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Relational Red Flags: Detecting Undesirable Qualities in Initial Romantic Encounters

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RELATIONAL RED FLAGS: DETECTING UNDESIRABLE QUALITIES IN INITIAL ROMANTIC ENCOUNTERS

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I've grown up some these last few years. I've learned it's not as bad as it first appears. I've slowed it down, started shifting gears, now I get by on little things as the dark clouds clear.
– David Olsen

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation extends the work of Signal Detection Theory (SDT) (Green & Swets, 1966; Swets, 1964) in the social sciences by applying it to romantic relationships, specifically initial romantic encounters (i.e. formal or informal first few dates, or random, chance encounters). The term relational red flag is put forth to describe the detection of signals in initial romantic encounters that may be perceived as any undesirable quality, which can be a characteristic, behavior, state, or trait that a person would not want in a potential romantic partner. These undesirable qualities can be costly to a healthy, stable relationship because they conflict with the individual's own expectations, similarities, and compatibilities. The significant findings of this dissertation are derived from a two-study, mixed methods approach. The results from Study 1 led to the formation of a relational red flag typology, comprised of the nine main types and 23 subtypes of relational red flags, which also included the identification of the most severe relational red flags. Gender differences were also discovered. Study 2 built off the foundation provided by Study 1, revealing that relational red flags change across young adulthood, depending on an individual's specific dating experiences and their own personal development. Findings also showed that an individual's family and social network can play a vital role in the detection and processing of relational red flags. Additionally, a sequential identification and decision-making process was also discovered, which explains how individuals detect, label, and then handle relational red flags. Lastly, the best and worst approaches to handling relational red flags was also identified. Discussions, limitations, and future research are provided for both studies.

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Imagine this: You meet someone new and make plans for a date. The two of you meet at a local restaurant for dinner. From the beginning, you can sense something is not right. As you arrive at the restaurant, you notice your date is glued to their phone. They put it down briefly, only to pick it back up, scroll through some unseen messages, apps or web page, and then put it back down again. Your date later excuses themselves and returns five minutes later. After you order, your date gets up once more, and this time is gone for 10 minutes.

You notice in the distance that your date is flirting with someone at the bar. They later return and promptly order several alcoholic drinks and consume them all before your food even arrives. Your date is now drunk and starts talking about their exes. Before the date even ends, it has become clear to you in numerous ways that this will not likely lead to a blossoming relationship. The disrespect and disinterest shown, coupled with the intense alcohol consumption and insecurity regarding past relationships, are just a few of the countless relational red flags that not only should be heeded, but for many are all too commonplace.

It is important to study these relational red flags because they signify undesirable qualities, which can be characteristics, behaviors, states or traits in the other person that conflict with our own expectations, similarities, and compatibilities. If these relational red flags go unnoticed, they could lead to weeks, months or even years of emotional, mental and physical abuse and misery as you find yourself in an unsatisfying and potentially even dangerous romantic relationship. Worse yet, it is a relationship you never should have been in in the first place, as the signs were all right there from the beginning. The relational red flags were waiting to be noticed.

This dissertation will focus on how people communicate and detect these relational red flags in initial romantic encounters, which can be anything ranging from formal or informal first few dates, or random, chance encounters or anything in-between, as viewed through the theoretical lens of Signal Detection Theory (SDT). The rationale for analyzing these relational red flags is a simple one. Romantic relational communication is a vital area of interpersonal communication research, one that has beneficial theoretical and practical applications. It is an area that many scholars study, and yet there has been an absence of research into this crucial field of relational red flags.

Theoretical and Practical Importance

Relational red flags are largely born out of violated expectations and dissimilarities, which lead to incompatibility, and compatibility is a foundational component of any close relationship. At their core, human beings are social creatures. It has been argued that we possess a need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). This is one of several basic interpersonal needs that every human being possesses (Schutz, 1958). The primary way we satisfy this need is by developing and maintaining close relationships with others, be it friendships or romantic relationships.

The more intimate and positively valenced the relationship is, the more satiated our need becomes. The desire to love and be loved is considered, especially in Western culture, as one of the most powerful and fulfilling driving forces in life (Aron & Aron, 1994; Baumeister & Wotman, 1992; Clark & Pataki, 1995). Indeed, some consider it to be the most fundamental of all human needs (Montague, 1970).

Individuals who are in satisfying, happy, stable relationships enjoy a number of positive effects in their lives. They experience an increase in positive financial, psychological, and

physiological benefits (Fincham & Beach, 2010; Hawkins & Booth, 2005; Reis & Gable, 2003; Ryff, 1995), benefits which result in these individuals who possess satisfied, healthy relationships to experience a 50% greater likelihood of survival (Holt-Lunstad, Smith, & Layton, 2010).

The reverse is also true for unsatisfactory relationships. Those in unhappy partnerships experience several negative physical and mental health effects, as seen in the increased presence and severity of heart disease, anxiety, and depression (Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001; Whisman, 2007). A poor quality of relationship with one's romantic partner not only leads to a significantly greater risk of depression (Teo, Choi, & Valenstein, 2013), but the sense of stress and loneliness that results from the depression can itself lead to a significantly weaker immune system, leaving the afflicted individual more susceptible to pain, illness, disease, fatigue and other health problems (Jaremka, Fagundes, Glaser, Bennett, Malarkey, & Kiecolt-Glaser, 2013; Jaremka, Fagundes, Peng, Bennett, Glaser, Malarkey, & Kiecolt-Glaser, 2013).

It is clear that when love is felt and reciprocated, it can result in feelings of immense happiness and satisfaction, but when love is one-sided, it can result in immense emotional and physiological pain (Eden, 2011). A person may like someone who does not like them back, or he or she may want to like someone, but feel they cannot or should not because of various dissimilarities. Either of these everyday situations can occur because of incompatibility. It is well known through empirical research on adult relationships that similarity and compatibility in, among other things, attitudes, values, interests and personalities are defining issues in whether a close, intimate relationship between two people is developed and maintained or whether it dissolves (Byrne & Nelson, 1965; Fehr, 2008; Miller, 2012).

