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## Millennials' perceptions of how their capacity for romantic love developed and manifests

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Kate McGuire  
Millennials' Perceptions of How  
Their Capacity for Romantic Love  
Developed and Manifests

This qualitative study explores how the Millennial Generation understands how they learned to love, how they define and experience romantic love in the present, and what their hopes and fears are for romantic love in the future. The investigation is based on the perspectives of 25 participants from the Millennial Generation who answered 11 interview questions, in addition to completing the Experiences in Close Relationships – Revised Questionnaire (ECR-R). Findings from my study suggests that the Millennial generation is forging a distinctively different pathway from older generations in areas related to social media, marriage and commitment, children, religious fidelity, social attitudes towards race, gender, and sexual orientation, and expressions of love and courtship. Findings from this study also address Millennials as the “Me Generation” and as resistance to giving up one’s freedom and independence to dedicate their lives to a romantic partner. Furthermore, participants in my study also defined major social and cultural influences on their romantic relationships, including how they both learned to love and how they define romantic love, specifically with regard to the impact that social media has had on Millennials and the way that it has shaped their understanding and experience of romantic love.

MILLENNIALS' PERCEPTIONS OF HOW THEIR CAPACITY FOR  
ROMANTIC LOVE DEVELOPED AND MANIFESTS

A project based upon an independent investigation,  
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Social Work.

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2015

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing this thesis has been a profound journey into the heart. Ever since I was a little girl, I have been head over heels in love with the idea of love. I even have friends who playfully mimic me emoting, "I'm in love with love." And I am indeed, madly, wildly, ridiculously, in love with love.

First and foremost, I want to thank my parents for teaching me what love feels and looks like. It was through your example that I took my first steps into the world of adoration and heartfelt sacrifice. Through all of the trials and tribulations that life has thrown at us, we never gave up on loving each other - I suspect we never will.

Secondly, I would like to acknowledge my thesis advisor, Narviar C. Barker, who not only supported me through this monster of a project, but also pushed me to the finish line with nothing less than kindness and compassion. Being matched with you through this process was like hitting the lottery.

It is also essential that I thank all of my lovers, both past and present, for allowing me to stumble my way through romantic relationships the best way that I knew/know how. In addition, to my greatest love in New York City, Kimberly Dasso aka KimmyCat, with whom I shared many glasses of prosecco, belly laughs, tears, and love stories, whilst laboring over our theses.

Most importantly, I want to thank the 25 brave souls who so vulnerably shared their love stories with me. My favorite shame researcher, Brené Brown believes that, "You should only share your story with those who have earned the right to hear it." I will never be able to express what an honor it has been to hear your love stories or adequately demonstrate my gratitude for trusting me with your hearts. One hundred thousand thanks.

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## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

“Where there is love there is life.” Mahatma Gandhi

Love is the most fundamental of all human experiences. The capacity for love has intrigued cultures throughout history and it is a topic that is never fully finished. As clinicians who work in therapeutic relationships across the life cycle, we are increasing our understanding of the concept of love and its influence in adult human relationships, and upon human behavior. For many, love is reported as a desire to enter and maintain, or develop a close, connected, and ongoing relationship with another individual. For the purpose of this study, I will use the Merriam-Webster Dictionary definition of love as a “strong affection for another arising out of kinship or personal ties; attraction based on sexual desire, affection and tenderness felt by lovers; affection based on admiration, benevolence, or common interests (Love). More extensive terminology and definition of terms used in this study are contained in Chapter II.

Our society today experiences various characterizations of love and we find that these depictions of love are viewed differently among generations. For example, the Millennial Generation, also known as Generation Y, appears to distinguish itself in its views on love, relationship expectations and responsiveness to each other; but extensive research specific to Millennial love as a variable in scientific study is limited.

bell hooks (2000) noted that, “There are not many public discussions of love in our culture right now” (p. xvii). It is a topic that is underrepresented not only in popular culture, but also in the realm of academia. Most research on love has focused on measurements for identifying and measuring passionate love and aspects of romantic love, which focuses on intimacy and commitment. Yet, in order to understand feelings of love and emotion, it is imperative to evaluate not only how persons currently experience love but also how they learned to love, and what kind of romantic love relationships they would like to manifest for themselves. The concept of love is fluid and the generation of the Millennials is at the forefront of redefining what love means. According to The Pew Research Center (2012), Millennials are adults between 18 to 33 years old, born 1981–1996. Millennials and their definition of love are the focus of this research study.

Millennials have been the direct beneficiaries of the social movements born out of the 1960s and 1970s, such as the civil rights and feminist movements. In 2015, Millennials are also the generation at the forefront of fighting for equal rights for the LGBTQQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, and questioning) community with regards to redefining who is legally allowed to marry and with whom. As a culture we have been progressively moving towards greater social equality between people of all races, sexes, genders, sexual orientations, and physical abilities; and these movements have undoubtedly had an impact on how Millennials experience romantic love. bell hooks (2000) purports that, “Indeed, all the great movements for social justice in our society have strongly emphasized a love ethic” (p. xix). The Millennial generation has directly experienced a shift in how romantic connections are initiated and fostered through the use of different social media and dating websites, i.e., Facebook, Tinder, Grindr, Match.com, Chemistry.com, and Plenty of Fish. When examining behaviors among generations, it is crucial

to understand the greater social context in which that generation was born and how shifts have occurred throughout their lifetime.

### Significance of Study

In order to best serve the Millennial Generation, social workers must gain insight into their expectations, attitudes and behaviors and how these variables impact the therapeutic relationship, as well as the Millennials' sense of well-being. Brustein (2014) found in his private practice that Millennial patients are both narcissistic and perfectionistic, with high expectations of themselves and others. On the other hand, Dr. Scott Shreeve, board certified Emergency Medicine physician and Chief Executive Officer of Crossover Health, states that he finds his Millennial patients engaged, savvy about their treatment, and empowered. Dr. Pat Love, a relationship consultant and marriage and family therapist, reports that Millennials are shrewder about dating, mating, cohabitation, monogamy, and matrimony than their predecessors; and that they more easily transition between relationship arrangements (2014). Understanding Millennial love is crucial because problems in love and love relationships are a major precursor to suicides, homicides, and major and minor emotional disorders, such as anxiety and depression. Love matters because it is a primary source for human emotion, i.e., pain or happiness, and impacts therapeutic outcomes. Hence, it is important to understand how Millennials learned to love and how love manifests in their romantic relationships and daily functioning. This study defines the particular experiences and behaviors of Millennials, which will allow clinicians to sort through various phenomena that is associated Millennial love, social relatedness, health and well-being.



## Research Questions

Eleven questions in four areas framed this study.

### Definition and Experience of Romantic Love:

1. How do Millennials define romantic love?
2. How do Millennials know when they are in love? What does love feel like?

### Early Child Experiences, Influences, and Impacts:

3. How did Millennials learn to love?
4. Who do Millennials identify as the top two people who raised them? What was their relationship like with these two people?
5. How has Millennials' relationship with their parents/guardians influenced how they experience romantic love as an adult?

### Social, Cultural, and Generational Influences/Differences:

6. What are the social influences that have impacted the way that Millennials view romantic love?
7. What are the cultural influences that have impacted the way that Millennials view romantic love?
8. How does the Millennial Generation define romantic love differently than older generations?

### Components of Romantic Love, Greatest Fears, and Future Hopes:

9. What are the most important components of Millennials' romantic love relationship?
10. What are Millennials' greatest fears regarding romantic love?
11. What are Millennials' hopes for their future regarding romantic love?

Findings to these questions will help clinicians understand how Millennials learn to define love and how they currently foster romantic love in their adult relationships, in addition to what fuels their hopes and fears for the future. This knowledge is an integral part of understanding how Millennials embrace and nurture love, and its role in their day-to-day functioning; and such knowledge will have direct impact on relationship treatment in clinical practice.

### Limitations and Assumptions

Like other research studies, there are limitations to the validity of this study in terms of generalizability of the population. This study is only generalized to its sample population and cannot be considered reflective of all Millennials. As often is the case, demographics such as age, gender, locale, race, ethnicity, relationship status and the like influence sample responses. This study nevertheless will be able to contribute to future research in the area of Millennial love. The researcher assumed that participants responded to the research questions with honesty and accuracy and understood the operationally defined terms. Self-reports of individuals are sometimes difficult because individuals' perceptions of themselves and phenomena are not always the truest.

### Summary

This chapter provided an introduction to the concept of love and the Millennial generation. The study's significance and its applicability to clinical practice, research questions and the study's limitations and assumptions were presented. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the literature specific to Millennials and their perceptions of love, and discusses attachment theory and adult romantic attachment theory as the theoretical framework for this research.

## CHAPTER II

### Literature Review

This chapter provides operational definitions for the Millennial Generation, social context, milieu, and love and discusses attachment theory and adult romantic attachment theory as the theoretical bases for this study.

Definition of Millennial Generation, Social Context, and Milieu:

The Pew Research Center (2014), an American think tank organization, reports, “The Millennial generation is forging a distinctive path into adulthood. Now ranging in age from 18 to 33, they are relatively unattached to organized politics and religion, and are linked by social media, burdened by debt, distrustful of people, in no rush to marry— and optimistic about the future” (Millennials in Adulthood, para. 1). My study uses the age range prescribed by the Pew Research Center; yet, acknowledges that there are conflicting views on who comprises the Millennial Generation.

The Pew Research Center describes Millennials as the most racially diverse generation in our society, and the most liberal when it comes to politics, social issues and religious disaffiliation. Their 2014 survey among 617 adults nationwide showed that:

Fully a third of older Millennials (ages 26 to 33) have a four-year college degree or more—making them the best-educated cohort of young adults in American history. The

median age at first marriage is now the highest in modern history—29 for men and 27 for women. Millennials lead all generations in the share of out-of-wedlock births. Some 43% of Millennial adults are non-white, the highest share of any generation. The racial makeup of today’s young adults is one of the key factors in explaining their political liberalism. Millennials are also the first in the modern era to have higher levels of student loan debt, poverty and unemployment, and lower levels of wealth and personal income than their two immediate predecessor generations. Their difficult economic circumstances in part reflect the impact of the Great Recession (2007-2009) and in part the longer-term effects of globalization and rapid technological change on the American workforce. Millennials have emerged into adulthood with low levels of social trust. Their racial diversity may partly explain Millennials’ low levels of social trust. (Millennials in Adulthood, Pew Research Center Survey, February 14 – 23, 2014.)

These findings indicate that there are a myriad of aspects that contribute to the uniqueness of Millennials’ social identity, from increased higher education to cultural shifts in single parenthood, greater number of self-identified multicultural and multiracial members to advances in the workforce, including advancement in technology. These attitudes and detachment behaviors are in stark contrast to previous generations and offer insight into the wave of the future. It is important to note that this demarcation is neither good nor bad, only different, but does provide a lens to view the future well being and needs of this generation, especially in relation to happiness, love, commitment, and marriage. Wang and Taylor (2011) report that, “Throughout history, marriage and parenthood have been linked milestones on the journey to adulthood. But for the young adults of the Millennial Generation, these social institutions are becoming delinked and differently valued” (p.1). Millennials are not married to the idea of

marriage as previous generations once were as young adults. In a study carried out with 536 young adults between the ages of 18-29, Wang and Taylor found that, “67% of Millennials say that happiness is not related to whether you are single or married. From a list of reasons offered in the survey questionnaire regarding reasons to be married or to get married, nearly nine-in-ten (88%) young adults say love is very important, followed by making a lifelong commitment (76%) and companionship (71%)” (p.11-12). Fewer Millennials feel the urge to tie the knot at the same rate as their predecessors, shifting the goal of romantic love relationships, even though they still see love as an integral part of what they are seeking in adult relationships. Wang and Taylor’s study begs the question, does this shift in mentality impact the way in which Millennials experience romantic love and what their hopes are for their future?

Other research shows that there are some people who believe that the youth of today do not look favorably upon love. bell hooks (2001) wrote, "Youth culture today is cynical about love. And that cynicism has come from their pervasive feeling that love cannot be found" (p. xviii). According to bell hooks, there is a lack of understanding of love, in part because it is difficult to define. bell hooks argues that the youth of today are chasing fantasy love in lieu of building solid, sustainable relationships based on true love. She wrote:

My work as a cultural critic offered me a constant opportunity to pay close attention to everything the mass media, particularly movies and magazines, tell us about love. Mostly they tell us that everyone wants love but that we remain totally confused about the practice of love in everyday life. In popular culture, love is always the stuff of fantasy. (p.xxiii)

Current forms of intimacy appear to be more diverse among Millennials within our society, and may range from casual sex like “friends-with-benefits” to exclusivity. Attitudinal changes

towards romantic love and casual sex are dominant among this generation but root causes are not known. Koski (2001) found that parent infidelity may be a factor in perceptions of love, marriage and intimate relationships, and can replicate relationship styles, patterns and attitudes of children. Lack of trust and faith in marriage, outside relationships and gender are potential factors for defining Millennial generation love attitudes. Tessina (2008) reported that Millennial attitudes about marriage may be related to their few models of good marriages for them to follow and admire. She states, “many Millennials have grown up in divorced or single parent households, so they have little experience of what good marriages look like” (p.1). If the youth of today truly have given up on the idea of love, then what has led the Millennial Generation to believe that love cannot be found? What role has social media played in the formation of Millennials’ definition of love and what they expect out of a romantic love relationship? While bell hooks does stand firmly behind this belief, she has not given up hope on the youth of today, as she insists that people can learn to love.

