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2013-06-27

The Relationship Between Romantic Relationship Initiation Processes of Single LDS Emerging Adults and Change in Attachment Working Models with Implications for Practice

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The Relationship Between Romantic Relationship Initiation Practices of Single LDS Emerging

Adults and Change in Attachment Working Models

with Implications for Practice

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science

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July 2013

ABSTRACT

The Relationship Between Romantic Relationship Initiation Practices of Single LDS Emerging
Adults and Change in Attachment Working Models
with Implications for Practice

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Relationship initiation is an integral part of romantic relationship development and a key developmental task of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2004). In addition, relationship initiation practices (such as dating) have the capacity to impact the fluctuating levels of attachment insecurity (whether anxiety or avoidance) that an individual experiences over the course of emerging adulthood (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). In the present study, I utilized latent growth curve modeling to examine whether certain dating variables (first dates, second or more dates, relationship breakups, dateless weeks) compiled over a 32 week dating history, as well as age and gender could predict change in attachment anxiety and avoidance over four time points in a sample of 309 Latter-day Saint (LDS) emerging adults. Results indicate that dateless weeks and second or more dates predicted the rate of change (i.e. slope) of attachment anxiety and that the overarching model accounted for 25% of the variance in the slope of anxiety. Findings also showed that age predicted initial levels (i.e. intercept) of attachment anxiety and that gender predicted initial levels of attachment avoidance. Findings were discussed in terms of theoretical significance and clinical application.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Introduction

One of the fundamental tasks of the time period between the late teens and the mid-to-late twenties—a time period which many scholars are now terming *emerging adulthood* (Arnett, 2000; 2004; Arnett & Tanner, 2006)—is the initiation and consolidation of romantic relationships. In this task, the larger process for emerging adults is what Tanner (2006) refers to as "recentering" a process by which their adolescent attachments give way to adult independence until they are gradually replaced by new attachments to romantic figures, fostering a sense of interdependency. Allen (2008) concurs, noting that the attachment system is in a state of fundamental transformation during the adolescent and young adult years, a transformation from being primarily a receiver of attachment from parents to a giver of attachment to others (friends, romantic partners, children, etc.). In this task of initiating relationships the typical *modus operandi* is that of flirting, socializing (i.e. "hanging out"), and dating (Arnett, 2004) often with concomitant sexual activity. In the case of conservatively religious groups such as Latter-day Saint (LDS) emerging adults, sexual activity is typically and socially reserved for after marriage, making dating and other relationship initiation activities particularly salient for them.

However, as emerging adults approach this process of relationship initiation they are influenced by their core interpersonal beliefs of self (i.e. one's inherent worth and lovability, self-worth, and interpersonal competency) and other (i.e. the trustworthiness, compassion, and inherent goodness of others), what Bowlby (1969) refers to as *working models* of attachment. These mental representations of self and others influence emerging adults across a variety of domains from interpersonal functioning, emotional regulation, couple relationship processes, sexual attitudes and practices, and mental health, as well as dating and relationship initiation processes (for a review see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

In addition, these working models demonstrate remarkable continuity and stability across the life course yet are nevertheless subject to change. In particular, through the dual processes of assimilation (i.e. incorporating new and sometimes conflicting information into pre-existing assumptions) and accommodation (i.e. adapting belief systems to fit new information which challenges them) individuals thus adapt to new experiences and information (Piaget, 1953) including attachment-relevant experiences (Fraley, 2002; Fraley & Brumbaugh, 2004; Fraley, Vicary, Brumbaugh, & Roisman, 2011). Thus, it seems reasonable that dating experiences have the capacity to influence the continuity and change of attachment working models over time.

In this paper, the main purpose is to examine whether or not short term dating events and transitions (e.g. dateless weeks, first dates, second or more dates) can predict change in the fluctuating levels of attachment avoidance and anxiety in sample of LDS emerging adults.

Emerging Adulthood

The initiation and consolidation of a long-term romantic relationship has typically been a key task of the time period between the late teens and mid-to-late twenties. Recently, this time period however has been reexamined and is now referred to by many scholars as *emerging adulthood* (Arnett, 2000; 2004; Arnett & Tanner, 2006). Emerging adulthood as conceptualized by Arnett and colleagues has been viewed as a unique developmental period during which the majority of major life course decisions (education, career, marriage, family) are made (Arnett, 2004; Tanner, 2006). It is also largely viewed as the time period during which emerging adults consolidate their own unique identity including decisions regarding religion, belief systems, sexual orientation, and so forth (Arnett, 2004; Cote, 2006). This consolidated identity creates the ability for emerging adults to engage in truly mutual adult romantic relationships. Thus, emerging adulthood is likely to be the time period in which dating and relationship initiation

processes take on a new level of seriousness, as emerging adults fall into and out of love with romantic partners in their meandering towards making their romantic relationship decisions.

However, Arnett (2004) is careful to note that not all components of emerging adulthood are necessarily positive and not all emerging adults flourish during the time period. In fact, one of the key features of emerging adulthood is that it is a time period of immense possibilities, as well as uncertainty. In fact, Arnett (2000) notes that there is more heterogeneity in emerging adulthood than in any other developmental time period in the human life span. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the realm of romantic relationships.

One significant source of such variation is cultural variations in the experience of emerging adulthood, even subcultures within the broader American culture. Specifically, this paper will examine the experience of emerging adults who are members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS). There is already some initial research about the experience of emerging adulthood for LDS emerging adults (Barry & Nelson, 2004; Heaton, 1992; Nelson 2003). Nelson (2003) notes that LDS emerging adults have a more condensed and highly structured emerging adulthood, due in part to specific religious rites, responsibilities, and events that occur during the late teens and early twenties (e.g. serving a full-time proselyting mission, acceptance of lay priesthood responsibilities for men, and entrance into the "Relief Society" a church service organization for women). Furthermore, LDS religious leaders promote standards of sexual abstinence before marriage and strongly encourage and promote dating (Monson, 2011; Oaks, 2011; Scott, 2011) as a necessary practice in preparation for marriage and parenthood responsibilities. In this vein, LDS emerging adults are quite similar to other conservatively religious groups. Arnett (2004) in his examinations of emerging adulthood notes that conservatively religious emerging adults are quite homogenous, especially regarding moral

values, the discouragement of premarital sex, and the importance of marriage and family relationships as taught by both parents and clergy. Therefore, dating as a relationship initiation process might be considerably more salient for conservatively religious emerging adults than other relationship initiation processes (e.g. cohabitation, "hooking up", etc.) and the dynamics for this population could be well represented by a participant sample of Latter-day Saint emerging adults.

