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Effects of Relational Equality on Happiness in College-Aged Heterosexual Dating Relationships

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**EFFECTS OF RELATIONAL EQUALITY ON HAPPINESS IN COLLEGE-AGED
HETEROSEXUAL DATING RELATIONSHIPS**

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of Sociology
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree
Master of Arts

Christopher B. Williams
December 2008

EFFECTS OF RELATIONAL EQUALITY ON HAPPINESS IN COLLEGE-AGED
HETEROSEXUAL DATING RELATIONSHIPS

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Christopher B. Williams

December 2008

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This study examines the effects of relational equality on happiness in college-aged heterosexual individuals involved in dating relationships. The purpose of this study was to learn whether individuals who felt they had equality within their dating relationships were happier than those who felt they had less equality within their relationship. Thirteen in-depth interviews were conducted on six males and seven females. Topics included demographics, time spent together, compliments to one another, time spent with friends, monetary expenses, intimacy, mood, discussion of issues, and perceived relational happiness.

Analysis revealed that individuals who felt their relationships were more balanced or equal rated their relationships higher on the happiness scale. This study is significant because it shows that relational happiness is

affected by individuals' perceived equality or equity in their relationships.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

To conceive of love and marriage as purely altruistic is to miss the point that rarely, if ever, can human love be sustained unless it be requited.
(Scanzoni 1972, p. 94)

Nearly every person, at some point in his or her life, has been involved in a dating relationship of some kind. Many of those relationships begin when in college for the simple fact that the majority of people in college are between the ages of 18 and 23. Traditional college-aged students are at the point in their lives at which they are looking ahead to the future, and society has taught them that part of that future requires a romantic mate.

Many studies have been conducted to determine why some couples are happy with their relationships and others are not. The purpose of this study is to determine what dictates happiness or unhappiness in dating relationships among heterosexual college students. The question that I pose is whether happiness is determined by equity or inequity in the relationship.

Through the use of exchange theory, I will take a micro sociological look at how people use a system of "checks and balances" to gauge relational happiness. Exchange theory is bound by the idea that people evaluate every situation in terms of maximizing rewards and minimizing costs. The concepts of exchange theory work well to explain many elements of dating relationships. People place values on certain characteristics of their relationships, and I contend that the presence or lack of those values will affect the subjects' perceived happiness in their relationships.

Using exchange theory as the theoretical perspective, I conducted in-depth interviews to gain information from heterosexual college students in dating relationships. I discuss the pertinent literature that I have reviewed to apply this theoretical perspective, and I then explain the methods used to gather my data. After I elaborate on the analysis, I close with a detailed discussion of the findings of the study and some personal thoughts on the subject of relational happiness in dating relationships.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Social exchange differs in important ways from strictly economic exchange. The basic and most crucial distinction is that social exchange entails unspecified obligations. (Blau 1964 p. 91)

The theoretical focus of this study is based on the social exchange theory as illustrated by George Homans. Homans sought to explain social interactions in terms of rewards and costs. Homans theorized that social behavior was based on an exchange of some tangible or intangible object or activity, either more or less rewarding or costly, between at least two persons (Homans 1961).

Homans embraced the idea of using psychological principles to explain sociological phenomena. In his work Homans looked at B.F. Skinner's work with pigeons. Skinner (1935) found that, if the pigeons were rewarded with food every time they peck at a red target, then they are more likely to replicate the pecking behavior in that one spot. Homans pointed out that the pigeons in Skinner's study were engaged in a one-sided exchange relationship, and human

interaction is necessarily two-sided. Based on the findings of Skinner and looking at a two-sided exchange, Homans developed several propositions:

The *success proposition* says that for all actions, the more often a person gets rewarded as a result of the action or actions, the more likely he or she will be able to replicate the same action (Homans 1961). For example, if a man rubs his girlfriend's feet every night while in turn she tells him how much she loves him and appreciates him every night, the success proposition suggests that he will continue to rub her feet every night.

The *value proposition* says that the more valuable the result of a particular action is to a person, the greater the likelihood that he or she will replicate that action (Homans 1961). Let us say that the man very much enjoyed getting back rubs from his girlfriend and did not care whether she told him she appreciated him. He discovers that the girlfriend will rub his back if he rubs her shoulders. He then observes that she will tell him she appreciates him if he rubs her feet. The value proposition would suggest that he would be more likely to rub her shoulders because he places a higher value on the result of his action.

In the *satiation proposition*, Homans says that the more often that a person receives a reward, the less valuable that reward becomes. (Homans 1961). This proposition suggests that, if the man's girlfriend continues to say how much she appreciates his rubbing her feet every time that he does it, then eventually he will get tired of that response, and he will begin to rub her feet less and less frequently.

The *stimulus proposition* says that, if in the past a particular stimulus was given on the occasion of which a person's action was rewarded, then the closer the present stimuli are to the previous stimuli, the greater the likelihood of the person to perform a similar action. (Homans 1961). This proposition would suggest that if a man were to rub his girlfriend's back and she rubbed his shoulders, then he is more likely to perform another act that is similar to rubbing her back. This proposition suggests that he would rub her feet in hopes that she would again rub his shoulders.

The *aggression/approval propositions* are stated in terms of *Proposition A* and *Proposition B*. *Proposition A* states that if a person does not receive an expected reward or he or she receives a punishment, then he or she will likely be angry and more likely to perform aggressive

behavior (Homans 1961). If the man rubs his girlfriend's feet, and she in turn tells him to get lost, then he is likely to become angry because he expected to hear her appreciation.

Proposition B states that if a person receives the desired reward or a greater reward than expected, then he or she will be more likely to perform more approving behavior (Homans 1961). If the man were expecting nothing in return for rubbing his girlfriend's feet and she in turn buys him a watch, then he will be more likely to rub her shoulders, back, and feet the next time.

The *rationality proposition* says that, in choosing between two actions a person will look at the value of the result of each action, multiply it by the probability of that result for each action, and choose the greater of the two (Homans 1961). This proposition would convince us that, if a man were deciding between two choices of whether or not to rub his girlfriend's feet, he would look at the choices rationally. His first thought might be whether or not he would receive a back massage. His second thought may be whether or not he wants to go to the trouble of rubbing his girlfriend's feet. He then decides which is more beneficial to him and chooses.

More recently social exchange theory has focused on equity and exchange in dating relationships (Sprecher 2001). Equity refers to the balance that is perceived between what a person is contributing to a relationship and what his or her partner is contributing to the relationship (Sprecher 2001). A person is either underbenefited or overbenefited in a relationship depending on how much he or she has benefited from the relationship compared to his or her significant other. Both underbenefiting inequity and overbenefiting inequity cause distress in the relationship. However, underbenefiting is more distressing. The theory also predicts that the distress caused by overbenefiting and underbenefiting will likely cause a strain on the relationship and lead to decreased happiness. When the distress leads to unhappiness, the individual in the relationship seeks to restore equity by either changing his or her contributions or convincing the partner to change his or her contributions.

The relationship will continue provided that the relationship is mutually rewarding. On the other hand, the relationship will begin to deteriorate and dissolve when alternatives seem preferable to their present situation in terms of costs and rewards (Thibaut and Kelley 1959). There is also a balance of fairness that one must take into

account. The perception of what is mutually rewarding to each person is a subjective one. What may seem an unfair balance in a relationship may seem very fair to that person who is receiving a certain reward at the time. For example, if a man rubs his girlfriend's back, shoulders, and feet and takes her out to dinner, it would appear to be unfair if she merely says thank you at the end of the night. However, it could be quite possible that the man has never dated anyone who has shown any kind of appreciation and that a mere thank you is all that he seeks. The general proposition of social exchange theory and relationships is that those persons who receive what they feel they deserve tend to feel satisfied. Those persons who receive less than they feel they deserve tend to feel angry. On the opposite end of the spectrum, those persons who receive more than they feel they deserve often feel guilty (Nye 1978).