#### Attachment Theory:

Attachment theory provides us with a roadmap to understanding all human relationships. Bowlby (1994) believed that attachment is a critical component of the human experience "from the cradle to the grave" (p.129). According to Bowlby attachment impacts the way that a person interacts with the world from the moment that a person is born until their death. In order to apply attachment theory, we must first strive to define and understand it. Davies (2011) writes, “Bowlby formulated the idea of attachment as a strong emotional tie to a specific person (or persons) that promotes the young child’s sense of security... Attachment has four main functions: providing a sense of security; regulating affect and arousal; promoting the expression

of feelings and communication; and serving as a base for exploration” (p.7-8). These four main functions of attachment can both be found within relationships between child and caregiver, and in romantic attachment between adult partners. The former has a significant impact on the later. Sroufe (1989) noted that,

The dyadic infant-caregiver organization precedes and gives rise to the organization that is the self. The self-organization, in turn, has significance for ongoing adaptation and experience, including later social behavior... Each personality whether healthy or disordered, is the product of the history of vital relationships. (p.71)

Sroufe (2005) speaks directly to the relationship between early childhood attachment and how this impacts a person’s relational functioning as an adult:

Secure attachment in infancy and toddlerhood predicts social competence, good problem-solving abilities, and other personality qualities associated with successful adaptation in later childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood. We have found security of attachment to be related to the emotional tone of adult romantic relationships (p.358).

This notion is applicable to the Millennial Generation, as they are currently categorized as young adults. Following Sroufe’s belief, it could be argued that the Millennial Generation are greatly impacted by their childhood attachment style given their young, malleable age.

A person’s early childhood attachment style does not automatically dictate the type of adult romantic attachment they will experience. A person’s natural level of resilience and social environment play a role in the way an individual processes their childhood relationships and how attachments with primary caregivers impact the way that they process their own stories. Davies (2011) contends that,

What distinguishes the adults who were judged secure was not their actual experiences but rather how well they had remembered, understood, and integrated their early experience. The quality of their discourse distinguished them from the adults judged insecure. Their accounts of their attachment relationships tended to be fluent, coherent, and organized, and they were easily able to include negative and positive feelings about their experiences. (p. 25)

An adult does not automatically fall into one attachment style or another solely based on the quality of their early childhood attachments. Davies (2011) goes on to say that, “Adults whose working models reflected insecure attachments generally felt less positive about attachment relationships, tended to deny the influences of attachment experiences on their personality, and did not seem objective in their descriptions” (p.26). Taking this viewpoint into consideration, is it impossible to predict an individual’s adult attachment style solely based on their early childhood attachments?

The cycle of attachment relationships, both in formation and loss, is crucial to construct the bond of a secure attachment. Bowlby (1980) spoke to this bond and describes the act of falling in love:

Many of the most intense emotions arise during the formation, the maintenance, the disruption and the renewal of attachment relationships. The formation of a bond is described as falling in love, maintaining a bond as loving someone, and losing a partner as grieving over someone. Similarly, threat of loss arouses anxiety and actual loss gives rise to sorrow while each of these situations is likely to arouse anger. The unchallenged maintenance of a bond is experienced as a source of security and the renewal of a bond as a source of joy (p. 40).



As young adults begin to form their own romantic attachments, the act of falling in love serves as a mirror for how love has been experienced in previous attachment bonds. The way that a young adult experiences joy and sorrow, anger and security, circles back to how that person learned to experience these emotions as a child.

#### Adult Romantic Attachment Theory:

Gleeson and Fitzgerald (2014) note, “As a result of these early interactions, the child develops mental representations or internal working models of attachment which act as a guide for perceptions and behaviours in subsequent relationships” (p. 644). The relationships that Gleeson and Fitzgerald are referencing are adult romantic relationships. A young adult’s experience in a romantic relationship is already hardwired into them by the time they reach their twenties. With regard to romantic attachment Fraley (2000) contends that,

As people build new relationships, they rely partly on previous expectations about how others are likely to behave and feel toward them, and they use these models to interpret the goals or intentions of their partners. Working models are believed to be highly resistant to change because they are more likely to assimilate new relational information, even at the cost of distorting it, than accommodate to information that is at odds with existing expectations. (p.136)

Not only are young adults hardwired to experience romantic attachments in a certain way but also Fraley argues that people will go as far as to distort reality in order to make it fit their hardwired expectations. If this is true, then an insecurely attached child will be hard pressed to break the cycle of insecure attachment as an adult, regardless of whether or not their partner provides them a chance at a secure romantic attachment.

On the other hand, Gleeson and Fitzgerald (2014) argue that, “Longitudinal studies have provided the strongest evidence for the continuity of attachment styles from childhood to adulthood. Importantly, research has shown that working models of attachment while resistant to change, are subject to revision over time as a result of new experiences or an unstable relationship environment” (p.1644). According to Gleeson and Fitzgerald a rewiring of the brain is possible as an adult if there is an incongruous experience with that of the primary childhood attachment. Thus insecurely attached children can experience secure romantic relationships and securely attached children can experience insecure attached romantic love relationships as adults. Gleeson and Fitzgerald (2014) also write that, “The results suggest that those who are securely attached in their romantic relationships are more satisfied and perceive their parents in a more positive light when reflecting on childhood than insecurely attached participants, especially those in the avoidant-fearful category” (p.1656). According to this viewpoint, adults with a secure romantic relationship are generally happier, both with regards to how they experience the present and while reflecting upon the past. If this theory is correct, then adults who have shifted to a secure romantic attachment have a tendency to change the way that they experience their memories of the past, thus resulting in more healing and less emotional stress.

#### Definition of Love:

bell hooks (2001) references M. Scott Peck (1978) definition of love as the most accurate description according to her own personal belief:

The will to extend one’s self for the purpose of nurturing one’s own or another’s spiritual growth. Love is as love does. Love is an act of will - namely both an intention and an action. Will also implies choice. We do not have to love. We choose to love. (p. 5)

According to this definition love is not something that a person “falls into”, but is an active choice, a conscious act. bell hook’s love is a soulful love, a nurturing love, a love that is chosen. Within her book, she quotes two other authors who define love in a way that is congruent with how she experiences love as an adult: John Welwood (1996) remarked,

A soul connection is a resonance between two people who respond to the essential beauty of each other's individual natures, behind their facades, and who connect on a deeper level. This kind of mutual recognition provides the catalyst for a potent alchemy. It is a sacred alliance whose purpose is to help both partners discover and realize their deepest potentials.

bell hooks also references Thomas Merton (1997) who speaks to the comradely necessary for experiencing love, "Love is our true destiny. We do not find the meaning of life by ourselves alone - we find it with another." The common thread in all three of these definitions is the connection that is fostered in conjunction with another person, the joining of souls and intentional nurturance of another being.

Love is a challenging idea to adequately define, which makes it difficult to operationalize for academic purposes. Thomas Oord (2005) spoke to the dearth of definitions of love, “It may be that resources for love research have been scanty and researchers generally have been reluctant to pursue love studies in part because so few of us have given time and energy to provide an adequate definition of love” (p.923). To add to the diversity of definitions of love, Thomas Oord shared his thoughts, “To love is to act intentionally, in sympathetic response to others (including God), to promote well-being” (p.924). Oord’s description of love is congruent with the previous definitions; however, slightly differing in syntax. This demonstrates a general

agreement as to what love is on a larger level, yet fails to provide one with a solid definition that can be understood by everyone.

While researching definitions of love, it is also valuable to add the Merriam-Webster Dictionary's (n.d.) definition of love as a noun, "a feeling of strong or constant affection for a person, attraction that includes sexual desire: the strong affection felt by people who have a romantic relationship, a person you love in a romantic way", in addition to its definition to love as a verb, "to feel great affection for (someone), to feel love for (someone), to feel sexual or romantic love for (someone), to like or desire (something) very much, to take great pleasure in (something)" (Love).

There is a plethora of literature on attachment and romantic attachment theory; however, there is a gap with regards to how these theories are applied specifically to the Millennial Generation. The term "young adult" is used often in academic literature, which makes an assumption that this term can be applied cross-generationally. However, the Millennial Generation is distinct from any of its predecessors. Love, specifically romantic love, has been a tough concept to define. In fact, there is no single definition for love which academics can agree upon, as the experience of love or being "in love" is subjective and has proven to transform overtime. This study details the Millennial Generation, who they are and how they perceive that their capacity for romantic love developed, examining their romantic attachment styles, and what their hopes and fears are with regard to romantic love.

This study also investigates how Millennials understand, define, and experience romantic love. Attachment theory and romantic attachment theory is used as the theoretical base for this mixed methods investigation.

## CHAPTER III

### Methodology

There is a gap in current academic literature on Millennials and romantic love, and how their love develops and manifests. More research is needed in order to expand practitioner understanding of Millennials and how to best serve them in a therapeutic setting. Hence, the purpose of this study was to explore how the millennial generation understands how they learned to love, how they define and experience romantic love in the present, and what their hopes are for romantic love in the future. The guiding research question for this study was: How do Millennials come to understand and define romantic love and how does it shape their present reality? This is a qualitative research study that used open-ended questions to gather narrative data from voluntary study participants.

#### Sample

Participants in this study were between 21 – 33 years old, represented diverse race and gender groups, and were of the Millennial Generation. Study participants represented Millennials born and raised in the United States and outside the U.S. All participants committed to a 45-minute interview as part of the criteria for participation in this study, and all were informed of their participation rights prior to the interview. The interview occurred either in-person or by Skype. No name and identifying information on participants is contained in this research. Participants signed an informed consent form acknowledging their willingness to participate in this study and their understanding of the nature of the study.

## Selection of Participants

Solicitation for participation in this study occurred through the use of Facebook, word-of-mouth, snowball sampling and referrals from participants in the study who knew of other potential participants.

## Instrumentation

Data was collected through qualitative methods. A 45-minute interview was conducted with each participant and clarification questions used only as needed (i.e., can you explain your response or can you say a little more about that statement?) Participants were asked semi-structured interview questions that were categorized into four groups: (1) Definition and Experience of Romantic Love; (2) Early Child Experiences, Influences, & Impacts; (3) Social, Cultural, & Generational Influences/Differences; and (4) Components of Romantic Love, Greatest Fears, & Future Hopes. These categories explored eleven research questions that are discussed in Chapter 4.

Findings from the semi-structured interviews were compared with participant attachment style scores using the Close Relationships-Revised Questionnaire (ECR-R), which also is discussed in Chapter 4. The ECR-R is available in the public domain. It is a free questionnaire and is accessible to anyone who accesses the website: <http://www.web-research-design.net/cgi-bin/crq/crq.pl>. The questionnaire is a revised version of Brennan, Clark, and Shaver's 1998 Experiences in Close Relationships (ECR) questionnaire. It is designed to assess participants' attachment style (secure, preoccupied, fearful-avoidant, and dismissing) and produces an anxiety and avoidance score for the participant at the end of the questionnaire. ECR-R questionnaire requires participants to respond to a series of 36 statements to which they report if they strongly

disagree, disagree, somewhat disagree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat agree, agree, or strongly agree with each statement. Examples of ECR-R statements read by participants included:

1. I'm afraid that I will lose my partner's love.
2. I often worry that my partner will not want to stay with me.
3. I often worry that my partner doesn't really love me.
4. I worry that romantic partners won't care about me as much as I care about them.
5. I often wish that my partner's feelings for me were as strong as my feelings for him or her.

Narrative data was obtained from the following eleven open-ended interview questions.

1. How do you define romantic love?
2. How do you know when you are in love? (Follow-up Question: What does love feel like?)
3. How did you learn to love?
4. Who are the top two people who played a significant role in raising you?  
Follow-up Question: Tell me about your relationship with these people when you were a child.
5. How has your relationship with your parents/guardians influenced how you experience romantic love as an adult?
6. What are the social influences that have impacted the way that you view romantic love? (Social media - Facebook, dating sites, social movements, etc.)

7. What are the cultural influences that have impacted the way that you view romantic love? (Traditions, cultural norms that may either align or conflict with your view of romantic love, etc.)
8. How do think that your generation defines romantic love differently than older generations?
9. What are the most important components of a romantic love relationship? (i.e. intimacy, sex, marriage, children, etc.)
10. What are your greatest fears regarding romantic love?
11. What are your hopes for your future regarding romantic love?

#### Ethics and Safeguards

Each participant was assigned an identification code that was used for the narrative data collection to preserve participants' confidentiality. An excel sheet with identifying information and subjects' names was encrypted to protect the identity of all participants. All data on my laptop computer remains password protected and all data adheres to federal regulations for research of human subjects. Consent forms were stored separately from transcriptions to further ensure confidentiality. I solely transcribed all interview transcriptions to further ensure confidentiality.

