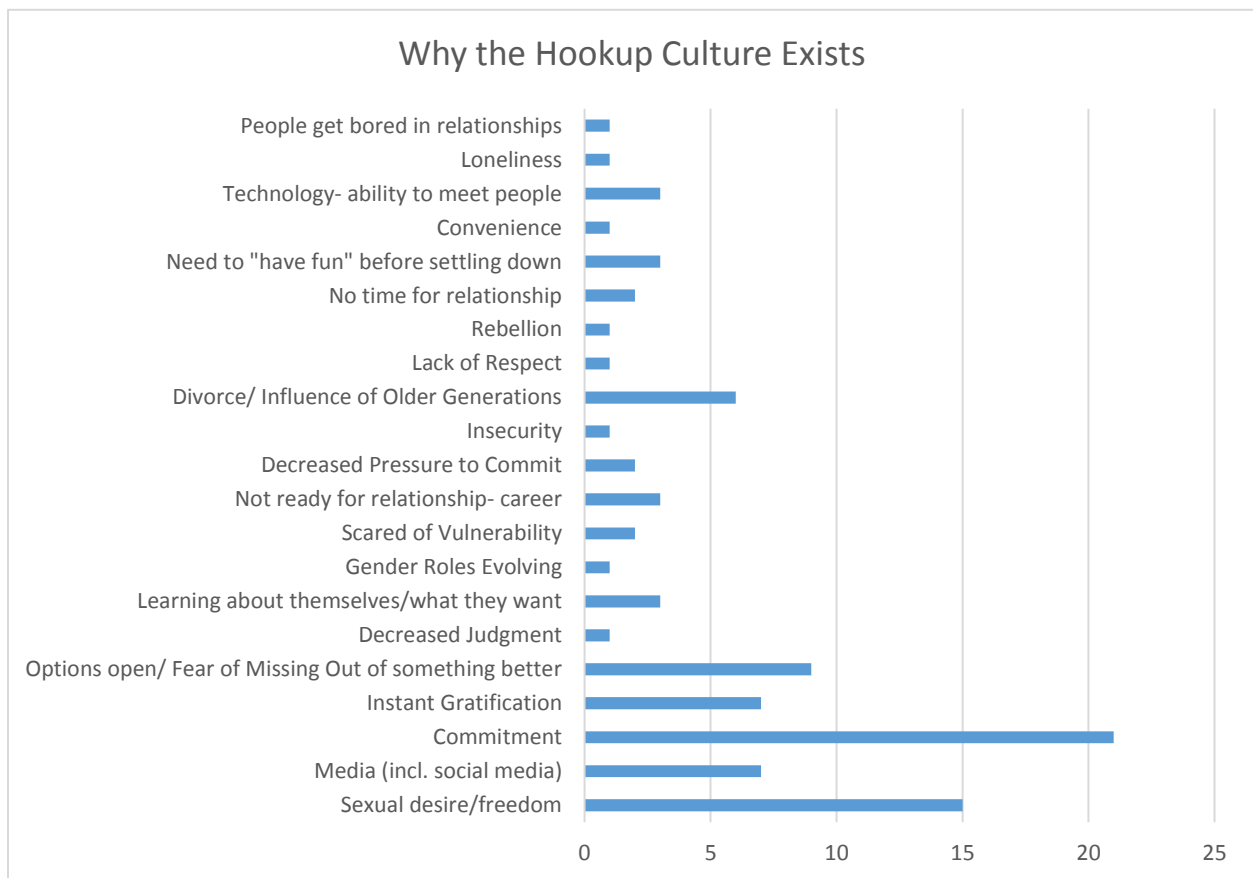
*Chart 3: Feelings/Views about the Current Dating Culture*



