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**“WITH LOVE, FROM ME TO YOU”: THE IMPACT OF LOVE STORIES
HEARD ON LOVE STORIES LIVED**

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

PSYCHOLOGY

by

Lauren A. Shapiro

March 2013

The Dissertation of Lauren A. Shapiro is
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Abstract

“With Love, From Me to You”: The Impact of Love Stories Heard on Love Stories Lived

Lauren A. Shapiro

This study compared how newlyweds whose parents were either married (NMs) or divorced (NDs) incorporated lessons learned from others' love stories into their own decision to marry. Fifty-six newlyweds (37 NMs, 19 NDs) were interviewed about their decision to marry, their parents' love story, their peers' love stories, and other love stories that influenced them, such as novels and other media. Responses were coded for the source of influential love stories, lessons learned from these stories, themes of parents' love stories and their direction of influence, and own marriage decision rationale. NDs were less likely than NMs to report being influenced by parents' love stories, more likely to be negatively influenced by parents' love stories, more likely to view such stories as practical rather than romantic, and more likely to marry for romantic than practical reasons. Otherwise, the two groups did not differ with regard to the lessons they learned from others' love stories or the reasons they provided for deciding to marry. The findings suggest that regardless of parents' marital status, young adults reconcile multiple and often contradictory models of romantic relationships when making the decision to marry.

Keywords: Stories, romantic relationships, children of divorce, marriage decision, media

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“With Love, From Me to You”: The Impact of Love Stories Heard on Love Stories Lived

He had come to the conclusion that he could not live without her, he wrote. He believed that he knew her, and could give her happiness, and that their marriage would be unlike other marriages...Katharine, as she read the pages through again, could see in what direction her feelings ought to flow, supposing they revealed themselves. She would come to feel a humorous sort of tenderness for him, a zealous care for his susceptibilities, and, after all, she considered, thinking of her father and mother, what is love?

– Virginia Woolf, *Night and Day*, p. 86

The decision to marry is one of the most important decisions that individuals make in their lives. Surprisingly little is known, however, about how people arrive at this decision. When making decisions, people generally have been found to be guided by the outcomes of their past experiences (Carnelley & Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Schwarz et al, 1991; Tooby & Cosmides, 1990). Obviously, people who are deciding to marry for the first time do not have this luxury, but they do have knowledge about the outcomes of other people’s decisions as transmitted through other available love stories.

Stories are a good vehicle for transmitting knowledge about decisions because stories are about the “vicissitudes of human intentions” (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 17). Stories are about people with goals who meet with unexpected consequences and experience particular emotions (Bruner, 1986). Furthermore, these emotions may not only be experienced by the storyteller, but also by the audience (Barsalou, 2008; Gibbs, 2003; Matlock, 2004; Oatley, 1999; Pulvermüller, Härle, and Hummel, 2001).

When people hear stories, they tend to put themselves in the storytellers' shoes, thereby gaining a glimpse into the consequences of actions without having to perform the action themselves. In this way, others' love stories can potentially guide one's own decision to marry.

Young adults whose parents are divorced may not be able to rely on their parents' love story as a guide for how to proceed in romantic relationships because their parents' story may offer a bleak view of romance and marriage. Indeed, presumably because of the dissolution of their parents' relationship, young adults whose parents are divorced are more likely than young adults whose parents are married to struggle with trust and commitment (Booth, Brinkerhoff, & White, 1984; Jacquet & Surra, 2001; Franklin, Janoff-Bulman, & Roberts, 1990; Johnston & Thomas, 1996; Ross & Mirowsky, 1999; Sprague & Kinney, 1997; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989), have a more pessimistic view of marriage in general (Amato, 1988; Boyer-Pennington et al., 2001; Burgoyne & Hames, 2002; Duran-Aydintung, 1997; Mahl, 2001), and believe that their marriage in particular will end in failure (Boyer-Pennington, Pennington, & Spink, 2001).

Despite these bleak views of marriage, young adults from divorced families are just as likely as those from married families to say that they would like to get married (Booth et al., 1984; Boyer Pennington et al., 2001; Burgoyne & Hames, 2002). To whose love stories, then, do young adults with divorced parents turn when they are deciding to get married? What are the sources, lessons, and themes of their

reportedly influential love stories, and how are these sources, lessons, and themes similar and different from those of young adults whose parents are married? The present study collected and analyzed interviews with newlyweds to explore precisely these questions, each of which is discussed in turn.

- 1) Are newlyweds whose parents are divorced (NDs) and newlyweds whose parents are married (NMs) reportedly influenced by love stories from different sources?
- 2) What kinds of lessons does each group learn from the love stories that they hear from these sources? Do the lessons learned differ by source, or do the two groups learn different lessons from the same sources?
- 3) Do the love stories that NMs and NDs report hearing from their parents have different themes?
- 4) Do these parental love stories impact NMs and NDs in different ways?
- 5) Do the two groups decide to marry for different reasons?

Sources of Influence on Romantic Relationship Development

The three major sources that have been found to shape romantic relationship development are parents, peers, and the media. Parents have been found to influence their child's romantic relationship development both by modeling parental relational dynamics that children observe (Dadds et al., 1999; Feldman et al., 1999; Reese-Weber & Marchand, 2002; Sanders et al., 1999) and by helping their child to form expectations about relationships and their role in them through direct interactions

with the child (Bowlby, 1969; 1973; 1980; Feeney, Noller, & Patty, 1993; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Roisman et al., 2005). Peers have been theorized to influence romantic relationship development by providing a space within which adolescents can practice participating in an intimate relationship (Sullivan, 1953). In addition, peers have been found to shape romantic relationships by creating opportunities for adolescents to meet potential romantic partners (Dunphy, 1963) and by providing cues for when and with whom it is appropriate to initiate romantic relationships (Brown, 1999; Dornbusch et al., 1981; Feiring, 1996; Roscoe et al., 1987). Lastly, the media has been argued to influence romantic relationship development not only by offering a model for viewers to imitate, but also by shaping viewers' perspectives of what is to be expected in romantic relationships (Gerbner et al., 1994). In support of these views, adolescents' expectations for and behaviors in romantic relationships have been found to more closely approximate those portrayed in the media with increased media consumption. For example, young adults who reported watching or liking romantically themed TV programming were more likely than other young adults to endorse the types of dysfunctional relationship beliefs that are commonly portrayed in the media (e.g. "people should be able to read each others' minds") and to report intentions to enact behaviors consistent with those portrayed in the media, such as intentions to marry within the next 5 years, marry for love, and stick to one marriage for life (Haferkamp, 1999; Holmes, 2007; Johnson & Holmes, 2009; Segrin and Nabi, 2002; Shapiro & Kroeger, 1991).

How NMs and NDs might report being differentially influenced by these three sources, however, remains unexplored. Prior research indicates that at least in the case of parents, the relative influence of this source of love stories might differ because young adults with divorced parents have been found to have more strained relationships with their parents (Amato, 1987; Furstenberg & Nord, 1985; White, Brinkerhoff & Booth, 1985). For example, in a meta-analysis of 92 studies comparing children from divorced and non-divorced families, Amato and Booth (1991) found that young adults with divorced parents described their relationship with their parents less positively than young adults whose parents were married, characterizing their relationships with their parents as involving less contact and less assistance. In a 20-year follow-up study of 300 divorced and non-divorced families, Heatherington and Kelly (2002) found that whereas 70% of young adults in non-divorced families reported being close to their fathers, this was true of less than 30% of young adults from divorced families. For this reason, NDs might be less likely than NMs to regard their parents' love story as particularly influential. However, because so little is known about how love story sources differ for NMs and NDs, no formal hypothesis was made with regard to which of the three love story sources—parents, peers, or media--each group would view as influential.

Love Lessons Learned from Parents, Peers, and the Media

Similarly, little is known about the kinds of lessons that listeners cull from the love stories of parents, peers, and the media. Numerous studies have analyzed love

stories shared by peers and the media, but these studies have focused on the types of messages transmitted by these sources rather than how these messages were interpreted or taken up by listeners. In general, these studies have found that whereas the media tends to present a one-dimensional vision of love, peers complicate that vision, and little is known about the vision of love offered by parents. I will review below what is known about the types of messages transmitted through love stories from the media, peers, and parents.

Messages from the Media. Content analyses of movies, magazines, and television shows have suggested that the representation of love transmitted by the media is as a one-size-fits-all trajectory. According to this view, everyone has only one partner (a soul mate), falling in love with this partner should occur instantly, and relationships should involve sweeping romance (initiated by men) and culminate in marriage. For example, in her analysis of romantic and sexual content in *Seventeen* magazine issues between the years of 1974-1994, Carpenter (1998) found that across time, pervading themes in the magazine included finding your “one and only,” love at first sight, and true love is everlasting. Similarly, in their analysis of 26 Disney films, Tanner, Haddock, Zimmerman, and Lund (2003) found that 78% of the films depicted love at first sight. Snow White, as they point out, falls in love even without sight (while she is asleep). Only 13% of the films depicted love unfolding over a lengthy period of time. With regard to romance in the relationship, in their analysis of 40 romantic comedy films, Johnson and Holmes (2009) found that men were more likely than women to make sweeping romantic gestures and give compliments. Lastly, in 82% of

the films analyzed by Tanner et al. (2003), couples ended up marrying (often immediately after meeting and falling in love).

Messages from Peers. Studies analyzing how peers converse about romantic relationships suggest that from peers, young adults may be receiving a more nuanced representation of love and romantic relationships. Specifically, studies have indicated that with peers, young adults practice positioning themselves in relation to cultural norms about love (rather than accepting them wholeheartedly). For example, in their interviews with and observations of female adolescents across two years of junior high school, Simon, Eder, and Evans (1992) found that peers alternately dictated and questioned norms regarding how much time and energy to devote to love, what the appropriate channels are for directing love, and what constitutes an acceptable partner to receive this love. Studying young adult heterosexual women, Korobov and Thorne (2009) found that through sharing stories about their romantic relationships, friends wrestled with their feelings about adhering to or resisting three relational scripts: Sentimentality (the extent to which one should idealize one's male partner or relationship), unrequited pursuit (the extent to which one should pursue an uninterested partner), and emotional caretaker (the extent to which one should carry the burden of facilitating emotion work in a relationship). Friends helped each other to strike a balance in expressing these scripts; in addition to speakers tempering their own positions with concessions and qualifications, friends chimed in, for example offering resistance to their friends' compliance in order to encourage their friends. Another indication that from peers young adults may be receiving a more nuanced

view of love is that stories shared about romantic relationships tended to feature relational problems. For example, in an archive of young adults' conversations, own and other peers' romantic relationships were the most frequent story topic, and the majority (80%) of these stories focused on problems in romantic relationships (Korobov & Thorne, 2007).

Messages from Parents. Compared to peers and the media, less is known about the kinds of messages that parents transmit about love. Most studies of parent-child storytelling have focused on young children. It is well documented that parent-child conversations are peppered with stories about the parents' past. For example, Fiese, Hooker, Kotary, Schwagler, and Rimmer (1995) found that even before their children could speak, 96% of the parents in their study reported telling their children stories about their childhood. However, little is known about what kinds of stories parents share about their romantic relationships. Parents do share these stories; a survey sent to the parents of college freshmen found that 86% of parents reported discussing with their children their current spouse, 38% their romantic involvements, and 13% their sex life (Dolgin, 1996). In a longitudinal study examining late adolescents' recollections of conversations with their parents about sex during their first and fourth years of college, Morgan, Thorne, & Zurbriggen (2010) found that by their senior year of college, over half of their participants reported hearing stories from their parents about their sexual or dating relationships. The nature of these stories, however, remains an open question.

In sum, although little is known about what kinds of lessons are learned from love stories heard from the media, peers, and parents, more is known about the types of messages conveyed by love stories from the media and from peers. Love stories from the media portray romantic relationships as swift, governed by fate, and drenched in romance. Love stories from peers offer a more nuanced portrait of love, questioning, for example, the extent to which partners should devote their time and energy to relationships and what constitutes an acceptable partner. Love stories from parents appear to be shared, but research to date has tended to neglect the messages conveyed in these stories. I now turn to the literature exploring differences in the themes of love stories in general, specifically, whether the stories are romantic or practical in nature.