It is possible that LDS emerging adults might be slightly unique in the fact that demographically they date more frequently (Chadwick et al., 2007), and marry and begin having children earlier than their national counterparts (Schaalje & Holman, 2007). Yet, this difference is likely a reflection of the way in which emerging adulthood is condensed in LDS culture (Nelson, 2003) rather than evidence that LDS emerging adults are somehow different in their developmental pathways from other conservative religious groups or of the broader population of emerging adults in general.

In either case, one of the chief tasks of emerging adulthood for nearly all emerging adults is the consolidation of a personal identity (Cote, 2006) and eventually the initiation and consolidation of a romantic relationship (Arnett, 2004). Essentially all emerging adults are engaged in the process of gradually moving from their child-like dependencies on parents to creating an independent adult identity, which can then be shared in an adult romantic relationship (Tanner, 2006). Yet in the course of trying to initiate and consolidate adult romantic relationships, emerging adults must also grapple with aspects of themselves which might hinder their ability to engage competently in the process of relationship initiation, namely, attachment insecurities.

Attachment Theory

Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory postulates that early experiences with available, responsive, and engaging caregivers produce a profound sense of interpersonal competency and security. In addition, experiences with sensitive and caring caregivers create internalized mental representations of self and others (i.e. "working models of attachment") which subsequently influence future relationship experiences. On the other hand, if experiences with caregivers have been harsh, insensitive, frustrating, or indifferent, a profound sense of insecurity in relationships tends to follow. Furthermore these negative attachment experiences are also internalized as attachment working models which subsequently influence future relationships. Bowlby theorized, and later his collaborator Mary Ainsworth (Ainsworth et al., 1978), confirmed that attachment experiences formed early in adulthood and encoded as working models of attachment, become instinctive and consistent ways of relating with meaningful others.

While initially a theory of parent-child interaction, the theory of attachment was later applied to the study of adult romantic relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Hazan and Shaver (1987) found that attachment working models tend to co-occur in theoretically-consistent ways with core relationship beliefs. Since this early nascent work, the study of attachment in adult romantic relationships has grown significantly (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007) and now attachment is widely regarded as a core theory of human love (Johnson, 2004).

Attachment working models, as noted earlier, are core beliefs about and mental representations of self and others (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Insecure working models of attachment tend to exist on two continuums: *Anxiety* includes negative views of self together with overly positive, even idealized, views of others (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998) and *avoidance* includes overly positive views of self together with lack

of trust in or dependence upon others (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998).

In addition to these intrapsychic beliefs individuals with characteristics of attachment anxiety and avoidance also tend to engage in relationship behaviors that are troublesome for forming mutually satisfying attachment bonds. Individuals with high levels of attachment anxiety tend to be clingy, hyperattentive to their partner's feedback, and act in childish and overly dependent ways (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007), while individuals high in attachment avoidance tend to engage in behaviors that distance and shut out attachment figures (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). They engage in what Mikulincer and Shaver (2005) call "defensive self-enhancement", essentially propping up ones fractured self-esteem by becoming aggressively self-reliant and minimizing the need or even the desire for intimacy.

Both forms of insecure attachment working models hinder the formation of secure attachment bonds either by pushing for intimacy and connection too quickly (anxiety) or by delaying or disregarding intimacy and connection altogether (avoidance). While others have gone so far as to place these continuums on an axis and create four attachment *styles* (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991), for the purposes of the present study I will simply be focusing on fluctuating levels of attachment anxiety and avoidance rather than classifying participants according to attachment style.

Attachment Stability and Change

Bowlby (1973) made two propositions regarding attachment stability and change. First, that attachment working models are based upon real experiences an infant has. As such, working models are created through a process of assimilation of experiences to existing mental schema. Second, that working models, while relatively stable, are also open to accommodation. These

dual principles of *assimilation* and *accommodation* were drawn from Piaget's (1953) theory of cognitive development and were used by Bowlby to argue that working models are thus stable and yet open to change.

Once working models are formed, a number of processes occur that encourage stability in attachment working models (i.e. assimilation). Mikulincer and Shaver (2007) describe three mechanisms in particular that serve to make working models stable. First, people tend to view relational experiences in ways that conform to their working models. Second, people behave in ways that conform to their expectations from relationships; this behavior elicits reactions from their partners that are consistent with their working models, thus reinforcing them. Finally, individuals tend to be attracted to and self-select partners that fit their working models.

Nevertheless, attachment working models, based as they are in actual experiences, are of necessity open to adaptation. On occasion, the individual experiences relational events that do not conform to their working models and thus must lead to a temporary revision in the working model. "Reparative" attachment experiences (Bowlby, 1988) might include such things as initiating a new romantic relationship or seeking psychotherapy. In either case, the insecure attachment working models are being challenged, and hopefully changed. On the other hand, failures in relationship initiation could lead to a negative re-interpretation of self and others and to attachment insecurity. While initiating new relationships, entering psychotherapy, sudden abuse or betrayal from a partner, and ending a relationship are primarily the attachment experiences Bowlby (1988) was alluding to, I argue that initial dating experiences also have the potential to be "reparative" (accommodating) or conversely to intensify attachment insecurities.

Thus, the impact of certain corrective attachment experiences (such as going on dates) could theoretically lead to change in the levels of attachment anxiety or avoidance. Mikulincer

and Shaver (2007) note that initially dating experiences and relationship initiation gambits (such as flirting) should theoretically activate the attachment behavioral system, because, "[dates and flirting] are emotionally charged and can arouse hopes of care and support, as well as fears of disapproval and rejection" (p. 286).

In fact, Mikulincer and Shaver (2007) argue that because at these earliest stages there is little information known about their romantic partners and the relationships have not developed sufficiently for a particular couple identity or interactional style to form, individuals must rely on their most basic, generalized, and chronic attachment working models to interpret their partner's behavior. Without a relationally-specific model in place (i.e. attachment beliefs based on experiences with a particular relationship partner), individuals must transfer their general attachment models (built from their cumulative relational history) to would be partners regardless of how accurately such models actually fit their potential partner (Brumbaugh & Fraley, 2006). Creasey and Jarvis (2008) concur, noting that relationship-specific attachments take time to form and therefore might not be applicable to the unstable and uncertain process of early relationship initiation. However, they also note that general attachment models—built from a cumulative history of romantic relationship experiences—will of necessity include some of these relationship-specific models built from previous relationships. Thus, a collective dating history is likely to be built upon chronic working models and in turn, subsequent dating experiences are likely to become incorporated into generalized attachment working models. It is important to note here, that within a developmental context, Allen (2008) argues that it is during adolescence when these generalized attachment working models are most likely to become coherent, brought to conscious awareness, and utilized in initiating actual romantic relationships. Yet, Allen (2008) makes little distinction between different phases of adolescence

(including what might be thought of as "late" adolescence) and therefore it might help to include Tanner's (2006) arguments on "recentering" that distinguish adolescence from emerging adulthood. In either case, the central premise is the same, that the development of the person from dependent child to independent (and later interdependent) adult, of necessity includes the development of generalized working models of attachment which are then "field tested", changed, altered, or confirmed through subsequent dating and relationship initiation experiences. In fact, it might be argued that romantic relationship initiation and consolidation is really the culmination of the process of attachment development with all subsequent attachment experiences building on this process. Next, there will be brief review of the ways in which attachment-relevant experiences have been used to predict change in the fluctuating levels of attachment anxiety and/or avoidance.