Though few of the hypotheses were supported by the data, the open-response questions provided an abundance of useful information about how the Millennials in our study viewed the current dating culture. We posed the question, “Some people discuss the ‘hookup culture’ in the US, in which young people may delay committed/monogamous relationships for relatively short-term, primarily sexual relationships. If you had to guess as to why the hookup culture exists, what would you say?” Of those who responded, 21 of the 63 participants (33.3%), mentioned the word *commitment*, in either the context of stating that people were fearful/afraid of commitment or that people no longer desire commitment. One response said “Fear of commitment because

it’s hard to find older couples who have been together for a long time and are satisfied in their relationship.” Another response said “So many of us have parents who were never in love, divorced, or were never on good terms I think that pushed many people away from commitment and just left sexual desire,” showing the effects of divorced parents on Millennials’ outlook on dating. Another respondent explained that “this generation may be more scared of commitment. More people going to college which perpetuates the single life style and then taking longer for people to become stable financially or career wise which delays commitment.” Another respondent simply said, “More sexual freedom in today’s society.” The open-ended responses were read and tabulated for the most common reasons or “buzz words” mentioned, the responses are available in Chart 4.

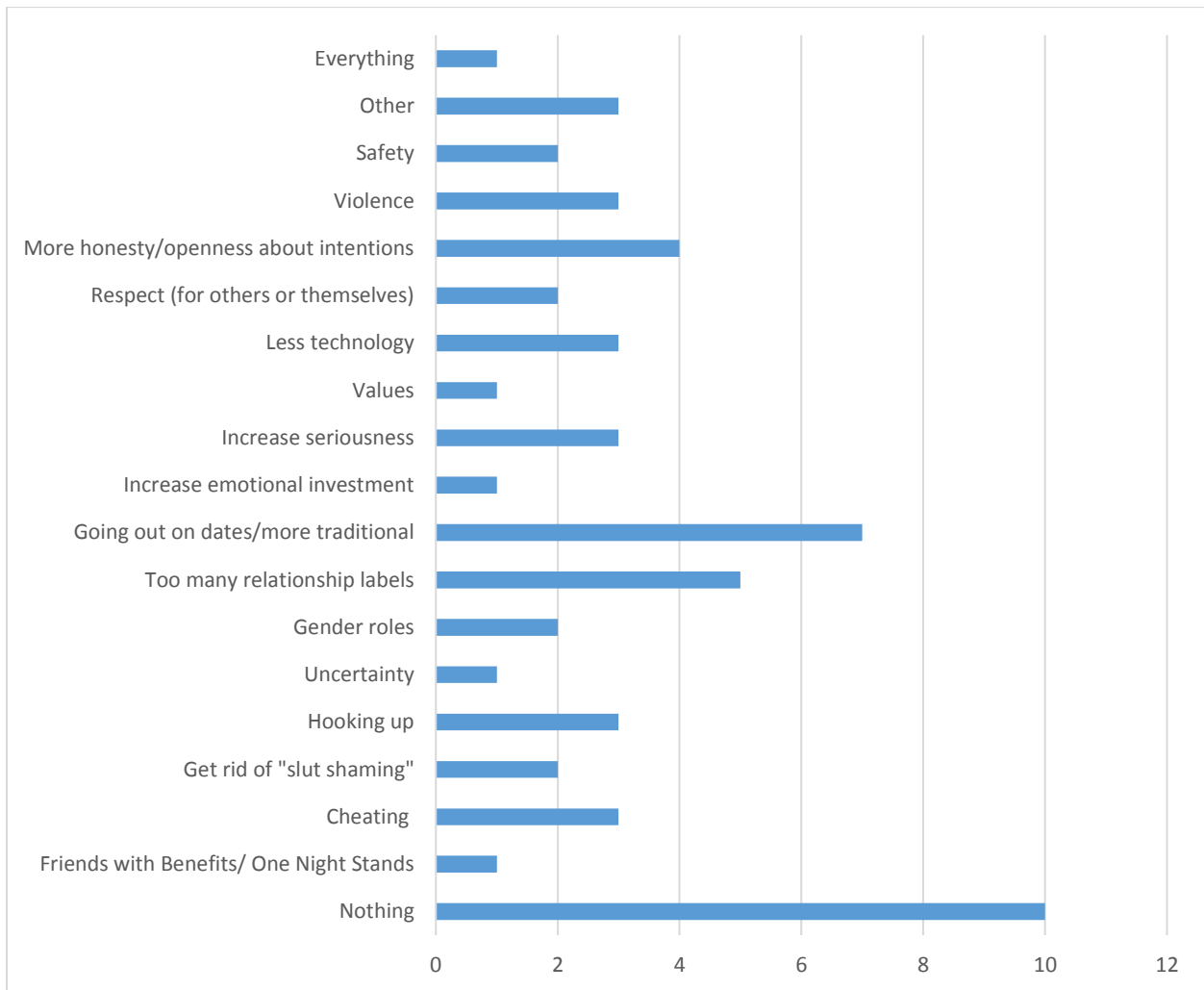
*Chart 4: “If you had to guess as to why the hookup culture exists, what would you say?”*