Social exchange theory, furthermore, takes into account the availability of other alternatives to the relationship in determining happiness or satisfaction. People tend to evaluate rewards and costs in terms of what they feel they have now and what they feel they can get somewhere else. The more attractive a person's alternatives are, the less dependent he or she is on the

present relationship (Levinger 1979). The amount of dependency one exhibits in a relationship affects what that person does or does not put into that relationship. When people attempt to balance the costs and rewards, they are trying to achieve equity in their relationship. The balancing continues while both parties try to reach a level of reciprocity that is acceptable (Graziano, Brothen, and Berscheid 1978; Walster, Walster, and Traupmann 1978).

The most basic principles of equity show that equity is in the eye of the beholder. One relationship is different from the next, and certain desirable actions in one relationship are not desirable in the next. These actions are relative to each couple's situation.

If each person's relative gains are equal to her or his partner's, they are classified as equitable. If one's gains exceed that of the partner's, that person is considered overbenefited. If the relative gains are less than those of the partner's, one is considered underbenefited (Ridgeway and Johnson 1990).

To understand the theory of equity in relationships, we must look at the four interlocking propositions suggested by Walster et al. (1978).

Proposition I: Individuals will try to maximize their outcomes (where outcomes equal rewards minus costs).

Proposition IIA: Couples can maximize collective rewards by evolving accepted systems for equitably apportioning resources among members. Thus, couples will evolve such systems of equity, and will attempt to induce members to accept and adhere to these systems.

Proposition IIB: Couples will generally reward members who treat others equitably and generally punish (increase the costs for) members who treat others inequitably.

Proposition III: When individuals find themselves participating in inequitable relationships, they will become distressed. The more inequitable the relationship, the more distress individuals will feel.

Proposition IV: Individuals who discover they are in an inequitable relationship will attempt to eliminate their distress by restoring equity. The greater the inequity that exists, the more distress they will feel, and the harder they will try to restore equity. (Sprecher 98, Pg. 33)

Proposition III properly sums the focus of this research. Walster et al. (1978) are suggesting that if individuals do not feel that they are in an equitable relationship, then they will feel distress. Individuals who feel distressed about a relationship are typically not going to be completely happy in that relationship.

Taking into consideration the historical background of exchange theory, this study will use the equity model as its focus. This research seeks to explain how equity or inequity in a heterosexual dating relationship among college students can predict relational happiness.

CHAPTER III

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a long history of interest in dating and marital relationships. Researchers have sought to explain why some relationships work while other relationships do not. Various explanations have been offered to illustrate factors that explain the inner workings of dating and marital relationships. While this research focuses on dating relationships only, I feel it is important to note research on marital relationships due to the similarities between the two. The following literature provides the background for this study.

Level of Distress

Research has shown that individuals who are involved in equitable relationships are less distressed than those in inequitable relationships (Winn, Crawford, and Fischer 1991). Furthermore, individuals in friendships are less distressed than those in dating relationships. Friends of the same sex that feel they are in inequitable friendships report to have more anger but feel less guilt. Individuals involved in dating relationships report equally high

amounts of anger and report more guilt than did the friends.

Individuals involved in equitable relationships tend to be more content and happy than those in inequitable relationships. Individuals in same-sex friendships tend to be more content than those in dating relationships; however, there are no significant differences between individuals in dating relationships and same-sex friendships when it comes to happiness.

Other studies have shown that the degree of inequity each person feels tends to predict distress in the relationship (Inoue 1985). Furthermore, a distressed person tends to struggle to find ways to restore equity to the relationship. Findings show that those slightly overbenefited would try to put more into the relationship while those slightly underbenefited will try to encourage their partners to put more into the relationship. Partners that consider themselves either greatly overbenefited or greatly underbenefited report to be tempted to sever their current relationship altogether.

Physical Attractiveness and Sexual Satisfaction

In 1976 researchers set out to determine factors noted in dating relationships that would predict couples that would break up before marriage. One factor that most

commonly predicts premarital breakups is unequal physical attractiveness (Hill, Rubin, and Peplau 1976). While the focus of the study by Hill et al. emphasized what causes breakups, one could assume that breakups occur due to dissatisfaction.

Attractive women who have attractive significant others tend to have a higher self-acceptance than attractive women who have reportedly unattractive significant others (Murstein, Reif, and Syracuse-Siewart 2002). One could gather from this information that women tend to rate themselves based on their mates. Another argument that could be made is that their self-acceptance could be pre-existing and may play a role in how they choose their mate from the start.

Sexual satisfaction is associated with relationship satisfaction, love, and commitment for both men and women. Participants that reported to be sexually satisfied by their partners also reported higher levels of satisfaction, love, and commitment in dating couples (Sprecher 2002). Evidence has shown that men have a stronger association between sexual satisfaction and relational quality than do women. Furthermore, couples that have stronger sexual satisfaction are less likely to break up. On average, men feel that rewards are equal when it comes to sexual

satisfaction, while women feel underbenefited. (Byers and Macneil 2006)

Rewards and Investments

Underbenefiting inequity is associated with a lower level of satisfaction and commitment and a higher likelihood of breaking up (Sprecher 2002). In terms of relationship stability, women's commitment is the stronger predictor. Women's underbenefiting inequity as well as men's and women's alternatives is associated with instability or breakups in the relationship. Furthermore, women's rewards and satisfaction along with men's satisfaction are also associated with stability in the relationship.

Individuals with high exchange orientation keep track by weighing all actions and attributes (Murstein et al. 2002). These people may have had unhappy childhood experiences that have left them to weigh all the costs and benefits in their current relationships in order to accurately measure where their current relationships stand. While one partner can be conscious of the exchange, he or she may not know the partner's actions all the time. If both partners are contributing 50 percent each to the relationship, then each could perceive that he or she is doing more than the other. This egocentric bias is not as

much of a problem in more established relationships because the couples are less likely to weigh every contribution.

Rewards exchanged in marriage are basically of two kinds: instrumental rewards from income and status in the occupational and class structure of society and expressive rewards from companionship, understanding, physical love and affection (Scanzoni 1972). As the relationship progresses, each partner has the power to influence the other and to impose his or her will. The power shifts back and forth, but ultimately there is one person who makes the final decisions. The higher the husband's social status, the more legitimate power he has in the relationship. On the other hand, the lower the husband's social status the more nonlegitimate power he would seize. As women feel that they are deprived, they are more likely to pose opposition to their situation.

Availability of Alternatives

Frank J. Floyd and Guenter H. Wasner (1994) conducted a study to evaluate whether relationship commitment results from satisfaction with the relationship, paired with limited availability of desirable alternatives.

Results of this study showed that commitment was positively linked to relationship satisfaction and negatively linked to perceptions of desirable alternatives.

Because of the ratio of men to women at this particular university, men perceived that there were more available alternatives than did women. The results are consistent with social exchange in that commitment develops when couple members are satisfied with and feel rewarded in a relationship and when they perceive that equally or more desirable alternative relationships are not readily available (Floyd and Wasner 1994).

Comparisons with prospective others are particularly important among young, relatively uncommitted partners. The rewards from the exchange are compared not only to those given to the partner, but also to those that one might receive in an alternative relationship (van de Rijt and Macy 2006, p. 1457).

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH METHODS

In exploring the factors that affect dating relationships, it is critical to select the most fruitful methodological approach. In the attempt to use a more qualitative approach, I am going to use in-depth interviews to gather my data. The advantage to using interviews is that it could possibly give a more in-depth look into what affects relational happiness by getting detailed input from the subject.

By using qualitative research methods, I would be able to focus on the exact questions that I want answered. By conducting interviews I would be able get direct responses in the subjects' own words. While interviews would mean that there would be fewer subjects, I feel the information gathered would be more accurate.

I am currently married, and my wife and I were involved in a dating relationship for approximately two years. My own experiences in our dating relationship as well as other experiences in past dating relationships are added to the literature on the subject to form the

foundation upon which my interview questions are constructed.