While compatibility in crucial interpersonal areas can often lead to a wide array of satisfying relationships, incompatibilities can be just as detrimental to any new or even longstanding relationship. These incompatibilities are signals that communicate that individuals are dissimilar in various areas, areas that for many people are key, defining issues that reflect the essence of who they are as well as what they want in a potential romantic partner. These signals that warn of potential incompatibilities are relational red flags.

The study of these red flags is crucial in our understanding of the role romantic relational communication plays in our lives. As Price and McKenry (1988) note, communication difficulties are routinely cited as the leading cause of relationship deterioration and termination. Ignoring these signals could cost a person several months to even years of distress and turmoil as they progress through an unhealthy, unsatisfactory and potentially even abusive and dangerous romantic relationship. It is for this reason that given the vital role they play in whether relationships are initially formed and then whether or not they are properly developed and maintained, that the study of relational red flags is one of considerable importance to interpersonal communication, the general study of communication and the social sciences as a whole.

Relational Red Flags

"You know, it's funny; when you look at someone through rose-colored glasses, all the red flags…just look like flags."

Such are the lamentations of a solemn young woman in her dour hour of need as she realizes her serious romantic relationship with her boyfriend had been derailed because she failed to notice the relational red flags that had been there all along. Ever since the beginning, in fact. The quote comes from television character Wanda Pierce, as voiced by Lisa Kudrow, in the 10th

episode of the critically acclaimed second season of the Netflix series *BoJack Horseman.* This stark revelation comes as Wanda leaves her now ex-boyfriend's house, heartbroken over the dissolution of their once close romantic relationship. This is just one of countless examples of when the topic of relational red flags was poignantly utilized in popular culture throughout the ages.

Even though there has been a dearth of empirical research on the topic, relational red flags have been consistently and creatively discussed throughout the world for several hundreds of years. Whether it is through countless literary classics by William Shakespeare, Emily Bronte, Leo Tolstoy, F. Scott Fitzgerald and many others in centuries past, to more contemporary usage in current popular culture, the core theme of relational red flags and what they represent have been a constant and rich source of interest among the general population.

Although the Gutenberg Bible marked the first true iteration of the mass-produced printed page through movable type in the last half of the 15th century, it was not until the 16th century and onward where the literary power of the printing press began to exponentially flourish with the vast dissemination of many literary works. Through this continually-growing widespread dissemination came the formation and prevalence of classic literary tropes. Chief among them were romantic tropes brought about by some of history's greatest playwrights and dramatists. At the forefront of this was the Bard himself, William Shakespeare. His plays, sonnets, and poems contained some of the world's most well-known romantic themes, with many of them notably consisting of romantic tragedies born out of the couple's severe dissimilarities and incompatibilities.

In Shakespeare's *Othello*, the play's namesake murders his innocent wife Desdemona based on nothing but circumstantial evidence and the unfounded belief that she had made him a

cuckold with his second in command. The two were portrayed in the play as an early and quite prominent example of how opposites attract. Their union was so hated and despised that they married in secret as the innocent, fair Desdemona fell for the exotic, strange, and ultimately dangerous Moor, Othello. If only Desdemona had been aware of his jealousy and violent tendencies, she would have seen how interpersonally incompatible they truly were.

Be it fitting then that Shakespeare coined the term that best fits these ill-fated matches, these star-crossed lovers present in countless early and present day literary classics. They are lovers whose affection for each other is doomed to end in tragedy (star-crossed-lovers, n.d.) due to either their own dissimilarities and incompatibilities or those of their social and family systems. This latter example is best seen through the term's originating use to describe the feuding family estates in Shakespeare's iconic *Romeo and Juliet*, which has inspired and influenced myriad creative minds over the centuries.

Shakespeare was hardly alone in realizing that a person who ignored their partner's dissimilarities and incompatibilities would be doomed to a tragic end. Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* gave the world the complex Heathcliff, who is seen by many as the quintessential tortured romantic hero. He is a man whose passions are so great that they destroy those around him. While he pined for his equally iconic Catherine, Heathcliff first married Isabella Linton, who found him to be exciting and handsome, but in the end he turned out to be coarse, brutal, and focused solely on petty revenge. This is yet another example of severe signals that went unnoticed that could have spared heartache and misery for all involved.

Other literary works considered to be among the greatest in the known world, ranging from the characters of Anna Karenina and Alexei Vronsky in Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, or Tom and Daisy Buchanan in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, show that much of

literature's most renowned love stories are tragic cases full of those who did not read the signals. In Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, the novel's namesake cheats on her husband for another man, believing this to be the timeless love she feels she so deserves; however, this relationship also ultimately spirals into despair. On the surface, Karenina is a beautiful, elegant, and educated woman, while Vronsky, who Karenina leaves her husband for, is a handsome, charming and wealthy man. Their initially torrid love affair is undone by jealousy, paranoia and insecurity, as her relationship with Vronsky proved not to be the unbridled passionate, ageless love she had idealistically believed it would be. Her expectations were not realistic and reality cost Karenina her happiness as Vronsky was just a flawed man full of failed career ambitions. In the end, Karenina, depressed and obsessed with an idealized view of a love she could never obtain, commits suicide.

Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* tells a different, but similarly cautious tale about failed romance stemming from glaring red flags. By all appearances, Tom Buchanan is a prestigiously educated and athletic man of wealth and class, while his wife, Daisy Buchanan, is a beautiful and charming woman of grace. In truth, however, the Buchanans' picturesque marriage is a miserable one for them both, due in equal parts to Tom, who is an arrogant, racist, sexist brute, and Daisy, who is an immature, fickle, shallow, money-hungry trophy wife.

These and many other classic literary characters either did not see these signals, or outright ignored them, believing that their raging dissimilarities were a trifling matter, believing instead that opposites attract. This, as the literature will show in the following chapter, could not be further from the truth. These very same red flags persist today in the love affairs of characters found in many popular movies, songs, books, and television shows. Relational red flags are signs that warn that caution should be taken. These red flags are inherently relational in their very

nature as they help us to better understand relational development in various areas, but perhaps none more prominently than in initial romantic encounters, as we often hold our romantic partners to higher and different standards than we hold all others.

Defining Relational Red Flags

It is clear that these red flags all have a listing of similar components. For some it is a specific behavior, for others a personal characteristic, and for others still they can be enduring, stable personality traits or merely a passing, conditional state. It if for these reasons that this author puts forth the term relational red flag to define this specific topic of relational communication.