When asked “if you could change something about the current dating culture, what would you change”, 8 of 57 who responded said that they wouldn’t change anything. We categorized each individual’s open ended response into 19 categories based on common responses. Refer to Chart 5 for this data, represented below.

*Chart 5: If you could change something about the current dating culture, what would you change?*



The “hooking up” category refers to people who feel that “hooking up” is too prevalent, and would like to see its prevalence decrease. “Too many relationship labels” refers to those who

dislike all the different terms that people use, (i.e. talking, friends with benefits, etc.) and would prefer it to be more black and white of a relationship or single. “Violence” includes responses referring to domestic abuse, date rape, or how one respondent said “patriarchal white supremacist culture.” A response categorized as “other” was “the difficulty in finding someone in the younger age group who wants to be in a relationship. Too many people desire to ‘live it up’ and are afraid they will miss out on some opportunity if they are tied down.” Seven of the 57 respondents explained that they wished the culture would revert back to being more traditional. These responses indicated individuals going out on “proper dates” and dating becoming more old-fashioned, perhaps being more chivalrous, was preferable. This category was the second most popular, second to people saying they would not change anything, followed by the disliking of all the different options of types relationships available. One individual said, “[The] hookup culture has to end, it leads to a rise in STDs, and the devaluation of sex.” Others responded by saying things to the effect of “Nothing. I think it’s there for people who want it.” Overall, these responses seem to provide modest support for the third hypothesis, which suggests that Millennials accept the reality of the current dating culture, but that not all Millennials are necessarily pleased with it or do not fully engage in it themselves.

### **Discussion of Results**

Since the average age of participants was 20.98, with the youngest participants aged 18 and the oldest aged 32, it shows that the majority of the data was gathered from college-age Millennials. As Millennials are those who were born between 1982 and 2004, this means that on average, those who responded were born in 1995, only 2 years away from the mid-point of the millennial generation (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Responses are mostly from women, therefore responses represent the female point of view more than the male point of view. Respondents

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mostly identified as straight, or heterosexual, with at least one participant who identified as bisexual, gay, lesbian, or pansexual. This means that our data is representative of only a subset of the Millennial population, as our data mostly represents the views and responses of heterosexual Millennials, but not necessarily the views of non-heterosexual persons.

As predicted in the second portion of my first hypothesis, there were more people who were classified as maximizers than satisficers. Using responses from our study, we found a small, yet significant negative correlation between the age of the participant and their average maximizing/satisficing score ( $r = -.26, p < .05$ ). This means that as age increases, it becomes less likely for participants to be a maximizer. Since the average age of participants in the study was 20.98, the statistics provide a possible explanation of why there were so many more maximizers and fewer satisficers in our sample. Most individuals were within the emerging adulthood stage, or in their early 20s. The age of 20.98 is when individuals are getting ready to finish their college careers and move on to beginning a professional career. At this stage, Millennials are still relatively new to the dating life and may feel that they have a lot of potential dating ahead of them as they move on to the next step in their lives. While Millennials around the 20.98 age are typically beginning serious relationships, they may be hopeful in finding their ideal mate who meets all of their desired criteria to begin their “perfect” relationship as soon as possible. As Millennials get older, though, they may feel as though they have exhausted more options and realize that a perfect mate is impossible to find and become more of a satisficer.

The hypothesis of a difference between classification (maximizer/satisficer/neutral) and dating app or website use was unsupported, as there were no differences in dating app/website use among the three groups. This possibly means that one’s score on the maximizing/satisficing scale does not apply to all aspects of their life. For example, while one specific individual may

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be a maximizer when it comes to retail shopping, they may not apply the same mindset to dating. However, one experimental limitation, however, is that the data is based on the whole sample, of which 55.4% ( $n = 41$ ) claimed to be in a monogamous relationship. It is extremely likely that those who are in monogamous relationships are not currently using dating apps/websites, therefore data may not accurately reflect the lifetime prevalence of dating app/website use.