Sample

This study was made up of heterosexual men and women who are enrolled in a mid-sized Southeastern university. I have chosen to study only heterosexuals because I feel that other factors such as social constraints and limited availability of partners are potential factors that could influence the relational happiness in homosexual individuals. Both men and women were studied to see whether there is a correlation between gender and perceived equality.

To conduct these interviews, I used the snowballing method. I have contacted a small group of students that have agreed to participate in the study. They have assured me that they can recommend other students that are involved in dating relationships.

The interview guide consists of a demographic section and a relational equality section that contains eight subsections. First I asked such demographic questions as age, gender, and classification to gain an idea of the sample I am studying. The second section consists of questions about relational equality and happiness. These questions consist of how the person views certain aspects

of his or her dating relationship and how happy he or she is within the relationship. A copy of the interview guide may be examined in Appendix A.

There are four aspects of the relationship that I looked at to determine each subject's perception of relational happiness. I looked at perceptions of time spent together, superficial and aesthetic perceptions, mood and physical intimacy perceptions, and perceptions of confrontational issues. I compared both men and women to see how they matched in all four aspects of perceived equality.

Each subject was asked to create his or her own pseudonym at the beginning of the interview. I then referred to him or her by that name from that point on. I also asked that he or she refer to the significant other as "my significant other." A copy of the consent form can be found in Appendix B.

I used a Sony Digital Voice Recorder to record the interview session. Following the session I placed the information on a secure computer and burned the interview onto a compact disc as a data file. I then erased the interview from the Digital Voice Recorder and Computer. The compact disc will be kept in the Sociology Department Office for no less than three years.

While there have been many studies done involving exchange theory and intimate relationships, this study differs in that I am focusing only on heterosexual college students. Many young men and women experience their most influential dating relationships while in college. These relationships occur early in life when they are still trying to explore what they want in a mate or a relationship. My final goal is for this research to generate an idea of what college men and women look for in a dating relationship. That information could help guide them to discover the happiest relationships that they can possibly have.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS

In depth interviews were conducted with thirteen individuals who were at the time of the interview involved in heterosexual dating relationships. All of the subjects in the study were enrolled in either a college or university. A chart is located in Appendix C that depicts the demographic information relating to the individual subjects of this research.

Relational Equality

Participants were asked about the amount of time they spend with their significant others. Of the men, John, Joseph, Jody, and Chris all stated that they spent an average of four to five hours per day with their significant others, and that time was spent doing activities both had chosen. Charlie stated that he spends a couple hours per day with his significant other, and the majority of time it is spent doing activities she has chosen. Fred stated that of the 12 hours they had spent together in their first week of dating, he had chosen

activities for about two hours and she had chosen activities ten hours.

While the women did not give answers that were as definitive in terms of the actual time spent together, four of them felt that the activities chosen were split half and half. Molly was definite in her belief that most of the time activities were chosen by her. Brooke felt the same way but quantified it by saying that six or seven times out of ten she chose the activities. Madeline was the only female that believed her significant other chose their activities four of the five hours they spend together per day. The majority of both male and female participants felt that time spent doing activities together was equal.

In the discussion of the amount of time the men felt they had their partners' undivided attention, some felt that it was roughly about 40 percent to 50 percent of the time, and all were content with that fact.

I'd say we go to the movie, go to dinner, and sometimes we may be in the same house and not interacting. Where it'll be me on the computer, her on the phone. As far as time, I'd say [I have her undivided attention] half and half. (John, happiness rating 8)

Probably I'd say 40 percent of the time. She's usually preoccupied with other stuff on her mind. (Jody, happiness rating 9)

Charlie was the only man who, when asked how often he had his partner's undivided attention stated "too often." This response is a prime example of Homans' satiation proposition. The more often Charlie has his significant other's undivided attention, the less valuable it becomes to him (Homans 1961). Charlie went on to say that he did not know if he could handle the fact that his partner wanted to be around him all the time.

She always wants to be around me, and I guess I have her attention, and I don't know if I can handle that. She just always wants to be around me. (Charlie, happiness rating 3.5)

Fred stated that his partner had A.D.D. so her attention came in two to ten minute spans. Fred also talked about frustration with his significant other as well. It is important to note that this interviewer felt many of Fred's answers were intended to be sarcastic or not fully truthful; however, many of his answers also add value.

I think we both sort of struggle with our busy lifestyles and spend as much time as we'd like with each other; but a lot of times it results in the more time we spend with each other, the more frustrated we get with each other. So it's like a healthy balance that we're trying to find the optimum time span. (Fred, happiness rating 1 or 10)

Allison, Ashley, and Brooke each felt that they had their partner's undivided attention. Allison was content with the amount of time spent together. While both Ashley and Brooke felt they spent plenty of time with their partners, Ashley stated that she actually wished she could spend more time with friends as opposed to just him.

Umm...he's not very social so he gives me more attention than others.
(Ashley, happiness rating 4)

Um..I'd say very often I'm not demanding of his attention. Most of the time [I have his attention].
(Brooke, happiness rating 9)

I would say most of the time [I have his attention] unless there is someone else with us or in the room. Then obviously he's going to split that time. (Allison, happiness rating 10)

Madeline and Molly felt that the majority of the time they did not have their partners' undivided attention, and neither was completely content with the amount of time they spent alone with their significant others. Monique and Proosia felt that they had a good balance of the attention they received and were content with their current time spent with each of their significant others. This balance is representative of the equity that Sprecher outlines in her discussion of social exchange theory. The fact that Monique and Proosia felt as if they are receiving as much

benefit as the effort they are putting into their relationships, it is more likely that they will continue in their relationships (Sprecher 2001).

[Time spent alone] is pretty even, 'cause I'll be like I want to see this movie, and next time he'll suggest something. It's actually pretty even. (Proosia, happiness rating 9)

I wish we had more time together, of course, but I'm ok with what we have. (Monique, happiness rating 10)

It is important to see how the participants view the amount of time they have their partners' undivided attention in order to determine whether they are getting a benefit from the relationship. If the participants receive what they feel they deserve, then they will feel more satisfaction within their relationships (Nye 1978). The more the participants feel they are receiving as much benefit as the amount of effort they put in, then the more likely they report higher levels of happiness.

Compliments to Each Other

The next section addressed the discussion of compliments to one another. All of the men were consistent in saying that they gave more compliments to their significant others. Chris at first said he thought they were equal but then grinned and admitted that he felt he probably gave more compliments. When asked if they had

given their significant others' compliments in the last week, all the men stated yes. All of the examples the men gave of their compliments were related to aesthetic attributes such as clothes or physical attractiveness. The men's perception was that the compliments that they had received from their significant others were in regard to aesthetic attributes as well. Only Charlie stated that he could not recall getting a compliment in the past week.

All of the men felt that compliments were important. Five out of six of the men felt that compliments act as a kind of affirmation of the relationship, while others saw compliments as more important to build up the other person. Fred felt that the type of compliments needed depended on the type of day you are having. He stated that if you are having a great day, compliments are not as important, but other days compliments are important.

On bad days, you need somebody to compliment you to bring you up a little bit. (Fred, happiness rating 1 or 10)

I think most people have low self-esteem or not a lot of confidence in themselves so just knowing that your partner thinks highly of you and satisfied helps the relationship grow. (Jody, happiness rating 9)

It's good to feel appreciated by your partner, and compliments go a long way to make you feel appreciated. (John, happiness rating 8)

It [compliments] just shows that you have acceptance of that person, and you enjoy that person, and you appreciate that time around you. (Joseph, happiness rating 9.5)

I know I'm a guy, but compliments every now and then are nice to know that that person cares. (Charlie, happiness rating 3.5)

In terms of what types of compliments the men felt were more important, half felt that compliments on physical appearance were more important.

Most important would probably be, I don't know... physical [appearance compliments]. (John, happiness rating 8)

I think physical appearance [compliments are most important]. (Chris, happiness rating 8)

Jody felt that, while physical attributes were important to compliment, they were not the most important. He felt that compliments about a person's intelligence or how he or she cares about others carried more weight. Joseph felt that it was more important to compliment someone for things about which she or he feels apprehensive.

