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**FROM “CALLING” TO “JUST TALKING”:
AN EXPLORATION OF CHANGING RELATIONSHIP TERMINOLOGY
AS A LINGUISTIC SOCIETAL PHENOMENON**

BY

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THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
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Abstract

This thesis will explore the correlation between societal and linguistic change, specifically relating to the usage of the colloquialism “Just Talking” in 21st Century courtship vernacular. The usage of this term seems to be relatively new and does not appear in many scientific articles. In 2019, at the beginning of the research project which prompted this paper, there were no scientific articles that attempted to discuss this phenomenon. Since then, only two articles on the subject have been published. This thesis will attempt to understand why this term is being used and how it relates to the terms which have come before it.

In order to properly discuss this phenomenon, I will utilize texts which study the different periods of relationship development in 20th and 21st-century America, as well as those that study how 21st-century American college students interact with one another within hookup culture on college campuses. Following this, I will utilize various texts regarding linguistic development and change to discuss language shifts within generations, both generally and specifically following the introduction of the internet into mass culture. Throughout both of these sections, I will make references to the data collected by the team of student researchers within the Binghamton Human Sexuality Laboratory to study the usage of the “Just Talking” term on Binghamton’s campus. Finally, I will connect all of these theories to the data to propose the idea that the term “Just Talking” is utilized by students on college campuses to connote a relationship interaction that is not new, but rather a continuation of similar forms of relationship development from history such as the “calling” period. This connection section will additionally posit that this new term is specifically newly introduced as a result of cultural shifts and the internet’s rapid influence on language in modern times.

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Introduction

"We've been hooking up for like two weeks." "Pretty sure she and that guy are in a situationship." "It's nothing, we're just talking!" These statements, and those like them, are commonly heard from and exchanged between students on modern American college campuses. In the Binghamton Human Sexuality Laboratory, a psychology research lab focused on studying the interpersonal relationships of students on their mid-sized university campus, one particular term caught the attention of the researchers: what did it mean when students said they were "Just Talking"? And why was the term new to the professors of the lab, but known by the students?

Over the course of six academic semesters, student researchers within the laboratory attempted to define "Talking," first via open-ended survey questions and then through semi-structured focus groups. Analysis of the results of the focus groups revealed that "Talking" appears to be an interaction that is focused on getting to know a potential romantic partner through the usage of texting and social media sites such as Snapchat. This analysis brought up another question: could talking be a continuation of a previous method of relationship development, only under a different name?

My research question focuses on relationships, the terms society has assigned to various relationships throughout history, and the ways linguistic theory describes these changes. I will attempt to contextualize the methods of relationship formation throughout history, from the "calling" days of the early 1900s to "Just Talking" today. I will discuss the various ways that terms to describe various relationship stages have been used, and how they have changed with the onset of new generations. Then I will explore how social change affects the words we use to explain these methods using various linguistic theories and attempt to contextualize that change in language through the study of internet linguistic development. Finally, I will utilize linguistic

theory to do an inductive analysis of the focus group data in order to understand “Just Talking” as a concept.

Literature Review

A History of Relationship Development

“It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife” (Austen, 1813). So begins Jane Austen's 1813 novel *Pride and Prejudice*, which follows a family of daughters as they make their foray into the elaborate world of relationship evolution within their society. The novel explores the ways in which women in the 19th-century English upper class attempted to attract marriage partners, as attracting a wealthy husband was the epitome of success at the time. This attempt to find a partner is inherent to “courtship,” a term that Beth Bailey, author of *From Front Porch to Backseat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America*, explains is

an old fashioned word. It summons visions of men wooing woman with small tokens of affection and proposing on bended knee. Studies of courtship usually look at the process of mate selection; the proposal is what makes the preceding acts qualify as courting. (Bailey, 1993, p. 3)

Courtship, at its core, is the process by which two people decide if they would be compatible in a relationship. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the process of courtship was meant to culminate in marriage. This enterprise eventually gave way to today's romantic norms, and though today's society doesn't refer to this process as “courtship” any longer, the lasting effects of courtship are evident even today.

Though Austen's novel is intended as satire, it gives a good insight into the ways that the people of the time period developed relationships with one another. Relationship formation has always been imperative to society, despite the many changes that courtship has undergone in the past centuries. Throughout the 19th and early 20th century America, the “conventions of

courtship” (Bailey, 1993, p. 14) were dictated and determined by the rising middle class, “often in imitation of the ways of ‘society’” (ibid.). In this time period, “society” referred to the cultural middle and upper class, and relationship development was dictated by the separation of spheres. Men traditionally dictated the rules of the “public” sphere - that is, the world outside the home - but were forced to cede to the desires of the women who ruled the “private” sphere within the home. The characters in Austen’s novel, for example, develop their relationships through a system we now refer to as “calling” - a method of courtship that was common in the 19th century, up until approximately the 1920s. This term

could describe a range of activities. The young man from the neighboring farm who spent the evening sitting on the front porch with the farmer’s daughter was paying a call, and so was the “society” man who could judge his prospects by whether or not the card he presented at the front door found the lady of his choice “at home” (Bailey, 1993, p. 15).

Despite the multiple ways a man could pay a call on a paramour, however, one theme is consistent throughout the literature on “calling”: men went to “call” on women in their homes, and the woman was allowed to decide if they would receive him or not (Bailey, 1993).

Though the middle class dictated how calling was performed during the 19th century, the lower working class often could not afford to host calls in the ways that upper and middle-class women at the time did. As a result of this, working-class young adults in the late nineteenth and early 20th centuries brought courtship into the public sphere. Lower-class youth “courted on the streets, sometimes at cheap dance halls or eventually at the movies” (ibid, p.18). The separation of spheres began to break apart by the early twentieth century, as more and more women entered education and the professional workforce (Vickery, 1993). Though it had originated in the working class, more and more young adults who would have been considered middle class began to bring their courtships into the public sphere, as Bailey explains, “Young men and women went out into the world *together*, enjoying a new kind of companionship and the intimacy of a new

kind of freedom from adult supervision” (1993, p. 19). The public sphere offered freedom in opposition to the strict rules which dictated how calls were made in the private sphere, which was tempting to the young adults of the time seeking connection.

This foray into the public sphere created “dating” as a method of relationship development that completely replaced courtship and changed the ways society engaged in relationships. Not only was dating more public but, as Bailey writes, “the dating system also shifted power from women to men” (1993, p. 20). Instead of a man paying a call to a potential paramour, now they hosted their prospective partners, taking them into the public sphere to be woo’d. The power had completely flipped from being held by the women of the time to the men, as Bailey explains,

Men asked women out; women were condemned as “aggressive” if they expressed interest in a man too directly. Men paid for everything, but often with the implication that women “owed” sexual favors in return. The dating system required men always to assume control, and women to act as men’s dependants (Bailey, 1993, p. 24).