Our data showed that there was a significant difference between when individuals felt they would be ready for marriage (26.6 years) compared to when they thought they would actually get married (27.9 years). This is likely due to the understanding that Millennials are getting married later in life than ever before and understanding that their partner may want to wait a longer period of time before tying the knot. The 27.9 years old that people thought they would actually be married is right in the middle of the median age at which men and women marry, according to the 2010 statistics (Elliot, 2012). This shows that Millennials are realistic about when they plan to marry and will likely follow the marriage trends that the early Millennials have been setting. When the data was broken down into sex, men felt that they would be ready for marriage at age 27.5 on average and women at age 26.2, which is actually younger than the average age of first marriage of 2010 (Elliot, 2012). This is consistent with the previous question, that respondents said that there would likely be a 1 year and 4-month time difference between when they would feel ready for marriage and when they would actually get married. Therefore, they would most likely actually get married later than the 27.5 years old for men and 26.2 years old for women, which would be more consistent with the statistics from 2010.

The research did not support the hypothesis that there would be more singles than people in a relationship in the 18-34 age-range, as 55.4% of respondents said they were in a monogamous relationship. Only 44.6% of respondents said that they were not in a monogamous

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relationship. While this part of the hypothesis was not supported, the subjects did report that falling in love, saving money, reaching career stability, and earning a college degree were the most important things they wished to accomplish before getting married.

Interestingly, saving money was the most selected accomplishment to achieve before marrying, supporting my point earlier regarding the correlation between economic factors and delaying marriage. However, possibly due to the divorce rate of the previous generation, Millennials are less reliant on their partner for income. Once women entered the workforce, the amount of divorces grew, and women no longer needed to rely on men for financial support (Ansari & Klinenberg, 2015). As women continue to fight for equal pay in the workforce, individuals now seem to be focusing on their own individual financial stability so they can be financially independent and not need to rely on a spouse for income. While 59 participants said they wanted to reach job/career stability before settling down and 64 participants said they wanted to save money, only 23 participants said they looked for financial stability in a partner. These statistics suggest that financial stability and saving money is something Millennials wish to do for themselves, and do not feel that they need to look to a partner for. Therefore, it can be concluded that financial independence is more important to the Millennial generation. Also, since intelligence was the top-rated most desirable quality that Millennials looked for in a partner, this suggests that Millennials may see a higher value in an education than anything else, supporting the statistics that show an increase in college degrees.

The hypothesis that Millennials generally disliked the current dating culture was supported by many of the open-ended responses. While the majority of responses had a neutral tone or respondents felt that it was based on the individual, the next two most common themes in the open ended responses were a negative tone or the individuals explicitly said they disliked the

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culture. While only 18% of Millennials surveyed said that they wouldn't change anything about the dating culture, about 77% of subjects had something specific they wish they could change about the current dating culture. This further suggests that there is a general dissatisfaction in Millennials' dating patterns. Aside from individual negative experiences in the current dating culture, there are many potential societal reasons for this dissatisfaction. Since the current dating style is different from many Baby Boomers' relationships, parental disapproval or misunderstanding of the culture may also have an impact on Millennials' views. Also, media, specifically love-story movies and books, generally portray and romanticize more old-fashioned types of dating. These romantic movies and books, otherwise known as "chick-flicks" and "chick-lit," are generally produced to entertain women, as implied by their name. Since our respondents were almost two-thirds female, it is extremely likely that this type of media influences the attitudes of women toward the dating culture.

In addition, a recent study has shown that Millennials may not be "hooking up" as much as was thought previously. The results suggest that the "hookup culture" may be an exaggeration of a small fraction of Millennials who choose to behave in such a way, as opposed to representing the new norm of dating behavior (Twenge, Sherman, & Wells, 2016). Therefore, the generation that seems to be represented as casual and overzealous about sex is actually not, but perhaps those who are engaging in this kind of activity are more comfortable admitting to their behavior, as pre-marital sexual behavior is not shamed as much as it was in previous generations. This supports the data which shows that many Millennials are displeased with the hookup culture, demonstrating that the behavior associated with the hookup culture is not as commonplace as was thought previously.