I think compliments about things that they are lacking or they think they lack [are important], anyway. Like if they think they don't have a very good sense of humor, then compliment them when they are funny. (Joseph, happiness rating 9.5)

Charlie stated that he had not heard a lot of positivity from his significant other in the recent past so he felt that any compliment would be nice. Charlie's responses would indicate that he feels underbenefited in his relationship. According to Sprecher, the underbenefited party in a relationship feels distress which leads to decreased happiness within the relationship.

The women's responses were consistent with the responses given by the men in saying that the men in their lives gave more compliments, with the exception of Madeline who stated that she felt they were equal. Based on these results, there appears to be a perceived gender difference because men are more likely to compliment their significant others.

Five of the seven women had given their significant others compliments about their physical appearance in the past week. Those same five had been given a compliment about physical appearance as well. Ashley had stated that her significant other told her he had a lot of fun with her, yet she could not recall complimenting him in the past week. Madeline stated that her significant other had complimented her cooking in the past week, and she complimented him on an accomplishment he achieved at work. While all of the women felt that compliments were

important, six of them felt they were important in order to build up the other person. Molly felt they were an affirmation and stated that it made her "feel like I don't have to try really hard" if her significant other gave her compliments.

In terms of the types of compliments that were important, five of the seven women felt that compliments about intelligence or effort made were most important. Allison felt that all were equally important, while Ashley was the only female participant that felt compliments about physical attributes were most important. In fact, many of the women felt that compliments on attractiveness were superficial and unnecessary, which differed from the male participants' responses in that they welcomed compliments regarding physical attractiveness.

I tend to like compliments that are more sporadic, not the normal cliché like you look nice. (Proosia, happiness rating 9)

[I like it] When he tells me he's proud of me for something. (Molly, happiness rating 10)

I guess intelligent ones [compliments are important], like you know when he's complimented me on something like I'm smart. (Monique, happiness rating 10)

Monetary Expenses

Participants were asked about how they handled

monetary expenses within the relationships. As expected, all of the men felt that they paid more often when it came to dates or other costs incurred while they were out. All of them felt it is a man's duty to pay.

That's just kind of the way it is. I just think the male should pay (Joseph, happiness rating 9.5)

Uhh, majority of the time as a guy, I think it's my job to pay. (Chris, happiness rating 8)

I feel like the man is supposed to [pay] (John, happiness rating 8)

Fred went on to say that he felt that it was a social norm that had been instilled in him since he was a small child. Jody stated that he and his significant other tended to split expenses 50/50 more often than the other participants indicated. Cohabitation as well as the length of time the couples were dating appear to play a role in financial responsibility as Fred has been dating his girlfriend for significantly less time than the other participants.

Coinciding with the men's responses, the women also felt that the men in their lives paid more often, with the exception of Madeline and Molly. Initially Madeline stated that she and her significant other have always split their expenses. Later, she revealed that he did not get paid for his job, and she paid most of the time. It was interesting

to note that she stated that she wished he paid more often because she is more of a "tradionalist."

It just depends on who has more money,
I'd say it [paying] is pretty equal
(Madeline, happiness rating 8)

Molly stated that she and her significant other "take turns" on paying because neither one of them "expect the other to pay." Unplanned and unknown to Molly, one of the male participants is her significant other, and he stated that he undoubtedly paid more often.

While Jody and Fred had not ever argued about money with their significant others, the rest were divided on the topic. Charlie's arguments were based around the fact that his significant other would rather he spend more money on her instead of going out with friends.

I think she would rather me spend my money on her. I like to go out with my buddies every now and then and get some beers. (Charlie, happiness rating 3.5)

John's significant other also had problems with him going out with friends and spending money at bars.

She thinks I spend my money on dumb stuff, for instance, like going out drinking with my buddies. Then I won't have money to do things she wants to do. When I thought I spent it on having a good time. (John, happiness rating 8)

Joseph stated that they had not argued about money as much as they had sat down and discussed expenses with one another. Chris was the only male participant that felt he had to monitor his significant other's spending. His feelings were captured in his following quote:

I know it is her money, but you gotta start looking at how a woman spends her money, 'cause it might be your problem one day. (Chris, happiness rating 8)

Among the women, Molly, Ashley, and Allison all stated that they had not argued with their significant other about money. Monique felt that they had not argued about money, but that she had made plans for a budget, and he "pretends to listen."

I'm OCD about things, I have to plan for things. We've never gotten into an argument about things, [concerning money], but I guess I talk, and he pretends that he listens. As long as we have a plan [about saving].
(Monique, happiness rating 10)

Proosia also felt they had not argued about money, but she was concerned because her significant other places an unrealistic emphasis on making more money, and having a nice house, clothes, etc. She felt that he had unrealistic expectations in terms of how much money they should both be making, but they had never argued about it. There were also evident differences in their relationship because he,

unlike her, comes from a wealthy family and has never had to work for a living until now.

He doesn't realize that you have to start from the bottom up, and he's never had to work. He comes from a wealthy family, and in college he didn't have to work. (Proosia, happiness rating 9)

Brooke felt the difference in her relationship revolved around her plan to save for a house and the future.

I'm probably bigger on saving money than he is, but he's not at all frivolous at the same time. I'm bigger on saving for a house. He's more about living in the moment. (Brooke, happiness rating 9)

Madeline expressed frustration with her significant other in terms of his drive to make money. He works without being paid coaching baseball, and she pays most of the time. As mentioned before, she initially stated that they both paid evenly. Because of her traditionalist nature, she wants to feel that her relationship is more balanced than it really is. The discussion of money within a relationship further lends to the topic of equity within relationships. While individuals want to feel as if they are getting equal benefits of interactions and time, they also see the importance of balance in how to manage money as well.

Initiating Intimacy

In this section the participants were reminded that, due to the nature of the subject, any questions with which they were not comfortable could be skipped. The category was broken down into nonsexual contact and sexual relationship.

Nonsexual Contact

Within the discussion of nonsexual contact, I asked the participants a series of questions relating to the frequency they engaged in hugs, kisses, holding hands, etc. I also included questions about who initiates the nonsexual contact to continue to determine equality within the relationship.

Among the men, Jody, Chris, and Charlie all felt that they initiated nonsexual contact more than their partners did. John and Joseph both felt their significant others more often initiated the nonsexual contact, while Fred felt it was mutually agreed that they "try not to." When asked how often this contact occurred, participants gave varying answers. Chris stated that it was "eight to ten times in an evening," and John simply stated "every day." Joseph said every hour, while Jody noted 20-25 times per day. Charlie stated that it was "a couple of times per hour."

I just find myself reaching for her hand, or kisses, or hugs, or whatever. (Jody, happiness rating 9)

Well, I think both of us do [initiate contact] at the same time. When she does it there's more of a motive behind it. When she's touchy feely, she wants something. When I do it, it's just because I like her. (Charlie, happiness rating 3.5)

She says I have a problem with just like stopping with a kiss, like if we start kissing, then I want to go all the way. (John, happiness rating 8)

The female participants were more diversified in their responses. Madeline was the only woman who felt that she initiated nonsexual contact more often than her significant other did. Allison, Proosia, and Monique all felt that their significant others initiated nonsexual contact more often.

I'd say it's balanced, Ok, so he may do [initiate contact] more than I do. (Monique, happiness rating 10)

Brooke, Molly, and Ashley all felt that initiation of the nonsexual contact was equal.

I think we both do actually, maybe, probably me more, no it's pretty equal. (Molly, happiness rating 10)

Both Ashley and Madeline felt that they did not engage in the nonsexual contact very often, while the rest of the

women stated that it was all the time when they were with their significant others.