Romantic Themes in Parent's Love Stories

Although little is known about the types of love stories that parents share with their children, researchers have begun to investigate differences in the love stories of happy and unhappy couples in general. In a longitudinal study of 264 newlywed couples, Veroff, Sutherland, Chadiha, and Ortega (1993) collected courtship stories from couples in their first year of marriage, coded the story themes, and assessed the couples' relationship satisfaction in their third year of marriage. They found that couples whose stories featured a positive accelerating plot in their first year of marriage were significantly happier in their third year of marriage than couples who did not feature this plot trajectory. Analyzing this same data set, Orbuch, Veroff, and

Holmberg (1993) separated stories with a positive accelerating plot into positive romantic and positive non-romantic stories. They found that couples whose stories featured a positive non-romantic theme (which depicted relationships that slowly evolved out of friendship) were significantly happier than couples whose story did not mention this theme. Contrary to their hypotheses, presence of a positive romantic theme (which involved love at first sight, one partner's avid pursuit of the other, the pair as childhood sweethearts, or the idea that the couple was destined) did not predict marital satisfaction. The authors reasoned that couples whose stories feature a romantic theme may be less satisfied in their relationships because they are setting themselves up with idealistic expectations for their relationship which ultimately can not be met. Arguably, these findings have implications for the present study. Because parents of NMs are presumably happier in their relationship than are parents of NDs, it seems plausible that parents of NMs would be more likely than parents of NDs to tell courtship stories featuring a positive non-romantic theme. Because prior research focused on the themes of newlyweds' stories rather than how couples who were long married told the story of their courtship and how their children perceived this story, however, no formal hypothesis was made. Rather, I investigated in an exploratory fashion whether NMs and NDs differed in characterizing their parents' love stories as featuring romantic themes.

Impact of Parental Love Stories: Positive or Negative

In addition to differentially emphasizing romantic or non-romantic themes, parents' love stories might also impact NMs and NDs in different ways. Specifically, NMs should be more likely than NDs to see their parents' love story as a model to imitate, for two reasons. First, in general, people have been argued to be less likely to imitate behaviors that they have observed to result in negative consequences (Bandura, 1977). For example, in his classic study of observational learning, Bandura (1965) found that children were more likely to imitate a behavior when they observed a model being rewarded for that behavior than when they observed the model be punished for it. Even infants do not reproduce actions that they observed to have resulted in anger in a third party (Repacholi & Meltzoff, 2007). Because NDs observed that their parents' love stories resulted in divorce, they may be less likely than NMs to incorporate elements of their parents' stories into their own love stories.

Second, people's decisions have been found to be guided by the amount of regret they anticipate experiencing as a result of making a particular decision. For example, when faced with a large discrepancy between the outcomes of a decision, people tend to choose the option that they believe will result in the least amount of regret (Bell, 1982; Loomes, 1987; Loomes & Sugden, 1982). Because they observed their parents' marriage end, NDs may be more likely than NMs to believe that imitating elements of their parents' love stories would result in regret and therefore may be less likely to do so.

In summary, because people are less likely to imitate behaviors that result in negative consequences and less likely to make decisions that they believe will result in regret, and because NDs' parents' decisions resulted in negative consequences and potentially resulted in regret, NDs should be more likely than NMs to report being negatively influenced by their parents' love stories.

Reason for Marrying

In general, little is known about why people decide to marry. The one study that has investigated this question (Surra, Arizzi, & Asmussen, 1988) found that newlywed couples tended to report deciding to get married for four sets of reasons: Social norms, interaction quality, social network fit, and circumstantial. With regard to social norms, newlyweds reported deciding to get married because they felt that it was the right time to get married (e.g., the right age) or because they felt that they had found a partner who matched socially constructed criteria (e.g., religious or economic). With regard to interaction quality, newlyweds reported deciding to get married because they enjoyed spending time with their partner or believed their relationship involved a healthy level of mutual self-disclosure. With regard to social network reasons, newlyweds reported deciding to get married because they felt that their partner or relationship fit well with or was accepted by their friends and family. The final reason, circumstances, referred to such practical exigencies as being pregnant or needing to get married for tax purposes. Whether the type of reason given varied as a function of participants' parental marital status, however, was not

explored. Consequently, we made no formal hypothesis with regard to how NMs' and NDs' decisions to marry might differ.

The Present Study

Informants in this interview study were heterosexual newlyweds from either divorced or non-divorced families. The large majority of the newlyweds had not been previously married. Newlyweds were individually interviewed about their most influential love stories, the love stories of their parents and friends, and their own love stories (with a particular focus on their decision to marry). Interviews were systematically coded for sources of influential love stories, the lessons learned from these stories, the themes of parental love stories, whether the impact of the parental love story was positive or negative, and the reasons given for the decision to marry. I then compared whether the responses differed between the two groups. Case studies were then used to ground and deepen the quantitative findings.

Four open-ended research questions (RQ) and one hypothesis (Hyp) were examined:

RQ 1: *Which sources of love stories – parents, peers, or the media—are most likely to be viewed as influential by NMs and NDs?* This question was exploratory because little is known about how parents, peers, and the media uniquely contribute to the romantic relationship development of NMs and NDs.

RQ 2: *What kinds of lessons do NMs and NDs report learning from memorable love stories from parents, peers, and the media?* This question was exploratory because prior research has focused on love story messages but has neglected lessons drawn from such stories.

RQ 3: *Do NMs and NDs differ with regard to how likely they are to report romantic versus non-romantic themes in their parents' love stories?* This question was exploratory because prior research has examined these themes in courtship stories of happy and unhappy couples, but not of children of divorced and non-divorced couples.

Hyp 1: *NMs will be more likely than NDs to report being positively influenced by their parents' love stories.* This question had sufficient empirical backing to be framed as a hypothesis because prior research has indicated that people are less likely to reproduce observed behaviors that resulted in negative consequences. Because NDs observed their parents' relationship dissolve, I expected NMs to report being more positively influenced than NDs by their parents' love stories.

RQ 4: *What kinds of reasons are offered by NMs and NDs for deciding to get married?* This question was exploratory because prior research on reasons for marrying has not examined associations with parents' marital status.

Method

Participants

Participants were 56 heterosexual newlyweds (26 couples and two men and two women who were not partners) who obtained marriage licenses from San Francisco City Hall in 2011. Women ranged in age from 25 to 58 ($M = 33.04$, $SD = 7.72$) and men from 27 to 54 ($M = 35.25$, $SD = 8.01$). The large majority of participants (81.3%) were European American; 8.3% were Asian, 6.3% were Hispanic, and 4.2% were multi-ethnic. Nearly all of the participants (94%) had completed at least a college degree; the average number of years of school completed was 17.67 ($SD = 2.19$). The majority of participants (71.7%) reported no religious affiliation; 15.2% were Christian, 8.7% Jewish, 2.2% Hindu, and 2.2% Buddhist.

Procedure

Recruitment. Participants were recruited at San Francisco City Hall between January and October of 2011. As couples left the County Clerk's office, they were approached and asked whether they would be interested in participating in a study of love stories. Interested couples were contacted by email and telephoned to schedule a meeting. Out of the 272 newlyweds who were approached, 192 provided contact info and 56 (21% of the newlyweds approached) responded to invitations to schedule an appointment.

Data Collection. Participants were met at a location of their choosing, such as a park or coffee shop close to their home. After providing consent to participate in the study and to be recorded, one partner completed an audio-recorded semi-structured interview (the Love Stories Interview) while the other partner completed a questionnaire, out of earshot of the interview. Once the interview was complete, the two partners switched places. On average, the interview and survey each took 30 minutes.

Materials

Love Stories Interview. The Love Stories Interview is a semi-structured interview that was developed by the author for the present study (see Appendix A). The entire interview is designed to resemble a naturally occurring conversation, with each question serving either to deepen the previous question or to move the narrative forward in time. For example, questions about how a couple met are followed by questions about how they decided to become exclusive and then marry. It is divided into two parts. The first part asks participants to share their own love story. Specifically, it asks how the participant met their partner, how the relationship progressed, and how the couple decided to formalize their commitment to each other through marriage. It also asks about the future of the relationship – what participants think it will take to maintain the relationship, and what about their relationship they are looking forward to the most. The second part of the interview focuses on stories about other people’s romantic relationships that may have impacted the participant’s

romantic relationships. Specifically, it asks the participant to describe their favorite love stories as well as other important love stories that influenced them and to discuss how these stories may have impacted them. It also asks participants whether and how they were influenced by the love stories of their parents and friends. Lastly, the interview includes a question about any advice the participant would like to pass on. As can be seen in Table 1, the responses to four questions were the focus of analysis:

- 1) Are there any love stories that you heard, observed, or read that impacted you? What happens in these stories?
- 2) Were you influenced at all by your parents' love story? Do you know the story of how they met, fell in love, and decided to get married?
- 3) Were you influenced at all by any friends' love stories? What happens in these stories? And,
- 4) How did the two of you decide to get married? That is, how did you decide to formally recognize your commitment?

Questionnaires. The questionnaires consisted of a personality scale, an attachment questionnaire, the Love Attitudes Scale, a relationship satisfaction questionnaire, and a demographic questionnaire, in that order. The present study focused on the demographic questionnaire (Appendix B). Participants were asked to provide their age, gender, religious affiliation, and ethnicity, as well as the number of years of schooling they had completed. Participants were also asked to provide information regarding their current relationships and relationship history. Specifically, participants were asked for the number of serious relationships they had been in (inclusive of their current relationship), whether or not they had previously been married, the length of their longest relationship, and the length of their current

relationship. Lastly, participants were asked about their parents' marital history (whether their parents had divorced or not, and, if so, how old they were when the divorce happened). Newlyweds with married parents were also asked to rate their parents' level of marital satisfaction (on a scale of one to five, with one indicating *very unhappy* and five indicating *very happy*).

Interview Coding

Coding categories for each question were derived by the author through an iterative process of grouping thematically similar responses into mutually exclusive categories until all responses were accounted for (Braun & Clark, 2006). Responses to each question were then coded by the author and by undergraduate research assistants, who were blind to the hypotheses. Reliability was assessed periodically throughout the coding process in order to prevent coder drift. Coding manuals for each question can be obtained from the author (Shapiro, 2012). Source questions for each variable can be seen in Table 1.

Love Story Source: Parents, Peers, or Media. Sources of love stories were assessed in two ways. First, in order to explore the range of sources that newlyweds voluntarily reported, I coded the sources mentioned by participants in response to the question, "Are there any other love stories that you heard, observed, or read that impacted you?" by sorting them into a set of mutually exclusive categories. From this process, five categories emerged: 1) Parents, 2) Grandparents, 3) Other Couples (e.g. older couples, in-laws, friends), 4) Self, and 5) Media (e.g. literature, film). The

author and an undergraduate research assistant then coded each response as representative of one of these five categories. Acceptable reliability was achieved for coding the source of influential love stories overall ($\kappa = .86$) as well as for each source individually (Parents $\kappa = 1.00$, Grandparents $\kappa = 1.00$, Other Couples $\kappa = .87$, Self $\kappa = 1.00$, and Media $\kappa = .91$). Friends were extracted to form the Peers category, and Grandparents, Self, and what remained of Other Couples were collapsed to form the category Other ($\kappa = 1.00$).

In addition to coding the love story sources that newlyweds nominated as influential (media, parents, peers, etc.), I also directly assessed whether newlyweds were influenced by stories told by their parents by examining responses to the question “Were you influenced at all by your parents’ love story?” Responses to this question were coded dichotomously for presence or absence of influence (yes-no). The majority of participants answered this question directly with a fairly straightforward “yes” or “no,” such as “Yes, definitely,” or “I don’t think that the story, itself, influenced me in any way.” A few respondents described in detail how the story influenced them; such responses were coded as a “yes”, as in the following example:

It [the story] taught us that there’s an unconditional love out there. That while you may love someone, there’s a different kind of love out there

Excellent reliability was achieved for this category ($\kappa = 1.00$).