Predicting Change in Adult Attachment

Several studies have explored the stability and change of adult attachment styles over time (for a more complete review, see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). A brief review of these studies will help frame the gaps in the literature that this study hopes to fill.

Baldwin and Fehr (1995) studied the stability of attachment ratings in a number of data sets analyzing attachment ratings. They estimated that roughly 30% of adults experience a statistically significant change in attachment in a relatively short period of time (less than 1 year). On the other hand, Fraley and Brumbaugh (2004) performed a meta-analysis of 24 studies and found that similar to Fraley (2002)'s meta-analysis of child attachment, that adult attachment scores were relatively stable overall. Their test-retest correlation was .56 as compared to Fraley's (2002) test-retest correlation of .39. These findings support Bowlby's (1973) hypothesis that attachment working models experience both elements of stability and change.

The primary predictors of adult attachment stability that have been studied were relationship transitions (marriage, parenthood) and specific relationship events (divorce, death of a partner) (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). The predictive value of these relational transitions and experiences has received mixed support. Several studies found that relationship breakups and difficulties predicted decreased attachment security over 2-5 months (Hammond & Fletcher, 1991; Ruvolo, Fabin, & Ruvolo, 2001) and Kirkpatrick and Hazan (1994) found an increase of attachment security following initiating a new relationship and a decrease in security following a breakup in their 4 year study, whereas several other studies (Cozzarelli et al., 2003; Davila & Cobb, 2003; Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1994) did not find significant changes in attachment security over time in their studies of the impact of relational events and transitions on attachment stability.

Mikulincer and Shaver (2007) suggest that there are two possible reasons for this inconsistency, both with some empirical support. The first possibility is that the studies did not find significant results because they did not account for the subjective perception or appraisal of the event. For example, Simpson et al. (2003) found that the transition to parenthood predicted changes in attachment only after accounting for the perceived spousal support that the individuals reported. More anxiously attached mothers increased in security if their partners were perceived to be more supportive, while mothers who did not seek support from their spouse became more avoidant during the transition to parenthood.

The second possibility is that the reason there is so much fluctuation in the stability of attachment working models is that they were never stably formed (i.e. disorganized attachment models) (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). This disorganization of attachment working models is thought to stem from certain vulnerabilities present early in childhood (personality, abuse,

trauma, etc.) which the individual has never been able to fully come to terms with. Again there is some support for this assertion that when such vulnerabilities are accounted for, there is a marked increase in the changes of attachment across life transitions (Cozzarelli et al., 2003; Davila & Cobb, 2003).

It is important to note here that all of the studies cited sample participants that are either currently involved in or are exiting from (in the case of divorce, relationship breakup, etc.) existing pair-bond relationships. As such they do not tell us about how attachment insecurities might change in the course of relationship *initiation*.

Attachment and Dating in Emerging Adulthood

Allen (2008) argues that the development of attachment reaches its culmination in the late adolescent years. Over the course of childhood and adolescence, child-like dependencies on adult attachment figures gradually diminishes, as adolescents learn to gradually become more and more independent, placing themselves in a position where they can then shift into mutual adult attachments, and eventually take on the role of parents and form attachments with their own children. Tanner (2006) makes essentially the same argument, except that she refers to the late adolescent years instead as emerging adulthood, and the process she describes (i.e."recentering") is not explicitly referred to as an attachment process. In either case, the same process is occurring, during the late teens and mid-twenties, during which emerging adulthood as a developmental period occurs, young emerging adults are engaged in the process of gradually forming adult romantic attachments.

In this vein then, dating as a developmental process might be thought of as more impactful, more serious, and more goal-directed than it has been in adolescence. While there does tend to be a cultural belief that emerging adults are shiftless, unwilling to face

responsibility, and delayed in their acceptance of adult obligations, Arnett (2004) notes that most emerging adults do desire to marry and have children and most of the emerging adults in his sample had done so by age 30. This would suggest that contrary to popular belief, dating and relationship initiation in emerging adulthood, while exploratory, is primarily geared towards eventually finding a spouse. Any relationship might end up being "the one" that is carried all the way to marriage. As such, it seems likely that the attachment working models formed from childhood and adolescence are now being "field tested" as they date individuals that could eventually become their new primary attachment figure.

In their conceptual examination of romantic relationship initiation in emerging adulthood, Clark and Beck (2011) argue that emerging adults engage in three processes that help them determine whether or not a particular relationship is viable to become a secure attachment bond: strategic self-presentation (i.e. presenting the self in ways that are most likely to garner a partner's interest, while minimizing the qualities that might be seen as unattractive), self-protection (against the possibility of rejection), and self-disclosure (to increase intimacy and familiarity in the relationship). While they do not specifically draw on attachment theory in their work, it seems quite clear that all three of these processes have their roots in attachment. The presentation of self is largely a function of ones beliefs about the self (i.e. working models), self-protection against rejection is part of why secondary attachment strategies (avoidance and anxiety) are used and self-disclosure is one form of attachment proximity seeking (see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007 for a review). Over the course of the relationship, self-protection decreases, disclosure increases in depth and breadth, and strategic presentation of self is gradually supplanted by honest and genuine presentation of the self (Clark & Beck, 2011). Thus, the specific interpersonal mechanisms used by emerging adults in dating are those that are

fundamentally facilitative of developing secure attachment bonds. At the process level, there are many ways to operationalize dating behavior. In the present study there were four specific dating variables of interest. After a brief review of these four dating variables and why they might be theoretical vehicles through which attachment working models are ameliorated, the specific hypotheses of the study will be highlighted.

Dateless weeks. One way to operationalize dating experiences is to focus on the lapses or gaps in active dating opportunities. Dateless weeks comprise the number of weeks during which emerging adults are not going on dates of any kind. Because these represent missed opportunities to interact socially with potential dating partners it is likely that a high number of dateless weeks would lead to increased attachment insecurities because rather than having attachment working models challenged by potentially caring and supportive romantic partners, individuals are instead left to stew in their insecurities. Furthermore, dateless weeks represent isolation from connecting with potential relationship partners, the opposite of connection. Human beings are fundamentally relational creatures (Bowlby, 1969) and therefore the lack of dating opportunities is likely to increase attachment insecurities. However, we also might expect that the two different types of attachment insecurity might interact differently for individuals with lots of dateless weeks. Going for long periods of time without dates might not bother someone with already high initial levels of avoidance because avoidant individuals tend to try and avoid intimacy (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). While anxiety would likely increase because it would reinforce anxious individuals beliefs that they are socially incapable of garnering a partners support, interest, and affection (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Thus the first hypothesis is that individuals with high levels of dateless weeks will experience an increase in attachment anxiety but not avoidance over time.