Probably him [initiates contact] because he's more a touchy feely type person. (Allison, happiness rating 10)

I think it's more important to me [to initiate contact], and I think that I like to feel that we're close in that way. (Madeline, happiness rating 8)

Sexual Activity

Taking the discussion of intimacy a step further, I asked the participants to discuss their sexual relationships as well. Questions in this section involved the participants' satisfaction with the sexual activity as well as a determination of which party initiates the sexual activity.

While all the men stated that they had a sexual relationship with their partners, they were split on the topic of who initiated sex. Chris, Joseph, and Fred all stated that initiating sex was half-and-half on who most often initiated sexual activity. It is interesting that those three men have been dating their significant others for the least amount of time. At least based on the findings of this research, one can assume that there might be a correlation between equality in initiating sexual activity and length of time dating. John, Charlie, and

Jody all stated, unequivocally, that they were the ones that initiated the sexual activity. When it came to satisfaction, all of the men were satisfied except for Charlie. Charlie stated that he felt his significant other "just does it" and does not enjoy it. He expressed feelings of guilt because he felt that she did not enjoy their sexual relationship.

I think that it's typical that guys [initiate sex] more often. I just don't feel that she likes to do that. I think she just does it, which makes me feel bad. (Charlie, happiness rating 3.5)

Joseph also noted that he felt that he and his significant other had sex for more "appropriate" reasons than in past relationships. He went on to say that there were more feelings involved than there had been in past relationships. The discussion of past relationships is important because it indicates a level of comparison to other alternatives. As individuals evaluate other alternatives to their current relationship, they take into account the costs and benefits as opposed to those they have experienced in the past or think they could experience with another person (Levenger 1979).

All of the women stated they had sexual relationships with their significant others, and six of the seven stated

that their significant others were more likely to initiate it. Proosia stated that initiation was equal due to the fact that they were separated most of the time. She stated that the distance caused both of them to want to have sex when they saw each other.

In terms of their satisfaction, six of the seven women stated that they were completely satisfied with their sexual relationships.

If you are sexually active, I think sex is important. There's just something intimate about two people being together that you can't get from holding hands. It [sex] is usually as soon as we see each other. (Proosia, happiness rating 9)

I feel very comfortable around him. If ever I don't want to do it, he respects my feelings. (Brooke, happiness rating 9)

Madeline said that she was frustrated at times because the frequency was less than that of past relationships; however, she also felt that it was good because they could focus on being friends more than anything else.

Mood

In the discussion of mood, I posed questions to the participants about the mood they are in when they are around their significant others as opposed to the mood they are in when they are not around their significant others.

I also asked questions about their perceptions of their significant others' moods. By addressing the participants moods and the moods of their significant others I was able to better understand if they perceive an equitable balance between their mood and the mood of their significant others.

Jody, John, and Chris all stated that they were in a more positive mood when they go around their significant others as opposed to when they are not around them. Fred and Charlie both stated that they were in a more positive mood when they were not around their significant others. Joseph was the only male participant that stated that his mood did not change either way. He went on to say that his mood had changed in past relationships, and he felt it was better that he was in the same mood whether she were around or not around.

Five of the seven women said that they were in a positive mood more often when they were around their significant others. Madeline stated that she was in a positive mood no matter who was around, and Ashley felt that she was in a better mood when she was not around her significant other. Ashley went on to say that she likes to surround herself with people who are laid back and easy going, but her boyfriend has neither quality.

When asked what behaviors of their significant others affected the male participants' mood, they had varying answers. Chris, Jody, and Charlie all stated that their partners' negative moods put them in a negative mood.

If she's in a bad mood, it's going to reflect on me; and if I'm in a good mood it will rub off on her. (Jody, happiness rating 9)

If she's kinda having a bad day, it puts me in a [bad] mood. (Chris, happiness rating 8)

Well, she's real moody. That's part of our arguments. We argue over petty stuff. She gets real mad and doesn't really know how to respond to me, and it sets me off, and I just shut down and don't want to talk about it. (Charlie, happiness rating 3.5)

John and Joseph both focused on their partners' positive moods and how they became more positive when their significant others were more positive. Fred stated that he was "disheartened" when his significant other was "trying to be nonsexual." He feels they are in a very sexual stage of their relationship and does not want that to change at this point.

Brooke, Allison, and Monique all stated that positive behaviors on the part of their significant others made them feel more positive. Molly, Madeline, and Proosia all stated that their moods were affected by the amount of

attention their significant others paid to them. More attention put them in a more positive mood.

Probably how much attention he gives me [affects my mood]. When we get off work and he's kissing me and touching me, it makes me feel good. (Molly, happiness rating 10)

Just having the main focus on me [puts me in a better mood]. Because I don't like it when we go down there [to his house] and we hang out with all his friends. I mean I like him to focus on me. (Proosia, happiness rating 9)

I want to have time with him, but when it is baseball season and he's busy doing his thing, I want to spend undivided time with him, and that affects me in a negative way. So when he comes home, I want his focus to see if he's going to be 100 percent with me or not. (Madeline, happiness rating 8)

Ashley was different in that she was affected by her significant other's behaviors around other people. She stated that he is not a social person; therefore, when he is around her friends, he "clams up."

The men all had differing descriptions of their moods around their significant others. John stated that he was "comfortable" around his significant other, and his significant other was "comfortable" as well. Fred asserted that his mood was affected by his "sexual appetite," and, therefore, he did not want to be around his significant other unless she was "thinking about sex" as well. Charlie

stated that he tried to stay "laid back" unless his significant other "put him in a bad mood"; however, he went on to say that she is "typically in a bad mood." Jody, Joseph, and Chris all reported that they were typically in a happy mood, and their significant others were as well.

The women also had varying descriptions of their moods. Monique stated that she felt safe and secure, and her significant other "seemed happy." Allison responded that both she and her significant other were "spontaneous" around each other. Ashley felt that she was a bit more uptight around her significant other, and he was usually in a good mood as long as only she or his best friend was around.

I think that I'm probably a little bit more uptight when I'm around him. He's uptight, and we feed off each other.
(Ashley, happiness rating 4)

Anyone else makes him uptight. Brooke and Molly felt that they and their significant others were in a good mood around each other. Proosia stated that she was typically in a better mood around him; however, when it came time for her to leave and drive back home, she became frustrated and would "take it out on him." She also noted that her significant other was always in a good mood. Madeline stated that she was "not elated" around her significant

other, but just happy. She went on to say that her significant other was "happy," and then said "we get along great."

Time Spent with Friends

In this section the participants were asked to discuss the amount of time spent with friends, theirs as well as the friends of their significant others. They were also asked about any mutual friends in the relationships.

On the topic of time spent with friends versus time spent with their significant others, John, Chris, Jody, and Joseph all said that they spent more time with their significant others than with their friends. All indicated that time spent with their significant others had increased as the relationship went on. Fred observed that he and his significant other both enjoyed time with friends. Because they have been dating for only a short period of time, it seems to go hand in hand with the others' comments about increasing time spent alone as their relationship grows. Charlie stated that, because he and his significant other were not getting along, they were spending less and less time together and more time with friends and family. He went on to state that his significant other is "unusually close" to her family.

When it came to discussions about time spent with significant others' friends or time spent with significant others and the guys' friends, all conversations went in different directions. However, there were commonalities among the participants.

Jody, Joseph, John, and Chris all got along with their significant others' friends, and their friends liked their significant others. Charlie did not like the fact that his significant other's best friends were her parents, and his significant other did not like his friends because she felt they did not like her.

She's unusually close to her family. Now, I'm all about family, but she's unusually close to her family. Real close to her family. Sometimes you just know who comes first. (Charlie, happiness rating 3.5)

Fred indicated that his friends showed that they did not like the fact that he had a girlfriend by stating that they were "jealous" of her.

Jody, Joseph, John, and Chris also stated that they had mutual friends as a couple. Most often they said that the mutual friends they shared with their significant others were also involved in dating relationships.