Lessons Learned from Parents, Peers, and the Media. Lessons learned from each source were coded by examining responses to the questions “Were you influenced at all by your parents’ love story? Do you know the story of how they met, fell in love, and decided to get married?” “Were you influenced by any friends’ love stories?” and “Are there any love stories that you heard, observed, or read that impacted you?” Lessons mentioned in response to these questions were sorted into mutually exclusive categories. As can be seen in Table 2, four lessons learned from parents emerged: Don’t Rush, Treat and be Treated Well, Love Exists and Can Endure, and, Relationships Take Work. Don’t Rush was coded when participants described learning that it is paramount to know themselves, their partner, and their compatibility before entering into a marriage or that marrying young is difficult because people have often not finished developing their personalities and can grow apart or because it is challenging to balance parenting responsibilities with finishing one’s own education. Treat and Be Treated Well was coded when participants described learning that relationships should involve mutual trust, affection, and respect. Love Exists and Can Endure was coded when participants described learning that there is such a thing as true love or what it means to truly love another human being and that it is possible for this love to stand the test of time. Lastly, Relationships Take Work was coded when participants described learning that relationships require effort, patience, and sacrifice. The author and an undergraduate research assistant coded each parent love story as representing one of these four lessons. Acceptable reliability was achieved for lessons learned from parents’ love

stories overall ($\kappa = .81$), as well as for each lesson individually; Don't Rush ($\kappa = .83$), Treat and Be Treated Well ($\kappa = .82$), Love Exists and Can Endure ($\kappa = .76$), and Relationships Take Work ($\kappa = .83$).

As can be seen in Table 3, four lessons from peers emerged: Many Types of Relationships are Acceptable, The Time is Now, Love Exists and Can Endure, and Don't Rush. Many Types of Relationships are Acceptable was coded when participants described learning that it is possible to meet a partner in a variety of ways, that relationships can take a variety of directions, and that alternative relationships are acceptable. The Time is Now was coded when participants described being encouraged, inspired, or gently pressured by friends to get engaged. Love Exists and Can Endure was coded when participants described their friends as providing an admirable model for healthy relationships. Lastly, Don't Rush was coded when participants described learning from friends that it is important to be cautious and take your time when deciding to marry rather than settle for a less than desirable partner. The author and an undergraduate research assistant coded each peer love story as representing one of these four lessons. Acceptable reliability was achieved for peer love story lessons learned overall ($\kappa = .91$), as well as for each lesson individually; Many Types of Relationships are Acceptable ($\kappa = .82$), The Time is Now ($\kappa = 1.00$), Love Exists and Can Endure ($\kappa = .88$), and Don't Rush ($\kappa = 1.00$).

From the media, participants reported learning five lessons (Table 4): Love Someone for Who They Are, Love Exists and Can Endure, Communication is Key,

Don't Hold Back, and Maintain Independence. Love Someone for Who They Are was coded when participants described learning that one should find beauty in and appreciate one's partner, due to or in spite of all his or her eccentricities. Love Exists and Can Endure was coded when participants described learning a cultural model for how romantic relationships should unfold or what love should feel like, that true love or destiny exists, that relationships can last a long time, or that love can endure despite hardship or challenges. Communication is Key was coded when participants described learning that it is important for one to express one's thoughts and feelings to one's partner or to maintain consistent communication across space and time. Don't Hold Back was coded when participants described learning that it is important to be affectionate or spontaneous with one's partner or that one should actively follow one's heart and pursue a partner, even if it involves taking risks or being irrational. Lastly, Maintain Independence was coded when participants described learning that it is important to be self-sufficient or that it is important to maintain a sense of self in a relationship. The author and an undergraduate research assistant coded each media love story as representing one of these six lessons. Acceptable reliability was achieved for media love story lessons learned overall ($\kappa = .84$) as well as for each lesson individually: Love Someone for Who They are ($\kappa = .88$), Love Exists and Can Endure ($\kappa = .82$), Communication is Key ($\kappa = 1.00$), Don't Hold Back ($\kappa = .92$), and Maintain Independence ($\kappa = 1.00$).

Theme of Parents' Love Story: Romantic or Practical. In addition to being coded for source, responses to the question, "Were you influenced at all by your

parents' love story? Do you know the story of how they met, fell in love, and decided to get married?" were coded for story theme. Specifically, I categorized parents' love stories as either Romantic or Practical. As can be seen in Table 5, stories were coded as Romantic when they involved love at first sight, partners being childhood sweethearts, one partner determinedly pursuing the other, strong physical attraction, spontaneity, sincere public displays of affection, or partners doing anything (even crazy things) for love. Parents' stories were coded as Practical when they involved an explicitly mentioned lack of romance or affection, marriage for circumstantial reasons (e.g. tax purposes, pregnancy), or meeting in a mundane setting (such as through friends, at a bar, or school). The author and an undergraduate research assistant coded each response dichotomously. Acceptable reliability was achieved ($\kappa = .81$).

Direction of Parental Love Story Influence: Positive or Negative.

Affirmative responses to the question "Were you at all influenced by your parents' love story? Do you know the story of how they met, fell in love, and decided to get married?" were content coded for the valence or direction of the influence, either positive or negative. As can be seen in Table 6, a Positive influence was coded if participants described looking to their parents as models and spoke of them with admiration and respect. Influence was coded as Negative if participants described their parents' relationship as a model of what not to do, something that made them cautious about relationships, or caused them to take a long time to commit. The author and an undergraduate research assistant coded each response dichotomously. Acceptable reliability was achieved ($\kappa = .81$).

Own Marriage Decision Rationale. The participant's rationale for deciding to marry was coded by analyzing responses to the question, "How did the two of you decide to get married? That is, how did you decide to formally recognize your commitment?" Responses were sorted into a set of all-encompassing, mutually exclusive categories. Five categories emerged: Practical Reasons, Natural Next Step, Partner Motivated, Why Wait, and Formal Recognition. As can be seen in Table 7, Practical Reasons was coded when newlyweds described their decision to get married as a response to external circumstances, such as a pregnancy or the need to secure a visa. Practical Reasons was also coded when newlyweds described getting married because they felt that it made sense financially. Natural Next Step was coded when newlyweds described deciding to get married because they felt that their relationship had evolved to a point where getting married was the only way to take their relationship to the next level and to express how they felt about each other. Partner Motivated was coded when newlyweds described deciding to get married because it was important to their partner or because their partner proposed. Why Wait was coded when newlyweds described deciding to get married because they felt they had found their perfect partner and did not want to delay starting a life together. Lastly, Formal Recognition was coded when newlyweds described deciding to get married because they wanted some form of external recognition of what they had gone through as a couple or because they wanted to make their relationship more permanent by officially committing to exclusivity. The author and an undergraduate research assistant coded each response as representative of one of these five

categories. Acceptable reliability was achieved for the categories overall ($\kappa = .92$), as well as for each category individually; Practical Reasons ($\kappa = .91$), Natural Next Step ($\kappa = .85$), Partner Motivated ($\kappa = .91$), Why Wait ($\kappa = .79$), and Formal Recognition ($\kappa = 1.00$).

Results

Overview of Analysis

Although all but 4 of the 56 participants were couples, the unit of analysis was the individual because the focus of the present study was parental marital status and the salience of parents' and other love stories, which was an individual rather than a couples phenomenon. Participants were divided into two groups according to their parents' marital status: Newlyweds whose parents were divorced (NDs; $n = 19$), and newlyweds whose parents were married (NMs; $n = 37$). The two groups were first compared with regard to demographics. Following these preliminary analyses, I then compared NMs and NDs on the key dependent variables, specifically, the sources they reported for their influential love stories, the lessons learned from each source, the theme of their parents' love stories, the ways in which their parents' love stories influenced them (valence of influence), and their own marriage decision rationale. Because almost all comparisons were categorical, most of these analyses were conducted with chi-square tests. Due to the small size of the sample, values are nearly universally reported for the Fisher's exact test, which is generally considered to be a

more precise measure of significance for 2 X 2 contingency tables with small samples (Fisher, 1922).

Preliminary Analyses: Demographics of the ND and NM groups

Preliminary analyses examined whether newlyweds with divorced parents (NDs) and newlyweds with married parents (NMs) differed with regard to gender, age, education, religion, ethnicity, and relationship histories, because these factors might also account for differences in the types of stories that they reported as influential and their rationale for deciding to marry. Table 8 presents the relevant means, t-tests, and chi-square statistics comparing the two groups on these variables.

The two groups did not differ with regard to any of these demographic variables. Roughly half of NDs (42%) and NMs (54%) were female. NDs ($M = 33.8$, $SD = 6.74$) and NMs ($M = 34.27$, $SD = 8.45$) did not significantly differ with regard to their age $t(47) = -.19$, *ns*. Similarly, NDs ($M = 17.69$, $SD = 2.57$) and NMs ($M = 17.67$, $SD = 2.03$) did not significantly differ with regard to the number of years of school that they had completed $t(47) = .03$, *ns*. Nor did the two groups differ with regard to their ethnicities; similar percentages of each group were Caucasian (87.5% of NDs; 78.1% of NMs; Fisher's exact test, $p = .70$), Hispanic (12.5% of NDs; 3.1% of NMs; Fisher's exact test, $p = .25$), Asian (0% of NDs; 12.5% of NMs; Fisher's exact test, $p = .29$), and Multi-Ethnic (0% of NDs; 6.3% of NMs; Fisher's exact test, $p = .55$). Lastly, there were no significant differences between the two groups with regard to religion; similar proportions of each group were Christian (7.1% of NDs; 18.8% of

NMs; Fisher's exact test, $p = .41$), Jewish (0% of NDs; 12.5% of NMs; Fisher's exact test, $p = .30$), Hindu (0% of NDs; 3.1% of NMs; Fisher's exact test, $p = 1.00$), Buddhist (0% of NDs; 3.1% of NMs; Fisher's exact test, $p = 1.00$), and not religious (92.9% of NDs; 62.5% of NMs; Fisher's exact test, $p = .07$).

In addition to resembling each other with regard to their age, schooling, ethnicity, and religion, the two groups also resembled each other with regard to their romantic relationship histories. Specifically, NDs ($M = 3.53$, $SD = .99$) and NMs ($M = 3.34$, $SD = 1.45$) did not differ with regard to the number of close relationships they reported $t(45) = -.46$, *ns*. Nor did NDs ($M = 56.25$, $SD = 29.95$) differ from NMs ($M = 60.18$, $SD = 40.13$) with regard to their relationship length, in months $t(47) = -.35$, *ns*. Lastly, NDs (10.5%) were not more likely than NMs (13.5%) to have previously been married (Fisher's exact test, $p = 1.00$).

In sum, the two groups resembled each other in demographics and relationship history. The newlyweds in this study were generally non-religious, highly educated Caucasians in their mid-thirties. They tended to have had an average of four close romantic relationships, the most recent of which lasted five years on average. We now turn to the primary focus of the study, whether NDs and NMs differed with regard to the sources they reported for their influential love stories, the lessons they learned from these love stories, the theme of their parents' love stories, the ways in which their parents' love stories influenced them (valence of influence), and their own marriage decision rationale.

RQ 1: Do NMs and NDs Differ with Regard to Sources of Influential Love Stories?

As can be seen in Figure 1, when asked to share their most influential love story, NMs and NDs did not significantly differ with regard to the sources they reported. On average, 51% of newlyweds cited the media as their source (Fisher's exact test, $p = 1.00$), 22.5% cited peers (Fisher's exact test, $p = .38$), 15.5% cited parents (Fisher's exact test, $p = .15$), and 11% cited other couples (Fisher's exact test, $p = .50$). When asked directly whether or not they were influenced by their parents' love stories, however, the two groups' responses did significantly differ. As can be seen in Table 9, in response to this question, NMs were significantly more likely than NDs to report being influenced by their parents' love stories (Fisher's exact test, $p = .04$). Whereas 84% of NMs reported being influenced by their parents' love story, only 58% of NDs did. In summary, although NMs and NDs did not report being influenced by love stories from different sources when asked to nominate an influential love story, the two groups did significantly differ with regard to the rates at which they reported parental love stories as an influential source (without regard to valence).

RQ 2: Do NMs and NDs Differ with Regard to Lessons Learned from Sources of Influential Love Stories?