#### Data Analysis

Data was compiled in aggregate format, which facilitated the process of identifying themes and unique responses among participants. Responses to the open-ended questions were analyzed using a thematic analysis by quick word counts and laborious, in-depth, line-by-line scrutiny of participant responses. Frequencies and percentages of themes were calculated. Quotes



from participants are used in this study to illustrate patterns and trends, in addition to outliers. Direct quotes are reported in a way that cannot be traced back to a specific participant.

### Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the methodology used in this study and included information on study participants, selection process, data collection and analysis, and research questions. Chapter 4 provides a detailed analysis of research findings.

## CHAPTER IV

### Findings

This chapter presents the analyzed data and results of my research on how Millennials come to understand and define romantic love, and how romantic love shapes their present reality. There were twenty five participants who agreed to participate in my study and in doing so, responded to all research questions. Total responses consistently exceeded 25 because some study participants gave more than one response to some of the questions. This chapter is divided into three sections: Section One provides demographic data; Section Two provides data pertaining to the Close Relationships-Revised Questionnaire (ECR-R); and Section Three provides analysis of each research question.

#### Demographic Data

Demographic (age, gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation) and personal data (country of residence, developmental years, legal relationship status and romantic love status) of the 25 study participants are presented in the Table 1. The study population was evenly distributed with age: 32% (n = 8) of participants were between 22 – 25 years old; 36% (n = 9) were between 26 – 29 years old; and 32% (n = 8) were between 30 – 33 years old. Forty eight percent (n = 12) were males and 52% (n = 13) were females. Sixty percent (n=15) of the participants identified as straight, 36% (n=9) as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, or questioning, and 4% (n=1) did not provide a sexual orientation identifying label. Race was more widely distributed with Blacks

(20%, n = 5), White (24%, n = 6), Hispanic (20%, n = 5), Asian (12%, n = 3), Native American (4%, n = 1), and Bi/Multiracial (20%, n = 5). Presentation of all demographics is reported in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographics of Study Population

Age	22-25 years old	8
	26-29 years old	9
	30-33 years old	8
Gender	Male	12
	Female	13
Sexual Orientation	Straight	15
	LGBTQQ	9
	Sexual Orientation Not Labeled	1
Race	Black/African American	5
	White	6
	Hispanic/Latino (non-White)	5
	Asian	3
	Native American	1
	Bi/Multiracial	5
Current Country of Residence	USA	24
	Outside of USA	1
Born/Raised in USA	Born in the USA	19
	Born & Raised Outside of the USA	6
Legal Relationship Status	Married	5
	Single	20
Currently Involved in a Romantic Love Relationship	In a relationship	13
	Not in a relationship	7
	Complicated	3
	Open Relationship/Multiple Partners	2
Longest Romantic Love Relationship	Under 1 year	4
	1-5 years	12
	6-9 years	5
	10 + years	4

### Close Relationships-Revised Questionnaire (ECR-R) Results

The ECR-R, an online questionnaire available to the public that measures attachment style in the context of intimate relationships, provided each participant an anxiety score and an

avoidance score based on their responses to a series of thirty-six statements. One of four attachment styles was assigned to each participant after their anxiety and avoidance scores were plotted on the ECR-R graph. The four attachment styles include: secure, preoccupied, dismissing, and fearful-avoidant. Seventy-two percent (n=18) of participants scored in the secure attachment style quadrant, while 28% (n=7) of participants scored within the preoccupied attachment style quadrant. None of the participants scored as dismissing or fearful-avoidant.

According to Fraley (2000):

Previous research on attachment styles indicates that secure people tend to have relatively enduring and satisfying relationships. They are comfortable expressing their emotions, and tend not to suffer from depression and other psychological disorders. Previous research on attachment styles indicates that preoccupied people tend to have highly conflictual relationships. Although they are comfortable expressing their emotions, preoccupied individuals often experience a lot of negative emotions, which can often interfere with their relationships ([ECR-R](#)).

These findings are presented in Table 2. Attachment style and anxiety/avoidance scores are presented in Table 3.

Table 2. Participant Attachment Style

Attachment Style	Secure	18
	Preoccupied	7
	Dismissing	0
	Fearful-avoidant	0
Average Score	Anxiety Score	3.07
	Avoidance Score	2.45

\*1 is low avoidance/anxiety; 7 is high avoidance/anxiety

Table 3. Participant Attachment Style and Anxiety/Avoidance Score Breakdown

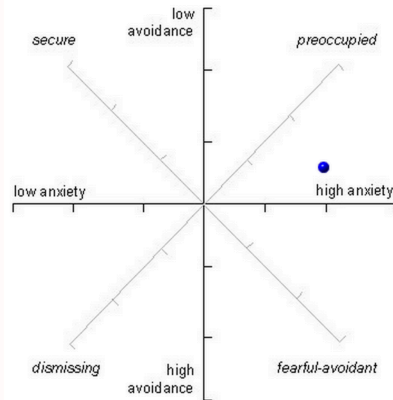
Participant*	Attachment Style	Anxiety Score	Avoidance Score
Jackson	Secure	1.67	1.94
Oliver	Preoccupied	4.89	3.17
Sebastian	Secure	2.5	3.39
Aarush	Secure	2	2.06
Leo	Secure	3.17	1.5
Kayaan	Preoccupied	5.22	3.22
Javier	Secure	3.44	3.67
Lucas	Secure	2.94	2.5
Micah	Secure	1.67	2
Gavin	Secure	2.89	1.44
Elijah	Secure	2.33	1.56
Charlie	Preoccupied	4.12	1.89
Anika	Preoccupied	4.61	2.44
Bella	Secure	3.72	3.72
Layla	Preoccupied	4.5	3.06
Mia	Secure	2.61	3
Sophia	Preoccupied	6.06	3.44
Camila	Secure	1.94	3.22
Kai	Secure	2.17	2.72
Makayla	Secure	1.89	2
Alaina	Secure	1	1
Cameron	Secure	1.94	2.06
Riley	Secure	2.39	1.94
Scarlett	Secure	1.61	1.33
Gianna	Preoccupied	5.56	2.89

\*Each participant in this study has been given a pseudo name to ensure confidentiality of their real identities.

## An example of preoccupied attachment style graft results is illustrated below by plotting Sophia's scores:

According to your questionnaire responses, your attachment-related anxiety score is **6.06**, on a scale ranging from 1 (low anxiety) to 7 (high anxiety). Your attachment-related avoidance score is **3.44**, on a scale ranging from 1 (low avoidance) to 7 (high avoidance).

We have plotted your two scores in the two-dimensional space defined by attachment-related anxiety and avoidance. Your approximate position in this space is denoted by the blue dot. (Note: If you left any of the questions unanswered, then these scores may be inaccurate.)



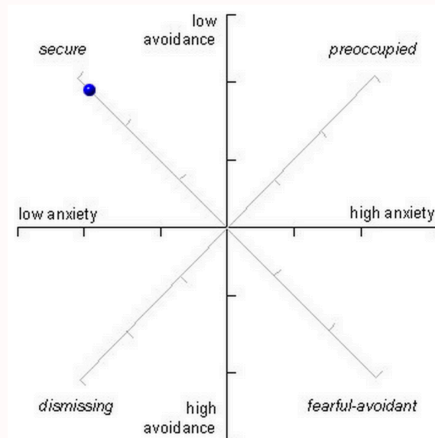
As you can see in this graph, the two dimensions of anxiety and avoidance can be combined to create interesting combinations of attachment styles. For example people who are low in both attachment-related anxiety and avoidance are generally considered *secure* because they don't typically worry about whether their partners are going to reject them and they are comfortable being emotionally close to others.

Combining your anxiety and avoidance scores, you fall into the **preoccupied** region of the space. Previous research on attachment styles indicates that preoccupied people tend to have highly conflictual relationships. Although they are comfortable expressing their emotions, preoccupied individuals often experience a lot of negative emotions, which can often interfere with their relationships.

## Riley shows a secure attachment style results graft:

According to your questionnaire responses, your attachment-related anxiety score is **1.94**, on a scale ranging from 1 (low anxiety) to 7 (high anxiety). Your attachment-related avoidance score is **2.06**, on a scale ranging from 1 (low avoidance) to 7 (high avoidance).

We have plotted your two scores in the two-dimensional space defined by attachment-related anxiety and avoidance. Your approximate position in this space is denoted by the blue dot. (Note: If you left any of the questions unanswered, then these scores may be inaccurate.)



As you can see in this graph, the two dimensions of anxiety and avoidance can be combined to create interesting combinations of attachment styles. For example people who are low in both attachment-related anxiety and avoidance are generally considered *secure* because they don't typically worry about whether their partners are going to reject them and they are comfortable being emotionally close to others.

Combining your anxiety and avoidance scores, you fall into the **secure** region of the space. Previous research on attachment styles indicates that secure people tend to have relatively enduring and satisfying relationships. They are comfortable expressing their emotions, and tend not to suffer from depression and other psychological disorders.

Data from the ECR-R was relevant for this study because it allowed participants to better understand how they think and feel about their own relationships and how they behave in these relationships during stressful times, which often is based upon their own history of interpersonal relationships and how historical relationships shape how they think and feel about current relationships, including how they behave in relationships. For example, anxious or high anxiety individuals in this study tended to report an ambivalent coping style while fearful and insecure participants expressed greatest anxiety about their relationships during the research interview. It is therefore possible that their current behavior in relationships is shaped or influenced by their history of or observation of previous interpersonal relationships.

### Analysis and Discussion of Research Questions

#### Research Question 1:

How do Millennials define romantic love?

#### Findings:

Participants' responses were grouped into seven (7) themes: (1) Emotional & Physical Connectedness/Bond; (2) Mutual Respect/Partnering/Paired Agreement; (3) Other Focused/Self Discovery/Uninhibited; (4) Mutual Bond/Extension of Self/Shared Oneness; (5) Evolution with Age; (6) Indescribable/Fantasy/Idealized; and (7) I don't know/Love Not Experienced. Of these thematic groupings, two major themes emerged for how Millennials define romantic love. A relative frequency and percent frequency analysis was used to report data and the two highest frequencies were recorded. Sixty-four percent (n = 16) of the participants defined romantic love as "Emotional & Physical Connectedness/Bond" and 42% (n = 10) defined romantic love as "Mutual Respect/Partnering/Paired Decision. One participant reported that they had not been in love and therefore could not define this emotion. See Table 4 for complete distribution.

TABLE 4. Millennials' Definition of Romantic Love

THEMATIC GROUPING	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	RELATIVE FREQUENCY	PERCENT FREQUENCY
Emotional & Physical Connectedness/Bond	16	0.64	64%
Mutual Respect/Partnering/Agreed Decision	10	0.4	40%
Other Focused/Self Discovery/Uninhibited	5	0.2	20%
Mutual Bond/Extension of Self/Shared Oneness	5	0.2	20%
Evolution with Age	2	0.8	8%
Indescribable/Fantasy/Idealized	2	0.8	8%
Has not Experienced Romantic Love	1	.04	4%
TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	25		

\*Percentages do not total 100% because some participants provided multiple responses.

These findings suggest that the majority of Millennials in this study define romantic love as an energetic connection, a bond – both emotional and physical – that is the epitome of happiness. It is a romantic partnership that embellishes mutual respect and attraction. Bella iterated this in defining romantic love as “A connection that stimulates me mentally, emotionally, and physically. The added physical part is when it becomes romantic.” Merriam-Webster Dictionary’s (n.d.) also illuminates the emotional and physical attachment of love in its definition of love as a verb, “to feel great affection for (someone), to feel love for (someone), to feel sexual or romantic love for (someone), to like or desire (something) very much, to take great pleasure in (something)” (Love).



Many Millennials in this study struggled to define romantic love. When asked to define romantic love, Leo admitted that, “I don't know. I can't define it. I think it is a feeling, but I can't really define what romantic love is to me in words.” This theme also surfaced in the literature review. Thomas Oord (2005) spoke to the dearth of definitions of love, “It may be that resources for love research have been scanty and researchers generally have been reluctant to pursue love studies in part because so few of us have given time and energy to provide an adequate definition of love” (p.923).

bell hooks (2001) references M Scott Peck (1978) definition of love as a decision that one makes, “Love is as love does. Love is an act of will - namely both an intention and an action. Will also implies choice. We do not have to love. We choose to love” (p. 5). Sebastian reinforced this statement by saying that the commitment to love is a decision of choice and that one chooses to actively engage in loving one's romantic partner:

As I get older everything has been changing. I use to think that it was like it is in the movies, but that is BS. It is a partnership. It is an investment... The commitment comes from the title that you choose - husband/wife, boyfriend/girlfriend. [You choose to] commit, [to] share, [to] understand, [to] fighting, [to have] sex – [which is] very important, [to have] friendship, to have an emotional connection, social and economic dependence. You become a team.

#### Research Question 2a:

How do Millennials know when they are in love?