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When asked about why the hook up culture exists, the reasons proposed earlier in the paper consisting of the emergence of the importance of gender-equality in conjunction with the deficit of similarly educated men, and the Feminist movement were supported by some responses, but these were not the most commonly listed explanation for the formation of the hookup culture. Sexual desire/freedom was the second most picked response, second to a fear of commitment. This response recalls Barry Schwartz's *The Paradox of Choice* (2005), where many subjects explained that with so many people to choose from, Millennials are commitment-shy for the fear of missing out on a better relationship.

### **Experimental Limitations**

There were several limitations within our study that affect its generalizability. A larger sample size would have produced more reliable and representative data. There were also a few discrepancies in which subjects did not seem to fully understand what was being asked of them, where they marked one answer but later explained in their own words that another would have been the best selected answer for their circumstance. For the future, it may prove to be helpful to re-word questions in order to make them clearer, while shortening what the subjects need to read, in order to get to the point of the question and make sure every answer is accurate.

In order to improve our study for the future, we should have asked about the history of the use of dating apps or websites, rather than simply asking about respondents' current use of apps/websites. This would have permitted us to compare it to the maximizer/satisficer scores, because many participants indicated that they were currently in a monogamous relationship, which may have artificially reduced the use of dating apps/websites.

Also, the survey was conducted via Facebook, so respondents were limited to my Facebook friends and the friends of those who shared the post containing the survey. Therefore,

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the results of the survey cannot be assumed to be representative of all Millennials' opinions and beliefs due to the small audience that was able to be reached by the posts.

If I were to conduct a follow-up study, I would ask how long Millennials wish to have a relationship with the person they plan to marry before actually committing to an engagement. This could be important to ask in further understanding why there was a significant gap in when Millennials thought they would be ready for marriage and when they thought they would actually get married. If the study were conducted again, I would be sure to make the survey available to a wider audience than just my Facebook friends and the friends of those who shared the survey in order to get a better representation of the Millennial demographic.

### **Conclusion of Primary Research**

In conclusion, our sample provided opinions of Millennials throughout our expected age range, though it was mostly composed of those of typical undergraduate age. As predicted, more participants were categorized as maximizers than satisficers. More research is needed on the hypothesis regarding maximizing/satisficing score and use of dating apps or website usage as it was not taken into account that most likely, if subjects were in a monogamous relationship, they would not be using dating apps/websites. There were more Millennials who participated in the survey who were in monogamous relationships than those who were not, which was contrary to one of the hypotheses. Among the sample of Millennials who took the survey, there was a general dissatisfaction, or at least feelings of ambivalence, with the dating culture. According to our respondents, the hook up culture is thought to exist because Millennials value sexual freedom and want to explore their options, as well as because many Millennials are shying away from committed relationships during the time they spend dating, as to not miss out on a chance with the possible Mr. or Mrs. Right.

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### Conclusion

Since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, when calling was the preferred method of dating, the anticipated result of dating was marriage. Then, in the mid-to-late 1900s, the style of dating shifted to “marketplace dating,” as did the purpose of dating, which included pleasure and getting to know someone of the opposite sex before committing to marriage. At this point, dating was thought of as the first step in a road that might lead to marriage, but there was much less pressure to commit to the first relationship attempted (Whyte, 1992). Marriage age decreased by about a year for women and two and a half years for men between the 1890s and 1970s (Elliot, 2012). The mentality of the marketplace approach was to find a mate who was the best fitted match, which, as the world shrunk in size, became elaborated into the current dating style, which includes many different relationship roles and titles, with varying levels of commitment. The result is millennial women and men marrying two and a half years later than those married in the 1970s, with women averaging at 26.75 years old and men averaging at 28.5 years old (Elliot, 2012).

The “hook-up culture” of the Millennial generation is theorized to exist for various reasons – from a surplus of women with higher education, to the shift of focus for young adults from starting a family to establishing a career and conversion to the relationship solely based on meeting sexual needs. These relationships based on sexual needs likely evolved while young adults kept their focus on their studies and careers, and wanted an easier relationship that involves less of a commitment of time and money. Millennials who work a full-time job are making significantly less than those who worked full-time jobs in 1980, making dating harder to fit into a tight budget (US Department of Commerce, 2015).