I posit that a relational red flag is any undesirable quality, which can be a characteristic, behavior, state or trait that a person possesses that the other individual would not want in a potential romantic partner. This is because these relational red flags are signals that represent the undesirable qualities that people identify as being costly to a healthy, stable relationship. Relational red flags are seen as undesirable qualities because they conflict with the individual's own expectations, similarities, and compatibilities. By exploring these relational red flags, we can better understand the dynamic role they play in various aspects of interpersonal interaction, as they are perhaps most notably inherent to the initial development of romantic relationships.

Relational red flags are important because they are signals. They are signals that describe the undesirable qualities that should be heeded by the signal receiver in their assessment of whether or not to proceed romantically with the other individual, who is sending the undesirable signals. This leads to the primary theoretical framework of this dissertation, Signal Detection Theory (SDT).

Theoretical Framework: Signal Detection Theory

The theoretical model I will use to guide this dissertation is Signal Detection Theory (SDT). A brief overview will be given here with a more complete and detailed review appropriately found in the following chapter, Chapter 2: Review of Literature.

It is natural to ask, "What is a signal?" A signal can be any behavior, which serves as a display or even more generally as anything that conveys information. Dawkins and Krebs (1978) define it as "anything that acts as an incitement to action" (p. 380). This definition is quite fitting for romantic relational research. For example, any undesirable quality, be it anything as moderate as a persistently annoying habit or as severe as one person's potentially violent tendencies, would be best detected and understood by the other person before the exertion and investment of the necessary time, energy, and effort are spent to form an established relationship. The detection of these potentially harmful signals could benefit both parties significantly by them realizing that they are not an appropriate, compatible match.

However, not all signals are detected. Whether a signal is detected is due to various factors, such as noise and uncertainty (Green & Swets, 1966). Signals can also follow one of three primary trajectories (Coffman, 1997). Furthermore, whether a signal is accurately detected or not is illustrated in the SDT principle of hits and misses, a vital component of signal detection (Krantz, 1969). Because of the collective power of these aforementioned factors, some signals are strong while others are weak. For example, while most strong signals are noticed and most weak signals are not, it is not uncommon for strong signals to go unnoticed while weak signals can be quickly identified.

Signals can not only be strong or weak, and go noticed or unnoticed, but their valency can also be labeled as either positive or negative, based on the specific preferences and

proclivities of the signal detector. However, while noticing a person's positive attributes are indeed important, it is not just the presence of positively valenced signals that lead to the formation of a romantic relationship, but also the presence of negatively valenced signals that influence whether a relationship will continue past the initial romantic encounter of a first date.

This leads to the primary research question.

RQ1: What are the most common relational red flags that people communicate and detect in initial romantic encounters?

Expectancy Violation Theory

While SDT will provide the primary theoretical framework for the analysis of relational red flags as undesirable signals in initial romantic encounters, another theory, Expectancy Violation Theory, will help explain why the presence of these signals is seen as either positive or negative in the first place. Expectancy Violation Theory (EVT), as conceptualized by Judee Burgoon (Burgoon & Hale, 1988; Burgoon & Jones, 1976), explains how people process and label unanticipated violations to personal, societal, and cultural expectations. When our expectations are violated, the violation will be labeled as either a positive or negative experience. Relational red flags occur for a number of reasons, one primary reason being that our romantic relational expectations were negatively violated.

Cognitive Script Theory

The violation of relational red flags occurs because they not only conflict with our personal, societal, and cultural expectations, but more specifically many of these violations occur because they are also counter to the patterns of socially expected behavior. These violations interrupt and defy our relational scripts. Relational scripts are a major component of cognitive script theory, which asserts that there are mental knowledge structures that we possess that serve

as our expectations for how particular events should unfold (Abelson, 1976, 1981; Tomkins, 1979, 1987). When relational scripts are violated, the expected behavior is interrupted and replaced with a violation that must be labeled as either a positive or negative interruption. Certain relational red flags are negative interruptions of our cognitive, relational scripts, given that we expected a particular thing to occur, because societal norms dictated that it should occur. Instead, however, a negatively valenced violation of that script occurred in its place. A detailed review of Expectancy Violation Theory, Cognitive Script Theory, and other related literature will be presented in the next chapter.

Conclusion

Very little empirical research has been conducted on how people communicate relational red flags, which this author proposes as a key term to better understanding relational development in initial romantic interactions. I posit that these relational red flags are any undesirable quality, which can be a behavior, characteristic, state or trait that a person possesses that the other individual would not want in a potential romantic partner. This is because these relational red flags are signals that represent the undesirable qualities that people identify as being costly to a stable, healthy relationship. Relational red flags are seen as undesirable qualities because they conflict with the individual's own expectations, similarities, and compatibilities. I am interested in exploring these relational red flags to better understand the dynamic role that they play in the initial development of romantic relationships. These relational red flags are signals which describe undesirable qualities that should be heeded by the signal receiver in their assessment of whether or not to proceed romantically with the other individual, who is sending the undesirable signals.

The following chapter provides a detailed review of the literature on signal detection theory as well as other relevant theories related to this dissertation's main focus. This will be followed by Chapter 3 and 4, which will provide a detailed account of the methodology and results of Studies 1 and 2, respectively. Chapter 5 will then close out this dissertation by providing a comprehensive discussion of this document's main findings, including related limitations, implications and directions for future research.

CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Signals are important and can be used in a wide variety of ways depending on their application. Signals are primarily important because they warn of potentially impending doom that may ensue if the signal goes unheeded, regardless of how strong or weak the signal may be (Robinson, 2012). Before they can be applied to romantic relationships, signals must first be understood in their original form, which led to their migration into the social sciences and later still into romantic research.

Signal Detection Theory

Signal detection, and its subsequent theory, has its earliest roots in radar research during the 1940s (Marcum, 1947). Here, signal detection was used as a development of communications and radar equipment for the purpose of pulsed radar during the first half of the last century. In the following decade, signal detection was brought into the social sciences through psychology (Tanner & Swets, 1954) by combining detection theory with statistical decision theory. It was later further built upon by Swets and Green when it was formally given the name Signal Detection Theory (SDT) (Green & Swets, 1966; Swets, 1964). SDT has since been used in a wide variety of ways in the social sciences, particularly in interpersonal communication. One such application by Honeycutt and Eldredge (2015) extended SDT to communicating and decoding uses of conflict escalation.