First dates. First dates, are situations in which an individual has gotten someone to agree to meet them for a first date. After flirting and other gambits to obtain first dates, first dates are likely to be the first forays into the relationship initiation process. Attachments do not form overnight but rather through a consistent pattern of repeated interactions with attachment figures (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Nevertheless, all attachment relationships must begin with some kind of an initial foray of trust of the other person. First dates, might represent initial attempts to trust an individual, even if only for a couple of hours. They are exploratory in that self-disclosure is initially very general, self-protective defenses could run high, and the self is crafted and presented in a way that is strategically aimed at showing the best qualities (Clark & Beck, 2011) as emerging adults "test out the waters" with this new possible relationship partner. Positive experiences on a first date could indicate to these individuals that the potential romantic partner is a viable candidate for subsequent dates.

On the other hand, a consistent pattern of going on lots of first dates without subsequent second or more dates could be taxing on an individual over time. As mentioned earlier, early dating experiences are likely to activate the attachment behavioral system because they drag up hopes for being supported and fears of being rejected (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Without the experience of continued interaction with a potential romantic partner the experience is likely to be ultimately unfulfilling, for how could a series of strangers with whom one only has brief encounter ever hope to fulfill one's attachment longings? Thus, while going on lots of first dates could theoretically reinforce one's sense of social competence and thereby increase attachment security, left by themselves without high levels of second or more dates, first dates could also seem hollow and empty.

Again however, we must note that it is likely that high levels of first dates are likely to impact the development of the two types of attachment insecurities differently. Avoidance is associated with attempts to avoid situations which might provide feedback on one's social competence (i.e. "socially diagnostic situations"; Beck & Clark, 2009) therefore it seems most likely that lots of noncommittal first dates would lead to a decrease in attachment avoidance because it would run counter to their tendency to avoid dating altogether. Anxiety is associated with feelings of social incompetence and a feeling of being hopelessly unable to garner a partner's consistent support and care. If partners never stick around long enough to raise the possibility of becoming an attachment figure then it is likely the anxious belief in one's incompetence would be reinforced. Thus, the second hypothesis that a high number of first dates will predict an overall increase in attachment anxiety and a decrease in attachment avoidance over time.

Second or more dates. Second dates represent situations in which a first date was successful enough that a partner's interest has extended further into developing the relationship. Acceptance of a first date could simply mean the partner was being polite, but continued acceptance of dates would imply an increasing interest in the other person as a possibly viable romantic partner. While these are not committed relationships as such, they represent opportunities to be actively engaged in the process of coming to connect with another person, as over time defenses are lowered, vulnerability gradually increases, and the real self is presented to the partner (Clark & Beck, 2011). Thus going on lots of second or more dates could gradually increase an individual's sense of competence and self-worth as they see themselves engaging competently in the relationship initiation process and gaining a partners continued interest and

attention. Furthermore, the consistently positive interaction with this new potential partner could also serve as evidence of their viability as an attachment provider.

In the case of second or more dates, it seems likely that both attachment avoidance and anxiety could decrease. Consistently spending time with and getting to know a person on subsequent dates could represent a decrease in the avoidant tendency to shy away from "socially diagnostic" situations and thereby a decrease in avoidance (Beck & Clark, 2009). Anxious individuals believe that others will not be there when needed (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007) and continued positive dating experiences with the same person would challenge those beliefs. Thus, the third hypothesis is that high numbers of second or more dates would predict a decrease in both anxiety and avoidance over time.

Breakups. The ending of a budding romantic relationship is likely to hurt, especially if the breakup was not mutually agreed upon. In either case a breakup represents an instance in which a potential attachment figure was deemed unable or unwilling to remain in the relationship. The extent of the damage a breakup has on an individual's attachment insecurities is likely to be based on a number of factors (length of the relationship, ambivalence vs. clearness of the reasons for the breakup, mutual agreement on the breakup, etc.) Nevertheless, the fact that a relationship ended when it could have continued would likely still hurt sufficiently that one could expect an increase in attachment insecurity, at least for a short while after the breakup. Therefore the fourth hypothesis is that breakups would predict an increase in anxiety and avoidance over time.

Cultural variation and final hypotheses. As noted earlier in the paper, cultural variations are an immensely important part of understanding the process of emerging adulthood particularly as it relates to relationship initiation. The study of Latter-day Saints presents some

elements which are unique (e.g. a more condensed emerging adulthood, Nelson; 2003) and some elements that are common across religiously conservative groups (e.g. the prohibition against premarital sex) and some that are shared by all emerging adults (e.g. the uncertainty of the future, the exploratory feeling of emerging adulthood, the hope for future relationship goals) (Arnett, 2004).

One common cultural phenomenon that is certainly present in LDS culture and likely to be present in various forms in other pockets of American culture is the belief that males should do the initiating in romantic relationships. In LDS culture specifically, church leaders have strongly advocated that it is the males' responsibility to initiate dates (Monson, 2011). This cultural mandate might make men feel greater pressure in their dating behavior and thus impact their attachment insecurities differently (whether in initial levels or rate of change) than women. Thus, the fifth general hypothesis is that there will gender differences in either the initial levels (i.e. intercept) or rate of change (i.e. slope) of attachment anxiety and avoidance.

Age was included partially because LDS emerging adults tend to marry younger than their national counterparts (Schaalje & Holman, 2007), one of the truly unique features of this subgroup of religiously conservative emerging adults, and thus older participants may feel "off time" if they are not dating and committing to relationships. Culturally LDS emerging adults tend to experience a more condensed version of emerging adulthood than other groups (Nelson, 2003). Thus, although they may be experiencing the same process, they might be undergoing the process at a somewhat accelerated rate from the main body of their national cohorts. This assumption is partially responsible for the reason why the study comprised such a relatively brief time period (32 weeks of dating history). In an accelerated experience of emerging adulthood these individuals, spurred on by family and cultural pressure may feel the need to date, commit

to, and marry more quickly than others might suggest necessary. Even if this weren't true however, the main body of emerging adults takes marriage with a measured pace, often quite slowly (Arnett, 2004) and therefore younger emerging adults regardless of subculture are likely to feel overall less pressure in dating while they are younger. Thus, the sixth and final hypothesis of this study is that older participants will start with higher initial levels of attachment anxiety and avoidance than younger participants.