For the most part, newlyweds learned different lessons from the love stories of parents, peers, and the media. From parents, they learned Don't Rush, Treat and Be

Treated Well, Love Exists and Can Endure, and Relationships Take Work. From peers, newlyweds learned Don't Rush, Many Types of Relationships are Acceptable, Love Exists and Can Endure, and The Time is Now. Lastly, from the media, newlyweds learned Love Someone for Who They Are, Love Exists and Can Endure, Communication is Key, Don't Hold Back, and Maintain Independence. Of all the lessons learned, only two were reported across multiple sources: Don't Rush was learned from parents and peers, and Love Exists and Can Endure was learned from all three sources.

NMs and NDs differed with regard to the sources from which they learned these lessons. Specifically, NMs were more likely than NDs to learn Love Exists and Can Endure from their parents. As can be seen in Table 10, whereas 35% of NMs reported learning this lesson from their parents' love stories, no NDs did (Fisher's exact test, $p = .01$). NDs were more likely than NMs to learn that Love Exists and Can Endure from the media (Fisher's exact test, $p = .01$) or from peers ($X^2(1) = 12.00, p < .01, V = .71$). As can be seen in Table 11, whereas 100% of NDs reported learning this lesson from the media or peers, only 33% of NMs reported learning this lesson from the media, and 25% from peers.

The two groups did not differ with regard to whether they learned the lesson Don't Rush from parents or peers. They also did not significantly differ with regard to how likely they were to report learning any of the remaining lessons from their parents, peers, or the media (see Figures 2, 3, and 4).

In summary, the majority of lessons learned from parents differed from those learned from the media or peers. For the most part, NDs and NMs did not differ with regard to how likely they were to report learning each of the lessons from each of the sources. The exception was that NMs were more likely than NDs to report learning Love Exists and Can Endure from their parents, whereas NDs were more likely than NMs to learn this lesson from the media or peers.

RQ 3: Do NMs and NDs Differ with Regard to the Presence of Romantic Themes in Parents' Love Stories?

In addition to learning different lessons from their parents' love stories, NMs and NDs perceived their parents' love stories as reflecting different themes. Consistent with the finding that NMs were more likely than NDs to report learning from their parents that Love Exists and Can Endure, NMs were significantly more likely (43%) than NDs (16%) to perceive their parents' love story as romantic. NDs, in contrast, were significantly more likely (63%) than NMs (35%) to describe their parents' stories as practical, or devoid of romance, $X^2(1) = 4.99, p < .05, V = .34$ (see Table 12).

Hyp 1: Is the Impact of Parents' Love Stories Positive for NMs and Negative for NDs?

Perhaps because NMs perceived their parents' love stories as romantic and NDs did not, the two groups also reported being influenced by their parents' love

stories differently, as hypothesized. As can be seen in Table 13, when asked whether they were influenced by their parents' love stories, of the newlyweds who reported being influenced by their parents' love story (31 NMs and 11 NDs), NMs were more likely than NDs to say that they were positively influenced by the story. Whereas 68% of NMs reported being positively influenced by their parents' love story, only 9% of NDs did $X^2(1) = 11.20, p < .01, V = .52$. In other words, for those whose responses were coded for this issue, NDs disproportionately (91%) reported being influenced by their parents' love story in a negative way.

Overall, thus, although the majority of both groups reported being influenced by their parents' love stories, the valence of the influence differed. Whereas NMs saw their parents' love stories as admirable models for how to conduct oneself in a romantic relationship, NDs viewed their parents' love stories as cautionary tales.

RQ 4: Do NMs and NDs Decide to Marry for Different Reasons?

Thus far we have found that NDs, compared to NMs, were more likely to describe their parents' love stories as practical and to report being more negatively influenced by their parents' love stories. We next turn to their reasons for deciding to get married. As can be seen in Table 14, NMs were significantly more likely than NDs to cite Practical Reasons for getting married. Whereas Practical Reasons was the most commonly cited rationale (39.4%) for NMs, this was the least commonly cited reason (5%) for NDs (Fisher's exact test, $p = .02$). The two groups did not significantly differ with regard to how likely they were to cite the remaining four

reasons (see Figure 5). On average, roughly 20% of each group reported deciding to get married because they felt that it was the Natural Next Step, 19% for Formal Recognition, because they felt no need to wait (Why Wait; 19%) and because they felt that it was important to their partner (Partner Motivated; 14%).

Summary of Quantitative Findings

Overall, the majority of the differences between NMs and NDs were small and somewhat obvious. Specifically, NDs were less likely to report being influenced by their parents' love stories and more likely to view these stories as practical rather than romantic and to be negatively influenced by their parents' love stories. Out of all of the lessons that newlyweds reported learning from parents, peers, and the media, NMs were more likely than NDs to report learning only one lesson, which was from their parents: Love Exists and Can Endure. Notably, NDs were more likely to learn this lesson from the media. Lastly, out of all the reasons for deciding to marry, NMs were significantly more likely than NDs to provide only one: Practical reasons. For the most part, NMs and NDs shared many similarities: The majority of both groups reported that their most influential love stories came from the media, and the majority of both groups reported being influenced by their parents' love stories (although the direction of this influence was positive for NMs and negative for NDs). Both groups also reported learning a variety of lessons from parents, peers, and the media. Most of these lessons did not overlap across sources and in some cases even contradicted each other (e.g. from parents and peers, newlyweds reported learning Don't Rush, whereas

from the media they reported learning the lesson Don't Hold Back). Lastly, both groups were fairly evenly distributed with regard to the reasons given for the decision to marry.

Case Studies

To explore how newlyweds integrated multiple and sometimes contradictory lessons from love stories across sources to arrive at their decision to marry, I now present four case studies, two NMs and two NDs. Each case represents a different approach that newlyweds took to configuring the often discrepant perspectives on romantic relationships offered by love stories heard from parents, peers, and the media. To anticipate, Natalie (an NM) finds that her parents' love story mirrors her favorite love story from the media, and she draws on both in her decision to marry. Sarah, an NM, dismisses love stories from the media and used only her parents' story as a template for how to decide to marry, Kate (an ND) uses love stories from the media to supplement her parents' love story. Lastly, Rob (an ND), dissatisfied both by his parents' love story and love stories from the media, remains uncertain as to how to reconcile the two, and skeptical about his own template for how to approach forming a long lasting romantic relationship.

Acceptance of Both Parent and Media Love Stories (Natalie, an NM)

For some newlyweds, integrating love stories heard from parents and the media posed no problem. Natalie, for example, was able to seamlessly draw upon a

love story from the media as well as her parents' love story because her favorite love story so closely resembled that of her parents'. Both stories involve two people who are initially enemies joining forces and becoming romantically involved, weathering financial hardship together and sticking together no matter what comes their way.

Natalie's parents met in elementary school but did not start dating until high school.

As children, their relationship was adversarial; Natalie's dad often was reprimanded for bullying Natalie's mother. As a young married couple, they faced financial hardships and relationship strains, but successfully overcame these challenges.

Natalie reports that after decades together, her parents are still very much in love:

They got married really young and went through periods of difficulty, but they always stuck by each other. There were multiple times when I was growing up when I was like, "are you guys gonna get divorced?" But they'd always say, you know, "no of course not." They don't believe in it. But um I still see them today and...when they're apart from each other for more than a week they both talk about how it's just not right, they don't like it. And I think it's a really good model for me. They started out poor and um they made it to a point where they are comfortable.

Natalie's favorite love story, *Far and Away*, shares a plot similar to her parents' love story. In *Far and Away*, two Irish immigrants attempt to build a life in the U.S. When they first meet, the two have an antagonistic relationship. As they support each other throughout their struggles, however, they continue to enter in and

out of each others' lives in different capacities, ultimately falling in love. Although this story resembles the love story of Natalie's parents', Natalie draws parallels between *Far and Away* and her own love story:

Well I think with uh *Far and Away* (laugh) I like that it takes place over so many years um and it spans you know different countries and um and adversity and the poor and the rich-I mean it's funny talking about it now 'cause I hear a lot of similarities - not that we ever couldn't be together um, but we always had each other we like we kept coming back to each other and like checking in with each other.

Indeed, Natalie's own love story shares features with *Far and Away*. Like the couple in that story, and like her own parents, Natalie and her husband Marco began their relationship in a capacity other than a romantic one. When the two met during their freshman year of college, both were involved in romantic relationships, so they began their relationship as friends. Over the course of a decade, as the two drifted in and out of romantic relationships with other people and moved back and forth across continents, they maintained contact, although never entering a romantic relationship with one another. Finally finding themselves in the same place with regard to both geographic location and relationship status, they initiated a romantic relationship. Although when they began dating, Natalie describes them as being "pretty poor," the two supported each other as they built careers for themselves. Ultimately, Natalie

decided to marry Marco because she recognized in his family a story not unlike that of her own parents, the same story told in *Far and Away*:

Looking at my parents has an effect on um...you know me having chosen Marco. I think as a friend and partner and someone who is going to you know really truly value our family. Because my parents are that way, I think it has the strongest effect on me. And when I met his family, I really fell in love with them as well. His parents are divorced, but his family story is very similar. His parents met when they were really young and started dating in high school. He has two siblings and I have two siblings, and lots of aunties and uncles as do I. And I just found sort of like this mirror image. It felt so comforting.

For Natalie, there is no friction between the love story she reports being influenced by from the media, and the love story that she heard from her parents at home. Perhaps due to the fact that these two stories resonated for Natalie, their messages seem to have reinforced one another. Ultimately, Natalie chooses a partner whose own parents' love story mirrors this unified vision she has for love. Together, Natalie and Marco play out this story, a story of two people evolving from friends to lovers and sticking by each other to surmount financial struggles and other life challenges.

Rejection of Media Love Stories for Parents' Love Story (Sarah, an NM)

For other newlyweds, integrating parents' love stories with love stories heard from the media presented a challenge. For Sarah, this was the case because her parents' love story caused her to question the love stories she heard through the media. Sarah's parents' love story sounds like a movie. After falling in love with Sarah's dad's voice over the phone, her mom flew across the country to meet him, initiating a relationship that has now lasted several decades. Sarah recounts:

My parents both worked for the same company and my mom was training someone and the girl screwed up. So my mom (my mom's from San Francisco)...called back to New York to correct the error and my dad was the one who answered the phone. And from there they just developed this amazing relationship and he offered to fly her one way if she would like... pay for the other to fly out there. And I was like "mom, that's how people get murdered, are you serious you got on the plane?" And she went out there and had the most amazing time. On the way home she sobbed so hard the entire flight back 'cause she had to leave him that the pilot came back to make sure she was okay. And so then my dad just like packed up everything—after that meeting—my dad packed up everything and left and moved to California.

Thoroughness is what distinguishes Sarah's parents' love story from those she has heard in the media. Whereas most other love stories that Sarah encountered through the media were heavily edited – cutting out important pieces such as what a relationship looks like after the wedding – her parents' story has spanned a significant

period of time, allowing Sarah to witness the elements that contribute to building and sustaining a long lasting romantic relationship. Her parents' story picks up where other stories leave off. She explains:

Most love stories you hear in fairy tales...the people have an end date. Like there's--you don't know what happens past that. And with my parents I think the reason why that's the only one I stick to is 'cause I—like it's the one that actually like you can visibly see it has lasted the entire time, like it hasn't fallen apart. Or it didn't just have a “the end” and you just imagine what happens after that.

Indeed, Sarah seemed to rely completely on her parents' love story to guide her when deciding to get married. She describes how she explicitly compared her romantic relationships with her parents' relationship when deliberating about whether or not to move forward with a partner. Each relationship was rejected until she found someone for whom she felt the type of love that she believed her parents' shared:

It [the story] taught us that there's an unconditional love out there. That while you may love someone, there's a different kind of love out there. I've been in five long-term relationships before this, and while I loved them, it wasn't the kind of love I saw that my parents have. And so when I met [my husband], it was like, no, that is what they felt. You immediately knew it when you found it. I was with someone for four and a half years and of course the next step would be to get married and I never wanted to because I knew that wasn't it.

After being in several serious long-term relationships (one of which lasted nearly five years), Sarah decided to marry her husband, Matt, after knowing him for less than five months. Sarah's story, thus, echoes that of her parents. Like her parents, Sarah took a great risk in entering her marriage. Perhaps because her parents' love story painted a clear portrait of what love is, Sarah was able to let go of media love stories and let her instincts guide her and marry once she found the experience that she was looking for.