A signal is any event in which some living system transmits a message during the course of its actions or behavior (Coffman, 1997). Simply put, and as previously alluded to, a signal can be any behavior, which serves as a display or even more generally as anything that conveys information. Dawkins and Krebs (1978) define it as “anything that acts as an incitement to action” (p. 380). This definition is perfect for use in romantic relational research. For example,

in the course of a first date, if one person acts hostile, it would be beneficial for the other person to detect these hostile signals and act on them by making decisions that ensure the signal receiver's safety.

Noise and Uncertainty

Not all signals are detected. Some are, while others are not. Whether a signal is detected is due to several factors. Two such major components of SDT are noise and uncertainty (Green & Swets, 1966). Every day we interact with others and in doing so we must make countless decisions when we engage in these interactions and we do this based on the information we receive. This information is often presented to us in the form of signals given by the person with whom we are communicating. However, we rarely have every possible piece of information available concerning a decision when we must make that decision. Because of this, SDT states that our decision-making processes occur in the presence of some level of uncertainty.

We must make these decisions despite this uncertainty while simultaneously attempting to accurately detect any and all signals amidst the presence of noise, which is any type of interference that may be present when the signal is sent (Green & Swets, 1966). Noise can be either internal or external. Internal noise can include our neural responses and any interference occurring in our mental processes. The beating of your own heart can be internal noise if it distracts you.

External noise includes anything in our external environment. If you are outside, this could include the force of the wind, birds chirping, rain falling, other people talking, cars honking, or construction equipment in use; the list is endless. If you are inside, many of these same outdoor sources could still be heard indoors, or the indoor noise could be contained to just your immediate environment. This could include conversations, televisions blaring, phones

ringing, A/C humming, appliances beeping, and so on depending on where you are. Regardless of where it is and how it occurs, noise needs to be anticipated and dealt with if a signal is to be detected.

Signal Trajectories

Coffman (1997) outlines how when a signal is sent, it can result in one of three different trajectories, depending on the characteristics of the stimulus (a weak signal versus a strong signal), the presence, intensity and degree of any background stimulation or interference (i.e. noise), and the physical and psychological states of the detector/receiver. Regarding the latter condition of physical and psychological considerations, if the receiver is in altered state or is not their typical self, he or she may not accurately detect signals he or she would normally pick up on under any other normal circumstance. For example, if a person is drunk, or impaired in some other way, this may severely restrict their ability to detect signals. Table 2.1 illustrates these three trajectories.

As Coffman (1997) points out, the first trajectory of signals regards those that, while they are indeed sent, are beyond the receiver's perception. This may be due to several reasons, as these signals may be transmitted across channels or on frequencies that the receiver is unable to access. Examples include our inability as humans to see infrared or hear ultrasonic sounds. Another example would be our inability to recognize radio waves, which stream constantly throughout our environment, but we still remain unaware of their presence.

Furthermore, even if an individual did have the possible, human ability to perceive the signals, he or she may not be in a physical position to do so. Take for example activities that occur on the other side of a building, or several miles away in another city, all of which occur

daily without our knowledge since they are outside the range of our personal and physical senses. Countless signals are sent every day that we are unable to receive.

Table 2.1. Signal Trajectories	
1.	A signal is sent, but it is beyond the receiver's ability to receive it.
2.	A signal is sent and it is able to be received, but it is ignored or goes unnoticed by the receiver.
3.	A signal is sent, it is able to be received, and the receiver recognizes the signal's presence.

An example of this trajectory in an initial romantic encounter would be if one person on a date were to get up and flirt with other individuals completely out of view of the other person. Since the unsuspecting person cannot see through walls and does not possess supersonic hearing, it is not humanly possible for them to receive such a signal and see that their date is flirting with other people, even though the signal is indeed being sent. The flirtatious individual is signaling to those around them that they are romantically available even though they are ostensibly on a date with someone else. The signal is still being sent in the setting of the initial romantic encounter, but due to various factors, the detection of the signal is beyond the receiver's perception. Table 2.2 illustrates an example of a signal in an initial romantic interaction for each corresponding trajectory presented in Table 2.1.

Next, there is the second possible trajectory of a signal. This pathway includes those signals that are able to be perceived but go unrecognized nonetheless by the receiver. These signals are simply ignored or are unnoticed for a variety of reasons. Many individuals employ mental processes that filter out a majority of signals that are deemed too trivial when in fact they may not be. This may occur because the signal is either too weak or because that individual has

labeled that signal (and any similar signals) as inconsequential. While it would seem foolish to not notice signals that are sent one's way, the reasons why we ignore these signals is not only quite simple, but it is often to our advantage. We are bombarded with countless signals every day and this filtering process is essential to allowing us to focus on the signals that we believe are most important.

Table 2.2 Examples of Signal Trajectories in Initial Romantic Encounters	
1.	A signal is sent, but it is beyond the receiver's ability to receive it. Ex: Your date flirts with someone else out of view in another part of the restaurant.
2.	A signal is sent and it is able to be received, but it is ignored or goes unnoticed by the receiver. Ex: Your date makes a quick passive-aggressive remark that goes unnoticed.
3.	A signal is sent, it is able to be received, and the receiver recognizes the signal's presence. Ex: You see your date being rude to the waiter while you're placing your order.

An example of this trajectory in an initial romantic interaction would be if your date makes a quick passive-aggressive remark that goes unnoticed or ignored. This may occur for any of a number of reasons. Maybe you were intently focused on a story you were telling them or you were listening to the waiter list that evening's specials; in these instances, the signal has gone unnoticed. Or perhaps you are conditioned to hearing passive-aggressive remarks in your daily life through work or personal relationships with family and friends and think nothing of it, leading this minor, quick remark to not register with you when perhaps it should have; in this instance, the signal was ignored. It does not matter if the signal goes unnoticed or ignored, in either instance it is not recognized.