Since relationship development was now controlled by those who were able to pay for outings into the “public”, young men were now mostly in control of the ways that they and their peers chose a partner. Dating also became a competition between men and women, no longer focused on finding a sexual or marriage partner, but rather on proving their own popularity (Bailey, 1993).

The rise of dating as a competition led to a new historical phase in relationship development, which sociologist William Waller called “The Rating and Dating Complex” in his 1937 article by the same name. Waller focused specifically on college students in the 1930s and used his article to detail the ways in which those students chose potential relationship partners. Within this article, Waller invented a hypothetical college campus based on Pennsylvania State

University, in which there are six male students to every one female student, and used that hypothetical college to explain how the Rating and Dating Complex worked:

Within the universe which we have described, competition for dates among both men and women is extremely keen. Like every other process of competition, this one determines a distributive order. There are certain men who are they the top of the social scramble; they may be placed in a hypothetical Class A. There are also certain coeds who are near the top of the scale of dating desirability, and they also are in Class A. The tendency is for Class A men to date principally Class A women. Beneath this class of men and women are as many other classes as one wishes to create for the purposes of analysis. It should be remembered that students on this campus are extremely conscious of these social distributions and of their own position in the social hierarchy. In speaking of another student, they say, "He rates," or "He does not rate," and they extend themselves enormously in order that they may rate or seem to rate (Waller, 1937).

According to Waller, college students in the early 20th century did not engage in the rating and dating system to find a marriage partner or romantic partner; rather, engaging in this system was a means of gaining social status and esteem. Each sex had different qualifications which would rank them in the desired class; young men who were "Class A" were rich, had good manners, owned a car, and were involved in "activities" around campus, while Class A young women had "good clothes, a smooth line, ability to dance well, and popularity as a date" (ibid.). If someone did not have these qualities, they were rated poorly by the opposing sex and would have difficulty procuring a partner. This wasn't only confined to college campuses, either; the high school students of the 1940s were a product of the rating and dating system, having been raised on it, and therefore accepted the idea of "Rating and Dating" as the norm (Bailey, 1993).

The rating and dating system, of course, was only sustainable for a while. The after-effects of World War II left America with a deficit of young, able-bodied men; competition increased between young women striving to both gain and hold onto an eligible bachelor, and the "going steady" phenomenon replaced "rating and dating" among young adults. Bailey explains that this progression "provided a measure of security and escape from the pressures of the

postwar world” (1993, p. 26). For many young women at the time, the possibility of being able to find a husband had suddenly become very real; the end goal of courtship was no longer an increase in popularity but had returned to a desire for a committed relationship resulting in marriage. “Youth” marriage surged in popularity; by 1957, “16 percent of America’s three million college students were married” (Bailey, 1993, pg. 43).

“The courtship experience and ideals of those who grew up before the war were profoundly different from those of teenagers in the postwar years”, states Bailey in her analysis of why dating norms changed post-World War II (Bailey, 1993, pg. 24). While college students and young adults post World War II turned to “going steady” in an effort to establish relationships which would result in marriage, high schoolers - who had been raised with both “rating and dating” and “going steady” as relationship norms - viewed both “rating and dating” and “going steady” as normal means of relationship development and seemed to utilize both types of relationship cultivation at the same time. A 1955 article entitled “The “Going Steady” Complex: A Re-Examination” studied high school students who were “going steady.” Their findings reported that there seemed to be two different types of “going steady”: “one which is oriented to and often eventuates in marriage, and a second type, a dalliance relationship” (Herman, 1955). A dalliance relationship is one where the participants “have no such expectations of imminent marriage” (ibid.), such as - in the case of the high schoolers detailed in Herman’s article - those who planned to attend college following their high school graduation. By the end of the 1950s, young women were getting married as early as age 18, and “early dating” - children between the ages of ten and thirteen attempting to find romantic partners - became a norm (Bailey, 1993, pg. 48). From high school to college, the focus of youth was no

longer on competition or popularity; courtship was once again focusing on marriage, and youth marriage was the new normal (Bailey, 1993).

The years between the 1960s and 1970s brought with them the Sexual Revolution, a period of societal change that brought to the forefront new views on sexuality, expression, and relationships as a whole. The development of the birth control pill, the Roe vs. Wade decision, and the free love movement all changed the way that American society viewed sexuality and relationships. For the first time, sexuality and sexual freedom were at the forefront of the American national consciousness; the concept of women having sexual desires and being deserving of sexual freedom was suddenly becoming a topic of conversation. Other topics “such as premarital sex, sexual variations, unmarried cohabitation, fornication, extramarital affairs, jealousy, homosexuality, pornography, teenage sex, abortion, exchange of partners, paedophilia, incest, and so on” (Wouters, 1998), were also now in the spotlight. The free love movement promised bodily autonomy to those that wanted it;

The 1970s ushered in a new era in sex advice literature that shifted away from the promotion of healthy marriages toward a focus on personal satisfaction, reframing sex and sexual relationships as critical domains of self-exploration and identity formation (Ward, 2015).

The rise of second-wave feminism in the 1960s and 70s brought with it the idea that sex outside of wedlock did not make a woman “immoral” (Bogle, 2008) but could instead be considered a norm. Both women and men began partaking in non-marital sex and the average number of sexual partners an individual had increased (Twenge et al., 2015). By the end of the 70s, cultural perceptions of relationships had completely pivoted; marriage was now perceived to be a separate entity from sexual relationships, and American youth had become more accepting of “premarital sex, a younger age at first intercourse, and a high teen pregnancy rate” (ibid.).