In order to answer these questions I will utilize latent growth curve modeling (Duncan, Duncan, & Strycker, 2006) to assess the impact of the dating variables (dateless weeks, first dates, second or more dates, and breakups) on the rate of change (i.e. slope) and the impact of age and gender on the initial levels (i.e. intercept) and rate of change (i.e. slope) of attachment anxiety and avoidance over the four time points.

Method

Sample and Procedures

The data were gathered in 2010 and 2011 as part of the Pathways to Marriage study conducted at Brigham Young University (BYU). Seven-hundred and five participants were recruited by ten researchers who went door to door within a pre-selected geographic area. This area had a high concentration of apartment complexes and houses generally rented by working or university student emerging adults. Those who agreed to participate were compensated by having their names put into a drawing for various gifts (e.g. HD TV's, iPad's, gift cards, etc.) every time they completed the assessment. Participants were asked to complete the READY online assessment, a 300 plus item questionnaire that measures a variety of dating and relationship constructs including attitudes about marriage, risk behaviors, family of origin functioning, attachment style, and so forth. The validity and reliability of the measurement scales

have been established in previous studies (for details see Busby, Holman, & Taniguchi, 2001). They were asked to complete this assessment four times (Fall semester 2010 and Winter semester, Spring/Summer term, and Fall semester 2011).

Participants were also asked to respond to a weekly text message that asked them about any relational transitions/events (e.g. first dates, breakups, etc.) that occurred during the week. Participants were also asked to provide the first name of the person with whom this event occurred. This allowed me to not only examine trends but also look at specific relationships.

The sample for this study was limited to exclude individuals who were already in a committed relationship at the time of the first data collection (n = 597). This is significant for the present study because the desire was to examine the moderating influence of dating experiences on attachment style when there are no persistent pair-bond attachments present. There was considerable attrition over the four time points: T1 (n = 597); T2 (n = 380); T3 (n = 264); T4 (n = 224). The final analytic sample only included participants who had participated in the weekly text message data collection and who had responded to at least 75% of the weekly texts (n = 309). Among the 309 individuals included in the analysis some participants did not complete the Ready assessments at T2 (n = 47), T3 (n = 111), and T4 (n = 135). Full information maximum likelihood estimation was used in AMOS to estimate models given this missing data. Male participants (N = 135) had a mean age of 22.27 years and female participants (N = 174) had a mean age of 20.04 years.

Measures

Attachment

Attachment working models were assessed using the Adult Attachment Questionnaire (AAQ; Simpson, Rholes, & Phillips, 1996). The questionnaire assesses attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety.

Avoidance. Avoidance was assessed using an 8-item measure in which participants were asked to score themselves on a 7-point likert scale on whether or not they agreed or disagreed (1-Strongly Disagree to 7-Strongly Agree) with a series of statements (e.g. "I find it difficult to trust others completely" "I don't like people getting too close to me"). Higher scores indicated the presence of high levels of attachment avoidance. This scale demonstrated sufficient internal validity with a Cronbach's alpha = .849.

Anxiety. Anxiety was assessed using a 9-item measure in which participants were asked to score themselves on a 7-point likert scale on whether or not they agreed or disagreed (1-Strongly Disagree to 7-Strongly Agree) with a series of statements (e.g. "I often worry that my partner(s) don't really love me" "I often want to merge completely with others, and this desire sometimes scares them away"). Higher scores indicated the presence of high levels of attachment anxiety. This scale demonstrated sufficient internal validity with a Cronbach's alpha of .824.

Dating Variables

The dating variables were created using responses from the weekly text messages. As text messaging only allows 160 characters per message, participants were instructed at the outset of the study to respond to the following cue. "Relationship transitions in the last week. Respond with Letter and Persons Name." Response options were; (a) no date, (b) first date, (c) second or more date with the same person, (d) in an exclusive relationship, (e) engaged. (f) broke-up, (g)

other, specify. Respondents were asked to include all dates they may have been on in the previous week, including multiple dates with the same partner. They were also instructed to give the name(s) of the individual(s) with whom they went on a date. From this other variables could be constructed measuring how often and how long participants dated certain individuals. Using the data collected through text messaging the following variables were created.

Number of dateless weeks. The first measure represents the number of weeks an individual reported not having a date of any kind. As respondents were followed for thirty-two weeks, higher numbers reflect a pattern of less dating. This variable was measured by counting the total number of weeks that the participant responded with the letter "a" signifying they did not go on a date that week.

Number of first dates. The second dating variable taken from the data was number of first dates. This variable reflects how many first dates an individual participated in during the week preceding the text. This variable was measured by counting the total number of "b's" (first dates) respondents indicated they had been on each week. Higher numbers reflect a pattern of consistent dating but not necessarily dating that progresses toward commitments or marriage.

Number of second or more dates. The number of second or more dates with the same person was measured by counting how many "c's" (indicating second or more dates) respondents said they had during the week. Higher numbers of second or more dates reflects a pattern of consistently dating the same person. Although these are not committed relationships they likely reflect a a developing interest in and attachment to certain people.

Number of breakups. The number of breakups was measured by the number of "f's" each participant indicated.

Because the link between initiating new relationships and changes in attachment has been fairly well studied (Kirkpatrick & Hazan, 1994; Ruvolo, Fabin, & Ruvolo, 2001; Cozzarelli et al., 2003; Davila & Cobb, 2003; Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1994), I decided to not include the variables of new relationship or engagements, but wanted to instead focus on the impact of the dating variables, as these have *not* been studied.

Proposed Analysis

This analysis proceeded in three stages. In stage one I created an unconditional latent-growth curve model with all four time points of attachment avoidance and anxiety in order to look at the initial levels (intercept) and rate of change (slope) in these variables over time. Then I created a multiple group unconditional model with gender as the grouping variable. I did this to assess whether or not the model fit gets significantly worse, which would indicate different growth curves for each gender. If gender differences existed, this unconditional model would be used for subsequent analyses. If gender differences do not exist, I would use the first unconditional model for further analysis.

Next, the dating variables (dateless weeks, first dates, second or more dates, breakups) were added as predictors of the latent slope and age and gender as predictors of both the latent intercept and slope of attachment anxiety and avoidance to create a conditional model. I did not use the dating variables to predict initial levels (i.e. intercept) because the dating variables were collected over the course of the study and therefore could not predict initial levels.

<div align="center">

Results

</div>

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Means, standards deviations, and correlations for attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance at all four time points and for the dating variables and age are presented in Table 1. It

should be noted that stability coefficients were significant and positive for both attachment

avoidance (r = .72, .66, .62) and attachment anxiety (r = .66, .45, .47). At all four times

attachment anxiety (r = .13, .25, .23, .24) and attachment avoidance (r = .23, .25, .22, .18) were

significantly correlated with dateless weeks. Attachment was not correlated with first dates or

with breakups at any time point. Only T1 anxiety (r = -.15) and T1 and T2 avoidance (r = -.13, -

.17) were correlated to second or more dates. Only T1 anxiety was correlated with age (r = .13).