The third and final trajectory occurs when signals are received, recognized, and utilized. This pathway often occurs because the signals are either quite strong and overt, or because the individual has been conditioned to recognize that specific signal. An example of this trajectory in an initial romantic interaction would be if you witness your date being rude to the waiter while you are placing your order.

Hits, Misses and Signal Strength

Even though a signal may be sent and detected, it may not always be *accurately* detected. Whether a signal is accurately detected or not is illustrated in the SDT principle of hits and misses, a vital component of signal detection (Krantz, 1969). Sometimes signals are accurately detected, and this would constitute a hit. Other times, though, they are ignored or go unnoticed, which would constitute a miss. Needless to say, it is important to have more hits than misses.

A signal's strength, or the prominence and intensity with which it is sent, can often decide whether it results in a hit or a miss (Krantz, 1969). Strong signals are often detected the most, but weak signals that may be misinterpreted or outright dismissed may still carry valuable information that should not be ignored. Robinson (2012) defines weak signals as "essentially unclear observables that warn about the probability of future events" (p. 6). They can be found in virtually every aspect of life, and yet they too often go unnoticed. Missing weak signals can have disastrous effects. These effects can be as small as a minor daily inconvenience or they can just as easily take place on a global level, as Robinson (2012) cites Pearl Harbor and 9/11 as historic examples of when numerous weak signals were ignored, resulting in a pair of tragedies that had far reaching effects on military history, international relations, and billions of lives the world over.

In reference to an example used earlier in Chapter 1, an undesirable quality may come in all shapes and sizes. It may signal anything as moderate as a persistently annoying, yet ultimately tolerable habit or it may be something severe and detrimental to one's coupling such as a person's potentially violent, dangerous tendencies. These undesirable qualities may vary as the hostile signals that particular individual displayed may be of either the strong or weak variety.

Regardless of the intensity of the signal, detecting hostile tendencies in a potential romantic partner would be beneficial for the other person on the date. No matter how strong or weak it is, its very presence would be an important thing to be aware of. However, if the signal is too weak, for example merely a quick sneer or a subtle passive-aggressive remark, the signal may go unnoticed. This could likely lead to relational difficulty down the road should a romantic relationship develop between the two people, given the hostile individual's potential violent tendencies. This is just one of countless reasons why these undesirable signals, proposed here as relational red flags, should be studied.

Positive and Negative Signals

Signals are not always negative; signals can be seen as positive as well. While in one instance your date may rudely yell at the waiter (negative signal), they may later perform any of a number of endearing romantic gestures (positive signal). Just as negative signals may warn of potential doom, positive signals may describe a number of desired compatibilities and similarities. However, while a person's positive attributes are important, it is not just the presence of positively valenced signals that lead to the formation of a romantic relationship, but also the presence of negatively valenced signals that influence whether a relationship will continue past the initial romantic encounter and onward to a second date, third and fourth date, and so on. This leads to the primary research question.

RQ1: What are the most common relational red flags that people communicate and detect in initial romantic encounters?

I believe there will be a number of relational red flags that are shared by most people. Outside of caution relating to physical violence, very little is known about relational red flags, with even less known about them in initial romantic encounters. This first research question is aimed at understanding the most common relational red flags that occur in initial romantic interactions (be it formal or informal first dates, a chance first encounter or anything in-between), to create a crucial foundational baseline for even deeper research into this area.

Error Management Theory

SDT has been applied to a few areas of romantic relationships. One such notable application is error management theory (Haselton & Buss, 2000; Haselton & Nettle, 2006). This concept illustrates why men typically tend to incorrectly perceive women as being more romantically open and available than they actually are. This is due to a signal-detection problem.

There are two distinct types of errors that may occur that we must consider and manage when attempting to detect the presence of a signal: a false positive error or a false negative error (Haselton & Buss, 2000). Because signals and other related cues are unfortunately sometimes ambiguous and subtle, errors are inevitable. Generally, people attempt to avoid false negatives, which consequently leads to more accidental false positives (Nesse, 2005). This relates back to the issue of hits and misses.

Sometimes a person perceives that there is a signal where there is none (false positive). Other times a signal is sent and goes unnoticed, as the receiver is under the understanding that no such signal had been sent (false negative). False positives are also commonly called false alarms while a false negative is also known as a miss (Green & Swets, 1966; Swets, 1964). Both are

errors in detection since they did not lead to a successful detection of a signal, otherwise known as a hit. A fourth and final type of detection response would be if the receiver believes no signal is being sent when indeed there is no signal being sent. This is known as a correct rejection. Examples of each of the four possible detection responses can be seen in Figure 2.1.

An example of this overall concept in romantic relationships is seen in a man's ability (or inability) to detect romantic interest from a woman. He commits a false positive if he perceives romantic interest where there is none. He could also commit a false negative by failing to detect romantic interest when it is presented. From an evolutionary perspective, it is better for men to minimize the costlier false negative error, which occurs when the male fails to notice that the female is indeed showing romantic interest in them. This is considered costlier because when there is romantic interest, there is an increased chance of procreation and thus continuing the existence of the species. And because it is better to minimize this costlier false negative error, this inevitably results in more false positives, which is perceiving that the romantic interest is there when it in fact is not (Haselton & Buss, 2000; Maner, Kenrick, Becker, Robertson, Hofer, Neuberg, Delton, Butner, & Schaller, 2005).