#### Findings:

Participants' responses were grouped into four (4) descriptive themes: (1) United/Secure/Familiarity/Emotionally Fulfilled/Empowered; (2) Void/Emptiness without the

‘other’/ ‘other’ focused/sacrifice for ‘other’; (3) Not been in love and/or cannot articulate; and (5) Sensual. Of these groupings, two major themes emerged for how Millennials know or describe when they are in love. A percent frequency analysis was used to report data. Seventy-six percent (n = 19) of the participants described being in love as “United with Partner/Secure/Familiarity/Emotionally fulfilled/Empowered.” The second highest response, which was 36% (n = 9) stated “Void/Emptiness without the ‘other’/‘Other’ focused/ Sacrifice for ‘other’”. Only 16% (n=4) reported that they experience love as a sensual experience. See Table 5 for complete distribution.

TABLE 5. Millennials Describe Love

THEMATIC GROUPING	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	RELATIVE FREQUENCY	PERCENT FREQUENCY
United with Partner/Secure/Familiarity/Emotionally fulfilled/Empowered	19	.76	76%
Void/Emptiness without “other”/ “Other” focused/ Sacrifice for “other”	9	.36	36%
Have not been in love or does not know how to articulate	5	.2	20%
Sensual	4	.16	16%
TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	25		

\*Percentages do not total 100% because some participants provided multiple responses.

These findings suggest that Millennials describe romantic love as being emotionally fulfilled, empowered, in a state of constant affection and emotionally secure with that ‘other’. This is consistent with the revelation of John Welwood (1996) regarding both the unity and connectedness with one’s partner, and the feeling of empowerment through the realization of one’s idealized self:

A soul connection is a resonance between two people who respond to the essential beauty of each other's individual natures, behind their facades, and who connect on a deeper level. This kind of mutual recognition provides the catalyst for a potent alchemy. It is a sacred alliance whose purpose is to help both partners discover and realize their deepest potentials.

Being in love for Millennials also can be expressed as a 'void without that other' or being 'empty' and incomplete without that 'other.' Participant 9 poetically stated that you know you are in love, "When there is a spring in your step and a song in your heart." Charlie speaks to both the sensual experience and the feeling of connection when they are in love:

It is just an experience, it is just like how you know if you are warm or cold or tired or energetic. [Being in love] is a feeling, it is a sensation. It is something that comes forth to you from another person. [Knowing you are in love] is an awareness of this connection that you have with another person. Once you are aware of that connection, that's when you know you are in love. You have to give it enough time to develop and merge and connect and grow together.

#### Research Question 2b:

How do Millennials feel when they are in love?

#### Findings:

Participants' responses were grouped into six (6) descriptive themes: (1) Euphoric/Unabridged Passion/Complete; (2) Vulnerability/Freeing/Connectedness; (3) Unsettling/Painful/Scary; (4) Security/Commitment/Familiarity/Homey; (5) Empowered Self; and (5) Sensual. Of these thematic groupings, two major descriptors surfaced for how

Millennials feel when they are in love. Seventy-six percent (n = 19) of the participants described love feeling “Euphoric/Unabridged Passion/Complete”. The second highest response was 48% (n = 12), which Millennials described as “vulnerable, freeing and connectedness”. Only 16% (n=4) described the feeling of love as sensual experience. See Table 6 for complete distribution.

Table 6. Millennials Feeling of Love

THEMATIC GROUPING	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	RELATIVE FREQUENCY	PERCENT FREQUENCY
Euphoric/Unabridged Passion/Complete	19	.76	76%
Vulnerability/Freeing/Connectedness	12	.48	48%
Unsettling/Painful/Scary	9	.36	36%
Security/Commitment/Familiarity	8	.32	32%
Empowered Self	6	.24	24%
Sensual	4	.16	16%
TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	25		

\*Percentages do not total 100% because some participants provided multiple responses.

These findings suggest that Millennials feel love as exhilarating, a euphoric state of completeness and unabridged passion, and expressing primal impulses. It is freeing, connected to the “other”, with an additional sense of empowerment. Micah emoted that, “It (love) feels like a thousand bottle rockets in my soul.” Cameron noted, “[Love feels] fun, happy, adventurous, comfortable, warm, kind of scary, kind of frustrating sometimes - everything - tons of different emotions. At the end of the day it makes me feel really good and confident and comfortable.”

Several participants spoke of the rollercoaster of ‘love’, specifically as related to the rollercoaster of ‘emotions’ that they experience when they are in love. Gianna stated that, “Love is beautiful, but it is painful. Love feels scary and uncertain right now.” Kayaan stated, “It's like skiing down a slope blindfolded. You know? It feels real good. You don't know where you are going, but you allow the slope to take you wherever it leads.” Other Millennials described the feeling of love to be connected to fear and pain. Bella reflected, “I know that it is like to love so passionately that when it is broken that it breaks you in every single way possible.”

### Research Question 3:

How did Millennials learn to love?

### Findings:

Participants’ responses were grouped into six (6) thematic categories: (1) Trial & Error; (2) Parents/Caregivers; (3) Role Models/Friends; (4) Media; (5) Have not yet learned to love; and (6) Self/Natural Lover. Of these thematic categories, two major themes emerged for how Millennials learned to love. A percent frequency analysis showed 48% (n = 12) reported that they learned to love by trial and error; and 44% (n = 11) of the participants described learning how to love from their parents or caregivers. Learning to love from role models and or from friends was reported by 28% (n = 7) of the study group. See Table 7 for complete distribution.

TABLE 7. How Millennials Learn to Love

THEMATIC GROUPING	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	RELATIVE FREQUENCY	PERCENT FREQUENCY
Trial & Error	12	.48	48%
Parents/Caregivers	11	.44	44%
Role Models/Friends	7	.28	28%
Media	3	.12	12%
Don't know how to love	1	.04	4%
Self/Natural	1	.04	4%
TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	25		

\*Percentages do not total 100% because some participants gave multiple responses.

These findings suggest that Millennials learn to love mostly by trial and error in their personal relationships and observations of their parents' and caregivers' relationships.

Millennials in this study reported learning from 'bad relationships' and these lessons learned better prepared them for new relationships. They also reported that learning more and more about themselves while in relationships and by getting in touch with their own needs taught them how to better love themselves and that 'other' when defining a romantic relationship. Learning from their parents' or other role models/friends' relationships also was reported as significant. Some participants in this study either want to duplicate their parents' relationship or avoid it completely.

Charlie spoke of learning to love by positive examples set by others:

I think you learn to love through example. Growing up you would see examples of love and they would set the path to show you how to love. I was having a conversation with

my friends recently. We can all pinpoint it back to a time when we were unconditionally loved, which gave us the freedom to blossom into the people that we were meant to be.

Those examples shaped who we were and who we are now is more loving people.

Along these same lines, Gleeson and Fitzgerald (2014) wrote, “As a result of these early interactions, the child develops mental representations or internal working models of attachment which act as a guide for perceptions and behaviours in subsequent relationships” (p. 644).

Contrary to Gleeson and Fitzgerald’s research pertaining to adult romantic relationships, Leo spoke about his deviance from the loveless relationships that he was provided with as a child:

I never saw love growing up. I didn't know what love was. I raised myself. I did what I did because of me. My mother never showed love, she still doesn't. She was always loud and angry all of the time. How did I learn to love a woman? Through experience.

Riley responded similarly about learning to love through personal experience and by being in romantic love relationships, “I learned a lot about how to love through heartbreak and through being through partnerships that didn't work and in partnerships where I felt scared of the person leaving me or I felt somehow smothered. I learned to love in a way that generates a sense of openness and freedom.”

#### Research Question 4a:

Who are the top two persons that Millennials report as most significant in raising them?

#### Findings:

Participants’ responses were grouped into six (6) thematic categories: (1) Mom; (2) Dad/Father Figure; (3) Other Family Member; (4) Neighbor/Friend; (5) Self; and (6) No One. Of these thematic categories, mom and dad/father figure were identified as the most influential individuals in raising the participants in this study. Eighty-eight percent (n = 22) of the

Millennials in this study reported their mom being most significant in raising them. Forty-eight percent (n =12) reported that their father or a father figure was most significant in raising them. The next highest frequency reported was “other family member” at 36% (n =9). See Table 8 for complete distribution.

Table 8. Millennials’ Identification of Persons Who Raised Them

THEMATIC GROUPING	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	RELATIVE FREQUENCY	PERCENT FREQUENCY
Mom	22	.88	88%
Dad/Father Figure	12	.48	48%
Other Family Member (Grandparent/Sibling/Aunt)	9	.36	36%
Neighbor/Friend	2	.08	8%
Self	2	.08	8%
No One	1	.04	4%
TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	25		

\*Percentages do not total 100% because some participants provided multiple responses.

Millennials in this study identified parent-figures as most influential during their upbringing. Generation X mothers were identified as presenting a presence and providing security for them in childhood, which helped Millennials in this study to grow into themselves and gain independence. Millennials raised by single moms were especially grateful to their mothers and admired their strength. Millennials in this study either were raised by a single mom or both parents and each groupings mostly had positive takeaways to share about those who raised them. Lived experiences by some of the participants in this study, however, were less favorable and negative.



Research Question 4b:

How do Millennials describe their relationship with the persons who raised them?

Findings:

Participants' responses were grouped into eight (8) thematic characterizations: (1) Unconditional Positive Regard/Empathy/Safety; (2) Self Actualization/Nurturing/Role Model; (3) Trauma/Unavailability/Neglect/Absence of Love; (4) Physically Present; (5) Single Parent/Parentified Child; (6) Tough Love/High Expectations; (7) Social and Behavioral Oversight/Repair After Rupture; and (8) Met Basic Needs. Of these thematic descriptors, Unconditional Positive Regard/Self Actualization 72% (n = 18) was the most frequented response used to describe Millennials' descriptions of their relationship with the person who raised them. Nurturing/Role Model was the next highest frequency 40% (n = 10); and reports of a "trauma/unavailability" and "physically present" relationship each ranked 36% (n = 14), respectively. See Table 9 for complete distribution.

Table 9. Millennials Descriptors of Relationship with Persons Who Raised Them

THEMATIC GROUPING	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	RELATIVE FREQUENCY	PERCENT FREQUENCY
Unconditional Positive Regard/Empathy/Safety	18	.72	72%
Self Actualization/Nurturing/Role Model	10	.4	40%
Trauma/Unavailability/Neglect/Absence of Love	9	.36	36%
Physically Present	9	.36	36%
Single Parent/Parentified Child	7	.28	28%
Tough Love/High Expectations	5	.2	20%
Social and Behavioral Oversight/Repair after Rupture	5	.2	20%
Met Basic Needs	4	.16	16%
TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	25		

\*Percentages do not total 100% because some participants provided multiple responses.

Bowlby (1994) believed that attachment is a critical component of the human experience "from the cradle to the grave" (p.129), which is precisely why it is important to understand the relationship that Millennials had/have with their childhood caregivers. On this note, Davies (2011) writes,

Bowlby formulated the idea of attachment as a strong emotional tie to a specific person (or persons) that promotes the young child's sense of security... Attachment has four main functions: providing a sense of security; regulating affect and arousal; promoting

the expression of feelings and communication; and serving as a base for exploration (p.7-8).

Almost three quarters of the Millennials in this study described their caregiver relationships as emotionally supportive, unconditionally accepting, encouraging, safe, happy, nurturing and close. Sophia commented:

[My dad] is my biggest role model and he is the person that I look up to most in my life...[He is] the person who taught me a lot about love through the way that he loved me and loved my mom. I feel like even when I disappointed him or didn't live up to his expectations he would push me to learn from those experiences and try harder and he would be hard on me when it was necessary, but he always made sure that I knew that he still loved me despite my mistakes. That was really important as a kid and continues to be really important to me - the attitude of unconditional love - as an adult.

Many participants experienced this kind of unconditional positive regard from their parents.

Seven participants grew up in households with single mothers. Layla stated:

My mom provided empathetic, character building, mother-daughter bonding love. I had a fantastic relationship with my mother. She was very strict. She said that she had to be strict because she was one person doing two roles. She had to provide and care for us on one salary. Because of my strong relationship with her, I learned to be a survivor and strong and that I don't need to rely on men and that I can do things myself.

Other themes present included intergenerational trauma. Makayla shared a reflection of family dynamics,

I lived in a house full of secrets. There is a lot of darkness. There is a lot of trauma that hasn't been worked out with my mom and her family in the Dominican Republic and the

migration. She does a lot of denying of the hurt that she has and the pain that she lived but it still affects us. I think it is genetic. We are connected, I feel her sadness.

Millennials are deeply impacted by their relationships with their primary caregivers as children, which in turn impacted their relationships as adults.

#### Research Question 5:

How do Millennials relationships with the person(s) that raised them impact their own experience of romantic love as an adult?

#### Findings:

Participants' responses were grouped into six (6) thematic categories: (1) Authentic/Meaningful Relationships; and (2) Repeating Negative Behaviors/ Dysfunctional Relationships; (3) Desire for Self Actualization Through Partnership; (4) Mirrored/Similar Relationship; (5) Knowledge of Healthy Relationship/Self Expectations; and (6) Self-Confidence/Knowledge of Self. Of these thematic categories, two themes surfaced as the most impactful on Millennials' experience of romantic love as an adult. Forty-eight percent (n = 12) of the Millennials in this study reported that their desire for an Authentic/Meaningful Relationship as an adult was influenced by their own relationship with the person(s) that raised them. Interestingly, 40% (n = 10), which was the second highest frequency, of the respondents reported repeating negative behaviors and dysfunctional relationships in their adult relationships as a result of their own experience with the person(s) that raised them. See Table 10 for complete distribution.