Supplementing Parents' Love Story With a Media Love Story (Kate, an ND)

Some newlyweds looked at multiple, potentially contradictory love stories as a boon, using some stories to fill in the gaps left by others. Kate, for example, drew upon love stories heard from the media to pick up where her parents' love story left off. Kate's parents' love story started off well; they fell head over heels for one another and married after two months:

They met in a bar in San Diego. Uh, just after work one day. They were each with their own friends. And um, they-my dad proposed 2 months later. So-and they are both actually very responsible people (laugh) that normally wouldn't do something like that. So I think that's kind of a fun side to it.

When Kate was 13, however, her parents divorced. Kate attributes this divorce to a breakdown in communication. She believes that her parents are still in love and could have been together today had they worked harder at the relationship.

When both of their lives individually kind of started falling apart at the same time, their marriage couldn't take it 'cause they didn't-they didn't talk to each other, they kind of did a "we're not going to, um, we're not going to have confrontation, we love each other too much to confront each other about issues." So when everything else started falling apart they didn't have enough of the foundation to be strong for each other and know what the other person needed and how to communicate with the other person and lean on them for support. So that's been a valuable thing for me to learn.

Because her parents' relationship dissolved, however, Kate does not have a sense for what that relationship might have looked like had it continued. She feels that her friends do not offer a better model, explaining, "neither of our friends have any meaningful relationships." Instead, she turns to the media to complete this story. Specifically, Kate reports that her favorite love story is *The Notebook*, the story of a couple that struggles to be together in their youth only to be separated once more (this time cognitively) in old age, as a result of Alzheimer's. Kate explains that what inspires her about the story is the longevity of the relationship:

A couple meets when they're young and are crazy about each other until the very end. I guess that's for me both what it was about and what I like about it... They're hopeful. They make me feel like a long happy marriage is achievable and something that we can have. I think that's probably the main thing.

The ending Kate ascribes to this fictional relationship is the one she thought possible for her parents, had they communicated to each other more clearly. Her decision to marry reflects her cognizance of the importance of communication in a relationship and is a direct application of the lesson learned from her parents' love story, an attempt to fill in this gap in their story. Heeding the lesson from her parents that it is important to speak one's mind to one's partner, Kate decides to marry because she feels it is the most apt expression of her love:

Uh, well I would say for me there was an emotional point where we kind of got to that, in 2 ½ years, that, I mean, I for some strange reason felt the need to get married. I felt that we had done everything that we're supposed to and everything that we wanted to and we had come to a place where the only way for me to properly express what I was feeling towards him was to marry him.

Kate's decision to marry is informed by perspectives from her parents and the media, cobbled together. Whereas the media has provided with her the model of an end point to strive for (a long lasting romantic relationship), her parents have provided her with an (albeit indirect) path for getting there. Rather than replicate her parents' story, Kate enacts the piece that she feels was missing from it, the piece that could have resulted in a more long lasting relationship: Communication. By attending to this fatal flaw in her parents' relationship, Kate hopes to achieve the happy ending that eluded her parents.

Rejection of Both Parents' and Media Love Stories (Rob, an ND)

Lastly, for some newlyweds, love stories heard from parents and the media contradicted each other to such an extent that each story effectively cancelled the other out as a viable model for romantic relationships. Rob, for example, felt that his parents' divorce caused him to question love stories from the media:

Who hasn't seen like hundreds of movies with love stories in them? But uh, I mean the one that I think impacts me is the—the notion that we kind of have socially that the wedding that we have is the end of something, you know? You're striving after this goal for so long and, you know, you finally find the right person as if, like this were the heroic journey that we're all on, you know—and then you find the right person and then, you know, you work through some minor difficulties. And you overcome those. And then there's a proposal. And the wedding. And that's so beautiful. And happily ever after. And then that's—there's no, like no—that's the end of the movie...I mean unless you die on the way home from the wedding, that's not the end to anything. You know. Um, so I think it's not just one story. It's that archetype that affects me because I realized maybe early on—maybe because of my parents' divorce, or maybe because, um, I'm a cynical bastard, but I just realized early on that that's not real.

Because Rob's parents divorced, he cannot rely on their story for a model for romantic relationships either. In fact, Rob believes that his parents' relationship crumbled because his father was chasing after the type of love story one hears from

the media, the type of story that Rob believes is not real. He also believes his parents' love story to be flawed because his father rushed into the relationship before fully figuring out his own identity. Consequently, Rob feels that his parents' love story offers a model for what *not* to do:

My dad didn't date a lot of women before he met my mom. I think he was kind of a nerd and not that popular with women...And honestly to this day—I felt like maybe...they didn't know if it was the right relationship-- for the long term-- because my dad was so inexperienced...Sometimes it does seem like he was just trying for the life that people imagine. You know, he found a woman that he loved...he was on a career path from really early on. And then they had kids, and everything was great...until it was totally a disaster and, uh, didn't work at all. And I think he really didn't know who he was at all until after him and my mom split up and then he kind of started to figure it out. Um and I think knowing that about my dad made me feel like I didn't want to make that same mistake.

Rob's parents' love story reinforces his skepticism of love stories from the media, but offers no replacement. His friends' love stories similarly offer no help. According to Rob, his friends' love stories also reflect an impulse to achieve the type of love story portrayed in the media; many of his friends got swept up in relationships swiftly and their relationships ended in disaster. He says he has learned “more from

the failures than anything.” Consequently, in general Rob feels that he had no model for a love story guiding him:

So, I mean it’s probably fair to say that this kind of absence of a story about how it’s supposed to go probably influenced me because I didn’t have a lot of firm ideas about, oh it’s supposed to be like this and this and this, you know. I was, I was just kind of like—with a lot of things in life—honestly. I was kind of like—I didn’t have a map that I thought I was supposed to follow. Or even knew that there was one.

Rob’s decision to marry reflects his skepticism of love stories and hesitance to put stock in them. Although his wife (Miranda) was certain from the beginning of their relationship that she wanted to marry Rob, Rob took a long time to come to this conclusion. He attributes this delay in part to his desire to sort out his identity and career before entering marriage. In this way, his decision reflects a deliberate departure from his parents’ and friends’ stories; rather than rush into a marriage, he heeded the lesson learned from his parents and made time and space for himself to solidify his career and to be certain of his feelings about the relationship before proposing. He also attributes his delay to a lack of faith in the institution of marriage. Because he has no model for how a long lasting relationship can work, he is hesitant to enter into one. He solves this problem by shifting responsibility for the decision to Miranda. Ultimately, he decides to get married because he recognizes that it is important to her:

She put a lot of pressure on me to make up my mind about getting married long before I even felt like it was time for me to start thinking about that seriously. Um, and it was a big—it was a big kind of fight for me to get her to back off of that and give me some room to decide that. Um, and finally what I decided to do was I kind of created an opportunity for myself to move to New York when I was in graduate school and I spent a summer out there. And I felt that would be good for me for a number of reasons. You know for my kind of career in school. That was the immediate reason but I also felt like it was going to be a really excellent opportunity for me to be by myself, have some time to make up my mind. And um I think that's what really did it for me. Um, it was just kind of like forcing that wedge in there for me to have enough time to myself to really decide, you know, that that was really what I wanted.

Perhaps because Rob does not put much stock in either his parents' love story or the other love stories that influenced him, he shifts responsibility to his partner when making the decision to marry. At the same time, his prolonged process reflects his wish to avoid repeating the plots of the stories that have influenced him. By very thoughtfully approaching the question of marriage, Rob felt that he was doing his best to improve the outcome of his relationship.

Summary of Case Studies

Each in their own way, Natalie, Sarah, Kate, and Rob integrate the perspectives on love that they learned from their parents and other sources. Natalie

feels that the media mirrors her parents' love story and is thus able to apply both, as a single story, to her decision to marry. Sarah feels that the stories offered by the media are inadequate and thus relies solely upon her parents' love story for the model she applies in her own life. Kate feels that her parent's story is incomplete, so supplements with the media. Rob discards both. Despite these differences, however, all of these cases suggest that the process by which young adults decide to marry may not always be as simple as adopting a particular view from a single source. By comparing love stories from several sources and reflecting on their points of discrepancy and alignment, the newlyweds developed their own vision for how love should proceed, whether they came from divorced families or not. The decision to marry may not necessarily be about one perspective winning out over another, but about how young adults stitch together multiple perspectives to create a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts.

Discussion

This study explored how newlyweds whose parents are married (NMs) and newlyweds whose parents are divorced (NDs) incorporated lessons learned from love stories heard from parents, peers, and the media into their own decisions to marry. Specifically, I investigated whether the sources of influential love stories for NMs and NDs were different, whether the lessons learned from these sources differed, whether the themes of parental love stories differed, whether the two groups reported

being differentially influenced by parental love stories, and whether the two groups decided to marry for different reasons.

Consistent with my only hypothesis, NMs were more likely than NDs to report being positively influenced by their parents' love stories. The content of parental love stories also differed for the two groups; NDs were more likely than NMs to view their parents' love stories as practical and NMs were more likely to view their parents' love stories as romantic.

Despite the larger and more positive role that parental love stories played for NMs, crafting a template for romantic relationships was not usually as simple as adopting the parental love story. Although the majority of both groups reported being influenced in some way by their parents' love story, when asked about love stories that influenced them in general, the majority of both groups cited stories that they had heard from the media, suggesting that NDs and NMs alike may be relying on love stories heard from multiple sources. The lessons that both groups learned from the media, parents, and peers tended to differ from and sometimes even contradict each other. Thus, NDs and NMs alike found themselves faced with the task of reconciling multiple, potentially competing love stories when constructing a model for romantic relationships to apply in their own lives and to their decision to marry. Perhaps partly for this reason, both NMs and NDs varied widely with regard to the reasons they offered for deciding to marry.

The findings that NDs were more likely than NMs to be negatively influenced by parents' love stories and to learn the lesson that Love Exists and Can Endure from the media rather than from parents suggest that NDs may be more vulnerable to media messages about romance and perhaps at greater risk for developing unrealistic expectations. As was evidenced with the case of Kate, in seeing their parents' relationship dissolve, NDs may turn to the media for answers to the question of what ingredients are required for a successful romantic relationship. Perhaps because they saw their parents' relationship as deficient in romance, or because they saw successful relationships from the media as saturated with romance and thus reasoned that it was lacking for their parents, NDs may be concluding that the romance depicted in the media (e.g. the belief in fate and a one-and-only) is key.

This emphasis on romance may be detrimental to NDs' romantic relationships. According to Orbuch et al. (1993), putting too much stock in romance may cause disillusionment and result in decreased marital satisfaction. This idealization of romance may partly explain findings that relationships in which one or both partners' parents are divorced are more likely than other relationships to end in divorce themselves; specifically, heterosexual relationships in which the woman is from a divorced family have a 59% greater likelihood of divorce than relationships in which both partners are from intact families (Amato, 1996). Of course, not all NDs turned to the media to fill in the gaps of their model. Some, like Rob, were not able to accept the representations offered by the media because they felt that their parents' love story debunked them. It would be interesting to explore how a penchant for romantic

love stories and a quest to incorporate romantic elements into one's own love story or lack of a model or cynicism regarding love may contribute to the intergenerational transmission of divorce.

A second implication of the findings concerns the role of friends and peers in the romantic relationship development of emerging adults. In many cases, lessons learned from peers struck a balance between or offered a counterpoint to lessons learned from parents and the media. For example, although newlyweds reported learning the lesson Don't Rush from parents and Don't Hold Back from the media, from friends they learned the lesson The Time is Now. Just as peers have been found to regulate the pace of romantic relationship development in adolescence (Brown, 1999; Dornbusch et al., 1981), they also may be assisting each other to navigate conflicting messages regarding timing of marriage in emerging adulthood. Similarly, from the lesson Many Types of Relationships Are Acceptable, newlyweds may learn that not all romantic relationships proceed like that of their parents or characters portrayed through the media. Thus, in emerging adulthood, as in adolescence (Korobov & Thorne, 2007; 2009; Simon et al., 1992), peers may be challenging cultural norms and sorting out dilemmas regarding love through the stories that they share about their own romantic relationships.