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Dating in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century takes the marketplace mentality to a whole new level, as Millennials are investing more into their education than previous generations, and therefore are looking for their efforts to pay off, in the form of a successful career. The Great Recession of 2008, which happened shortly after the older Millennials began their careers, impacted the way the rest of the Millennial generation views jobs, with an important focus on job security and financial foundation for their families and futures (Milkman, 2014). Millennials want a job that they will put in extra time into in their younger years and expect to grow a relationship with their employers, where after a few decades of working, the work-load lessens and employees will be able to enjoy more benefits and have freedom to improve their work-life balance and have a better family life (Adams, n.d.).

The gradual increase in divorces that took place from the mid-to-late 1900s also had an effect on Millennials and the way they choose to go about their own relationships. Statistics show that those with divorced parents are more likely to get divorced themselves, and that those who wait longer to marry are more likely to have more successful marriages (Jefferson, 2008). Therefore, while parental divorce is out of the child's control, they may place more of an emphasis on the marketplace mentality of dating to ensure that they are committing to the right person, and therefore take their time in making the decision (Jefferson, 2008).

With the invention of the internet and online dating evolving into dating applications for smart phones, the dating opportunities have become even more abundant. Text messaging has changed the frequency and the way millennial couples communicate to a much less formal version than the traditional phone call (Jayson, 2013a). In congruence with the less-formal communication, Millennials are also demoting a first date from a traditional dinner date, to "getting drinks" which involves less of a time commitment (Jayson, 2013a). Online dating is

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growing in popularity and losing its negative stigma as more people are exploring its capabilities, and learning about the success stories associated with the applications and sites. A large feature of many dating apps is that they are based on location (Jayson, 2013b). When young adults move to new cities for school or careers, they are often new to the area, and want to start talking to someone they have a likely chance of meeting up with, and successfully having a relationship with fewer barriers. The advancement of technology makes the world a smaller place for young singles, allowing them access to explore more potential dating options than ever before with the tap of a screen.

In understanding Millennials' less-committed relationship style and the apparent increase in non-committed relationships, it is important to recognize the reasoning for why Americans traditionally chose to have monogamous relationships. The two theories behind monogamy were biological adaptiveness, and the other that it is a learned behavior (Dow & Eff, 2013). Regardless of which theory more accurately reflects reality, it seems clear that monogamy is still the eventual, preferred form of relationships for Millennials.

Emerging adulthood is a recently added stage of development between adolescence and young adulthood where individuals are transitioning to becoming adults (Arnett, 2000). During this stage, individuals begin to take on the responsibilities of adulthood, between the ages of 18 and 25. In this phase, emerging adults experiment with different potential roles, both in a family life in the workplace (Arnett, 2000). It seems that individuals now are taking advantage of this time in their lives to gain experience and learn about themselves as an individual, delaying the marriage age.

The Investment Model Theory explained the three factors (satisfaction, alternative value, and investment size) that determine an individual's commitment to a company or relationship

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(Le & Agnew, 2002). For Millennials, the emergence of dating apps therefore increased quality of alternatives, possibly decreasing the value of commitment.

Barry Schwartz's *Paradox of Choice* describes the dilemma faced when an individual is presented with too many options, which makes it seem like an easier decision, as its more likely to attempt to find the perfect option. Instead, expectations rise and the chooser creates the perfect idea in their head, which is far less likely to please the individual. This leads to Schwartz's idea of the two categories of decision makers – maximizers and satisficers – those who want the best and those who want what is good enough (Schwartz, 2002).

The primary research concluded that of the mostly undergraduate-aged population surveyed, more people were maximizers than satisficers. Contrary to the hypothesis, more participants were in monogamous relationships than other forms of relationships. However, many of our participants expressed displeasure in the present dating culture in the open-ended portion of the survey. Open-ended responses also suggested that the reason the “hook-up” culture exists is because Millennials value their sexual freedom and want a chance to explore as many options as they can before they decide to commit to a relationship that might last the rest of their lives.