Table 10. The Impact of Childhood Caregivers on Millennials' Experience of Romantic Love as Adults

THEMATIC GROUPING	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	RELATIVE FREQUENCY	PERCENT FREQUENCY
Authentic/Meaningful Relationships	12	.48	48%
Repeating Negative Behaviors/ Dysfunctional Relationships	10	.4	40%
Desire for Self Actualization Through Partnership	7	.28	28%
Mirrored/Similar Relationship	7	.28	28%
Knowledge of Healthy Relationship/Self Expectations	5	.2	20%
Self-Confidence/ Knowledge of Self	3	.12	12%
TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	25		

\*Percentages do not total 100% because some participants provided multiple responses.

These findings suggest Millennials love relationships may be patterned after those who raised them. Millennials in this study who reported having authentic and meaningful relationships with their caretakers or observing this type of relationship between those who raised them most wanted the same or similar relationship with their own love interest. Aarush reported that, “[My mom] promoted a feeling of security in love for me which is what I have taken to my love relationships.” Scarlett noted that, “I am able to carry over the acceptance. I was a strong willed child and a strong willed adult and I challenged them, but they never made me feel unwanted or unloved. I strive to find people who are going to give me that same acceptance.” With regard to romantic attachment Fraley (2000) contends that,

As people build new relationships, they rely partly on previous expectations about how others are likely to behave and feel toward them, and they use these models to interpret

the goals or intentions of their partners. Working models are believed to be highly resistant to change because they are more likely to assimilate new relational information, even at the cost of distorting it, than accommodate to information that is at odds with existing expectations. (p.136)

Those who reported dysfunctional relationships by those who raised them either duplicated these types of relationships or adamantly tried to avoid them in their own love relationships. Micah speaks to breaking out of negative relationship patterns:

It impacted the way that I relate to romantic partners. I had a lot of abnormal patterns happen to me in relationships. I had to be conscious of them while they were happening and make sure that I wasn't damaging my partner and backtrack to see what part of it was me, what part of it was my partner, what part of it was normal and natural, and how much of it is not. I never had anyone to look up to as far as what a healthy relationship should look like. It influenced me in that I had to reach out to my wider social network for that support, so I ended up making more friends.

Gleeson and Fitzgerald (2014) also speak to resilience in love relationships:

Longitudinal studies have provided the strongest evidence for the continuity of attachment styles from childhood to adulthood. Importantly, research has shown that working models of attachment while resistant to change, are subject to revision over time as a result of new experiences or an unstable relationship environment (p.1644).

#### Research Question 6:

What are the social influences that have impacted the way Millennials view romantic love?

Findings:

Responses to this research question were placed in eight (8) thematic groups categories: (1) Social Media; (2) Work/Education/Training/Life Events; (3) the Arts (movies, literature, music); (4) No Impact from Social Media; (5) Social Acceptance of Non-traditional Relationships; (6) Friends/Networks; (7) Politics; and (8) Social Norms of Urban vs. Rural Setting. Of these thematic categories, one theme surfaced as the most impactful of social influences that impact Millennials' dating and romantic love experiences. Fifty-six percent (n = 14) of the Millennials in this study reported social media as key to impacting their view of romantic love. A secondary influence that impacted their view of romantic love among Millennials was Work/Education/Training/Life Events at 36% (n=9). See Table 11 for complete distribution.

Table 11. Social Impacts of Millennials' View of Romantic Love

THEMATIC GROUPING	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	RELATIVE FREQUENCY	PERCENT FREQUENCY
Social Media	14	.56	56%
Work/Education/Training/Life Events	9	.36	36%
the Arts (movies, music, lit.)	6	.24	24%
No Impact from Social Media	5	.2	20%
Social Acceptance of Non-traditional Relationships	4	.16	16%
Friends/Networks	3	.12	12%
Politics	1	.04	4%
Social Norm of Urban/Rural Setting	1	.04	4%
TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	25		

\*Percentages do not total 100% because some participants provided multiple responses.

These findings suggest that social media may be the preferred method for finding and engaging in romantic relationships for the Millennials Generation. These findings are consistent with Wang & Taylor (2011) findings that Millennials who have grown up in a digital world find comfort in texting, hanging out, and hooking up with love interests; and that rather than dating in the traditional fashion, Millennials are more inclined to engage on online dating sites and use Twitter, Facebook and other social sites to seek out and maintain relationships. Elijah reported that, “I think romantic love is dying out due to social media and online dating. It seems like people don't work towards romantic relationships, they search for them.” Long-distance dating, unspoken “don't ask, don't tell” agreements, and non-monogamous relationships are not unusual among Millennials despite the fact that they still believe in romantic love and security. Oliver spoke about conflict experienced diving into the world of polyamory,

In theory I think that polyamory is the way to go. I think that monogamy is really tied to capitalism, but in my personal practice I have tried to have deep connections with multiple people at the same time and it is really hard - the deeper you go.

It appears that social media is a convenient way for working Millennials, who do not have time to date, to seek out relationships and sexual partners. Social media also provides a convenient way to somewhat screen potential lovers and partners. Through the use of media sites like Facebook, Grindr, Tinder, and Linked-In, Plenty of Fish, and OkCupid, Millennials comfortably peruse profiles to gather information on individuals of interests, to screen negative and or undesirable traits, and to minimize the length of time that traditional dating entails. Lucas spoke to personal experience on a dating website:



Grinder has changed the way that gay men date. It's a GPS based dating application that tells you who is closest to you. Everyone is on Grinder. Anyone you are dating has 200 guys at their fingertips. Everyone that is trying to date hates grinder. No one wants to date a guy who is on grinder, but the only way to find a guy is on grinder.

bell Hooks (2001) found that media sites are an easy “hook up” for many Millennials despite the fact that romantic love remains a fantasy.

Work/Education/Training/Life Events also was found to influence Millennials romantic love and relationships. It appears that Millennials are shaped by their experiences and environment. Much of their time seems to be spent at work, in groups, in training, and/or involved in social movements, all of which impact the way that Millennials interact with people around them, including their romantic relationships. Based upon this study’s findings, it appears that Millennials feel that social media allows them to connect faster, limit and or control their communications and social relationships, and have immediate access to life events. In essence, social media places Millennials in control of who and what they want in their personal space. There is also social pressure that accompanies unregulated access to other people’s personal information, which some reported to increase pressure and anxiety around romantic relationships. Mia reported,

With Facebook you see other people getting engaged and married and how their relationship moves. You feel this pressure to tell others how your relationship moves. That affects your relationship. When you hit your mid-20s everyone appears to be getting married and you see it, even with my friends from high school who I would not otherwise have contact with. That definitely puts pressure. When you see everyone else doing something, you want to do it too.

Research Question 7:

What are the cultural influences that have impacted the way that Millennials view romantic love?

Findings:

Responses to this research question varied and represented seven (7) thematic categories: (1) Divergence from Cultural Heritage; (2) Assimilation to Parent's Cultural Heritage; (3) Cultural Views of Gender Roles and the Objectification and Discrimination of Women; (4) Cultural Stigma/Biases Regarding the LGBTQ Community; (5) Art; (6) Cultural Ideas regarding disability and desirability; and (7) Religiosity. While 44% (n = 11) of the participants in this study stated that parental culture/upbringing influences their perception and ideologies about love, 64% (n = 16) stated their need to "move away from" or place less weight on their cultural heritage and values about love was significant for them. Thirty-two percent (n = 8) reported that their views of gender roles were impacted by their cultural heritage and 28% (n = 7) reported differentness in their and their parents' perceptions and feelings about love relationships in the LGBTQ community. See Table 12 for complete distribution.

Table 12. The Role of Culture in Millennials View of Romantic Love

THEMATIC GROUPING	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	RELATIVE FREQUENCY	PERCENT FREQUENCY
Divergence from Cultural Heritage	16	.64	64%
Assimilation to Parent's Cultural Heritage	11	.44	44%
Cultural Views of Gender Roles and the Objectification and Discrimination of Women	8	.32	32%
Cultural Stigma/Biases Regarding the LGBTQ Community	7	.28	28%
Art	2	.08	8%
Cultural Ideas re: disability and desirability	1	.04	4%
Religiosity	1	.04	4%
TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	25		

\*Percentages do not total 100% because some participants provided multiple responses.

These findings seem to suggest that culture plays a significant role in Millennials love for the participants in this study, whether it is positive or negative. A “cultural theme” was a common thread throughout Millennials perceptions and feelings about love and what they sought in romantic love relationships. What this may imply is that Millennials are keenly aware of values reflected by their parents versus their own; and while their parents values and culture may what things were like when they were growing up, Millennials have changing ideas and practices and appear to be more accepting of differentness in people and environment, especially regarding nontraditional love relationships, sexual orientation, gender diversity and interracial dating, for

example. This study's findings validates Pew Research Center (2014) research informing that Millennials stand apart from their parents and young adults of the silent generation when it comes to home life, marriage, and dating attitudes. Camila spoke of a shift in culture coming from a Latina family:

Being a first generation American with a Master's Degree is huge and I view my life in many ways as an American and I have the same goals as most other American's have. I read plenty of books from a very "American" point of view - i.e. you shouldn't even get married before the age of 25 and if you don't have all the money you need before 30 years old, then don't do it. But culturally you should get married sooner rather than later and who cares if you have an education, all you need are a husband and a family. I don't see myself having either - ever - or maybe much later into my life.

Sophia addressed the cultural impact that romantic love has as a person with a disability:

There is a belief that people with disabilities aren't sexually desirable and I know that we are not talking about sexual desire, but there is a connection between romantic love and one's image of how sexually desirable a person is... Because I am so different, I thought that I wasn't worthy of romantic love and I wasn't as sexually desirable as an abled bodied woman, so I tried to minimize the fact that I have a disability - which is really obvious, because it is visible. I tried to do all of the things that I could to overcompensate so that I could fit into this societal construction of normalcy so that you'll like me or just let me not date anyone because I am stuck in my own limiting beliefs.

There is a common thread present amongst many Millennials who feel the need to break away from their cultural ties, whether they are to the traditional gender roles or limiting beliefs imposed upon them regarding disability and desirability. Millennials appear to be involved in a

new movement of romantic love that is more accepting and inclusive, stepping outside of the cultural box that they were born into.

#### Research Question 8:

How do Millennials define romantic love differently from older generations?

#### Findings:

Responses to this research question were placed into four (7) thematic categories: (1) Millennials: Transient Love/Fostering Conditional, Superficial Love/Instant Gratification Focused (2) Older generation: More Traditional, Serious, Loyal, Resilient, and Dedicated; (3) Millennials: Breaking with Tradition/Redefining Gender and Partner Roles; (4) Millennials Focus on Finding True Love/Building Healthier Relationships/More Freedom to Explore/Focus on Feelings of Love; (5) Shift in Courtship Behaviors; and (6) Differences in Attitudes towards Divorce; and (7) No Generational Differences. Of these thematic categories, 60% (n = 14) of the participants reported that Millennials experience love as transient, fostering conditional/superficial love, in addition to being focused on instant gratification, while 56% (n = 14) reported that older generations were more traditional, serious, loyal, resilient, and dedicated to their romantic love relationships. Millennials breaking with tradition and redefining gender and partner roles, 44% (n = 11) presented with the third highest percent frequency differentiation. Millennials focusing on finding true love (as opposed to pragmatic partnerships) and building healthier relationships (breaking out of the cycle of settling and abuse), at 28% (n = 7), presented with the fourth highest frequency. 8% (n = 2) stated that there were no generational differences in how Millennials and older generations experience love. See Table 13 for complete distribution.

Table 13. Differences in Millennials and Older Generation Definition of Romantic Love

THEMATIC GROUPING	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	RELATIVE FREQUENCY	PERCENT FREQUENCY
Millennials: Transient Love, Fostering a Conditional, Superficial Love, Instant Gratification Focused	15	.6	60%
Older Generation more “traditional”, serious, loyal, resilient, and dedicated	14	.56	56%
Millennials breaking with tradition, redefining gender and partner roles	11	.44	44%
Millennials focus on finding true love and building healthier relationships/more freedom to explore/focus on feelings of love	7	.28	28%
Shift in Courtship Behaviors	5	.2	20%
Differences in Attitudes towards Divorce	2	.08	8%
No generational differences	2	.08	8%
TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	25		

\*Percentages do not total 100% because some participants provided multiple responses.

These findings suggest that Millennials and older generations define, express and experience love and commitment in romantic love relationships very differently. Gavin noted that, "Older generations are more unconditional in giving. Our generation is more of a conditional love." There is a transitory nature present within Millennial relationships that can be viewed in both a positive and negative light. Javier stated:

I don't think that people have romantic love (in my generation); they are too selfish and self-centered. There is a huge difference in how people use to see love. People would to

commit to each other no matter what. But now people are too self centered and narcissistic. They just think about themselves, not the person next to them. They just want to shop around. They see one flaw in one person and then they are ready to move on to the next person. It's not really love. They don't believe in love. It is a much more selfish generation.