The 1980s brought even more changes to the sexual landscape. The idea of sexual freedom was pitted against traditional values: “some people applauded the sexual openness, the freedom of speech or the emancipation of female and gay sexuality; others decried the loss of traditional values, continuing sexism, growing consumerism, extreme individualism or unabated Puritanism” (Hekma & Giami, 2014). The mid-70s and early 80s brought conservative views on sex to the forefront of societal consciousness; evangelical activists such as Phyllis Schlafly fought against birth control, gay rights, and other ideals that would, as she claimed, destroy the traditional makeup of the family (Allyn, 2000, p. 274) - instead of the traditional nuclear family being comprised of a man, his wife, and their children, Schlafly argued, feminists and “the gays” desired a society comprised of single mothers and same-sex partnerships (Schlafly, 2014). These activists campaigned against the Equal Rights Amendment in 1982 (Granat, 1997); they also fought to keep sex education out of schools. At the same time, American society was becoming increasingly aware of AIDS as a nationwide problem, leading to campaigns promoting safe sex and condoms. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, there was a slight decline in acceptance of non-marital sex, coinciding with the height of public attention on AIDS (Twenge et al., 2015). Interestingly, this era also witnessed the emergence of a new term, "seeing," which found its place in the lexicon of committed relationships (Outspoken, 2022). In the 80s, American youth embraced sexuality as a means of freedom and self-expression. They engaged in sexual activities from a young age and approached their choice of sexual partners with the same openness as the preceding generations.

By the 1990s, sexual freedom on college campuses had created a whole new method of separating sex from emotional relationships: that of the hookup. Originally used in the 20th century to imply a meeting or connection, by the end of the 1990s “hookup” had taken on a

whole new definition: “a sexual encounter without a long-term commitment” (*Definition of Hookup* | *Dictionary.com*, n.d.). College campuses, which have been a space that encouraged relationships between students since even before the rating and dating system was established, now became the epitome of sexual freedom. Hooking up, a term that began to be used in the 90s and persists until today, is defined by the Binghamton Human Sexuality Laboratory as a short-term casual sexual encounter.” American youth, following in the footsteps of their parents who had grown up during or in the wake of the sexual revolution, viewed sexuality as something separate from emotions; in 2001, Glen and Marquardt defined the hookup as “when a girl and a guy get together for a physical encounter and don’t necessarily expect anything further” (Bogle, 2007). Fraternities and sororities had always been popular on college campuses, with the rating and dating scene being “almost exclusively carried on by fraternity men” (Bogle, 2008), but party culture took that to a new extreme. “College students began socializing in groups, rather than pair dating, and “partying” with large numbers of friends and classmates. Parties represented more than just a social outing; they became the setting for potential sexual encounters” (Bogle, 2008, p. 20). The end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century created hookup culture as the dominant culture of sex on campus; as Lisa Wade, author of *American Hookup: A New Culture of Sex on Campus*, stated, by the mid 2000s, “Hookup culture [...] descended upon college campuses like a fog. {...} Hookup culture is an occupying force, coercive and omnipresent” (Wade, 2018, p. 18).

As hookup culture became increasingly popular, more terms for the various types of relationship cultivation began to emerge on college campuses. The term “dating,” for example, once would have been used to describe a similar phenomenon as “hooking up” - before the year 2000, the term was normally used “in the old sense of ‘meeting’ someone” (Wolfe, 2010, p.7) or

even to refer to a platonic meet-up with a friend - but now both “hooking up” and “dating” took on completely new definitions. No longer used in reference to “rating and dating” but instead used in an increasingly similar way to how “going steady” was used post World War II, dating at the turn of the 21st century meant “a man and a woman, who are *already a couple*, going out on a date, or attending a fraternity or sorority function accompanied by a date” (Bogle, 2007). Other terms such as “friends with benefits” come into use around this time, a phenomenon which

refers to a man or woman who has someone of the opposite sex with whom he or she has sex on some level; however, they are not in an exclusive romantic relationship with that person. Friends with benefits are defined from the outset as “just friends”; the twist is that they are friends who are attracted enough to each other to want to engage in some version of a sexual relationship (Bogle, 2008, p. 118).

The term ‘friends with benefits’ seemed to walk the line between “hookups” and “dating”:
 simply put, “friends with benefits (FWB) refers to “friends” who have sex” (Bisson & Levine, 2007). Ironically, the first usage of this term was not in relation to a non-committal relationship; rather, the term is suspected to have first been used by Alanis Morissette in her musical *Jagged Little Pill*, singing, “You’re my best friend / Best friend with benefits” (Morissette, 1995) in reference to a committed partner (*Friends with Benefits Meaning & Origin*, 2018). At the time, Morissette probably meant to relay to her listeners that her partner was both her best friend and her sexual partner, thereby making him her “best friend with benefits,” but the term quickly took on a very different connotation - that of “friends who have sex” (Bisson & Levine, 2007).

The introduction of technology to society seems to have sped up the rate of words used to imply relationship development in today’s society; in the past two decades, college students have evolved from only using “hooking up,” “friends with benefits,” and “dating,” to using increasingly niche terminology such as “situationship” - i.e.. “that space between a committed relationship and something that is more than a friendship” (Page, 2019), and, of course, “Just

Talking”. The term “Just Talking” is one used on college campuses in the 21st century, though what exactly the term is used for is questionable even within popular culture. Some use the term to connote a relationship that, according to Urban Dictionary user Becca51, is “when two individuals are interested in each other, make out etc on a regular basis, but are not dating. There may or may not be the prospect of dating in the future” (“Urban Dictionary: Just Talking”). On the other hand, in a 2016 opinion written by a high school senior on Achonaonline.com - a newsletter from The Academy of the Holy Name in Tampa, Florida - the writer defines “Just Talking” as “the period of texting, development of feelings, and hanging out with another person before officially dating” and claims it is “the parallel of dating” (Roca, 2016). Conversely, in another 2016 article found on thoughtcatalogue.com, one man defined talking as “hooking up, but without expectations” (Eastman, 2016). All three of these definitions present a different understanding of the usage of the “Just Talking” terminology.

Although this terminology is not even a decade old, it is now commonly heard on college campuses, perhaps - as the rest of this paper will hypothesize - as a result of the prevalence of social media usage among college students today.

A Note on Terminology

The terminology used to describe the concepts involved in this paper are fluid and have changed meaning over time. Terms such as “relationship”, “courtship”, “dating”, and “talking” are all utilized throughout this paper. Though these terms have had many different definitions throughout history, this paper utilizes them within specific definitions.

Throughout this paper, the term “relationship” is utilized to imply an intimate partnership between two individuals. For the purpose of this paper, the term “relationship” applies both to the union or marriage of two individuals romantically and sexually, as well as the more modern,

committed “boyfriend/girlfriend” relationship prevalent in college students today. Additionally, “courtship” is another term that is frequently used throughout this paper. Though commonly assigned a more historical connotation, the term is used to imply the social interactions that may or may not lead to one entering a relationship; “relationship development” is another term that is used as a synonym which is somewhat interchangeable with “co. Courtship, however, was specifically geared towards resulting in a marriage, and relationship development seems to apply more to modern rituals of partnership. Finally, the term “dating” is utilized frequently within this paper to connote the modern method of courtship, wherein two young adults engage in romantic outings geared toward spending within an intimate setting. The term is commonly used by modern young adults to imply that two people are engaged in a committed relationship.