At first it [hanging out with her friends] was weird because I didn't know them, but now that I've gotten to know them and their significant others

it's cool. (John, happiness rating 8)

It's different for us because her friends are in couples, and my friends are single. She doesn't have a problem with them [my friends]; she likes them. (Chris, happiness rating 8)

It's important [for her significant other to get along with my friends], they are who they are. It's important. They get along. (Joseph, happiness rating 9.5)

Fred and Charlie did not share mutual friends with their significant others. In looking at their satisfaction, it appears that having mutual friends could also indicate a factor related to happiness within a relationship as Charlie and Fred both reported low scores.

All of the women stated that they spent more time with their significant others than with friends. They all felt the same in that as the relationship had grown, time spent with friends had lessened.

Madeline and Brooke both stated that their significant others most often hung out with their friends as opposed to their significant others' friends; moreover, Brooke felt that her significant other did not like one of her friends. Molly and Monique both felt that they most often hung out with mutual friends within the relationship. Allison, Ashley, and Proosia felt that they hung out with their

significant others' friends more often although Proosia did not like one of her significant other's friends.

Two out of five times we hang out [with his friends]. But that also comes with he had a roommate, but he knows that I won't always want to [hang out with his friends]. If his friends are having a cookout, that wouldn't be my first selection [of things to do]. (Proosia, happiness rating 9)

Ashley felt that she had no choice but to hang out with her significant other's friends because of his dislike for social situations and awkwardness around her friends.

He just doesn't have much fun around them [my friends] so I don't ask him to do anything. (Ashley, happiness rating 4)

All of the women stated that they had mutual friends except for Ashley. Ashley stated that she and her significant other had no mutual friends, which further strengthens the notion that the presence of mutual friends could have bearing on happiness within the relationship as she reported the lowest happiness score as well. Almost all the mutual friends within the relationship were involved in dating relationships as well. It may be argued that individuals in dating relationships surround themselves with other individuals in dating relationships in order to maintain the balance between their relationship and the relationships of their friends as well.

Discussion of Important Issues

Probably one of the most important sections in the interview has to be the discussion of important issues within the relationship. In this section I discuss confrontation within the relationships, typical disagreements within the relationships, and who is most likely to surrender in a disagreement, among other topics.

When it came to the male participants, Chris and Charlie felt that their significant others were more confrontational, while Fred felt that both he and his significant other were confrontational and welcomed it. Jody, Joseph, and John all felt that they were more confrontational than their significant others. Jody, Joseph, John, and Charlie all felt that in the event of an argument, they would like to see their significant others just calm down and talk it out, as opposed to getting "worked up." Chris wanted his significant other to see her role in an argument or disagreement instead of always blaming.

[I'd] like for her to see the role she plays in the argument. She gets real defensive. (Chris, happiness rating 8)

Fred welcomed all confrontation as he felt that it was a sign of confidence and strength in his mate.

Charlie, Chris, John, and Jody all felt that they were most likely to "give in" in the event of an argument or disagreement. All four felt that by giving in they would make it easier on themselves in the long run because usually the argument was not worth fighting about anyway. It would appear that giving in to the other's point of view helps to maintain the equitable balance between the two partners involved in each relationship. By giving into their significant others, compromising is the cost and a peaceful interaction is the benefit. Fred and Joseph both stated that their significant others were more likely to be the ones to "give in." Fred went on to say "she realizes it won't stop" when asked why his significant other was more likely to give in. Joseph stated that his significant other dealt with trust issues and had what he called "irrational arguments." He felt as if his significant other knew she had a tendency to pose irrational arguments and, therefore, was more likely to back down in light of that fact.

In terms of confrontation, all of the women with the exception of Ashley were consistent. While Ashley felt that she and her significant other were equally confrontational, all of the other women felt that they were more confrontational than their significant others.

Furthermore, all of the other women felt that they wanted their significant others to be more willing to discuss important issues instead of avoiding them. Ashley felt that her significant other just needed to give her some space to calm down in the event of an argument.

Madeline, Brooke, Allison, and Molly all stated that their significant others were more likely to give in or back down in the event of an argument.

I'm more persistent, and I want to cover everything, and he just wants to relax (Madeline, happiness rating 8)

Oh, he 100% of the time does (back down). He hates confrontation. If I feel strongly about something, I'll drive it into the ground (Brooke, happiness rating 9)

He just lets me have my way (Molly, happiness rating 10)

Ashley and Proosia both felt that they were more likely to back down than were their significant others, while Monique felt that both would be likely to back down.

If I want to smooth things out, then I have to back down (Ashley, happiness rating 4)

He could tell me that the sky was green and he'd win. He's a great arguer; I'd say me, [would back down] because he'd win. He usually proves me wrong. (Proosia, happiness rating 9)

Ashley, Allison, and Proosia all felt that neither could admit he or she was wrong. Madeline and Molly felt that both could admit they were wrong. Monique felt as if she could admit she was wrong; however, her significant other could not. On the other hand, Brooke felt she could not admit when she was wrong, while her significant other could.

RELATIONAL HAPPINESS

In the final section, participants shared the characteristics they felt personified a happy relationship and any additional issues they feel significantly affect the happiness of their relationship, and they rated their relationships on a scale of one to ten. A column in the demographic portion of this research in Appendix C contains the participants ratings of relational happiness on a scale of 1-10.

John, Charlie, and Joseph all felt that trust and communication were the two most important factors affecting happy relationships. Jody felt that communication and affection were the most important characteristics, while Chris felt trust and compassion were most important. Fred was the only participant that felt passion was the most important characteristic for a happy relationship. None of

the men felt there were any additional topics that significantly affected the happiness in a relationship.

When asked how they felt about their current dating relationships, clear patterns emerged. Chris, Jody, Fred, Joseph, and John all gave positive responses.

I feel good about it (Chris, happiness rating 8)

Very, very happy. (Jody, happiness rating 9)

It's fantastic. (Fred, happiness rating 1 or 10)

Happy. (Joseph, happiness rating 9.5)

Very happy. (John, happiness rating 8)

Charlie's statements were more negative than were the others. Due to the issues going on in Charlie's relationship, he indicated that the future of the relationship looked grim.

I don't know how I can deal with this much more. (Charlie, happiness rating 3.5)

The final question posed required the participants to rank their relationships on a scale of one to ten. One would represent extremely unhappy, while ten represented extremely happy. A clear pattern emerged; however, Fred's answer blurred the lines a bit.

Chris, Jody, Joseph, and John all ranked their relationships as an "8" or higher. Chris rated his relationship as an "8," Jody a "9," Joseph a "9.5," and John rated his as an "8." Fred stated that his relationship is a "1" at times and a "10" at times. Charlie, on the other hand, ranked his relationship as a "3 or "4."

Madeline, Molly, Brooke, and Proosia all felt that either trust or honesty was top priority for a happy relationship. Allison felt that spontaneity and compassion were the two most important characteristics. Ashley felt that comfort, fun, and intimacy were the three most important characteristics involved in happy relationships. Going along with the men, Monique was the only female participant to say that communication was most important in a happy relationship, along with time spent together and understanding.

In response to questions about additional topics that affect happiness, Ashley, Monique, and Molly all had additional suggestions. Monique felt that the amount of time each person works would have a significant effect on relational happiness as it goes hand in hand with time spent alone. Ashley felt that her significant other's negative relationship with her family significantly

affected the happiness within her relationship. Molly noted that the fact that she lived with her significant other had an effect on the happiness within her relationship.

As with the men, there was a clear pattern with the women in terms of their positive remarks about their relationships. Proosia, Madeline, Brooke, Allison, Molly, and Monique all had positive comments about their relationships.

I'm extremely happy (Proosia,
happiness rating 9)

Very good (Madeline, happiness rating
8)

I'm thrilled with it (Brooke,
happiness rating 9)

I feel great (Allison, happiness
rating 10)

Very happy (Molly, happiness rating
10)

I like it, I'm extremely happy
(Monique, happiness rating 10)

Ashley was the only female participant with negative comments about her dating relationship. When asked how she felt, she simply stated "It's not going to last." The awkwardness within her relationship and the issues with her significant other are, in her mind, too great to overcome.