Along those same lines, Elijah half-heartedly joked, “You know the saying, ‘There are plenty of other fish in the sea?’ Well, our generation is eager to exercise that.” From a different point of view, Charlie stated:

I think that our generation has broken away from that and realizes that we have a lot of options and that we want something that is real and true. Our generation is looking for the real thing, we are looking for a real connection, and we don't want to just make something work with another person for superficial reasons, bearing children, financial security, stuff like that. Our generation has a lot more freedom to go out there and explore the terrain of love.

Participants in this study also showed differences in social attitudes towards others with Millennials being more accepting of diversity differences than older generations. These findings also support Pew Center Research on Generation X (2010) where they found Millennials’ attitudes toward marriage seemed to reflect apathy for the institution of marriage, different lifestyles, and a reflection of lived experiences from their upbringing. These findings are further supported by Johnson (2013) who found that Millennials express higher levels of support for same-sex marriage, greater tolerance for racial/ethnic differences, and attitudes towards marital security (Pew Center Research Center, 2010).

Two outliers defended that there is no difference in how Millennials and older generations define romantic love. Jackson argued that:

[Romantic love] is the same; a lot of people say that is more of a hook up culture now and that it is harder to find love - but I think that is just sensationalism; love is someone who you can call your best friend; love is someone who you can be emotionally connected to; love is the same thing and will always be the same thing - it will just be shown in different ways.

#### Research Question 9:

How do Millennials define the most important components of a romantic love relationship?

#### Findings:

Responses to this research question fell into twelve (11) thematic categories: (1) Physical Attraction/Sexual Chemistry/Sex; (2) Trust/Honesty; (3) Emotional Connection/Intimacy/Vulnerability (4) Communication/Open-mindedness; (5) Security/Commitment/Acceptance; (6) Like-mindedness; (7) Attentiveness; (8) Similar Background/Shared Values; (9) Authenticity; (10) Receptive to Children/Marriage; and (11) Unafraid. Of these thematic categories, Physical Attraction/Sexual Chemistry/Sex (18%, n = 16), Trust/Honestly and Emotional Attraction (16%, n = 14, respectively), Equality Talk/Open-mindedness (14%, n = 12), and Commitment/Acceptance (11%, n = 10) received the most frequency responses. See Table 14 for complete distribution.



Table 14. Millennials Identify the Most Important Components of a Romantic Love Relationship

THEMATIC GROUPING	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	RELATIVE FREQUENCY	PERCENT FREQUENCY
Physical Attraction/Sexual Chemistry/Sex	16	.64	64%
Trust/Honesty	14	.56	56%
Emotional Connection/Intimacy/Vulnerability	14	.56	56%
Communication/Open-mindedness	12	.48	48%
Security Commitment/Acceptance	10	.4	40%
Like-mindedness	9	.36	36%
Attentiveness	3	.12	12%
Similar Background/Shared Values	3	.12	12%
Authenticity	3	.12	12%
Receptive to Children/Marriage	2	.08	8%
Unafraid	1	.04	4%
TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	25		

\*Percentages do not total 100% because some participants provided multiple responses.

These findings suggest that Millennials are consistently diverse in their views on the most important components of romantic love, and on the importance of the lifestyles they choose to live. Millennials attitudes towards romance seem to reflect a ‘live and let live’ society that supports diversity, multiculturalism, tolerance and change. Their varied responses to romantic

love and marriage suggest traditional marriage vows and love relationships may be a thing of the past for younger Millennials. While 5 of the 25 participants are married, they are located on the older spectrum of the Millennial Generation, between the ages of 28 and 33.

There appears to be a sense of equality in Millennials' relationships that did not and does not exist in relationships of older generations. The shared talk and openness, trust/honesty, and reciprocity in relationships when it comes to acceptance, sex, emotional bonding and receptivity appear to be more pronounced in Millennials than in the older generations. There is a large focus on both sexual chemistry and emotional connection. Gavin explained the importance of being naked in romantic relationships:

Being romantic to me is being intimate, whether it is clothed or unclothed. Either way I enjoy being naked, in all senses of the word. Not just running around butt naked, although that is fun too, but present, naked, no filters, nothing - that level of intimacy is something that I enjoy. I really enjoy having sex with [my partner], because there is no one else in the world that I can be that close with, that unadulterated, raw kind of close.

#### Research Question 10:

What are Millennials' greatest fears regarding romantic love?

#### Findings:

Responses to this research question yield one (1) distinct theme and two supporting themes: (1) Unreciprocated Love/Loss; and (2) Fear of Deception/Being Used and (3) Fear of a Broken Heart. These three frequency responses consisted of 52% (n = 13) of the participants reporting that their biggest fear for romantic love was unreciprocated love or loss; and 24% (n = 6) responding a fear of deception or being used in a relationship (n = 6) and fearing a broken

heart (n = 6), respectively. While other fears were reported, they did not reach meaningful numbers. See Table 15 for complete distribution.

Table 15. Millennials’ Greatest Fears Regarding Romantic Love

THEMATIC GROUPING	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	RELATIVE FREQUENCY	PERCENT FREQUENCY
Unreciprocated Love/Loss	13	.52	52%
Deception/Being Used	6	.24	24%
Broken Heart	6	.24	24%
Initial Attraction Loss	3	.12	12%
Over Sacrificing/Lost Identity	2	.08	8%
No Fears	2	.08	8%
Wrong Time/Right Person	1	.04	4%
Won’t Find Love Again	1	.04	4%
the Unknown	1	.04	4%
TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	25		

\*Percentages do not total 100% because some participants provided multiple responses.

The number one reported fear from Millennials in this study is experiencing unreciprocated love or the loss of love from their romantic partner. Sophia shared:

[My greatest fear is] that he won't love me as much as I love him or that he'll leave me. If we get really close and I show him the really vulnerable, raw parts of myself that he is not going to like me or love me in the same way he did when we first met or that he'll only like what is on the surface and not what is at the depths of my being.

Millennials in this study secondary responses is the fear of deception or of being used, or experiencing a broken heart. Scarlett spoke to the fear of experiencing pain through heartache, “Being hurt. It sucks to be hurt. In the end a lot of growth comes from hurting and they can end up being positive, but no one wants to go through it.”

These findings also support research that shows that Millennials are waiting to marry, or are choosing not to marry at all. The fact that many Millennials grow up with divorced parents or parents with dysfunctional marriages may spur their wanting to avoid ‘the marriage trap’ or going through the pains of divorce or dysfunction, as experienced by their parents. These fears also may suggest why Millennials are delaying marriage, hoping that when they do marry, it will last. This being the case, it stands to reason that the fear of unreciprocated love and loss as witnessed through their parents maybe threatening or unnerving to Millennials. Kai also speaks to her struggle being enrolled in the idea of getting married:

My parents are divorced as are the parents of my partner. His father, in particular, has been through a series of unsuccessful marriages, on number 5 right now. It has been an example to us for what we don't want and that has influenced the fact that we have been together for almost a decade and that in many people's minds would mean the next step in a relationship - living together, or getting engaged, getting married, having kids, buying a house together - whatever that next step typically is, we haven't done that because we have seen both of our parents not have successful marriages. That recently has been more of a defining influence in our relationship.

Mirroring dysfunctional relationship patterns is also a possible reason why Millennials who have already taken the plunge into marriage are facing higher rates of divorce. Gianna reflected upon why her marriage failed:

My dad love my mom so much and she always wanted more - he was never enough. She treated him like shit. Which is actually why I walked away from my first marriage, I was very mean to my first husband. My mom never appreciated anything. She would stay out all night dancing and he would just be there. He drowned his pain in alcohol. My first relationship mirrored my parent's relationship.

Research Question 11:

What are Millennials' hopes for their futures regarding romantic love?

Findings:

Responses to this research question showed that 44% (n = 11) of the participants in this study wanted their current relationship to continue and flourish and 40% (n = 10) wanted to find the "right partner" to be in a relationship where they could experience reciprocated love.

Twenty-four percent (n = 6) of participants want to trust the relationship process and make healthy relationship choices for themselves in the future. While 20% (n = 5) of the participants are already married, only 12% (n = 3) of the remaining participants reported that they wish to be married in the future. Sixteen percent (n=4) of the participants already have children, while only 16% (n=4) of the participants reported that they would like to have children in the future. See Table 16 for complete distribution.

Table 16. Millennials' Hopes for their Futures Regarding Romantic Love

THEMATIC GROUPING	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	RELATIVE FREQUENCY	PERCENT FREQUENCY
Desire for Current Relationship to Continue to Flourish	11	.44	44%
Will Find "Right Partner"/Reciprocated Love	10	.4	40%
Trust in the Process/Make Healthy Relationship Choices	6	.24	24%
Desire to Have Children	4	.16	16%
Desire to be Married	3	.12	12%
Seeking Happiness	1	.04	4%
Desire for Shared Passion	1	.04	4%
No Hope for Romantic Love	1	.04	4%
TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	25		

\*Percentages do not total 100% because some participants provided multiple responses.

Participants in this study had many hopes for the future regarding relationships they were currently in and relationships that they hoped to have. Riley remarked that, "I hope that I continue to be in a relationship that fosters openness and adventure and exploration and passion and that I not stay in a relationship that in any way limits me." Makayla spoke to her hopes regarding romantic love and the example she would like to set for others:

That [my wife and I] can be an example for our kids and that we continue to be inspiring for other people. Romantic love exists, it's real, it's not fake, and you can have this kind of love. I want my kids to say, "Look how much mom and mom love each other - I want that, I want someone to love me like that." I want them to feel deserving of that kind of love.

Millennials in this study are similar to other Millennials. Research shows that Millennials have the lowest rates of marriage by age 40 compared to any previous generation, and that more than 30% of Millennial women will remain unmarried by age 40, which is nearly twice the share of their Gen X counterparts (Urban Institute Report; Pew Research Center, 2012). Thirty-three percent of Millennials report a successful marriage as important to their long-term happiness but do not feel the need to rush into it. Millennials are delaying marriage and childrearing, taking time to get it right. In fact, some onlookers may call Millennials “the frozen egg generation” because they actively choose to delay childrearing. Only 16% (n = 4) of the Millennials in my study reported that wish to have children. When asked about hopes for the future, Camila that, “I don't know if I have any hopes, mainly because my goal is not to live behind a white picket fence and have three little kids. At one point I might want that, but it isn't a priority right now.” This sentiment is shared among many in the Millennial Generation.

My findings also compare to Kasperkevic (2014) findings that the majority of Millennials (66%) *do* plan to marry at some point in the future; 22% reported that marriage *might* be in their future; and only 12% reported *not* planning to marry at all. One participant stated, “... so instead of having the ‘goal’ to be marriage, I’d rather focus more on building a successful, stable and honest relationship first. Millennials in my study also compare to Dr. Stewart Friedman, Management Professor at Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, research on Millennials. Alcorn (2014) refers to Friedman’s 2012 study where he found that the percentage of Millennials who plan to have children has decreased from 78% to 42% in twenty years.

## Summary of Findings

Findings from my study suggests that the Millennial generation is forging a distinctively different pathway from the older generations in areas related to social media, marriage and commitment, children, religious fidelity, social attitudes towards race, gender, and sexual orientation, and expressions of love and courtship. Millennials are today's most diverse generation; and are proving to be in many ways different from older adults when they were the age of today's Millennial Generation.

Findings from this study also address the Millennials as the "Me Generation" and their resistance to giving up one's freedom and independence to dedicate their life to a partner. Findings from the participants in my study also addressed the major social and cultural influences on their romantic relationships, including how they both learned to love and how they define romantic love, in addition to their fears and goals for the future, specifically with regard to the impact that social media has had on Millennials and the way that it has shaped their understanding and experience of romantic love.



## CHAPTER V

### Discussion

The objective of this qualitative study was to explore how the Millennial Generation understands how they learned to love, how they define and experience romantic love in the present, and what their fears and hopes are for romantic love in the future. Twenty-five Millennials, ages 22-33 years old, from diverse backgrounds and life experiences participated in interviews for this research study. This chapter reviews the findings in the following order: 1) Key Findings; 2) Limitations; and 3) Implications and Conclusions.

#### Findings in Relation to Current Research

Findings from my study largely validate current literature regarding the Millennials Generation. Not only does my study, but also previous studies, clearly show that Millennials will have a profound impact on American family life moving forward. There are distinct differences between the Millennials Generation and our grand and great-grandparents. These differences are seen in attitudes towards romantic love, marriage, gender, politics and diversity. And while there are distinct differences between the generations, there are some similarities. The challenge for clinicians, practitioners, educators and social institutions within our society will be to accommodate these differences so that Millennials and families will have the support they need to be successful within their social context.

Does romantic love even exist within the Millennial Generation? Participants posed this question time and time again as we discussed the topic of this study. While some of the participants sincerely answered yes to this question, many of the participants laughed out loud in skepticism. Javier laments:

I don't think that people have romantic love [in my generation], they are too selfish and self centered. There is a huge difference in how people use to see love. People would to commit to each other no matter what. But now people are too self centered and narcissistic. They just think about themselves, not the person next to them. They just want to shop around. They see one flaw in one person and then they are ready to move on to the next person. It's not really love. They don't believe in love. It is a much more selfish generation.