Because the goals by which people engage in partnering have changed over time, from desiring marriage to now desiring emotional and physical intimacy, it is difficult to find language which may apply to all historical periods of partnership; though these terms have taken on these specific meanings in modern times, they also commonly have other definitions which would be utilized in other contexts. As a result, utilizing these terms to define an emergent term requires these terms to be defined clearly, lest they be misunderstood.

Sexual Script Theory and Symbolic Interactionism

Simon and Gagnon’s theory on Sexual Scripts posits that there are unwritten rules, or “scripts”, that people utilize in order to communicate concepts via body language, eye contact, and other signs determined by the culture in which they are designed. Simon and Gagnon propose that there are three types of scripts: cultural scenarios, interpersonal scripts, and intrapsychic scripts. Cultural scenarios instruct the “how” of scripting - that is, the culture one lives within contributes to the way one acts within a situation, from beginning to end, and the

way one understands the events that occur within the situation. (Simon & Gagnon, 1986).

Cultural scenarios dictate how an individual responds to an advance - be it sexual or otherwise - depending on their environment. The execution of a cultural scenario response within a bar, for example, would look vastly different from one within a library, because the culture which society creates within a loud bar is not the same as one created inside a quiet, studious library.

The second layer of scripting theory is interpersonal scripts. Interpersonal scripts are the method by which an individual utilizes their knowledge of a cultural scenario to achieve a desired outcome within an interpersonal encounter. When one buys a potential sexual partner a drink in a bar, for example, the potential partner's understanding that this is a method of showing interest would be an example of an interpersonal script. This script is comprised of reading body language, subtext, and context clues while using the knowledge one has of the cultural scenario, and all of that knowledge is used to determine how to proceed within the encounter.

Finally, intrapsychic scripts are the thought processes that create the importance of interpersonal scripts; made up of internal dialogue, the intrapsychic scripts organize our understanding of reality, allowing people to engage in sexual fantasies. This layer of scripting also encompasses how emotions and beliefs influence the way people interact with one another. As Simon and Gagnon write, "scripts are essentially a metaphor for conceptualizing the production of behavior within social life" (1986). The intrapsychic script adds desire to the hypothetical bar scenario, creating a level of fantasy in which the symbolic nature of scripting can be understood.

While scripting is not always sexual, the norms that dictate sexuality, relationship evolution, and dating are all part of cultural scenarios and interpersonal scripts. As Simon and Gagnon explain,

From a "scripting perspective," the sexual is not viewed as an intrinsically significant aspect of human behavior; rather, it views the sexual as becoming significant either when it is defined as significant by collective life (sociogenic significance) or when individual experiences or development assign it a special significance (ontogenic significance) (1986).

Sexual script theory suggests that because the modern-day culture views sexuality as significant, sexual scripts themselves are significant, and nowhere is that more true than on college campuses.

In the fast-paced modern world of social media, scripting has taken on a mind of its own. College students no longer need parties or bars to meet and hook up with one another; rather, they have moved the majority of relationship cultivation and development online. It is possible to posit, then, that "Just Talking" is a new form of cultural scenario developed by college students in conjunction with technology. The introduction of dating applications to modern youth has created a space defined by unspoken rules such as who texts first, how long one must wait before responding to a message, or even if it's time to move the interaction offline. The transmission of these online norms among modern youth creates a cultural scenario within which they may assign meaning to interactions.

If sexual script theory is to be applied to this phenomenon, it is possible that the interpersonal scripts of "Just Talking" dictate where the talking phase is conducted - on Snapchat, for example, or through text messaging. Participants' tendencies to refer to "Just Talking" as a "game" could also be attributed to intrapsychic scripts, allowing for those engaged in the talking stage to utilize their knowledge of the rules and expectations that are set within the cultural scenario in order to derive meaning from the interaction. It is therefore possible for "Just talking" to be understood through the lens of sexual scripting theory to be a new variation of a courtship ritual.

Herbert Blumer's theory of symbolic interactionism holds a very similar viewpoint on how human nature is construed. Symbolic interactionism believes that people act based on the meanings of situations, which they are able to interpret based on social interactions with other people and "the ways in which other persons act toward the person with regard to the thing" (Blumer, 1969, p. 4). The ways in which a person interprets these meanings is crucial to the theory, as the interpretations lend themselves to how one interacts with their surroundings. Those meanings, however, are useless until they are connected to the interpretations of social groups, or what Blumer calls "joint actions". As Blumer explains, "the joint action of the collectivity is an interlinkage of the separate acts of the participants" (1969, p. 17). The ways in which people interpret the meanings of situations are dictated by the groups they surround themselves with, but the groups that people are surrounded by also dictate the ways in which people interpret situations.

Linguistic Change and Societal Change

In order to understand changes in relationship language, it is important to consider the theories of language as a whole. Theories of language attempt to answer questions such as "what is language?" and "who assigns meaning to language?". Ferdinand de Saussure, who was a Swiss professor of Linguistics in the mid-19th century, is one of the most influential figures in what has become known as the structural theory of language. In his lectures, later collected and published by Saussure's students in the book *Course in General Linguistics*, Saussure posits that language derives meaning from a collective - that is, a community decides the meaning of the words that it uses. The usage of a word implies that the word has meaning, but said word may mean something entirely different when one moves communities - be they geographical communities or social communities (De Saussure, 1916). When someone who grew up in the 1980s uses the

phrase “Just Talking”, for example, they did not mean that they were engaging in courtship; the phrase is a standalone concept today, but there is no documentation of the term being used to imply a relationship back then. Within the social communities which exist on college campuses and amidst high school aged teenagers, however, the expression “Just Talking” takes on a very different connotation.

English is, at its core, an adaptive language, forever changing the meanings and usages of words to reflect evolution within society. Relationship terminology is one way to illustrate this evolution, as throughout history the terms utilized to describe phenomena have shifted rather drastically, but this evolution of language can also be traced within other terminology. One example of language use that has changed over time is slang, which the Cambridge Dictionary defines as “very informal language that is usually spoken rather than written, used especially by particular groups of people” (2020). The internet has sped up language evolution across the globe; the new generation learns slang from all over the world and incorporates those words into the vernacular. Today, the Oxford English Dictionary reportedly adds approximately 4,000 words over the span of one year (Atkins, 2015), the majority of which are slang.