The same pattern also held true when the participants were asked to rank their current dating relationship. Proosia, Madeline, Brooke, Allison, Molly, and Monique all ranked their relationships "8" or higher. Ashley ranked hers as a "4." Allison, Monique, and Molly all ranked their relationships as "10," while Brooke and Proosia ranked theirs as a "9."

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate the subjective relational experiences of college-aged individuals involved in heterosexual dating relationships. The specific concern was whether or not these individuals use a sort of checks and balances approach to gauging relational happiness. Using exchange theory as a theoretical foundation the research has shown that there are distinct differences between individuals who report feeling more equal within their relationships and those who feel more inequality within their relationships. Those individuals reporting more equality within their relationships also described higher ratings of satisfaction within their relationships. Those individuals reporting inequality reported lower ratings of satisfaction.

By analyzing the responses of each individual participant, I was able to rate the participants' responses on a scale of (1-10) where "1" is extremely unhappy and "10" is extremely happy in all categories but relational happiness. In the category of relational happiness I asked

the participants to assign a rating using the same scale. The results of this analysis may be reviewed in Appendix D.

Sample

The sample was selected from a mid-sized Southeastern University that had students who varied in socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. Due to the qualitative nature of this study and small sample size (n=13), the findings can not be confidently generalized across time and space. Though the sample size is small, the interview process can ascertain more valuable information about specific issues within all of the participants dating relationships. The primary purpose was to explore the level to which individuals felt equality and happiness within their relationships, which this research was done. Beyond this study's limitations, valuable insight has been gained into the personal relationships of college-aged men and women involved in dating relationships.

Equality

While it is difficult to qualitatively determine the degree to which individuals perceived equality within their relationships, this study has identified some determining factors that are considered in individuals perceptions of the level of equality. Among men, feelings of not being able to choose activities were determining factors in the

discussion of inequality. Among the female participants, differing educational levels along with differing personality types were determining factors in the discussion of inequality as the participants who involved in relationships with partners who had equal or higher education levels reported higher levels of happiness.

Under Homans' success proposition, the individuals who gave more favorable answers in regard to the topics involving relational equality would be more likely to continue the relationship. Based on the responses given, Ashley and Charlie do not appear to be receiving as much reward, and therefore would be less likely to continue with their respective relationships. By assigning a rating of "3" to "4," both have acknowledged the discontent within their relationships and even stated that they each did not see the relationships going any further. One can hypothesize that the individuals in this study that have higher relational happiness ratings are happier because they feel their actions are rewarded by favorable interactions with their significant other.

Mood

Mood was also a determining factor in the consideration of equality and happiness. This research has shown that individuals' moods are affected by their

significant others either positively or negatively. The effect that mood has on them helps to determine whether or not the individuals feel they are getting a benefit from being in the relationship. Individuals that report better moods when they are around their significant others also reported higher rates of happiness. Likewise, individuals that report better moods when they are not around their significant others report lower rates of relational happiness. Mood differs from relational happiness in that one can be in a bad mood but still be perfectly content with her or his dating relationship. The discussion of mood gets to the heart of the individuality of a qualitative study in that people react differently to different situations.

While mood is difficult to measure, it may be argued that many individuals, in general, desire to be in a good mood. In looking at Homans' value proposition, individuals who felt they were in a better mood around their significant others would be more likely to continue to stay in their relationships. While they may not be able to pinpoint one particular action that prompts a favorable response from their significant other, the interaction with their significant other alone is what they value.

Friends

Friends were another determining factor in the consideration of equality and happiness. Those individuals that reported positive relationships between their significant others and their friends also reported higher rates of happiness. Individuals reporting consistent difficulties between their significant others and their friends reported lower rates of relational happiness. The women reporting higher rates of happiness felt that trust was the most important part of a happy relationship, while others felt that comfort and fun were more important. The men reported trust and communication as the most important aspects of their relationships. At least from the information gained in this research, it can be hypothesized that a trusting relationship is important to people and has a beneficial value to them.

Gender Roles

Distinct gender roles were also identified through this study. This research has shown that both men and women perceive that men are more likely to give compliments to their significant others than are women. Furthermore, the research has shown that men are more likely to initiate sexual intimacy than women.

Limitations of the Study

This research has been exploratory in nature; therefore, findings should be interpreted as suggestive, rather than conclusive. This research suggests that happiness within dating relationships may be attained through relational equality as well as through promoting a trusting relationship. It has added to the small amount of literature in the area of equality within college-aged dating relationships. The findings of this research should provide a framework from which to continue to explore this much needed research in this area.

Suggestions for Further Research

Future research should continue to explore the areas of importance noted here. Greater emphasis needs to be placed on the importance of friendships outside of the dating relationships as well as mood changes within relationships and choosing activities. In hindsight, I feel that breaking this topic out into more categories would more clearly show how individuals' mood changes based upon the mood of the people by which they are surrounded. Two topics omitted from this research were family approval and cohabitation. Future research could benefit by discussion of these two topics. Furthermore, future researchers should focus on the perception of trust within

the relationship along with perceptions of communication between the individuals and their significant others.

Potential Use of Research

The findings of this research have the potential to raise awareness among individuals involved in dating relationships as well as individuals who work professionally with individuals involved in dating relationships. Individuals who are seeking the tools to build happy and healthy relationships can use this research to identify issues within relationships. This information can be used to assess issues within other relationships and ultimately address those issues in an attempt to resolve them and improve the happiness within those relationships.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research has only just begun to analyze the factors within college-aged dating relationships. The findings of this research and future research will be of interest to a wide range of individuals both for personal and professional reasons. Within most people lies the desire to share their life experiences with another person on an intimate level. Research in this area can help give more insight in improving the quality of individuals' lives.

What one can take from this research is that the more

equitable the relationship is to both parties the happier both parties will be. In relationships, it is important for individuals to feel as if they are receiving enough benefit from their partner to justify the amount of effort being put in. If individuals feel that they are not receiving the enough benefit from the relationship, then they will not be happy.

APPENDIX A

RELATIONAL EQUALITY AND HAPPINESS INTERVIEW GUIDE

DEMOGRAPHIC

1. What is your age?
2. What is your current classification?
3. What is the age of your significant other (S.O.)?
4. Is your significant other currently enrolled in a college or university?
5. Are you currently employed? If so, where?
6. Is your significant other currently employed? If so, where?
7. Is your significant other male or female?
8. What is your ethnicity?
9. What is the ethnicity of your significant other?
10. How long have you been dating your significant other?
11. During the time you and your significant other have dated, have you ever broken up?

TIME SPENT ALONE WITH YOUR SIGNIFICANT OTHER

12. How much time alone do you spend with your partner? Why?
13. How often is the time spent doing activities that you have chosen?
14. How often is the time spent doing activities that your partner has chosen?
15. Talk about how often you have your partner's undivided attention.
16. Talk about your level of contentment with the amount of time you spend alone with your significant other.

COMPLIMENTS TO ONE ANOTHER

17. Between you and your partner, which one would you say gives more compliments?
18. Have you been given a compliment by your partner in the last week? Can you give an example?
19. Have you given your partner a compliment in the last week? Could you give an example?
20. Do you feel that compliments are important in your relationship? Can you explain why or why not?
21. If you do feel that compliments are important, what types of compliments are necessary? (i.e. physical, personality, intelligence, etc.)

MONETARY EXPENSES

22. Which one of the two of you pays for dates or meals more often? Why?
23. Has it always been dealt with in this way?
24. If not, when did it change?
25. Is this the way you would prefer? Why?
26. Talk about a time that the two of you have argued about money?

INITIATING INTIMACY

27. Which one of you more often initiates non-sexual physical contact? (i.e. hugs, kisses, holding hands, etc.) Why?
28. How often do you and your partner engage in non-sexual physical contact?
29. Do you and your significant other have a sexual relationship?
30. Which one of you more often initiates sexual intimacy?
31. How would you describe your sexual satisfaction in your relationship?
32. Talk about your feelings regarding this?
33. How does the frequency compare to that of past relationships?