Lastly, the finding that newlyweds do draw upon lessons learned from love stories in general when making the decision to marry has implications both for our understanding of romantic relationship decision-making and the role of narratives in

development. Few studies have explored how people make decisions in romantic relationships in general or how they decide to marry in particular. Instead, the majority of the literature on decision-making has focused on consumer (Bettman, Luce, & Payne, 2008), medical (Chapman, 2007), and career (Pleskac, Keeney, Merritt, Schmitt, & Oswald, 2011) decisions. Furthermore, most of the romantic relationship literature has focused on which qualities people look for in potential mates (e.g. Buss, Shackelford, Kirkpatrick, & Larsen, 2001; Wiederman, 1993) and how partners decide whether or not to remain in a relationship (e.g., Rusbult, 1983). By attending to the impact of love stories heard on love stories lived, the present study suggests a potential bridge between these two literatures. With regard to the role of narratives in development, plenty of studies have explored how *telling* stories facilitates self development and how differences in personality are associated with differences in types of stories told (e.g. McAdams et al., 1997; McLean, 2005), but few studies have explored how other people's love stories might differentially impact listeners development. This study opens the door for such future research.

It is important to consider the limitations of the present study, beginning with the small sample size (37 NMs, 19 NDs). The small number of newlyweds whose parents were divorced is particularly problematic. The lower prevalence of NDs than NMs may reflect the tendency for NDs to generally be less likely to marry (Wallerstein, Lewis, & Blakeslee, 2000). Nonetheless, replication with a larger sample size is important. The sample was also limited in that it was quite homogenous. The participants in this study were a very specific demographic of

mostly European American, highly educated, non-religious adults from Northern California. A more diverse sample with regard to religion, education, and ethnicity might have resulted in a broader array of reasons for the decision to marry. Had the sample been more religious, for example, couples might have reported deciding to marry out of a sense of religious or spiritual obligation, or as a prerequisite for cohabitation. It would be interesting to explore whether newlyweds continue to report learning similar lessons and deciding to marry for similar reasons in a more broadly representative sample.

The sample was also limited to heterosexual couples. This was in part due to the method of recruitment. As a result of the passing of Proposition 8, same sex couples are currently banned from getting married in the State of California. By restricting recruitment to couples obtaining marriage licenses from the county clerk's office at San Francisco City Hall, this study limited participation to heterosexual couples. The decision to limit the study to heterosexual couples was also, however, a choice made in order to control for variation in responses that might be accounted for by differences in sexual orientation. In part because of the current political climate, including same sex couples in the study could potentially introduce a host of additional considerations in the decision to marry. It is possible, for example, that some same-sex couples decide to marry as a political statement or as an act of asserting their civil liberties. Thus, same sex couples who decide to marry have an additional set of issues to navigate in making their decision, without even taking into

consideration their parents' marital status. Exploring this complicated network of additional issues was beyond the scope of the present study.

Lastly, the study was limited because it did not include adults who choose not to marry. As Wallerstein et al. (2000) reported, this includes a large percentage of adults with divorced parents. In their sample of 93 adult children of divorce, 40% had not married by the 25-year follow-up, compared with the national average of 16%. Although studying cohabiting couples was also beyond the scope of this study, it would be interesting to investigate the sources of the love stories that they attend to, the types of love stories that they gravitate toward, and their rationale for cohabiting, and to compare the responses of young adults with divorced parents who cohabit and who decide to get married, as well as young adults with married parents who cohabit and who decide to get married.

Despite these limitations, the study offers several new paths to be explored through future research. First, as mentioned previously, it would be interesting to trace the fate of NMs' and NDs' marriages across time and assess whether differences in the lessons they reported learning or the reasons they gave for deciding to marry relate to differences in marital satisfaction down the line. Specifically, it would be interesting to explore whether newlyweds who chased after romance did indeed face disillusionment later in their relationships (as suggested by Orbuch et al., 1993), or whether, as prior research has suggested, deciding to marry for circumstantial reasons results in decreased marital satisfaction (Surra et al., 1988).

Second, it would be interesting to explore individual differences in the types of love stories that people report being influenced by, the lessons they learn from these stories, and the approach that they take to reconciling competing lessons. For example, some newlyweds reported that they lost faith in love stories from the media because they felt that these stories did not portray the full picture of a relationship evolving past marriage, but other newlyweds revered love stories from the media precisely because they felt that they depicted long lasting relationships. Similarly, when faced with contradictions between media love stories and parental stories, some newlyweds chose to discard media love stories, while others chose to discard those of their parents. If parents' marital status is not the deciding factor in these decisions, then what is? Personality? Attachment style? Also, how do these individual differences in stitching together lessons learned from love stories play out in couples' own romantic relationships? What happens when two partners decided to marry for different reasons? When partners have different models for how romantic relationships should proceed? Do their perspectives approach each other over time? How does match in perspective relate to marital satisfaction?

Another line of inquiry for future research would be to compare newlyweds' recollections of parents' love stories with the stories as told by the parents themselves. In this way, researchers could discover the extent to which people are influenced by the stories as they are told versus the way that they interpret these stories. It would also be interesting to explore similarities between mothers' and fathers' accounts, and whether their stories change over time. Further, it would be interesting to explore

whether a relationship exists between the types of lessons that parents learned from their own parents, peers, and the media, and the lessons that their children reported.

Lastly, future research could investigate the role of stories heard in other romantic relationship decisions. For example, it would be interesting to explore how people draw upon lessons learned from love stories when deliberating about whether to initiate or to leave a relationship. Further, it would be interesting to examine how people integrate lessons learned from stories when making other significant decisions in their life. For example, how do people draw upon lessons learned from stories when deciding on a career to pursue, where to live, or how to raise their children?

Overall, this unprecedented study offers unique insight into how people make one of the most important decisions in their life, and lays the groundwork for future research examining how differences in such decision processes might relate to subsequent differences in marital stability and satisfaction. This study also broadens our understanding of how parental divorce influences adult romantic relationships; although the types of stories and lessons that NDs report being influenced by may differ from NMs', it appears that NDs and NMs alike are struggling to stitch together multiple conflicting models. Lastly, this study advances our understanding of the ways in which people draw upon others' stories when making difficult decisions in their lives, and how stories heard get translated into stories lived.

Table 1
List of Variables Coded, and their Source Questions

Source Question Coded	Variable Coded For				
	Source	Lesson	Theme	Valence	Rationale
Are there any other love stories that you heard, observed, or read that impacted you? What happens in these stories?	X	X			
Were you influenced at all by your parents' love story? Do you know the story of how they met, fell in love, and decided to get married?	X	X	X	X	
Were you influenced at all by any friends' love stories? What happens in these stories?		X			
How did the two of you decide to get married? That is, how did you decide to formally recognize your commitment?					X

Table 2

Definitions and Examples of Lessons Learned from Parents' Love Stories

Lesson Learned	Definition	Example
Don't Rush ¹	Have a good understanding of your partner, yourself, and your compatibility	Although they're still together, I think that they've each found in their own way, a way of saying, "we encourage you and your sister to—whether it's live with your partner or travel, or you know do a number of different things, kind of try to have a number of different experiences to kind of give you an idea of what it might be like with that partner over the long-term."
Treat and Be Treated Well	Relationships should involve mutual trust, affection, and respect	I feel like I was always trying to find the opposite of my dad. My dad didn't treat my mom very well and so I was always trying to find somebody who was a very good person and do the right thing and be there. Um so stuff like that I mean yeah growing up with parents like that. I mean they were together for a long time very unhappy and so I was just like I don't want that to be me.
Love Exists and Can Endure ²	Relationships can be based in true love and span long periods of time	When my mom passed away, they had been together for 38 years. Their story gives me hope in that they endured and their love just kept getting stronger and stronger as they got older. When you have kids it can be hard, but they stayed together and they just kept their romance alive. They are inspirational in that you know what? It's not always going to be perfect, but your love can continue to grow.
Relationships Take Work	Relationships require patience, work, and sacrifice	Don't give up if you're having trouble for six months or a year or something of marriage. Just shut up and sit it out and um don't make a rash decision when it comes to ending a marriage

¹ Also a lesson learned from peers

² Also a lesson learned from peers and media

Table 3

Definitions and Examples of Lessons Learned from Peers' Love Stories

Lesson Learned	Definition	Example
Many Types of Relationships are Acceptable	Relationships can take a variety of directions, alternative relationships are acceptable	I just like hearing about how people got together. I mean it can be all different types of stories but just hearing about how things happened. Like one of my good friends who'd been in a relationship for a long time um she met him at a bar and we'd always been like "Can you actually meet somebody at a bar?" like that's crazy!
The Time is Now	Now is the appropriate age to get married.	I certainly saw some of my friends get married, and um, you know it kind of, that was kind of a sign you know that we're, we're coming to that age where our friends are getting married, you know people are settling down. And it's something that I realized that I wanted.
Love Exists and Can Endure ³	Healthy and happy relationships are possible	I think we both draw upon the relationships of all of our friends and everybody brings something to the table, everybody has a different dynamic that they draw strength from. And, for both of us, uh I think optimism is, is uh something we try to reinforce and surround ourselves with. It's too easy to go down the dark road sometimes. So in that sense I think we're lucky to be surrounded by people who are in functional relationships.
Don't Rush ⁴	Be cautious, don't settle	I grew up in an area where lots of people married very young. My best friend, met her first boyfriend when she was 15 and they were married by the time she was 23. And she has three kids now and is you know, as nice as it is, I think there is kind of a romance about marrying your high school sweetheart, I think it was more difficult for them because they married so young. Um a lot of my friends married very young. And a lot of them are already getting divorced.

³ Also a lesson learned from parents and media

⁴ Also a lesson learned from parents

Table 4

Definitions and Examples of Lessons Learned from Media Love Stories

Lesson Learned	Definition	Example
Love Someone for Who They Are	One should find beauty in and appreciate one's partner, due to or in spite of all his or her eccentricities	The language describes very tiny and amazing things about this woman that this guy noticed. It wasn't about passion—there was passion, but it was not about it. It was about finding beauty and being amazed by another person.
Love Exists and Can Endure ⁵	There is a cultural model for how romantic relationships should unfold, what love should feel like; true love exists, relationships can endure despite challenges	I think growing up you always have a perception of love. You watch <i>Beauty and the Beast</i> or <i>Little Mermaid</i> or any Disney show and I think all of those things influence what you think about love... how love should be and what you thought you should look like and feel like when you were in love.
Communication is Key	It is important to express one's thoughts and feelings to one's partner; maintain consistent communication	The failures of the people in the partnerships in Carver's stories are really, not necessarily failures of character, but failures of communication. People just don't say the things that are in their brains, or in their hearts... don't say them when they should.
Don't Hold Back	It is important to be affectionate or spontaneous with one's partner; one should actively follow one's heart, even if it involves risk	Well I guess it would show that the um, the extremes that a man would go to claim what he thinks is his true love. That he would be willing to put a nation at war, and put his own life at risk. In an effort that could be considered to be highly risky...
Maintain Independence	It is important to be self-sufficient and / or to maintain a sense of self in a relationship	It is a reminder to a woman to not lose herself completely. That you must always maintain yourself and your life. That you are a partner in a relationship, but you are not a servant. You are not a captive, and that's why I work, that's why I earn my own money

⁵ Also a lesson learned from parents and peers

Table 5
Definitions and Examples of Themes of Parents' Love Stories

Theme	Definition	Example
Romantic	Parents' story depicts love at first sight, partners being childhood sweethearts, one partner determinedly pursuing the other, strong physical attraction, spontaneity, sincere public displays of affection, or partners doing anything (even crazy things) for love	<p>“They um, met in a furniture store (laugh). My mom was wearing miss-matched socks and she was really worried that my dad would notice, but he didn't, luckily. I guess he talked for a while at this furniture store and she had told him that she was a teacher at this school and so he like mailed a letter to the school to get in touch with her. So it was kind of serendipitous and sweet and a little old fashioned”</p> <p>“They ran off and went to Reno, they got married, they didn't tell anybody, and they're still together. Which is crazy.”</p>
Practical	Parents' story involves an explicitly mentioned lack of romance or affection, marriage for pragmatic reasons, or meeting in a mundane fashion	<p>“They were married uh about eight years before I was born. And um, it was kind of- they were kind of more drinking partners I think than anything else. There was about a fifteen-year age difference. And uh I was born after they'd been together a number of years. And uh they divorced when I was two.”</p> <p>“My dad was a friend of my mom's brother, and so they met through him. They're not, they're not still married. And they haven't been married for a long time. I think their marriage was more a matter of circumstance.”</p>

Table 6
Definitions and Examples of Valence of Parental Love Story Influence

Rationale	Definition	Example
Positive	Parents' love story is admired, respected, or regarded positively.	"The fact that that my dad was able to go out of his comfort zone [and date the participant's mom] is in a way inspiring. For one, I'm here because of that. I just think it's very enlightening and refreshing."
	Parents' love story is considered a positive role model to emulate.	"Seeing them made me see how I wanted to be with my partner."
Negative	Parents' love story is considered to have contributed to a cynicism or wariness toward marriage, trust, or relationships.	"I was conditioned to believe that the traditional family structure didn't work." "It made me more cautious in all of my decision making and relationships"
	Parents' love story is considered to be a cautionary tale—a model of what mistakes to avoid.	"I've been very careful about not um repeating that." "It was something that I definitely wanted to avoid at all costs, you know if at all possible."