Word Up: A Lexicon and Guide to Communication in the 21st Century, a novel written by Australian researchers Mark McCrindle and Emily Wolfinger, documents the changes in slang usage by Australian teenagers in the 21st century. The two researchers had noticed throughout their time studying Australian youth that Australian slang - what McCrindle calls ‘Australianisms’ such as “mate” and “crikey” (McCrindle & Wolfinger, 2010) - was largely being replaced by American slang words. They chose to study this phenomenon in an attempt to understand why words that were considered important to older Australians had largely fallen out

of use by the younger generation. One of the conclusions that McCrindle and Wolfinger come to is that

English is a dynamic language, owned and shaped by each generation. Some words disappear before they ever enter the mainstream, while others remain in use for generations, or make a comeback after decades on the sidelines. You will find in the lexicon words popularised by the Boomers in the 60s (“that guy is lush – totally bananas”) along with X-er words of the 80s (“this band’s majorly sick dude”), all used without any cringe factor at all. Young people know what they like. It doesn’t matter where a term comes from, if it sounds good, they’ll use it (2010, 17).

The word choices used within a period in history are constantly changing, words gaining and losing popularity based on that generation’s youth. Each generation brings new words to the English language, leaving its own mark on the common slang of the time.

The fact that young people are leading the changes in evolution is no surprise, either. According to internet linguist Gretchen McCulloch, people are much more likely to acquire new vocabulary when entering a new community, and during adolescence, “a whole population is entering a new social group all at once.” Adolescents are far more likely to change the way they speak to appease their peers, and those changes - big or small - can affect everyone within a single social group. Generational shifts are not the only contributing factors to language change, however. The introduction of the internet into daily life has increased the evolution of language almost exponentially, combining the spoken and written word in ways that would have been impossible only one hundred years ago. The written word was once considered ‘formal,’ bound by proper spelling and grammar (McCrindle & Wolfinger, 2010), but as conversations moved online through chatrooms and text messaging, the discourse became more colloquial. As McCulloch explains it, “when it comes to conversations that happen via technology, its norms are subject to a lot of change” (2019, p. 198).

Those changing norms don't only apply to grammar, either. Within the confines of the internet, online communities have developed their own words and lingo that are idiosyncratic to the collectives from which they originate. Uses of terms like "LOL" and emoticons began in early chatrooms to connote feelings that were difficult to describe with words, and communities are constantly creating new types of vocabulary which they use to relate to one another. Fan communities, for example, utilize the word "ship" to imply a relationship, not a sea-faring vessel; the word "noob" or "n00b" originated in online gamer communities to connote someone who is new to a game and doesn't know what they are doing. Learning to use the vocabulary within one of these communities allows a person to integrate themselves into the community they are attempting to join, and people who do not know the "lingo" are often looked down upon by more senior members (Zubernis & Larsen, 2013). These linguistic developments help foster community and create means by which friendships and relationships can be developed within those communities.

Flirting on the Internet

The internet has not only accelerated evolution in linguistics but has also brought about other changes as well. Once it was possible to have conversations on the internet, the internet created means of relationship formation within those channels. Online spaces such as chatrooms created terms like "a/s/l" - literally asking for "age/sex/location" - to find peers to talk to, both in terms of friendships and relationships. In a 2004 study on how adolescents engaged in chatrooms, researchers found that young adults used "a/s/l" to find conversation partners to chat with, normally to the end of what they call the "cyber pickup" - literally, "when one person makes a sexualized advance to another with the goal of going off into a private, dyadic Instant Message space" (Subrahmanyam et al., 2004). As technology evolved, so did the ways in which

relationships could be developed online. In 1995, Gary Kremen launched the first ever online dating website, Match.com. This website was geared towards “matching” individuals so as to allow them to find a romantic partner; within 6 months of inception, the site had over 100,000 users (Pamanian, 2022).

Nowadays, it’s common for people to meet potential partners online; the popular dating application Tinder reported over 75 million active users worldwide in 2021 (Iqbal, 2023). The online dating world has completely swept through American culture; according to Gretchen McCulloch, “over a third of couples who got married between 2005 and 2012 met online. By another, 15 percent of American adults have used online dating, and 41 percent know someone who has” (McCulloch, 2019, p. 64). Additionally, at its inception in 2013, Tinder was marketed towards specifically college students engaged in greek life fraternities and sororities (Buyukeren et al., 2022), and those college students remain one of Tinder’s most active user demographic groups today. Other dating apps such as Bumble, Hinge, and Grindr have also achieved popularity amongst college students. As a result, college students are especially likely to find romantic partners on these dating sites, and within those dating sites exist language and norms created solely to address those college students.

Just as internet communities create words to express themselves and find like-minded people, dating sites and applications have their own terminology as well. Terms such as “match” (as in ‘you’re a match!’ to connote when two people are determined to be compatible by the app) “swipe right” and “swipe left,” (swiping right on someone means you are interested in them; swiping left means uninterested) all originated within dating applications. On Grindr, the hookup and dating app for the queer community, gay men commonly use terms such as “dl” (“down low,” a term which implies a gay man who is not “out” and is closeted) to identify themselves, or

terms like “masc4masc” - a term defined by Urban Dictionary as referring “to gay and bisexual men who are naturally masculine and are attracted to other masculine males” (JLDN, 2021) - to tell others within the community what kind of person they are looking to date. All of these terms are indicative of a community or person and were created by the community by which they are used to imply a specific situation or meaning, separate from any original use the term may have had.

While it is difficult to trace the origin of the usage of the term “talking” to connote relationships, it is possible to hypothesize that the term is used within young adult communities to connote an act that is not limited to conversations. The following section will present data from focus groups conducted by the Binghamton Human Sexualities Laboratory which attempt to discern the reasoning behind the usage of the term, and how the term relates to relationship development as a whole. It will also show that this term was created by the young adult community to imply a form of courtship that was created as a result of technology and changes or shifts in social norms.

Research Methods

The Just Talking project of the Binghamton Human Sexualities Laboratory is an example of inductive qualitative research. If quantitative research encompasses that which can be quantified by a numeric value, then the term “qualitative research” implies anything that isn’t quantifiable (Aspers & Corte, 2019). The term encompasses many experimental methods, from open-ended survey questions to one-on-one interviews and focus groups. Though it is possible to do deductive qualitative research by beginning with theory and then creating a testable hypothesis, qualitative research is often done inductively in an effort to build new theories based on observations. Inductive research is built with only the most basic of hypotheses to guide the

research; instead of a researcher's experiment being guided by a definitive hypothesis often deduced from existing theories, it is informed by observed social phenomena and a flexible research question.