MOOD

34. Do you find that you are in a positive mood more often when you are around your significant other or when you are not around him/her?

35. If you find yourself in a better mood when you are in the presence of other people, then tell me about those people (e.g., friends, family, etc.).
36. What behaviors on the part of your significant other affect your mood? Why?
37. Describe your customary mood when you are around your significant other? Why?
38. Describe the typical mood of your significant other.

TIME SPENT WITH FRIENDS

39. Compare the amount of time you spend with friends to time spent with your significant other.
40. Compare the amount of time your significant other spends with his/her friends to that of time spent with you.
41. How much time do you spend with your significant other and his/her friends?
42. How much time does your significant other spend with you and your friends?
43. Talk about your feelings regarding his/her friends.
44. Talk about your significant other's feelings regarding your friends.
45. Describe your friends' feelings toward your partner.
46. Talk about the number of mutual friends you have as a couple.
47. Are most of your mutual friends currently involved in a dating relationship?
48. Does he or she spend more time with his or her friends or with you? Why?

DISCUSSION OF IMPORTANT ISSUES

49. When it comes to discussing difficult issues, which one of you would you say is more confrontational?
50. In the event of an argument, how would you like to see your significant other deal with confrontation? Why?
51. Talk about a perpetual problem within your relationship.
52. Describe a typical disagreement between you and your significant other.
53. In the event of an argument, which one of the two of you is more likely to give in to the other's point of view or "back down" so to speak? Why?

54. Can you admit when you are wrong?
55. Can your significant other admit when he/she is wrong?
56. How does this compare to the way you dealt with confrontation in past relationships?

RELATIONAL HAPPINESS

57. In your opinion what are the three most important characteristics involved in a happy relationship? Why do you feel these are so important?
58. In general, how do you feel about your current dating relationship?
59. Are there any other issues that you feel significantly affect the happiness within your relationship?
60. Rate the happiness within your relationship on a scale of 1-10 (1=extremely unhappy and 10=extremely happy).

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT

Project Title: Effects of Relational Equality on Happiness in College-Aged Heterosexual Dating Relationships

Investigator: Chris Williams, Sociology, (270)779-5120

You are being asked to participate in a project conducted through Western Kentucky University. The University requires that you give your signed agreement to participate in this project.

The investigator will explain to you in detail the purpose of the project, the procedures to be used, and the potential benefits and possible risks of participation. You may ask him/her any questions you have to help you understand the project. A basic explanation of the project is written below. Please read this explanation and discuss with the researcher any questions you may have.

If you then decide to participate in the project, please sign on the last page of this form in the presence of the person who explained the project to you. You should be given a copy of this form to keep.

1. **Nature and Purpose of the Project:** I am interviewing both males and females between the ages of 18 and 25 years old. The purpose of this research is to see how a person's perception of his or her equality within a dating relationship affects his or her happiness within that relationship.
2. **Explanation of Procedures:** I am conducting in-depth interviews that will be recorded on a digital voice recorder. I will put the interviews on compact disc following this interview, and after analysis the information will be kept in the Sociology Department at Western Kentucky University for no less than three years.
3. **Discomfort and Risks:** If at any time you do not feel comfortable discussing any of the issues within this interview, I would ask that you simply state "I do not feel comfortable talking about that," and we will move on to another topic. Because this topic is a very personal one, you may see your current dating relationship in a new light

and may have some strong emotions associated with that new reflection.

4. **Benefits:** I anticipate that you will reflect on your relationship and identify some strengths and weaknesses within that relationship so that you may have a healthier dating relationship in the future.
5. **Confidentiality:** I ask that you create a name to be called during the interview. Furthermore, I ask that you refer to your significant other as "my significant other" as opposed to using his or her name. I will be using a Sony Digital Voice Recorder to record the interview session. Following the session, I will place the information on a secure computer and will burn the interview on a compact disc as a data file. I will then erase the interview from the digital voice recorder and computer. The compact disc will be kept in the Sociology Department Office for no less than three years.
6. **Refusal/Withdrawal:** Refusal to participate in this study will have no effect on any future services you may be entitled to from the University. Anyone who agrees to participate in this study is free to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty.

You understand also that it is not possible to identify all potential risks in an experimental procedure, and you believe that reasonable safeguards have been taken to minimize both the known and potential but unknown risks.

Signature of Participant

Date

Witness

Date

THE DATED APPROVAL ON THIS CONSENT FORM INDICATES THAT
THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN REVIEWED AND APPROVED BY
THE WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW BOARD
Sean Rubino, Compliance Manger
TELEPHONE: (270) 745-4652

APPENDIX C

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

NAME	AGE	CURRENT CLASS	S.O. AGE	S.O. IN COLLEGE? (Yes, No, Grad*)	EMPLOYED/ WHERE?	S.O. EMPLOYED/ WHERE?	ETHNICITY	S.O. ETHNICITY	HAVE YOUR RELATIONSHIP FROM 1-10	LENGTH OF TIME DATING (in months)	EVER BROKEN UP?
WOMEN											
Madeline	26	Senior	24	Yes	Rivendell	Teacher	Caucasian	Caucasian	8	12	Yes
Brooke	20	Sophomore	24	Grad	Bar Server	The Gap	Caucasian	Caucasian	9	7	No
STOOSER	24	Senior	24	Grad	Rivendell	Lewis	Caucasian	Caucasian	9	12	No
Monique	24	Graduate	24	Yes	Rivendell	Rivendell	Caucasian	Caucasian	10	15	No
Abby	22	Junior	23	Yes	Rivendell	Rivendell	Caucasian	Caucasian	10	5	No
Ashley	21	Junior	26	No	Server	Server	Caucasian	Phillipino	4	24	Yes
Allison	25	Senior	26	Yes	Victoria's Secret	Liquor Store	Hispanic	Caucasian	10	3	No
MEN											
Shias	25	Senior	21	Yes	Rivendell	Rivendell	Caucasian	Caucasian	8	12	No
Charlie	22	Junior	19	Yes	Law Office	Server	Caucasian	Caucasian	3 or 4	12	No
John	25	Junior	23	Yes	Lifeguard	Server	Caucasian	Caucasian	3	60	Yes
Joseph	23	Junior	22	No	Rivendell	Rivendell	Caucasian	Caucasian	9.5	7	No
Josh	24	Senior	24	Yes	Rivendell	Rivendell	Caucasian	Caucasian	9	15	No
Fred	22	Sophomore	19	Yes	Liquor Store	Unemployed	Caucasian	African American	1 or 10	0.25	Yes

* "Grad" = Participant Other has graduated from a college or university.

APPENDIX D

CATEGORICAL RATINGS SCALE

NAME	RELATIONAL EQUALITY	COMPLIMENTS	POORARY EXPENSES	IRITATING INCIDENT	MOOD	TIME SPENT WITH FRIENDS	DISCUSSION OF IMPORTANT ISSUES	RELATIONAL HAPPINESS
* ALL RATINGS ARE ON A SCALE OF 1 - 10								
WOMEN								
Michelle	5	9	4	8	7	5	4	8
Brooke	9	9	9	10	10	8	9	9
Erinella	9	7	9	10	8	7	7	9
Monique	8	9	9	10	9	9	7	10
Melly	5	10	9	9	10	9	7	10
Ashley	5	4	7	5	1	1	1	4
Allison	9	9	5	9	10	7	8	10
ME								
* ALL RATINGS ARE ON A SCALE OF 1 - 10								
Carrie	7	8	5	10	7	8	7	8
Charlie	5	3	5	1	1	1	5	3 or 4
Josh	5	5	7	9	8	5	7	8
Joseph	9	9	9	10	9	9	10	9.5
Jody	7	9	10	10	9	9	9	8
Fred	5	8	9	9	4	6	5	1 or 10

* Rankings were assigned based on the responses given by the participants. Only the Relational Happiness responses were assigned by the participants themselves.

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