Sixty percent (n=15) of participants argued that Millennials only know how to foster a transient love that is conditional, gratification focused, and superficial. Sophia stated, "I feel that we live in a hook up culture and not a culture of romantic love." Kayaan spoke to the shift in priorities for Millennials and how this shift in priorities has impacted their experience of romantic love, "Now life is very career oriented and love has to fit like a puzzle. People go after what fits nicely in their lifestyles - they don't go after love." This is a viewpoint that can also be found within current literature, For example, bell hooks (2001) wrote, "Youth culture today is cynical about love. And that cynicism has come from their pervasive feeling that love cannot be found" (p.xviii). There are a plethora of articles that talk about the individualistic nature of the Millennial Generation, whose focus appears to have shifted away from a romantic partnership mentality to one of personal growth and development. Ironically, even though the majority of participants in this study argued that Millennials do not truly participate in romantic love

relationships, 96% (n=24) of Millennials vocalized that they do have hopes and dreams for their futures of fostering romantic love relationships. Findings indicate that there is a discord between how Millennials romanticize about love relationships versus how they experience them.

Expected findings were the link between the ways that Millennials were raised by their primary childhood caregivers, observation of caregiver relationships and the types of relationships that Millennials either foster or avoid as adults. Only 48% percent (n=12) of the participants reported that their father played a significant role in raising them. None of the participants reported that they were raised by two same-sex parents, which suggests that the remaining 52% were either raised by a single mother and/or that their father figure was either emotionally or physically unavailable throughout their childhood. Many Millennials in this study grew up in single-parent households, which impacted the way that romantic relationships were modeled for them, and how they experience romantic relationships as adults. This is similar to Tessina's (2008) findings that Millennial attitudes about romantic relationships may be related to their few models of healthy relationships. She states, "many Millennials have grown up in divorced or single parent households, so they have little experience of what good marriages look like" (p.1). Consequentially, this has impacted Millennials' views of romantic love and both the fears and hopes that they have for their future romantic love relationships.

Many participants reported that they felt inspired by their mothers who served as their primary caregivers. Camila remarked, "I grew up in a very matriarchal household. My mom was a single parent, so I didn't come from a traditional mother/father household, but she knew how to keep me safe and she knew how to keep me happy. And I knew that I wanted those qualities in a partner." Many of the Millennials who grew up in single mother households felt empowered by watching their mothers break out of the traditional binary gender roles box, which both provided

them with a sense of their own ability to survive/thrive independently, in addition to what qualities they are looking for in a potential romantic partner, based on love and respect, in lieu of seeking out someone to provide economic security. This could also be a contributing factor to the ambivalence that many Millennials feel about participating in the institution of marriage and their goals for their futures related to love.

Both male and female participants in this study acknowledged the shift towards equality for women both in the work force and within the role they play in intimate relationships. Women in the Millennial Generation were raised by a wave of feminists who fought tirelessly to afford future generations equal footing, and Millennials are the direct beneficiaries of this movement. Conflicted feelings also transpired as the messages that Millennial women received from their mother's was not always synchronized with what they modeled, which in turn created a sense of shame and confusion. Riley poignantly stated,

One thing that I have noticed for my friends and me is that our mothers were 2nd wave feminists, but who got married very young and whose lives were build around partnership. My mother encouraged a narrative of 'don't get married until you are over 30, you won't know who you truly are and you have to be independent' while demonstrating something very different. It made me second-guess any desire I had to merge with another person; actually I was divisive and critical of myself when I had that desire. I think that is true for my family and true for many of the women that I am friends with. That likely plays some part in prioritizing our professional careers or feeling conflicted about feeling too boy crazy or all of the ways that we are cruel to ourselves about our desire for romantic love.

Findings indicate that the Millennial Generation is breaking with tradition and redefining gender and partner roles for themselves; however, this is not an easy process, as Millennials still battle with the hardwiring instilled in them by older generations. Oliver remarked, “[The Millennial Generation is] starting to debundle some of the responsibilities of a romantic partner that have traditionally existed and we are starting to get into decouple some of the traditional roles of a partnership.” Whether the message is to get married as soon as possible or to rebel against the system, Millennials are fighting to forge their own path to romantic love relationships.

The Pew Research Center (2014) states that, “The Millennial Generation is forging a distinctive path into adulthood” (Millennials in Adulthood, para. 1). According to the Pew Research Center, Millennials are the most diverse generation of our society, and the most liberal when it comes to politics, social issues and religious disaffiliation. Sixty-four percent (n=16) of participants reported that they are actively and consciously diverging away from their cultural heritage. With this breaking away from tradition and deeply rooted cultural norms, Millennials are forced to redefine who they are, what kind of relationships they desire, and how they want to fit into the world. As Millennials trail blaze a new path to romantic love relationships, they are afforded the opportunity to reprioritize what they deem most important to their interpersonal relationships and their individual goals. In a study carried out with 536 young adults between the ages of 18-29, Wang and Taylor (2011) found that, “67% of Millennials say that happiness is not related to whether you are single or married.” Scarlett spoke to the Millennial Generation’s drive for emotional fulfillment, even at the expense of parting ways with romantic relationships:

My generation is more open minded and experimental. We are not afraid to go out on a limb and be different. In my parents generation are in that husband/wife cookie cutter

mindset, you hide your affairs, and go on with your "happy life". My generation would rather be happy and alone, than be in a dysfunctional relationship.

Findings from this study indicate that self-actualization is an overarching goal of the Millennial Generation; and while some Millennials are able to reach this level of gratification, emotional satisfaction and personal development within a romantic partnership, is in no way the only means for achieving this goal.

### Unexpected Findings

One unexpected finding was the number of participants who reported stressed relationships with primary caregivers as children who also fell within the secure attachment quadrant with regards to their adult attachment style on the Experiences in Close Relationships - Revised Questionnaire (ECR-R). Thirty-six percent (n=9) of the participants reported that they experienced their relationships with their early childhood caregivers to be laden with neglect, trauma, emotional unavailability, and/or marked by an absence of love. Of these nine participants, only one of them fell within the preoccupied attachment style quadrant according to the ECR-R. Eight of the nine participants (89%) scored within the range of a secure adult romantic attachment. Similarly 40% (n=10) of the participants reported that they repeat negative behaviors and dysfunctional relationship patterns that have been hardwired into them from their childhood caregivers in their adult romantic relationships. However, 70% (n=7) of these 10 participants scored within the range of a secure attachment style based on the ERC-R.

There are two plausible explanations as to why there is discord between those who experienced dysfunctional relationships with their early childhood caregivers and/or continue to experience dysfunctional relationship patterns/behaviors in their adult romantic relationships, yet

scored within the range of the secure attachment quadrant of adult romantic relationships: 1) There is a high level of natural resiliency present within the participants who reported that they experienced trauma, neglect, and emotional unavailability and those that continue to repeat dysfunctional patterns in their adult romantic relationships; and 2) Self-reporting questionnaires do not ensure accurate results due to the fact that participants' recollections and memories are sometimes distorted by time and or personal objectivity. Many participants reported finding it difficult to fill out the questionnaire because they found themselves vacillating between how they perceive themselves to be in general and how they are in their current relationships.

Most literature is consistent with Gleeson and Fitzgerald (2014) who noted that, "As a result of these early interactions, the child develops mental representations or internal working models of attachment which act as a guide for perceptions and behaviours in subsequent relationships" (p. 644). While it is expected for those who had less optimal attachments with their childhood caregivers to report that they also struggle to break these negative behaviors and patterns as adults, it is not expected for the vast majority of these people to also be categorized as having a secure attachment style as adults. Davies (2011) states that, "Adults whose working models reflected insecure attachments generally felt less positive about attachment relationships, tended to deny the influences of attachment experiences on their personality, and did not seem objective in their descriptions" (p.26). However, this statement proves contrary to the data collected throughout the interview process, as participants were so open and honest about negative aspects of their relationships with early childhood caregivers as evidenced by their responses to the interview questions. Based on this unexpected finding, further research on resiliency and the Millennials Generation is indicated to further explore this topic specifically.

Another unexpected finding pertains to participants who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, or questioning (LGBTQQ) and their experience with romantic love relationships as adults. LGBTQQ Millennials in this study were raised by a generation who, generally speaking, were not as openly accepting or loving towards people who engaged in same-sex partnerships in comparison to the newest wave of parents and guardians. Lucas spoke to the relational set back they experienced growing up gay, "Growing up gay/bisexual, you had to hide it. It's not like with straight people. They start dating when they are young and they grow into being a good [romantic] partner. When you're gay, you have to hide it. You're 'online' getting off all the time and then you get older without that [romantic partnership] experience. [Some gay] people aren't use to having relationships, so it is hard to find someone who actually wants to date and if they do, do they even know how?" Makayla shared her view that being in a gay relationship is a revolutionary act in and of itself,

My mom doesn't validate my idea of love. It's not real to her. It is a revolutionary act to be in this relationship with [my wife]. For us to just be... for us to just exist together ...and become a fuller family unit means that we are winning the war.

Alaina reflects upon the lack of community support, both as she was growing up and in her current daily life,

My community was not accepting of me dating girls. We live in New York City - probably one of the most openly gayest places in the world and in 2014, I am still given the side-eye because of who I am with - what kind of partner I have. It is still not culturally accepted.



The majority of this data reflects Millennials at the older end of the spectrum (ages 28+). On the younger end of the spectrum, Mia reflected upon her unique experience growing up in a liberal urban setting,

I went to LGBT family camp growing up with my parents. My two best friends in elementary school had two moms. I was the weird one with two straight parents. I've never experienced almost any homophobia, except in other parts of the country when I was older.

Younger Millennials are growing up in a much “gay friendlier” society which is moving towards equal civil rights for the LGBTQQ community as the sociopolitical climate shifts to be more just and inclusive in its policies and attitudes in 2015. As a result, there is great variance even within the age bracket of the Millennial Generation regarding their experience growing up gay, their perception of their place in the world, and how they experience romantic love relationships. More research is indicated to further explore social and cultural shifts within the Millennial Generation as it pertains to the LGBTQQ experience of coming out, social acceptance, and direct impact on the experience of interpersonal romantic love relationships.

### Strengths and Limitations

Issues of bias include my own personal opinion of the Millennial Generation, as I am also a card-carrying member. I view the world of love through the lens of an older generation Millennial and found that throughout the interview process I could heavily relate to participants' responses to the interview questions. I had to be mindful of my own personal bias while writing the findings of the data collected as to accurately reflect what the majority or minority of the participants felt, in lieu of interjecting my own personal opinion as a Millennial. Another

potential bias to consider would be composition of the study pool itself and my personal connection to the participants interviewed. Posts on my personal Facebook page recruited many of the study pool. This may suggest that a personal and or professional relationship was present among some of the participants in the research pool, and would account for some of the openness and frank disclosures during the interviews and potential protectiveness in taking the ECR-R. I reference here the unexpected finding regarding the number of participants who reported stressed relationships with primary caregivers as children but fell within the secure attachment quadrant with regards to their adult attachment style on the Experiences in Close Relationships - Revised Questionnaire (ECR-R). I also am aware however that my previously developed rapport with each of the participants in this study served as an asset in constructing a comfortable and supportive interviewing environment, but it is also possible that my relationship with some of the participants did impact the information that they chose to share during the interview process.

Another limitation is the exclusion of Millennials who do not engage on social media. All participants in this study were active on social media. Taking into consideration that one of the findings was the strong influence that social media has on the Millennial Generation. Millennials who do not engage on Facebook would not have had access to the marketing that was done to recruit participants for my study since my marketing consisted of only two Facebook posts on my personal page.

Another limitation of this study could be the type of participant that was recruited by default from my friend's list on Facebook. Generally speaking, I tend to be friends with socially conscious, introspective, liberal, free spirited people, which may have framed those that elected to participate in this study, and subsequently influence the study's findings. This is not to say that all of the participants fit this profile; in fact, it is quite possible that many of the participants

stand somewhere on the opposite end or somewhere in the middle of this spectrum of personalities, social justice activism, and political beliefs. Nevertheless, given the nature of how and where the participants were recruited, it is definitely a limitation of this study.

One major strength of my study was the diversity present in the sample of participants: 32% (n = 8) of participants were between 22 – 25 years old; 36% (n = 9) were between 26 – 29 years old; and 32% (n = 8) were between 30 – 33 years old; forty-eight percent (n = 12) were males and 52% (n = 13) were females; 60% (n=15) of the participants identified as straight, 36% (n=9) as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, or questioning, and 4% (n=1) did not have a sexual orientation identifying label; race was more widely distributed with Blacks (20%, n = 5), White (24%, n = 6), Hispanic (20%, n = 5), Asian (12%, n = 3), Native American (4%, n = 1), and Bi/Multiracial (20%, n = 5); 52% (n=13) of the participants were either foreign-born (n=6) or second-generation citizens (n=7). Even though my sample is rich in diversity, a sample of 25 is a small number to be applied to the general Millennial population. A much larger sample is required for generalizability to the larger generation of Millennials, even though the majority of this study's findings are consistent with recent literature on Millennials and how they form and foster romantic relationships.