In order to analyze qualitative data when conducting iterative research, iterative coding must be conducted. Joanne Neale explains in her article "Iterative Categorization: A Systematic Technique For Analysing Qualitative Data" that iterative coding is an extensive process. Themes found in the data are used to construct a codebook, or list of codes, which are then used to assign numerical values to themes that can be potentially analyzed in a similar manner to quantitative research (2016). As these themes are assigned values, however, new themes may emerge, leading to additions to the codebook and the recoding of earlier data. Analysis of these themes can then commence, "underpinned by three concurrent activities: (i) data reduction (simplifying, abstracting and transforming raw data); (ii) data display (organizing the information by assembling it into matrices, graphs, networks or charts); and (iii) conclusion drawing/verification (interpreting the data and testing provisional conclusions for their plausibility)" (Neale, 2016). Neale's systematic technique represents just one approach to iterative analysis of qualitative data. However, it is important to note that different methods for conducting thematic analysis may arise as the project itself demands alternative iterative analysis strategies. As different themes emerge within the process of data collection and analysis, the hypothesis that the inductive researcher is operating within can change completely; an inductive researcher is not bound by the question they are attempting to answer, but rather, the question is constructed based on what one observes within the research.

The Just Talking research project began as the result of a conversation held within the lab in which students within the lab discussed the fact that they'd noticed a new terminology with

which students on our campus discussed their relationships. They discussed that their friends no longer exclusively reported that they were “hooking up” or “dating” another individual, but that a third term had become prevalent within the community - that of “Just Talking.” While the students within the lab all seemed to know what “Just Talking” referred to, they were unable to define the phenomenon to the mentor professors in a way that proved to be satisfactory. As such, the “Just Talking” research group was created. The first stage of this research project was comprised of three open-ended survey questions piloted within the 2020 Hookup Survey put out by the Binghamton Human Sexuality Laboratory. The questions were “Some people have described their interactions with others with the phrase “we're just talking.” What does the phrase “we're just talking” mean in this context?” (Q1) “What might be the purpose of saying you're ‘just talking?’” (Q2) and “What are some of the ways people who are ‘just talking’ communicate with each other?” (Q3) These questions ran in two consecutive iterations of the survey, and received many different responses.

Throughout the duration of this study, student researchers read through both academic articles and popular media in order to identify relevant literature that would further contribute to their understanding of the “Just Talking” phenomenon. The author was familiar with linguistic theory and the label’s connection to language led to the suspicion that linguistic theory could be a tool that would enable the researchers to understand the phenomenon. Throughout the duration of the study, students and professors discussed various types of theoretical bases that could apply to the phenomenon in question, from Foucault’s theory of the panopticon in *Discipline and Punishment* to sexual script theory. Over the course of these discussions, the possibility was raised that “Just Talking” was not actually a new phenomenon; rather, it was merely a new term referring to a much more common phenomenon. The research team, therefore, began to turn their

attention to the history of relationship formation - a process known as “courtship” - as well as to linguistic theory.

Student researchers’ attempts to code the answers given to the open-ended survey questions into cohesive themes such as Just Talking being a “casual relationship” or “having a sexual component” failed to provide a cohesive answer to the question of “Just Talking”. Although the survey results yielded certain insights, such as the understanding that "Just Talking" entails a lack of commitment between participants and occurs within social media applications, the substantial data discrepancies posed challenges in obtaining legible and cohesive results. Subsequently, it was suggested that enhanced clarity of outcomes could be attained within the framework of a focus group. Given that the project itself was conceived through student discussions, it was hypothesized that a similar approach could yield pertinent findings. The researchers, therefore, created an interview narrative that would act as an alternative method of researching this phenomenon. The focus groups conducted for this project were semi-structured; the written interview guide contained eleven open-ended questions such as “What is the purpose of Just Talking?” “Are the traits you look for in someone you are talking to different from the traits you look for in a committed or hookup partner?” and “What role, if any, do emotions have in talking?”, which were intended to prompt discussion between participants. Following the conclusion of each interview, the audio was uploaded into a private drive reserved for the lab and used to transcribe the whole conversation. These transcription documents were then utilized to develop and analyze themes that were consistent throughout the recordings as a whole.

Results and Discussion

Focus group analysis revealed several themes that were commonly found among the participants' definitions of the term “Just Talking”. Nearly all participants agreed that “Just Talking” was established to be “pre-relationship” - that is, when one engages in “Just Talking”, they do so as a means of assessing if their “Just Talking” partner is someone with whom they would be interested in getting into a relationship. Participants also commonly agreed that the “Just Talking” term was a label which, ironically, was used to connote an undefined label; when one is “Just Talking”, they are neither single nor in a labeled relationship with another person, but rather in an unspecified in-between. Finally, there seemed to be consensus that “Just Talking” was a term that left room for interpretation both between those who are engaging in “Talking” and those who are merely observing the “Talking” process. The ways in which young adults interpret the term “Just Talking” are even informed by the usage of the term itself; a common theme found throughout the focus groups was that “Just Talking” does not solely exist between the two people actually engaging in the interaction; rather, each party commonly reports to friends and colleagues about the conversations they are engaged in and frequently asks others what they believe the meaning of one message or another may be. Overall, the thematic analysis of the “Just Talking” focus groups seems to show that “Just Talking” is a new form of courtship defined by the desire to not label the interaction as any type of committed relationship.

Just Talking as Courtship

One of the most definite themes of the “Just Talking” focus groups was that the term “Just Talking” connotes a time before two people enter a labeled or committed relationship. This theme emerged in nearly all of the nine focus groups conducted. George¹, a participant from a mixed-gender focus group stated that “In the stages of relationship talking [is] like the second

¹ All participants named are referred to by pseudonyms chosen by the participant

one, I guess, from going from casual and you talk, and then you're going to have a relationship - you're going to date.” Jessica, another participant from a completely different mixed-gender focus group unknowingly agreed with this statement, claiming, “I feel like some people start by just talking, because obviously like you're not going to just jump into a relationship, but like you talk and then it, like, escalates.” This conversation is echoed not just in mixed-gender conversations but also within same-sex focus groups, such as the statement made by Melanie, a participant of one all-female focus group, who claimed,

I think [just talking is] like, kind of looking for people, and just to talk to. It's for people who, who want a relationship. They don't want something casual so they're not going to hook up, so I think that's kind of like for people who want to take that step, and then they talk to see if they like the person, and if they want to take things further and so like more of a dating kind of thing.