In conclusion, the delayed marriage age seems to be a result of Millennials having more opportunities than their predecessors. More Millennials go to college than ever before and are more career focused in hopes of establishing a solid financial future before beginning a family. Since so many Millennials have experienced a parental break-up, they may be more hesitant with their commitment, taking the time to ensure that the person they are with is the person they will be with for the rest of their lives in order to avoid their own children experiencing the same emotional trauma they experienced during the divorce. With the emergence of the newly

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described emerging adulthood stage of development, American Millennials are taking advantage of this exploration stage in order to learn about themselves and “maximize” their contentment later in life with whatever career, spouse, and lifestyle they find suits them best.

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### Appendix A: Survey

**General explanation:** I am writing an Honors Thesis paper about Millennials' Dating Patterns for Johnson & Wales University. The honors project requires extensive research about the topic and reporting research in an overview paper. As a part of this, I chose to conduct primary research to understand other Millennials' attitudes and behaviors toward dating.

**Risks/benefits:** The survey will take about 10-15 minutes. We do not anticipate more than minimal risk to you. You are free to leave responses blank as you wish.

**What to expect:** If you agree to participate, you will follow the link and complete our web-based survey. You will be asked questions about dating and your views on relationships.

**How data will be used:** Data will be combined and averaged together to get an overall scope of attitudes and behaviors. The following survey is being conducted solely for academic purposes. Your responses are anonymous and no respondents will be identified. Your responses will be kept confidential and only will be reported as aggregate data.

I have read and understand the above information regarding how my responses to the following survey will be used. I understand that my responses are anonymous and I will not be identified. I agree to allow my responses to be included in the results of the study.

**I agree**

1. Age
2. Sex
3. Sexual Orientation
4. State of primary residence

Likert-Scale Questions—based on a 7-point scale

5. Whenever I make a choice, I'm curious about what would have happened if I had chosen differently.
  6. Whenever I make a choice, I try to get information about how the other alternatives would have worked out.
  7. If I make a choice and it turns out well, I still feel like something of a failure if I find out that another choice would have turned out better.
  8. When I think about how I'm doing in life, I often assess the opportunities I have passed up.
  9. Once I make a decision, I look back and reassess if I chose the right thing.
  10. When I watch TV, I channel surf, often scanning through the available options even while attempting to watch one program.
  11. When I am in the car listening to the radio, I often check other stations to see if something better is playing, even if I'm relatively satisfied with what I'm listening to.
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12. I treat relationships like clothing: I expect to try a lot on before I get the perfect fit.
13. No matter how satisfied I am with my job, it's only right for me to be on the lookout for better opportunities.
14. I often fanaticize about living in ways that are quite different from my actual life.
15. I'm a big fan of lists that attempt to rank things (the best movies, the best singers, the best athletes, the best novels, etc.)
16. I often find it difficult to shop for a gift for a friend.
17. When shopping, I have a hard time finding clothes that I really love.
18. Renting videos is really difficult. I'm always struggling to pick the best one.
19. I find that writing is very difficult, even if it's just writing a letter to a friend, because it's so hard to word things just right. I often do several drafts of even simple things.
20. No matter what I do, I have the highest standards for myself.
21. I never settle for second best.
22. Whenever I'm faced with a choice, I try to imagine what all the other possibilities are, even the ones that aren't present at the moment.

- If you agreed with more of the above statements than you disagreed with, then you are a maximizer. Maximizers tend to search for the best of everything.
- If your responses are around even between agree and disagree, your classification depends on the situation.
- If you disagreed with more of the above statements than you agreed with, then you are a satisficer. Satisficers tend to go with what fills the requirement, and aren't as concerned with whether or not it's the best option.