This study holds significant relevance for social work practice specific to mental health practitioners who work with young adults from the Millennial Generation in a therapeutic setting. Better understanding the Millennial Generation and how they define/experience love will impact the depth of work that clinicians are able to achieve while working with a Millennial, in addition to making the clinician more relatable to the Millennial Generation. Gleeson and Fitzgerald (2014) report that:

Romantic relationships are failing at an alarming rate as evident with the dramatic increases in the rates of single- parent families, separation, divorce, as well as relationship violence. Furthermore, dissatisfaction within relationships can lead to stress and to the development of clinical problems. Therefore, such research has important practical applications for family therapy and clinical psychology for the Millennial generation” (p.1646).

The Millennial Generation is unlike any generation that has preceded it and clinicians must be ready and open to meet Millennials where they are according to their sociocultural location. The Pew Research Center (2014) describes Millennials as the most racially diverse generation in our society, and the most liberal when it comes to politics, social issues and religious disaffiliation. This is critical background information for mental health practitioners to have while working with this distinct generation.

### Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore how Millennials believe that their capacity for love developed, how they define and experience romantic love in the present, and what their fears and hopes are for romantic love in the future. Findings in this study point to the complex nature of romantic love and the social and cultural shift that is suggested to be present within the Millennial Generation with regards to how they define, experience, and desire romantic relationships. The Millennial Generation is forging their own path to interpersonal romantic love relationships, redefining partnership roles, and challenging antiquated cultural norms that currently serve as barriers to equality, success, and happiness within relationships. Millennials find themselves in a juxtaposition of battling the traditional path to romantic love relationships as

defined by their parents and grandparents (i.e. marriage and children), yet still deeply desire romantic love connections.

There is an overarching air of cynicism that hovers over the Millennial Generation's idea and experience of love. Many argue that perhaps this generation of young adults is too narcissistic to build authentic romantic love relationships with other people, while others contend that Millennials have higher standards for love and are unwilling to compromise, because they are seeking soul mate connections with partners to fulfill a deeper, emotional need. Regardless of how Millennials experience love in the present, findings from this study concluded that the vast majority of Millennials desire romantic love and want to work towards manifesting their hopes and dreams for the future into a reality, shifting the tide of what a socially acceptable relationship looks and feels like.

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Appendix A

HSR Approval Letter



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School for Social Work  
Smith College  
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063  
T (413) 585-7950 F (413) 585-7994

November 15, 2014

Kate McGuire

Dear Kate,

You did a very nice job on your revisions. Your project is now approved by the Human Subjects Review Committee.

*Please note the following requirements:*

Consent Forms: All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

Maintaining Data: You must retain all data and other documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

*In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:*

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

Renewal: You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

Completion: You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

Congratulations and our best wishes on your interesting study.  
Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elaine Kersten'.

Elaine Kersten, Ed.D.  
Co-Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee  
CC: Narviar Barker, Research Advisor



Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

Consent to Participate in a Research Study  
Smith College School for Social Work

.....  
Title of Study: Millennials' Perceptions of How Their Capacity for Romantic Love Developed and Manifests

\*For the purpose of this study Millennials are defined as young adults born between 1981 and 1993.

Investigator: Kate McGuire, Smith College School for Social Work MSW Candidate  
.....

Introduction

- You are being asked to be in a research study of romantic love.
- You were selected as a possible participant because you demonstrated interest in participating and are between the ages of 21-33 years old.
- I ask that you read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Purpose of Study

- The purpose of the study is explore your relationship with love, how you learned to love, how you currently experience romantic love, and what your hopes are for the future regarding romantic love relationships.
- This study is being conducted as a research requirement for my master's in social work degree.
- Ultimately, this research may be published or presented at professional conferences.

Description of the Study Procedures

- If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following things: Be interviewed individually by the researcher for 30-45 minutes in person or via Skype call. The interview will include a short demographic questionnaire, the Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-R) Questionnaire, and 11 narrative interview questions. The interview will be audio recorded.

Risks/Discomforts of Being in this Study

- The study has little foreseeable risk but I will be asking you to discuss events from your childhood, which may bring painful memories. Feel free to decline to answer any question, or even end the interview early if the discussion causes you discomfort. I will provide you a list of follow-up supports in the area.

Benefits of Being in the Study

- The benefits of participation are having an opportunity to talk about your experience and possibly gaining insights into your experience of romantic love, reflecting upon how you came to love, and analyzing what kind of romantic love you would like to manifest in your life.
- The benefits to social work/society are: to provide therapists with greater insight into the Millennial Generation, impacting the way that they provide therapeutic services to better connect with and serve the Millennial population.

Confidentiality

· Your information will be kept confidential. The researcher will be the only person who will know about your participation. In person interview will take place at a library or at a quiet local coffee shop or another public place of your choice that provides privacy. Skype interviews will take place in the privacy of my own home and the location of your choosing. *In addition, the records of this study will be kept strictly confidential. I will be the only one who will have access to the audio recording, with the exception of a potential transcriber, who will sign a confidentiality agreement. Recordings will be destroyed after the mandated three years. They will be permanently deleted from the recording device.*

· All research materials including recordings, transcriptions, analyses and consent/assent documents will be stored in a secure location for three years according to federal regulations. In the event that materials are needed beyond this period, they will be kept secured until no longer needed, and then destroyed. All electronically stored data will be password protected during the storage period. I will not include any information in any report I may publish that would make it possible to identify you.

Payments/gift

· You will not receive any financial payment for your participation.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw

· The decision to participate in this study is entirely up to you. You may refuse to take part in the study *at any time* up to April 1, 2014 without affecting your relationship with the researcher of this study or Smith College. Your decision to refuse will not result in any loss of benefits (including access to services) to which you are otherwise entitled. You have the right not to answer any single question, as well as to withdraw completely up to the point noted below. If you choose to withdraw, I will not use any of your information collected for this study. You must notify me of your decision to withdraw by email or phone by April 1, 2014. After that date, your information will be part of the thesis and final report.

Right to Ask Questions and Report Concerns

· You have the right to ask questions about this research study and to have those questions answered by me before, during or after the research. If you have any further questions about the study, at any time feel free to contact me, ~~XXX-XXX-XXXX~~ or email me at [kmcguire@smith.edu](mailto:kmcguire@smith.edu). If you would like a summary of the study results, one will be sent to you once the study is completed. If you have any other concerns about your rights as a research participant, or if you have any problems as a result of your participation, you may contact the Chair of the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Committee at (413) 585-7974.

Consent

· Your signature below indicates that you have decided to volunteer as a research participant for this study, and that you have read and understood the information provided above. You will be given a signed and dated copy of this form to keep. You will also be given a list of referrals and access information if you experience emotional issues related to your participation in this study

.....  
Name of Participant (print): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Researcher(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C

### Marketing on Facebook

Let's talk about LOVE...

I am writing my Master of Social Work thesis on romantic love and I need your support! I am looking for a diverse group of participants to interview about their personal experience with romantic love.

Title of my thesis: Millennials' Perceptions of How Their Capacity for Romantic Love Developed and Manifests

\*For the purpose of this study Millennials are defined as young adults born between 1981 and 1993.

Who: Adults ages 21-33 (15 people will be randomly selected)

What: Interview on Romantic Love

Where: In person or via Skype

When: November - December

Time Commitment: 45 minutes or less

Contact: Message Kate McGuire via Facebook ([www.facebook.com/katedmcg](http://www.facebook.com/katedmcg)) or email ([kmcguire@smith.edu](mailto:kmcguire@smith.edu))

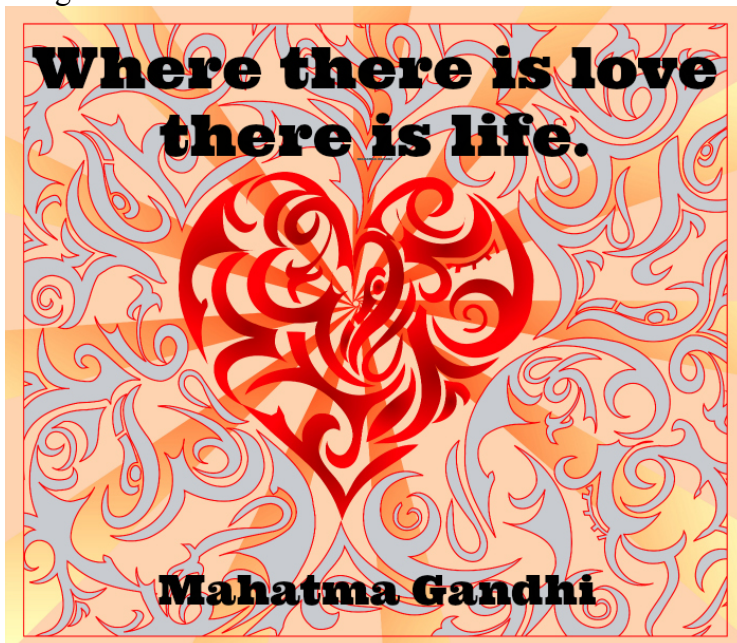
It would be an honor to hear about your journey with love from childhood to adulthood, exploring your greatest fears and future hopes. I genuinely hope to hear from you. If you are willing, please spread the word!

NOTE: I will be posting three to six times to recruit participants. In each post, the text will remain the same; however, I will change the picture that will accompany the text. The images used will be any of the images listed below, or images that are very similar to the examples provided.

Image #1:



Image #2:



## Appendix D

### Demographic Questionnaire

1. Date of birth
2. Sex
3. Identified gender: male, female, transgender, gender queer, other
4. Sexual orientation: LGBTQQ, heterosexual, other
5. Race: White (non-Hispanic), White (Hispanic), Black, Asian, Native American, biracial/multiracial or other \*Note: Can check more than one race.
6. Ethnicity
7. Current country of residence
8. Born and/or raised in a country other than the one in which you currently reside
9. Relationship status: single, married, divorced, separated
10. Currently involved in a romantic relationship/s? (yes/no)
11. Have been involved in a romantic love relationship in the past? (yes/no)
12. Length of longest relationship: under 1 year, 1-5 years, 5+ years

## Appendix E

### Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (EC-R Questionnaire)

1. I'm afraid that I will lose my partner's love.
2. I often worry that my partner will not want to stay with me.
3. I often worry that my partner doesn't really love me.
4. I worry that romantic partners won't care about me as much as I care about them.
5. I often wish that my partner's feelings for me were as strong as my feelings for him or her.
6. I worry a lot about my relationships.
7. When my partner is out of sight, I worry that he or she might become interested in someone else.
8. When I show my feelings for romantic partners, I'm afraid they will not feel the same about me.
9. I rarely worry about my partner leaving me.
10. My romantic partner makes me doubt myself.
11. I do not often worry about being abandoned.
12. I find that my partner(s) don't want to get as close as I would like.
13. Sometimes romantic partners change their feelings about me for no apparent reason.
14. My desire to be very close sometimes scares people away.
15. I'm afraid that once a romantic partner gets to know me, he or she won't like who I really am.
16. It makes me mad that I don't get the affection and support I need from my partner.
17. I worry that I won't measure up to other people.
18. My partner only seems to notice me when I'm angry.
19. I prefer not to show a partner how I feel deep down.
20. I feel comfortable sharing my private thoughts and feelings with my partner.
21. I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on romantic partners.
22. I am very comfortable being close to romantic partners.
23. I don't feel comfortable opening up to romantic partners.
24. I prefer not to be too close to romantic partners.
25. I get uncomfortable when a romantic partner wants to be very close.
26. I find it relatively easy to get close to my partner.
27. It's not difficult for me to get close to my partner.
28. I usually discuss my problems and concerns with my partner.
29. It helps to turn to my romantic partner in times of need.
30. I tell my partner just about everything.
31. I talk things over with my partner.
32. I am nervous when partners get too close to me.
33. I feel comfortable depending on romantic partners.
34. I find it easy to depend on romantic partners.
35. It's easy for me to be affectionate with my partner.
36. My partner really understands me and my needs.

## Appendix F

### Interview Questions

#### Definition and Experience of Romantic Love:

1. How do you define romantic love?
2. How do you know when you are in love? (Follow-up: What does love feel like?)

#### Early Child Experiences, Influences, & Impacts:

3. How did you learn to love?
4. Who are the top two people who played a significant role in raising you?  
Follow-up: Tell me about your relationship with these people when you were a child.
5. How has your relationship with your parents/guardians influenced how you experience romantic love as an adult?

#### Social, Cultural, & Generational Influences/Differences:

6. What are the social influences that have impacted the way that you view romantic love? (Social media - Facebook, dating sites, social movements, etc.)
7. What are the cultural influences that have impacted the way that you view romantic love? (Traditions, cultural norms that may either align or conflict with your view of romantic love, etc.)
8. How do you think that your generation defines romantic love differently than older generations?

#### Components of Romantic Love, Greatest Fears, & Future Hopes:

9. What are the most important components of a romantic love relationship? (i.e. intimacy, sex, marriage, kids, etc.)
10. What are your greatest fears regarding romantic love?
11. What are your hopes for your future regarding romantic love?