Insert Table 1 about here

Latent Growth Curve Analysis

The first step in the analysis was to examine how attachment and avoidance changed over

the course of the study. In order to answer this question, I utilized latent growth curve analysis

(Duncan, Duncan, & Strycker, 2006) using AMOS software (Arbuckle, 2010). I created an

unconditional model including both attachment anxiety and avoidance with an intercept (i.e. the

initial levels of attachment anxiety and avoidance) and a slope (i.e. the rate of change of

attachment anxiety and avoidance over time). It should be noted that an intercept in Latent

Growth Curve Modeling is different than a regression intercept, but instead represents the value

of the outcome when the growth curve begins, or the "initial level" (Acock & Li, 1999). I also

modeled the variance around the intercept and slope.

First an unconditional model was fit to determine the intercept and slope of attachment

anxiety and attachment avoidance. The model had adequate fit χ^2 = 62.366 (df = 28), n = 309, p

< .001, CFI = .964, TLI = .954, RMSEA = .063. The mean intercept for anxiety was (M = 3.491,

p < .001) and the mean intercept for avoidance was (M = 3.193, p < .001). Analyses also

revealed that the mean of the slope of anxiety (M = -.035, p < .001) and avoidance (M = -.027, p

< .001) both differed from zero (see Fig. 1). These mean values represent an overall decrease in

attachment anxiety and avoidance over the four time points, which might indicate a move towards more attachment security over time. In addition, the variances for the intercepts of anxiety ($s^2 = .685$, $p < .001$) and avoidance ($s^2 = .829$, $p < .001$) and the variances for the slopes of anxiety ($s^2 = .003$, $p < .001$) and avoidance ($s^2 = .002$, $p < .001$) are all significant, suggesting a significant amount of variability in initial levels and change over time in both attachment anxiety and avoidance.

<center>Insert Figure 1 about here</center>

A multiple group analysis was used to examine gender differences in the intercept and slope means and variance parameters of avoidance and anxiety for males and females. I used a chi square differences test when the means for the intercept and slope and the variances for intercept and slope are constrained to be equal for males and females. The overall model fit did not significantly worsen (chi square = 0; df = 8; p = 1.00) indicating a similar growth curve for both males and females.

The second step was to see if dating variables (e.g. dateless weeks, first dates, second or more dates with the same person, and breakups) could predict the rate of change (i.e. slope) and if age and gender predicted the initial levels (i.e. intercept) and rate of change (i.e. slope) in attachment anxiety and avoidance over time. I therefore created a conditional model with these dating variables predicting latent slopes and gender and anxiety to predict the latent intercepts and slopes of attachment anxiety and avoidance. It was this unconditional model that was used to test the main hypotheses.

As a function of the significant variability found in the original unconditional model, a conditional model was tested and had adequate model fit $\chi^2 = 108.463$ (df = 60), $n = 309$, $p = .000$, CFI = .964, TLI = .937, RMSEA = .051. In partial support of the first hypothesis (but not

of second, third, and fourth hypothesis) analyses revealed that dateless weeks ($b = .004$, $p < .001$) and second or more dates with the same person ($b = .004$, $p = .023$) predicted the slope of anxiety, with both being linked with higher levels of anxiety, although these effect sizes were very small. No dating variables predicted the slope of avoidance, although first dates ($b = .002$, $p = .150$) and dateless weeks ($b = .001$, $p = .073$) approached significance at the trend level. In addition first dates ($b = .003$, $p = .122$) also approached trend level significance in predicting the slope of anxiety. These findings together lent only a small amount of support for the first hypothesis, that all dating variables would significantly predict the rate of change (i.e. slope) of attachment anxiety and avoidance.

Gender predicted the intercept ($b = .354$, $p = .011$) of avoidance with females having higher initial levels of avoidance (but not anxiety). Gender also approached trend level significance at predicting the intercept ($b = .208$, $p = .121$) of anxiety (but not avoidance). These findings lent partial support of the fifth hypothesis; namely, that initial levels of attachment insecurity would differ by gender.

Age predicted the intercept ($b = .091$, $p = .007$) of anxiety (but not avoidance) with older individuals starting with higher levels of initial anxiety, in partial support of the sixth hypothesis. Neither age nor gender predicted the slopes of anxiety or avoidance. All intercept values are presented in Table 2 and all slope values are presented in Table 3.

Insert Tables 2 and 3 about here

In addition R^2 values demonstrated that the overall model accounted for a modest amount of the variance in the slope of anxiety ($r^2 = .256$) but less of the variance in the intercept of anxiety ($r^2 = .032$) and the intercept of avoidance ($r^2 = .026$) and the slope of avoidance ($r^2 = .051$). Indicating that overall the model explained about 25% of the variance in the slope (or rate

of change) in anxiety over time, as well as 3% of the intercept (or initial levels) of anxiety, 2% of

the intercept (or initial levels) of avoidance and 5% of the slope (or rate of change) in avoidance

over time.

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to examine whether short term dating events and

transitions could predict change in attachment anxiety and avoidance over time in a sample of

LDS emerging adults. Overall, the results, while modest, seem to suggest that there is something

unique about dating experiences as a vehicle for change and stability in attachment working

models over time. Emerging adulthood is a time which presents both opportunities and

challenges. At least part of the reason for this is because it is during emerging adulthood that

some of the most important long term decisions are made (career, identity, marriage, family,

education, training, etc.; Arnett, 2004; Tanner, 2006). Therefore it makes sense that dating

experiences during this time might take on an added measure of seriousness as emerging adults

meander towards marriage. The overall trend of the growth models suggests a decrease in both

anxiety and avoidance over time. This increasing security could be a reflection of a number of

possibilities. Perhaps as emerging adults undergo their exploration of identity and "find

themselves" they gradually experience an increase in security as they learn how to become

capable and competent adults and romantic partners. It is also possible that they develop greater

strategies for managing their insecure working models. Whatever the reason, this finding

suggests an overall trend towards increased security in emerging adulthood, which fits within

Arnett's (2004) conceptualization of the time period as one that is very optimistic and hopeful.

Before addressing specific findings, a brief caveat must be mentioned in which to frame

these results. The impact of culture is something that has been clearly addressed in the literature

on emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2004). Emerging adulthood is experienced somewhat differently for different groups (e.g. the more condensed version of emerging adulthood experienced by LDS emerging adults; Nelson, 2003), yet overall the five key features of emerging adulthood tend to be quite similar. Emerging adulthood is a time of 1) possibilities, 2) instability, 3) feeling "in between" adolescence and adulthood, 4) identity exploration, and 5) self-focus (Arnett, 2004). In this study there were no attempts to account for unique cultural variations other than that the fact that the dating history period studied was relatively brief (32 weeks) which was presumed to be sufficient time to see significant dating activity for LDS emerging adults assuming that they do tend to move through emerging adulthood more quickly. Considering the briefness of this time period, the fact that there were significant findings, albeit modest ones, seems to highlight the fact that for LDS emerging adults, dating activity over even relatively brief periods is impactful to their attachment working models. This would lend initial support for Mikulincer and Shaver's (2007) statement that attachment working models, laden as they are with hope for love and support and fears of rejection, are likely to be activated in dating experiences, even if the dating experiences are initially noncommittal.