Table 7
Definitions and Examples of Reasons for Deciding to Marry

Rationale	Definition	Example
Practical Reasons	Partners decided to marry in order to allow them to live abroad as a couple or secure a visa, because it made sense financially, or due to pregnancy	“We decided to get married <i>when</i> we did because we were moving to [a foreign country] and in order to live together we needed to be married.”
Natural Next Step	Partners decided to marry because they felt that their relationship had progressed to a new level and marriage was the best way to express their feelings	“Um we’ve been together for gosh since 2003 so 7, 7 years now? And it just came a point where calling him my boyfriend didn’t feel like the right title. He’s more than a boyfriend”
Partner Motivated	Partners decided to get married because it was important to one partner, or because one partner proposed to the other	“Um, he asked me to marry him.” “I don’t think that the institution of marriage is that important, but she does. And if I really don’t feel like it’s that important, then what’s the problem?”
Why Wait	Partners decided to marry because they realized they wanted to spend their lives together and wanted to start that life right away	“When you know you want to get married you don’t want to waste a minute of that time.”
Formal Recognition	Partners decided to marry because they wanted formal recognition or celebration of their commitment, or what they had gone through together	“I think that the biggest thing that marriage represents to us is a formal commitment to each other. Right now, we’re—even though we are committed to each other—marriage is more of a formal commitment.”

Table 8
Comparisons of Demographic Measures for Newlyweds with Either Divorced (ND) or Married (NM) Parents

	NDs (n = 19)	NMs (n = 37)	Two tailed t (df)	p	Effect Size (Phi & r)
<i>Gender: % Female</i>	42%	54%		.57	-.11
<i>Age: Mean Years and (SD)</i>	33.81 (6.74)	34.27 (8.45)	-.19 (47)	.85	.03
<i>Education: Mean Years and (SD)</i>	17.69 (2.57)	17.67 (2.03)	.03 (47)	.98	.00
<i>Religion: %</i>					
<i>Non-Religious</i>	92.9%	62.5%		.07	.31
<i>Christian</i>	7.1%	18.8%		.41	.15
<i>Jewish</i>	0%	12.5%		.30	.20
<i>Hindu</i>	0%	3.1%		1.00	.10
<i>Buddhist</i>	0%	3.1%		1.00	.10
<i>Ethnicity: %</i>					
<i>Caucasian</i>	87.5%	78.1%		.70	.11
<i>Hispanic</i>	12.5%	3.1%		.25	.18
<i>Asian</i>	0%	12.5%		.29	.21
<i>Multi-Ethnic</i>	0%	6.3%		.55	.15
<i>Length of Current Relationship: Mean Months and (SD)</i>	56.25 (29.95)	60.18 (40.13)	-.35 (47)	.73	.05
<i>Number of Close Romantic Relationships: Mean and (SD)</i>	3.53 (.99)	3.34 (1.45)	-.46 (45)	.65	.07
<i>Previously Married: %</i>	10.5%	13.5%		1.00	.04
<i>Parental Marital Satisfaction: Mean and (SD), 1-5 Scale</i>	NA	3.97 (1.14)			
<i>Age at Time of Parental Divorce in Years: Mean and (SD)</i>	9.82 (7.28)	NA			

Table 9
Influenced or Not Influenced by Parents' Love Story, by Parental Marital Status

	NDs	NMs	Total
<i>Influenced</i>	11	31	42
<i>Not Influenced</i>	7	5	12
<i>No Mention</i>	1	1	2
<i>Total</i>	19	37	56

(Fisher's exact test, $p = .04$)

Table 10
Lessons Learned from Parents: Frequency Reported by Each Group

Lesson Learned	NDs	NMs	Total
Don't Rush	5	7	12
Treat and Be Treated Well	3	8	11
Love Exists and Can Endure*	0	12	12
Relationships Take Work	3	3	6
No Mention	8	7	15
Total	19	37	56

* Fisher's Exact = .01

Table 11

Source for Lesson “Love Exists and Can Endure:” Parents vs. Media vs. Peers, by Parental Marital Status

	NDs	NMs	Total
<i>Learned from Parents</i>	0	12	12
<i>Learned from Media</i>	5	6	11
<i>Learned from Peers</i>	8	4	12

(Fisher’s exact test, $p = .01$; $X^2 (1) = 12.00$, $p < .01$, $V = .71$)

Table 12

Parent Love Story Theme, by Parental Marital Status

	NDs	NMs	Total
<i>Romantic</i>	3	16	19
<i>Practical</i>	12	13	25
<i>No Mention</i>	4	8	12
<i>Total</i>	19	37	56

$X^2 (1) = 4.99$, $p < .05$, $V = .34$

Table 13
Valence of Parental Love Story Influence, and Number of Newlyweds from Each Group who Reported Each

Valence	Valence Subcategories (%)	NDs	NMs	Total
<i>Positive</i>		1	21	22
	Admired / respected / regarded positively (41)			
	Thought served as good model (59)			
<i>Negative</i>		10	10	20
	Caused issues (e.g. with trust) (30)			
	Encouraged to do opposite (70)			
<i>No Mention</i>		8	6	14
<i>Total</i>		19	37	56

$X^2(1) = 11.20, p < .01, V = .52$

Table 14
Rationale for Own Decision to Marry, by Parental Marital Status

	NDs	NMs	Total
<i>Practical</i>	1	13	14
<i>Non-Practical</i>	18	24	42
<i>Total</i>	19	37	56

Fisher's exact test, $p = .02$

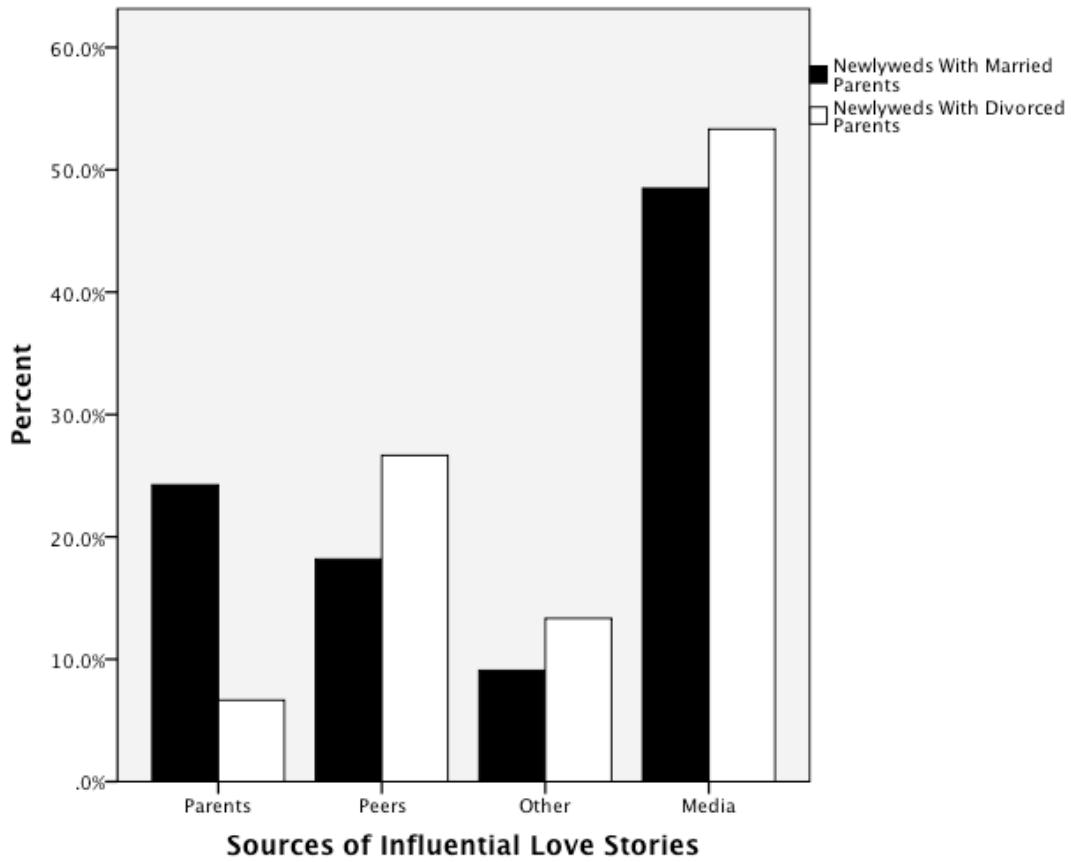


Figure 1. Percentage of NMs and NDs who reported parents, peers, the media, or other as the source of their influential love story.

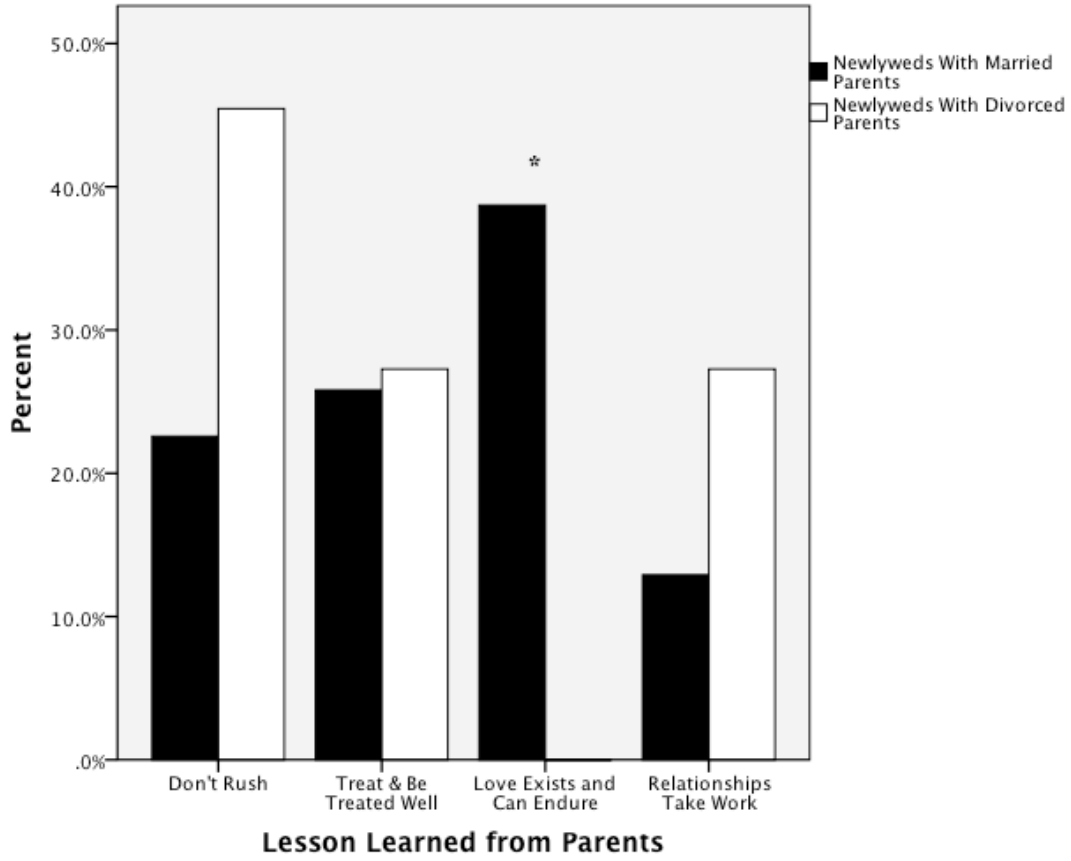


Figure 2. Percentage of NMs and NDs who reported learning each lesson from their parents.