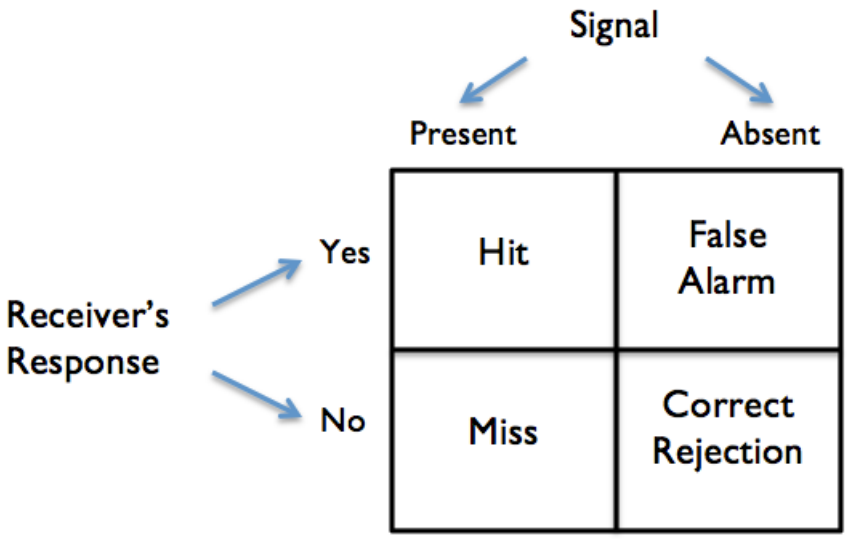

Figure 2.1. Signal Detection Responses

Evolutionary theorists (Maner et al., 2005; Neuberg, Kenrick, & Schaller, 2010), argue this is a bias that can be predicted to regularly occur: that men will typically tend to err on the side of caution by choosing the less costly error, which is perceiving romantic interest where there is none. This often results in men becoming more physical in their affection, since they believe the woman is displaying romantic interest. As the aforementioned evolutionary theorists have shown, this supports an important difference among the genders: that men are far more receptive to, and focused on, engaging in sexual activity than women. Indeed, it has been well-researched and consistently shown across numerous studies that men are 1) more desiring of sex, 2) more open to the possibility of sex, 3) and are more ready to have sex at a much faster rate, than women. Take for example the following findings, which support these suppositions.

Men are predominantly perceived by both genders as being more focused on sex and more geared towards obtaining sex. One study found that both sexes identified communication strategies targeted at obtaining sex as more typical of men and strategies aimed at avoiding sex as more typical of women (Mercer & Kohn, 1979). Men also perceive both genders to be more promiscuous, seductive, and flirtatious (La France, Henningsen, Oates, & Shaw, 2009).

Building on this, men are not only *perceived* to be more open to sex, they also *are* more open to sex far more frequently than women. A recent study found that the male participants experienced greater intensity and frequency of sexual desire than the female participants, showing that the male respondents experienced 37 instances of sexual desire per week, compared to just nine episodes of sexual desire for the female respondents. Furthermore, the men reported thinking about sex an average of 60 times per week compared to women who had just 15 such instances during the week (Regan & Atkins; 2006).

Men do not only think about sex much more often than women, but they are also typically ready for sex long before women are (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). Indeed, men are more accepting of sexual goals during first dates compared to women, who instead preferred friendship and fun goals (Mongeau, Serewicz, & Therrien, 2004). Not only that, but men are also more willing to have sex with someone they have just met, regardless of whether it was in the confines of a first date or not (Herold & Mewhinney, 1993).

The main theme of all of these findings can be understood through evolutionary psychology. This is because, as Baumeister (2000) explains, in nearly every human society, the females embody the restraining force on sex, as it is up to them to refuse or accept opportunities for sexual activity. This is done because of several key biological and evolutionary processes; men can sire an unlimited number of children at one time with numerous women while women cannot have nearly as many offspring simultaneously and as often as men can sire them. As a result of this, women need to be more selective of their mates for the purpose of healthy reproduction and subsequent protection of their life and their progeny's life. When a couple engages in sexual activity, it is typically because the female has decided to allow it, granting the male access to engage in the activity.

The aforementioned literature is clear that there are gender differences regarding sex. Thus it would be worthwhile to investigate whether there are also differences among the sexes regarding relational red flags. This leads to a second research question.

RQ2: Do some relational red flags differ based on gender?

Costly Signaling Theory

Other important components of signals and how they might relate to relational red flags in initial romantic encounters involves the study of costly signals. Costly Signaling Theory

(CST) has been used as a framework for various scholastic disciplines ranging from the fields of economics (Collins, Baer, & Weber, 2015), criminology (Hardisty, 2012), religion (Sosis, 2003), warfare and international relations (Sosis, Kress, & Boster, 2007; Thyne, 2006) and evolutionary approaches (Zahavi, 1975), just to name a few.

Handicap Principle

Biologist Amotz Zahavi originally devised CST, whose own work on sexual selection was contrary to that of Charles Darwin's (Darwin, 1874; Darwin & Wallace, 1858). Zahavi's handicap principle (1975), from which CST stems, argues that an organism's characteristics and behaviors may have evolved to be interpreted as signals meant to attract a mate. However, these particular characteristics and behaviors that the signals represent increase the creature's chances at reproduction while simultaneously potentially hurting those same chances since the evolved characteristic or behavior appears to hinder the organism's fitness and thus it endangers its chances at survival.

Despite their handicapped nature, the characteristics or displays are considered valuable since they advertise the ability to amass resources that are considered scarce and because they signal possession of beneficial traits to potential mates that could be passed on to offspring (Grafen, 1990; Griskevicius, Sundie, Miller, Tybur, Cialdini, & Kenrick, 2007; Miller, 2000; Zahavi, 1975). A classic example is the colorful tail plumes of a peacock. This communicates to potential mates that this sexually selected trait displays conspicuous consumption in that this peacock is a desirable mate because it can afford to squander a resource that inferior quality signalers could not afford to produce (Grafen, 1990; Griskevicius et al., 2007; Miller, 2000; Zahavi, 1975). What this illustrates is that the peacock's tail is a handicap in that while its large span and colorful display may attract the attention of a desirable peahen, the large and quite

vibrant tail may also naturally attract the attention of nearby predators, thus potentially handicapping the peacock's chances at survival, let alone mating and then passing on its traits. The peacock cannot do any of these things if it has fallen prey to a predator due to its vibrant plumage. These evolutionary assertions put forth by CST may play a role in how individuals communicate caution in initial romantic encounters.

Before those comparisons are drawn, it is important to summarize the key findings of Costly Signaling Theory. Smith and Bird (1999) assert that in order for a behavior to count as a costly signal, it must first meet four specific criteria. This includes 1) the behavior must be beneficial to others, 2) it must be observable by others, 3) it must be costly in some way to the signaler in ways that cannot be reciprocated, and lastly 4) it must be associated with some strength or fitness that is embodied by the signaler.