Throughout nearly all of the focus groups, participants agreed: the goal of “Just Talking” is to get to know someone and ascertain whether or not another person would make a good romantic partner.

Despite this consensus, however, participants maintained that “Just Talking” is strictly casual, and could end without becoming a romantic, “dating” relationship at any point. There are two possible ways a “Talking” interaction could go, according to most participants: either the two “Talking” participants begin a romantic relationship, or the relationship between the two fizzles into nothing. “I feel like a talking stage is kind of just the beginning and it can lead to other things and it could just end there,” explained Jessica. Amanda, a respondent from a different same-sex female focus group, concurred, stating,

I think that's what's interesting is that like talking is kind of relationship progression (...) like it would maybe follow the same like trajectory, but sometimes it would just, like, you kind of know that it's not going to happen, and other times like it might like end up in a relationship.

Either those who were “Talking” would “end up in a relationship”, as the respondent above expressed, or it would just “end there”; either way, as one male participant from a same-sex group said, “if there was a just talking stage it would definitely happen before asking someone out on a date.”

Throughout the focus groups, participants agreed with one another that “Just Talking” is a method of getting to know another person and seeing if that individual is a potential partner for the future. They unknowingly echo the words of Beth Bailey, indirectly referencing “the process of mate selection” (Bailey, 1993, p. 3), or courtship. Just as men would “call” on women in the 1920s to ascertain whether they would be interested in beginning a relationship, and just as young adults in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century “dated” multiple individuals at the same time to figure out who they were going to marry, modern young adults engage in “Just Talking” to get to know potential partners. It is therefore possible to propose that “Just Talking” is the newest form of courtship in which modern youth are engaging to find themselves potential partners.

Just Talking as Courtship on the Internet

Another theme that nearly every participant throughout the focus groups discussed was that “Just Talking” is mainly conducted online, whether that be on dating apps such as Tinder or Grindr, or on social media applications such as Snapchat. As one advances further into a “talking” interaction, the talking may move from online to a more personal method of communication such as texting or even video-chatting. As Amanda explained in her same-sex focus group, “I feel like people usually start, like, Snapchattin, and then like you get someone's number and then maybe like FaceTime or something, there's, like, steps, I guess.” Emily, another participant from the same focus group concurred with her statement, saying.

I'd say, like, it definitely starts out with like, Snapchat, and then if you like, move more into like a more like deep talking stage I guess then you'd like text, and then if you're like deep in that talking stage you'd be FaceTiming and then it's probably going to go somewhere else, like, past talking.

Drew, a participant from a completely different focus group, unknowingly agreed with this sentiment as well, as he explained in one of the two all-male groups,

People will start texting on, like, Instagram or Snapchat or like maybe Tinder and then later moves on to, like, phone texting because that's, like, a little bit more formal, that's like when you're a little bit closer to the person.

The evolution of the “Talking” interaction from an online platform to a more personal platform such as FaceTime, according to participants, seems to connote an increase in the depth of the relationship between the two who are engaging in “Talking”.

Just Talking: A Label to not Have a Label

If “Just Talking” is a method of courtship, why do modern youth refer to it in such a flippant manner as “oh, we’re *just* talking”? The usage of the adverb “just” in this term is used to connote that the two participants are “only” communicating, as though the two participants are engaged in a charade of nonchalant indifference. In the modern age where there is a label for every type of relationship - from “friends with benefits” to “situationships” - why is the term used to connote this particular method of courtship one that is entirely ambiguous as to the meaning of the word? Participants of the focus groups also indirectly discussed why modern youth chose this particular term, referring to the term “Just Talking” itself as a “label to not have a label”. In response to the question ‘why do people say they’re just talking?’ John, an interviewee from an all-male focus group, explained,

you don't want to necessarily put like a label on anything, especially because, like, a lot of the labels we have are either ‘in a relationship’ or ‘friends with benefits’ so there's not a lot of labels [...] to necessarily use so ‘just talking’ [...] it's a kind of a label without a label so you're able to not really describe so much, it's like very general terms you're not

really labeling it, I guess.

John's description of "Just Talking" as a "label without a label" seems to explain the rationale behind the term - literally, the term is used to escape the need for a label. The usage of the words "Just Talking" is meant to connote exactly that the relationship between the two is deliberately casual, even as the two move towards a more serious relationship.

Other participants had similar, if not slightly more cynical, views on why the term "Just Talking" appears so casual. "We literally use these terms as an excuse to just shy away from actually committing to someone and, like, being involved in a relationship", explained Chloe, a participant from one of the first fully-female focus groups conducted, a statement with which Emily later unknowingly concurred in her fully-female group,

just talking is like, when you're just like not ready to put a label on anything and you're kind of just like feeling out how you feel about the person, what you want from that relationship and whether you want that to be like to go any further.

Using this label allows for the two people engaged in "Talking" to get to know one another without labeling what they're doing as 'courtship' or as a relationship; even if 'talking' is courtship, the lack of a label allows for the charade of casualness within the encounters that wouldn't be permitted if the encounter was given a different term. Should the encounter be given a label such as "dating" or "friends with benefits", the expectations of the two participants in regards to one another would change - a 'boyfriend' has emotional responsibilities to his 'girlfriend', for example, but if two people are "Just Talking", there may be less expectations of responsibilities between the two.

The lack of a label for this type of "courtship" is deliberate, perhaps because of the possibility that nothing will come of this "Just Talking" relationship. If two people refuse to label their courtship as "partners" or "dating", terms that imply a more serious relationship, then the

expectation seems to be that the dissolution of the talking relationship may hurt less. The term seems to imply that the participants won't be upset if the interaction terminates unexpectedly; whether one is actually upset is unimportant because the charade of casualness allows for the participants to pretend that they are not. As Abby, a participant from the same focus group as Melanie, explained,

I feel like a lot of times, people say they're just talking because they don't know what the other person wants, so they just say they're just talking. Because it's like, there's no communication, because if you say you want a relationship and they don't, then you seem like you're too much or something. Like, I feel like you can't be honest with how you feel anymore, really.

Because 'talking' is a tenuous form of courtship that could dissolve at any time, the term deliberately connotes casualness so as to protect those engaged in the 'talking' from being hurt if they are eventually rejected or if the 'talking' relationship ends. The act of saying that the relationship is a 'talking' relationship declares the relationship to be casual, even if it seems to be established as a real relationship; the term implies casualness, thereby allowing for a level of detachment from the relationship itself if it does in fact terminate.