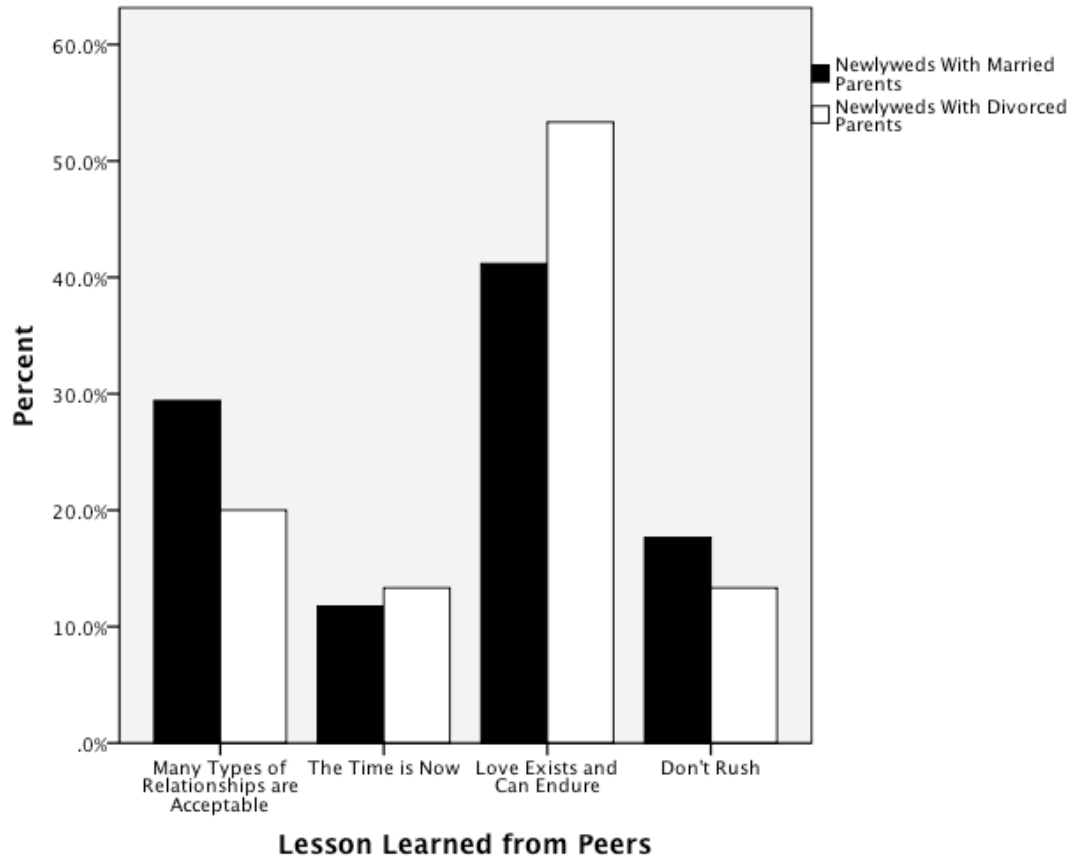


Figure 3. Percentage of NMs and NDs who reported learning each lesson from their peers.

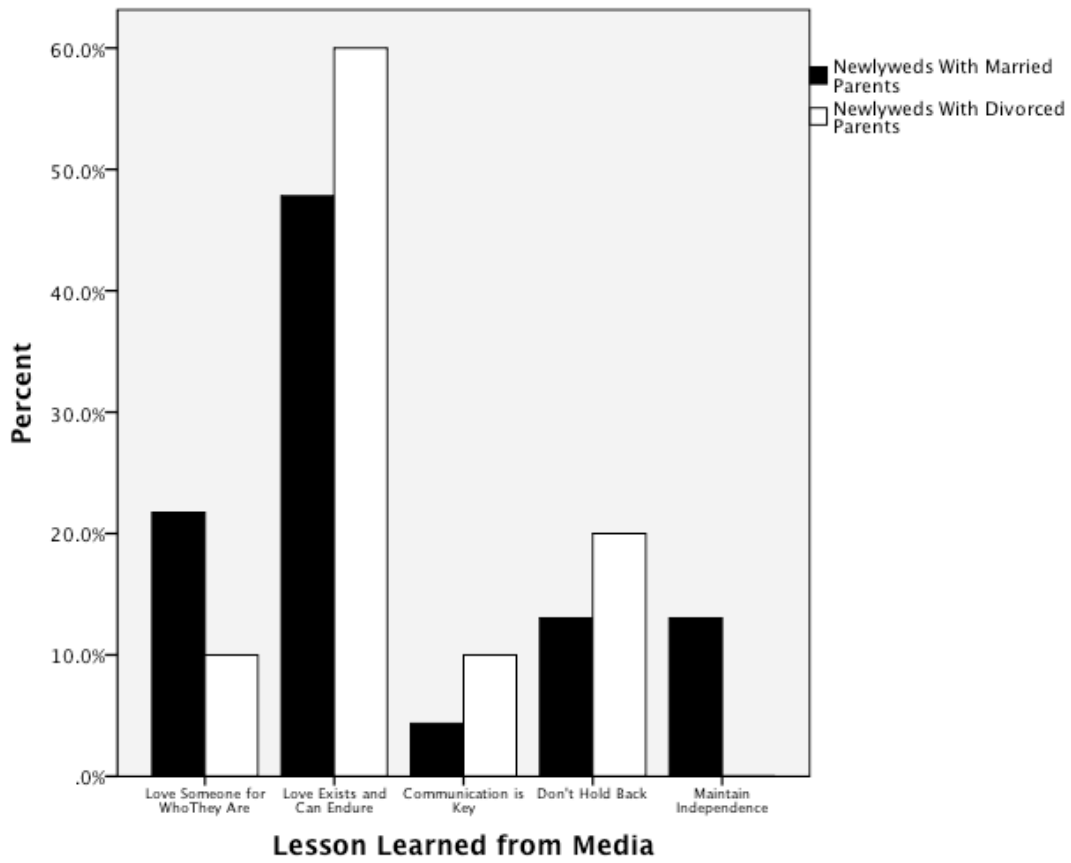


Figure 4. Percentage of NMs and NDs who reported learning each lesson from the media.

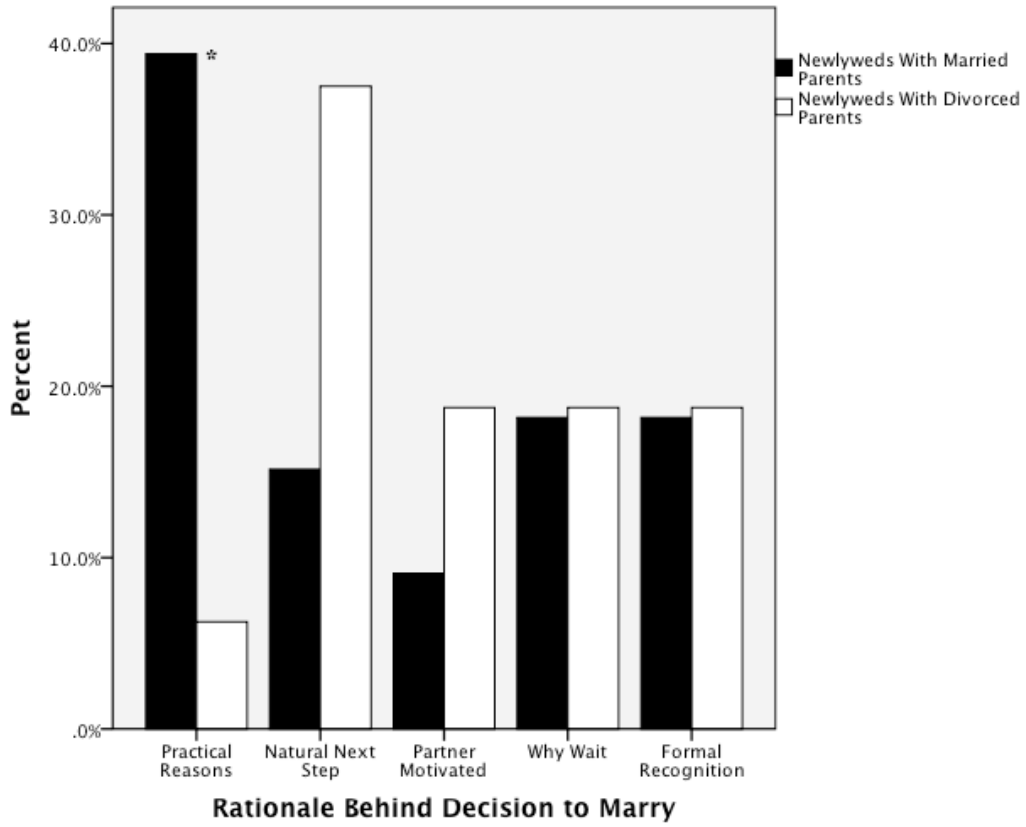


Figure 5. Percentage of NMs and NDs who reported making the decision to marry based on each of the five rationales.

Appendix A

Love Stories Interview

Part I: The Story

1. How did you and [your partner] meet?
2. What was it about your partner that drew you to her/him?
3. How did the two of you become a couple?
4. When did your relationship get serious?

9. How did the two of you decide to get married? That is, how did you decide to formally recognize your commitment?

10. Was there a proposal? If so, how did it unfold?

11. What do you think maintaining the relationship will require? What does it take to keep a marriage going?

12. What about your life together are you looking forward to the most?

Part II: Influences and Advice

1. Do you have any favorite love stories? These could be stories you read, encountered in film, or heard from others. If so, could you share them?
2. What happens in these stories?
3. What is it about these stories that you like?
4. Are there any other love stories that you heard, observed, or read that impacted you? What happens in these stories?
5. In what ways did these stories have an impact?

- a. For example, did they influence your partner selection?
 - b. Did they influence any difficult decisions you had to make in your relationship?
 - c. Did they influence your decision to marry your partner?
 - d. The timing of your marriage?
 - e. Did they influence the approach you take to your relationship on a daily basis?
6. Were you influenced at all by your parents' love story? Do you know the story of how they met, fell in love, and decided to get married?

How did the story influence you?

7. Were you influenced at all by your grandparents' story? What happens in this story?

How did the story influence you?

8. Were you influenced at all by any friends' love stories? What happens in these stories?

How did these stories influence you?

9. What is the best or most memorable piece of advice you've received about love, marriage, or romantic relationships? Who gave you this advice?
10. Do you have any advice you would like to pass on?

Appendix B

Love Stories Study: Personal Information

Age:

Sex:

Ethnicity:

Sexual Orientation:

Religious Affiliation:

Number of years of school completed:

Relationship Status

Length of Current Relationship

Length of Longest Relationship

Number of Close Romantic Relationships

If married, is this your first marriage?

If no, how many times have you married?

Love Stories Study: Parents' Information

Were either of your parents born outside the U.S. (please circle one)?

Yes No

If yes, which parent?

Where were they born?

Parents' Marital Status (Please circle one)

Married Divorced Separated Widowed Other

If you circled "Married" above, please rate the quality of your parents' marital relationship, in your opinion:

Very Unhappy 1 2 3 4 5 Very Happy

If you circled "Divorced" or "Separated," how old were you when your parents separated?

If you circled "Other," please explain

Please rate your closeness with your mother

Not Close at All 1 2 3 4 5 Very

Close

Please rate your closeness with your father

Not Close at All 1 2 3 4 5 Very Close

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