Conspicuous Consumption

While CST was originally applied to the evolutionary approaches of animals, it has been extensively applied to human behavior and communication as well in not just the aforementioned areas of economics (Collins, Baer, & Weber, 2015), criminology (Hardisty, 2012), religion (Sosis, 2003), and warfare and international relations (Sosis, Kress, & Boster, 2007; Thyne, 2006), but also prominently in mate selection. The same principles that apply to animals and organisms has also been applied to mankind, most predominantly in the way of the handicap principle and conspicuous consumption. The handicap principle, as previously mentioned, is any behavior, trait or display that increases an animal's chances at reproduction while simultaneously potentially hurting those same chances at survival.

A popular and often-cited example of the handicap principle in humans occurs when a woman wears high heels on a date. In this instance she is attempting to appear not only taller but

also more fashionable and aesthetically pleasing compared to other women. This occurs even though the footwear may often be uncomfortable and make it more likely that she might falter or trip as well as make it more difficult for her to run or evade any dangers that may occur, all of which may result in injury and even potentially hinder her survival far more than a woman who does not wear high heels (Zahavi & Zahavi, 1997).

Another common principle of mate selection in humans derived from Costly Signaling Theory is conspicuous consumption. Drawn from the work of Thorstein Veblen (1902), this is the public display of one's economic power through often wasteful and extravagant spending. This is an extension of the handicap principle made real in the economic realm as it communicates wealth and social status to potential mates through the costly handicap of wasteful spending of financial resources, which could have been spent towards more beneficial means (Miller, 2009).

This is commonly seen through the accumulation of various luxury items, or Veblen goods, which is appropriately labeled after its aforementioned namesake Thorstein Veblen. These goods often include luxury homes, vehicles, and clothing, just to name a few. It has been shown that women prefer men who publicly display their Veblen goods and engage in conspicuous consumption, which results in these men having more reproductive success than those who cannot afford such goods (Collins, Baer, & Weber, 2015).

Expectancy Violation Theory

It is important to understand why individuals label these signals as relational red flags in the first place. It is important to understand why these signals are seen as undesirable qualities. Why aren't they seen as desirable qualities? Instead of being conceptualized as harbingers of potential doom why aren't they instead seen as serendipitous signs of good things to come? This

is because these signals, these relational red flags, often violate our expectations and in doing so are labeled negatively.

As originally devised by Judee Burgoon (Burgoon & Hale, 1988; Burgoon & Jones, 1976), Expectancy Violation Theory (EVT) is a post-positivistic theory that seeks to explain how individuals react to unexpected violations to social norms, and personal and cultural expectations. EVT posits that our expectations in any given situation are influenced by three primary factors: 1) the other communicator, 2) the relationship with that communicator, and 3) the context in which the interaction occurs.

As these three primary factors show, we expect people to behave differently if we feel we know them well compared to those we know nothing about. We also have certain expectations based on our specific relationship with them, and if we like them or dislike them, and if they are in a good mood or bad mood, and so on. The specific, given situation also influences our expectations as we expect people at a funeral to behave differently than people who are at a party.

Predictive and Prescriptive Expectancies

Our expectations also differ based on social norms. After all, what is the norm in one society may not be the same in another. Further still, our expectations also differ based on our belonging to any cultural groups or subgroups. While there may be societal norms, our smaller cultural or identity-based group or subgroup may have its own list of expectations for those in the group that differ from the larger societal expectations that govern those outside the group. Lastly, our own individual, personal preferences are also an important part of our expectations.

This is seen when Burgoon (1993) notes that there are predictive and prescriptive expectancies. Predictive expectancies are what we anticipate will occur while prescriptive

expectancies are what we personally desire or prefer. Both expectancies can be violated. Predictive expectancies can be seen as the governing social, cultural or group norms while prescriptive expectancies can be seen as our own personal preferences for what we like and how we hope others will behave and interact.

Positive and Negative Violations

When our expectations are violated, we experience arousal and we must cognitively appraise this violation by labeling it as either a positive or a negative violation. Positive violations increase our attraction, bringing us closer to the other individual while negative violations decrease our attraction, forcing us apart (Burgoon & Hale, 1988). Positive violations can be conceptualized as pleasant surprises. For example, imagine that you are out on a blind date, one which you did not want to go on because you do not trust the matchmaking judgment of the friend who set you two up. Your expectations heading into the date are low and largely unpleasant, but then your date arrives and he or she is an attractive, well-spoken, well-read, humorous individual with whom you have many things in common. This is a positive violation. It was not at all what you expected.

Negative violations however are far more frequent. Any unpleasant outcome that you did not anticipate constitutes a negative violation. Your date yelling at you constantly, or showing up to the date egregiously late, or even cancelling without notice altogether would be deemed by many to be a negative violation.

Cognitive Script Theory

It is also important to consider specifically what type of expectations these relational red flags are violating. Regarding social norms, these violations occur because they conflict with our relational scripts. Relational scripts derive from cognitive script theory, which refers to our

mental knowledge structures, which serve as our expectations for how certain events are expected to unfold (Abelson, 1976, 1981; Tomkins, 1979, 1987). These scripts outline the behaviors necessary to accomplish a goal (Bower, Black, & Turner, 1979; Schank & Abelson, 1977).

These knowledge structures are comprised of memory components, which Fletcher and Fitness (1993) define as organized clusters of coherent information that we create from experience. These hypothesized knowledge structures are important because they help us make sense of our world by providing a mental "script" that outlines how particular processes and events typically occur. These scripts are a specific, ordered sequence, which help guide us in anticipating a given situation. Just as a movie script mentions an outline of what will occur, complete with the presence of actors, props and setting, so too do our cognitive scripts.

A classic example of a cognitive script is dinning out at a restaurant. As Sternberg (2012) notes, this script is well known by most people. It begins with a person or a group of people entering a restaurant, then it typically proceeds sequentially with the customers sitting down at a table, being greeted by a waiter, ordering drinks and possibly appetizers, then ordering their main course, then eating, then possible ordering dessert, and ending with paying the bill and leaving the restaurant.

Relational scripts, or relational schemata which can be used interchangeably, are cognitive scripts for how we anticipate our interactions with others to unfold. These refer to "units of organized information stored in memory, which act as repositories for fundamental beliefs and expectations regarding the development of relationships" (Honeycutt & Bryan, 2011; p. 126). Furthermore, because these relational schemata are some of our most fundamental beliefs, they significantly influence our interpretation and attributions of various events

(Flannagan, Marsh, & Fuhrman, 2005). They help guide our understanding of expected behaviors in relationships (Scott, Fuhrman, & Wyer, 1991) based off the information derived from prior experiences (Andersen, 1993).