Just Talking: Leaving Room for Interpretation

Perhaps the most interesting theme to emerge from the focus group discussions on 'just talking' is the idea that the point of the term is to leave room for interpretation, which means that there is little definitional consensus on certain aspects of what the term actually encompasses. Participants agreed about certain aspects of "Talking", but could not bring themselves to agree on others. This lack of definitional consensus can lead to issues for those engaged in "Talking", because it invites participants to read too far into a situation and can lead to misinterpretations. Misunderstandings can arise in all aspects of 'just talking', from whether the participants are exclusively talking or hooking up, or even if there is no exclusivity involved. The term itself

implies a lack of clear or deep communication despite being labeled a “Talking” relationship.

Stacy, a participant from a mixed-gender focus group, attempted to express this lack of communication using the term “Just Talking” itself, claiming,

I feel like there's a difference between someone saying, like “oh, we're just talking” and “we're talking to each other”, because, like, if you're “Just Talking” it kind of sounds like you're unexcited about the relationship, and [...] to me, it indicates that, like, [...] maybe it isn't that exclusive and they're talking to someone else too. But then, what if you're like “oh I'm talking to this one person, like, I'm *talking* to this person,” it makes it seem like it's more exclusive and it's just like one-on-one and there isn't really anyone else in the picture at the moment.

Stacy’s statement demonstrated the ability to derive interpretation from any aspect of the “Just Talking” relationship, including if one described the relationship by saying they were “Talking” versus if they were “Just Talking”. This sentiment unknowingly echos a statement made by Chloe within her all-female focus group, who shared her frustration with this ambiguity, explaining,

[talking is] just like such like a open term [...] that can lead to so much interpretation. Like, you're talking to them, like, some people take that as being exclusive, some people take that as we’re still hooking up with other people. That leads to problems when no one ever clarifies like what is this.

While that lack of clarification is intentional, it often leads to misunderstandings, and these participants - as well as many others throughout the focus groups - expressed much frustration at the prevalence of misunderstandings in a “Talking” relationship.

Analysis and Conclusion

Through analysis of focus group data within the lens of both the history of relationships and linguistic theory as a whole, it is possible to determine that the term “Just Talking” is the product of a linguistic change in relationship terminology. The linguistic evolution of relationship terminology is not new, as demonstrated by historical precedence in the

development and transformation of courtship and marriage terminology across various times in American history. As society changed, the terminology used to connote the evolution of relationship cultivation shifted to reflect those changes, and the term “Just Talking” is no different. While the term “talking” was historically used to connote direct communication, modern society has evolved to use the term to signify the act of evaluating one's compatibility with a “talking” partner with the potential intention of eventually committing to a romantic relationship with them. While the formal definition of the term "talking" differs significantly, colloquial usage has evolved to include it in the realm of relationship terminology. The term “Just Talking” is a direct result of the introduction of the internet and social media into general society; the “Just Talking” interaction would not exist without the introduction of applications such as Snapchat or Tinder, just as “calling” ceased to exist once relationship development was no longer restricted to parlors.

The choice to use a phrase such as “oh, we’re just talking” to describe this relationship is deliberate, as it allows for the uncertainty that is inherent to the interaction itself. Referring to the interaction as though it is nothing more than conversation - despite the implication that the communication be courtship or even lead to a more serious relationship - allows the person to pretend they are protected from the possibility of rejection if the other participant chooses to end the interaction. The ability to perform courtship through a screen also allows for the participants to retain distance from the situation in a way that was not possible during in-person courtship. The intentional vagueness inherent to the “Talking” term facilitates the depersonalization of courtship in a manner that was not feasible when courtship was performed face-to-face; because “talking” is deliberately non-definitional and distant, people engaged in “talking” are able to detach themselves from their talking partner in ways that are impossible when physically

speaking to someone. Even calling the interaction “talking” creates distance between the two individuals engaged in communication. It is therefore possible to understand “Just Talking” as an intentionally vague method of courtship that was developed by young adults in response to the increasing ability to communicate with one another through social media applications and the internet.

It is also possible to state that “Just Talking” is a new method of understanding sexual scripting in the modern era. “Just Talking” does not fit into the traditional methods by which Simon and Gagnon defined sexual script theory, yet it still seems as though script theory applies in the context of “Talking”. In the prelude to an in-person sexual encounter, interpersonal scripts are made up by body language and context clues within the cultural scenario, such as offering to buy someone a drink as a prelude to a one-night-stand. Traditional scripts allow for interpretation of interest in a physical scenario, and may lead to either a short-term sexual encounter or even further courtship. When the cultural scenario occurs online, however, there is an absence of body language to utilize in order to understand context clues regarding if another person is interested in proceeding with the courtship. As a result, “Just Talking” becomes an entirely new type of sexual script, composed of cultural, interpersonal, and intrapsychic scripts which dictate how often one “talks” to a potential partner, how they derive meaning from the messages they send and receive, and even how often they respond. In the absence of interpersonal scripts, “Talking” becomes almost dependent on intrapsychic scripts. Intrapsychic scripts are based on interpreting reality in order to engage in sexual fantasy; they add the layer of interpretation that students agree is essential to the “Talking” process.

In addition to being a new form of sexual script, “Just Talking” can also be understood through the lens of Symbolic Interactionism. The “Just Talking” situation is in itself a joint

action created by the collective that is young adults, just as “dating” was created by the collective of young adults in earlier iterations of courtship. A college student who is engaging in “Just Talking” with another individual interprets the meanings of the interaction based on the people they are surrounded by, commonly asking for friends’ inputs on messages both sent and received. In this way, participants of the “Just Talking” method of courtship are utilizing others to derive the meaning of their situation. It is therefore possible to apply either sexual scripting theory or symbolic interactionism to “Just Talking” when attempting to analyze the phenomenon, as both theories allow for a greater understanding of how young adults in the 21st century engage in “Just Talking”.

The “Just Talking” interaction is a new method of courtship that has arisen as the result of the introduction of social media to young adults such as college students in the modern age. Analysis of this new style of relationship cultivation allows for a greater understanding of the modern young adult’s views on relationships as a whole. There is reason to speculate as a result of this research that the introduction of social media has changed relationships as a whole, as the distance one creates for themselves online keeps one from forming deeper relationships with their peers. Given that communication on social media and other online platforms is frequently perceived as noncommittal or even a “game” due to participants' apprehension of rejection, it is not surprising that the emergence of dating applications has led to a more detached approach to relationship formation. In an age of constant scrutiny, modern young adults are desperate for connection but are unwilling to allow themselves to be put at risk of rejection; as Abby so succinctly put it, “you can't be honest with how you feel anymore, really”.

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