The specific findings of this study are also interesting to highlight and frame within the context of theory. The finding that dateless weeks predicted an increase in attachment anxiety but not avoidance seems to suggest that there really is something about isolation that is particularly conducive to anxious states of mind. One of Bowlby's (1969) central premises of attachment theory is that human beings are inherently relational creatures and do not thrive in isolation. However, as Mikulincer and Shaver (2007) note, as individual's age, they gradually develop the capacity to carry with them secure states of mind even when separated physically from attachment figures. This finding would suggest that perhaps individuals with anxious

working models might be less able to carry secure attachment thoughts in their heads without the presence of an actual physical attachment provider. Another possibility for this finding is that being alone on nights when others are out dating generates thoughts of being incompetent, unlovable, and low self-worth which are all key features of anxious working models (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

The finding that second or more dates predicted an increase in attachment anxiety was an unexpected finding and requires particular attention. One possibility, which fits well within the existing literature, is that attachment anxiety becomes more pertinent as relationships develop rather than early on in relationship initiation. In reviewing a series of studies on the attractiveness of different kinds of dating partners, Mikulincer and Shaver (2007) note that in all but one of the studies avoidant individuals were most disadvantaged in initial dates in terms of their attractiveness. Although secure individuals were considered most attractive, anxious individuals were favored over avoidant. Klohnen and Luo (2003) note the finding makes sense because "individuals' preference with regard to emotional and physical closeness, as captured by the avoidance dimension, should play a more central role in initial attraction than how individuals think and feel about themselves vis-à-vis their relationships, as captured by the anxiety dimension" (p. 719). Thus, perhaps what is happening is that anxious individuals working models become more activated as the relationship progresses than in the initial dates when avoidance is more likely to be activated.

The finding that women started with higher initial scores on avoidance than males is an interesting and again somewhat unexpected finding. The added pressure on males in LDS culture to date seemed likely to increase their own avoidance, but the finding that women actually started with high levels of avoidance was unexpected. One possibility is that this avoidance is

also a reflection of age. We started with a younger sample of females than males which could suggest that these women are more avoidant in attempts to protect themselves against overzealous suitors who might want them to commit before they are feeling ready to do so. With the males being older and LDS emerging adults tending to marry younger anyway (Schaalje & Holman, 2007), it would make sense that perhaps these older males are being overzealous in their attempts to get their dating partners to try and commit. Another possibility is that females are more avoidant as a self-protective measure against possible unwanted or premature physical affection or closeness. Religiously conservative individuals, such as Latter-day Saints are often encouraged to reserve sexuality for marriage. Finally, this could simply be a reflection of the impact of feminism on these females. They may more closely desire to guard their long term career aspirations and therefore may become more avoidant as a means of communicating to the males they are dating casually for now and are not ready to worry about commitment to marriage, lest a marriage derail their long-term career plans. Whatever the reason ultimately is, this finding bears merit for further study in the future.

The finding that older individuals started with higher levels of anxiety (but not avoidance) was an expected finding. Over a time period of unsuccessful dating experiences, these older individuals are likely to gradually become more and more hopeless of the possibility of finding a potential mate, thus increasing their anxiety. Whereas it would seem that avoidance does not increase as a function of unsuccessful dating experiences, in that older single adults are not starting with higher levels of avoidance than their younger counterparts.

Finally, the R^2 finding that the overall model accounted for about 25% of the variance in the slope of attachment anxiety seems to suggest that attachment anxiety is particularly sensitive to dating experiences. This will be dealt with in greater depth in the clinical implications.

Clinical Implications

As noted earlier, emerging adulthood is a unique developmental period for a number of important reasons, one of them being that it is during this time that adolescent dependencies on parents give way to adult independency and eventually to interdependent adult romantic relationships (Tanner, 2006). Allen (2008) argues that the development of mature attachment relationships is really the culmination of a developmental process from childhood attachments to mature adult pair-bond attachments. Dating plays an integral part in this process of gradually developing early romantic relationships in adolescence, and later in emerging adulthood, culminating in commitment to a specific romantic partner, typically by the time the emerging adult has turned thirty (Arnett, 2004).Yet many emerging adults struggle to establish lasting romantic relationships. Attachment theory would suggest that part of the reason for this is that insecure beliefs about themselves and others might be hindering their ability to engage competently in the dating and relationship initiation process (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

Attachment theory has recently become a considerably influential framework for understanding clinical intervention at the individual, couple, and family levels of relationship distress. Specific clinical approaches such as emotionally focused couples therapy (EFT; Johnson, 2004), as well as process level interventions such as therapeutic enactments (Davis & Butler, 2004; Wooley, Wampler, & Davis, 2012) are all aimed at attempting to restructure relationship dynamics to increase attachment security and decrease attachment insecurities. Yet these clinical methods of necessity involve the fostering of a couple attachment bond in an already established relationship, that is, it does little good to utilize these techniques if the client is not in a pair-bond relationship. Therefore, it might be possible that little work can be done in ameliorating these attachment insecurities for single emerging adults without working within

some kind of an attachment relationship (whether parental, pair-bond, or the therapist-client attachment).

With the finding that dateless weeks and second or more dates predict an increase in attachment anxiety over time, one clear clinical implication from this study is that emerging adults who go for long stretches of time without having some kind of potentially reparative (Bowlby, 1988) attachment experiences or who are actively involved in the process of developing a relationship tend to become more anxious over time. Going on dates and risking the possibility of relationship formation is scary (Clark & Beck, 2011) but also potentially healing because it opens the individual up to the possibility of experiencing relationships differently, thereby leading to accommodation of new attachment representations, especially relationship-specific representations. Especially once an individual starts to really progress in that relationship, as self-presentation becomes more transparent, self-protection decreases, and self-disclosure increase in depth and breadth (Clark & Beck, 2011) this would suggest that attachment anxieties are likely to bubble to the surface.

While these findings do not yet support any specifics on what kinds of dating experiences are healing, it is quite clear that a *lack* of dating experiences generally seems to merely make attachment insecurities worse, especially anxiety. Therefore, in working with emerging adult clients with attachment insecurities, particularly anxiously attached emerging adults, one clear point of intervention is helping to decrease the isolation of not engaging in the relationship initiation process at all. This fits more generally within Bowlby's (1969) overarching clinical paradigm that human beings are fundamentally relational. Whether the presenting concern is relational or individual psychopathology, emerging adults in therapy, who isolate themselves and

forego dating opportunities might be limiting themselves from experiencing potentially healing relationship experiences.