23. Are you currently in a monogamous relationship? – Y/N

- a. NO Responses: If you are not in a relationship now, why do you wish to stay single? (Check all that apply)
  - I would prefer not to be single, and am looking for a relationship
  - Focusing on school instead
  - Focusing on job/career instead
  - Focusing on learning more about myself
  - No time for a relationship
  - Religious reasons
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
- b. YES Responses: Please check the type of relationship (or lack of) that you are in now (check all that apply)
  - I am single, not in a relationship
  - Monogamous relationship—dating (bf/gf title)
  - Engaged
  - Married

- "Friends with benefits" (friends who have some level of sexual relationship, but explicitly or implicitly agree not to have an emotional relationship or commitment)
- "Booty call" (sexual relations, usually initiated by a phone call or text message - no strings attached, no friendship)
- "Together" (two people hooking up with solely each other, but there is no title to the relationship)
- "Talking" (two people are not exclusive with each other nor have established what they are as a couple, but have some sort of beginning of a relationship)
- "Open relationship" (you are allowed to hook up with or date other people while dating someone you are invested in emotionally at the same time)
- Non-committed dating/seeing each other (possibility of a relationship in the future)
- "On a break" (temporarily broken up from partner, may/may not allow individuals to be involved with others)
- Other (please specify)

24. Please check the types of relationships you've been in from age 16 on (check all that apply)

- Single (no person of interest)
- Monogamous relationship—dating (bf/gf title)
- Engaged
- Monogamous relationship—marriage
- Friends with benefits (two friends who hook up, or have some level of sexual relationship, but explicitly or implicitly agree not to have an emotional relationship or commitment)
- Booty call (takes place later at night and is initiated by a phone call or text message- no strings attached, no friendship)
- "together" (hooking up with solely each other, but there is no title to the relationship)
- "talking" (two people are not exclusive with each other nor have established what they are as a couple, but have some sort of beginning of a relationship)
- Open relationship (you are allowed to hook up with or date other people while dating someone you are invested in emotionally at the same time)
- Non-committed dating/ seeing each other (possibility of a relationship in the future)
- One time hook-up
- "On a break" (temporarily breaking up. Depending on the agreement, allows individuals to be involved with others)

25. Are you interested in marriage eventually? – Y/N

NO responses: move on to Q 26

YES responses:

- a. What is the minimum age you would be ready to get engaged?
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- b. At what age do you think (realistically) you will get engaged?
- c. What age do you predict you'll be when you start a relationship with the person you think you'll marry?
- d. If you believe you are likely to marry the person you're with now, how old were you when you started the relationship?
- e. What is the minimum age you would be ready for marriage?
- f. At what age do you think (realistically) you will be married?
- g. These days, many people now are delaying marriage for a multitude of reasons. What are/ were your goals to accomplish before getting married? (Can check more than one)
  - I am ready now
  - Finish High school
  - Earn College degree
  - Earn graduate degree (Master's/ Doctorate)
  - Job stability
  - Save money
  - Reach a certain point in career
  - Fall in love
  - Travel/see the world
  - None of the above
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_

h. Do you use mobile dating apps or websites? Y/N  
NO responses: continue to Q 27

YES Responses:

1. What app(s) do you use?
    - OkCupid
    - Tinder
    - Grindr
    - Hinge
    - Match
    - PlentyofFish
  2. How often do you use the app?
    - N/A, do not use this site
    - Hourly/almost constantly
    - Several times per day
    - A few times per day
    - Once a day
    - 2-3 times per week
    - Once a week
    - 2-3 times per month
    - About once per month
-

26. Do you use dating websites? Y/N

NO responses: continue to Q27

YES Responses:

a. What dating site do you use?

- OkCupid
- Match
- eHarmony
- PlentyOfFish
- Zoosk

b. How often do you use the website?

- N/A, do not use this site
- Hourly/almost constantly
- Several times per day
- A few times per day
- Once a day
- 2-3 times per week
- Once a week
- 2-3 times per month
- About once per month

27. What qualities would make you want to commit to someone? (check all that apply)

- Attractiveness
- Fun to be around
- Intelligence
- Compatibility / same interests
- Personality
- Sense of humor
- Trustworthy
- Loyalty
- Creative
- Hard working
- Self-respect, respect for others
- Adventurous
- Financially stable
- Other\_\_\_\_\_

28. In the current time, many types of relationships exist that weren't common previously (i.e.: friends with benefits, together, on a break, etc.) What are your feelings/views on current dating culture?

29. Some people discuss the "hookup culture" in the US, in which young people may delay

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committed/ monogamous relationships for relatively short-term, primarily sexual relationships. If you had to guess as to why the hookup culture exists, what would you say? Why do you think the hookup culture exists?

30. If you could change something about the current dating culture, what would you change?

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