Limitations and future directions

While this study is a significant first step in clarifying the impact of initial relationship initiation efforts (such as early dating experiences) on attachment stability and change, there is still considerable work left to do. Before addressing future directions however, limitation of the study must first be acknowledged. The first and most obvious limitation is the high amount of attrition in the sample. One of the more difficult issues in doing longitudinal research is being able to maintain a viable sample across the lifetime of the study without participants experiencing burnout. In the case of this sample, LDS emerging adults living near and often attending a private LDS-university, there is likely to be considerable pressure from their cultural surroundings to date and asking such a sample to text weekly reminders of their dating experiences (or lack thereof) is likely to be taxing on them, not to mention the fact that merely texting a researcher every week could become irritating after a while.

The second obvious limitation is the homogenous nature of the sample. Religiously conservative emerging adults such as Latter-day Saints are but one of four religious groups (conservative religious, atheists, agnostics, and liberal religious) which Arnett (2004) sampled in his work. For these emerging adults there may be different beliefs regarding what is and isn't appropriate in relationship initiation than with the other three groups. Thus, dating may be more salient for groups of emerging adults who strive to avoid premarital sex than those who have no issues with premarital sexual activity. However, despite this limitation, Arnett's (2004) finding that virtually all emerging adults desire to and eventually do marry and have families coupled with Tanner's (2006) and Allen's (2008) work on the developmental nature of attachment in

emerging adulthood suggests that regardless of whether or not dating and relationship initiation includes casual sexual activity virtually all emerging adults are engaged a similar process of trying to learn how to develop adult attachment bonds with romantic partners, they may simply go about it in different ways. Future research could potentially compare the development of adult attachments with romantic partners in a more nationally representative sample and the impact of different relationship initiation strategies (dating, "hooking up", etc.) on the development of those bonds to find out if there are pertinent differences. Another limitation with the sample's generalizability is that the majority of the sample were current or former university students and therefore may differ significantly from other emerging adults in the larger population on a number of indices including SES, access to and awareness of resources (including information obtained in personal relationships classes and workshops commonly available on campuses but not necessarily prevalent in the larger community), etc.

One final limitation of note is that the approach utilized in compiling the dating histories into the variables used in this study is not necessarily the most elegant or the most accurate way of doing it. The operationalization of the dating variables was largely exploratory and experimental and therefore there is likely to be some problems with accuracy in such measurements. Consequently, there are likely to be individual differences that this operationalization cannot account for. For example, two individuals each with 12 dateless weeks during the 32 week time period are likely to be very different if one person had those 12 dateless weeks spread out over the course of the time period (with many first and second or more dates in between those "lulls" in their dating activity) and another had experienced the 12 weeks in a row at the outset of the study and then met, dated, and initiated a relationship with a partner during the course of the remaining 20 weeks. According to this operationalization there would be no

way to distinguish these individuals by simply looking at their individual dating variables (such as dateless weeks).

Therefore, future researchers might want to employ more complex statistical models such as latent class analyses to better understand the patterns individuals engage in during their dating histories. Furthermore, the weekly texting method is likely to be quite cumbersome if employed with a larger and more nationally representative sample of emerging adults especially over long periods of time (especially considering the attrition), therefore future researchers might consider other methods of obtaining relationship histories that might be less intrusive such as weekly diaries, web-based reporting methods, etc.

Despite these limitations and modest findings, this paper contributes to the overarching body of literature. It has provided some initial evidence that attachment insecurities are sensitive to change over relatively brief periods especially when using dating and other relationship initiation variables. This has not been done before and represents a significant first effort in trying to understand how attachment insecurities in emerging adulthood experience elements of stability and change. Furthermore, this study also suggests that dating experiences in emerging adulthood are formative, impactful, and significant enough to actually influence the continuity and change of chronic attachment working models over time. This is especially interesting because generalized attachment models have taken years to form across a variety of life experiences and the finding that brief dating experiences can actually predict change in these models, albeit modest change, is a significant finding. The overall hope is that this paper will stimulate further discussion on how attachment dynamics "play out" in the course of initiating and consolidating romantic relationships in emerging adulthood.

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Table 1

Means, standard deviations, and correlations on all study variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Avoidance (T1)	1												
2. Avoidance (T2)	.723**	1											
3. Avoidance (T3)	.663**	.729**	1										
4. Avoidance (T4)	.620**	.667**	.774**	1									
5. Anxiety (T1)	.118**	.157*	.054	.205**	1								
6. Anxiety (T2)	.091	.273**	.169*	.282**	.664**	1							
7. Anxiety (T3)	.038	.259**	.286**	.333**	.456**	.690**	1						
8. Anxiety (T4)	.036	.216**	.235**	.315**	.475**	.637**	.655**	1					
9. Dateless Weeks	.236**	.252**	.228**	.188*	.136*	.251**	.236**	.243**	1				
10. First Dates	-.096	-.082	.023	.013	-.060	-.089	.016	.020	-.240**	1			
11. Second + Dates	-.138*	-.174**	-.084	-.078	-.159*	-.114	.042	-.075	-.456**	.542**	1		
12. Breakups	-.102	-.044	-.049	-.132	-.011	-.007	-.097	-.102	-.376**	.025	.149**	1	
13. Age (T1)	-.023	-.019	-.010	-.043	.136*	.074	.022	.040	.065	-.060	-.088	.030	1
Mean	3.20	3.09	3.03	3.02	3.48	3.37	3.23	3.08	14.39	4.95	3.20	0.41	21.01
SD	1.06	0.99	1.03	1.05	0.97	1.07	1.06	1.04	7.77	3.76	3.51	0.68	1.96

*p < .05, ** p <.01
Note. T1=Time 1, T2=Time 2,
T3=Time 3, T4=Time 4

Table 2

Predictors of the intercepts of attachment anxiety and avoidance

	Attachment Anxiety		Attachment Avoidance	
	Latent Intercept Estimate	SE	Latent Intercept Estimate	SE
Gender	.208	.134	.354*	.140
Age	.091**	.034	.039	.035

*p < .05, **p < .01

Table 3

Predictors of the slopes of attachment anxiety and avoidance

	Attachment Anxiety		Attachment Avoidance	
	Latent Intercept Estimate	SE	Latent Intercept Estimate	SE
Dateless Weeks	.004***	.001	.001	.001
First Dates	.003	.002	.002	.001
Second + Dates	.004*	.002	.000	.002
Breakups	.009	.008	.006	.007
Age	.005	.014	-.006	.013
Gender	-.001	.004	.000	.003

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

Figure 1

Unconditional latent growth curve model for attachment anxiety and avoidance