There are cognitive scripts for many interpersonal areas of our lives. In terms of relational communication, Honeycutt has done extensive work on cognitive scripts in romantic relationships (Honeycutt, 1993), specifically in the escalation and de-escalation of those relationships (Honeycutt, Cantrill, & Allen, 1992; Honeycutt, Cantrill, & Greene, 1989). Additionally, a series of studies by Pryor and Merluzzi (1985) showed that there is a cognitive script, a typical sequence of behavior, for a first date. The behaviors included the man picking up the woman, taking her to the location of the date, performing a series of behaviors based on that location (e.g. waiting in line at a movie theater, buying tickets, then possibly popcorn and drinks, then finding a seat and watching the movie), and then taking the woman home at the end of the evening. Any of these scripts, whether they are based on social norms or our own personal experiences, may be violated.

Dating Abuse and Violence

The only cautionary signs of romantic relationships that have been given any significant research attention have occurred in the area of dating abuse and intimate partner violence. There has been contention over the exact titles and definitional uses of these various terms (Murphy & Smith, 2010; O'Keefe, 2005), as dating abuse and dating violence have typically been used interchangeably, just as relationship abuse, intimate partner violence (IPV), domestic violence, and domestic abuse have been used interchangeably.

Given that the focus of this dissertation is to identify relational red flags in initial romantic encounters, and given that relationship abuse, intimate partner violence, domestic

violence, and domestic abuse are terms that are universally used to describe individuals who have progressed to either an intimate relationship and/or are living together, the focus on detecting signals related to violence will remain confined to the aforementioned synonymous areas of just dating abuse and dating violence. This is done to better serve this dissertation's specific research focus on initial romantic encounters rather than on established romantic relationships. To that end, even less research has been conducted in this area. The lion's share of scholarly work that has been conducted on violence in relationships has focused on domestic abuse and domestic violence, which pertains to any two or more people living together regardless of familial or romantic ties, and intimate partner violence, which is reserved for individuals who have achieved an intimate relationship, (World Health Organization, 2002), although there has been some contention that domestic abuse and domestic violence are synonymous labels with intimate partner violence (Wallace, 2015).

Physical Violence vs. Other Forms of Violence

Further contention exists regarding how exactly to define violence in general (Kilpatrick, 2004; Tjaden, 2004). Whether it is any of the leading terms of domestic abuse, domestic violence, or intimate partner violence, most scholars seem to agree that these definitions of violence pertain primarily to just *physical* violence and harm (Sugarman & Hotaling, 1989). This limited definition is unfortunate as there are several other forms of violence and abuse that exist in not just intimate relationships, but emerging romantic relationships as well, which extend far beyond just physical violence. In addition to physical violence, the Center for Relationship Abuse Awareness (2015) lists several other types of abuse seen in dating couples as well as intimate relationships. The most prominent additional forms of abuse listed by the organization

include economic abuse, sexual abuse, verbal abuse, emotional abuse, and psychological abuse (Center for Relationship Abuse Awareness, 2015).

Indeed, these types of abuse are also echoed in the Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus, 1990a; 1990b), a well-known measure of different types of abuse commonly experienced in all facets of interpersonal relationships, not just in romantic relationships. However, many of the different types of abuse though described in the scale are also often seen in intimate relationships. These types of abuse include physical abuse, sexual abuse, social abuse, and emotional/psychological abuse. Physical abuse is meant to threaten, injure, restrain, dominate, or control another person, while sexual abuse is characterized by forced sexual behaviors that threaten, manipulate, dominate, corrupt, or injure another person. Social abuse concerns any form of abuse where the victim's social relationships are dominated, manipulated, or controlled by the aggressor. Lastly, emotional and psychological abuse are used interchangeably by Straus (1979) to include any verbal or nonverbal actions or behaviors that are meant to "symbolically hurt" the other person (p. 77). This includes, but is not limited to, taunting, teasing, ridicule, sarcasm, and name-calling as well as any general or specific type of aggression, humiliation, and intimidation enacted onto the victim by the aggressor.

Furthermore, the Center for Promoting Alternatives to Violence (2015) describes those who inflict violence on others as typically sharing one or more common traits. These traits include mood swings, over-confidence, obsession with the other individual, jealousy regarding any perceived potential mates, a desire to isolate the individual from family, friends, colleagues and any other outside voices of influence, a tendency to blame external stressors, and a general personal history of violence (Center for Promoting Alternatives to Violence, 2015). Many of these traits can also shared by those who enact IPV.

However, while physical violence is a serious matter and should always be treated as such, the presence of physical violence itself is fortunately not all that prevalent in dating relationships, according to a Bureau of Justice Special Report on Intimate Partner Violence (2000). The report found that only 20% of dating couples reported some type of physical violence in their relationship, leaving the overwhelming majority of dating relationships, 80%, free of physical violence.

Recent research by Honeycutt and Eldredge (2015) applied signal detection theory to domestic conflict and violence. The research found a number of verbal and nonverbal cues that may be typical of an escalating domestic argument. The verbal cues included sarcasm, sneering and ridicule, a hostile vocal tone, criticism, profanity, defensiveness, and name-calling. The nonverbal cues included contempt through gaze, vocal tone and facial expressions, and physical violence such as objects being thrown as well as pushing and grabbing of the other person (Honeycutt & Eldredge, 2015). Some of these behaviors have been found to prominently characterize the dissolution of many romantic relationships, particularly marriages (Gottman & Levenson, 1984). For instance, the four most corrosive communication behaviors that most often lead to divorce are contempt, criticisms, defensiveness, and withdrawal (Gottman & Silver, 2012).

It is clear that there are many destructive behaviors that can damage and ultimately end a romantic relationship. Physical violence has been studied extensively as a warning sign that should be heeded in any type of interpersonal relationship. What though are the other destructive signals that should be heeded? A third research question explores this.

RQ3: Which relational red flags are perceived to be the most severe?

Similarities and Compatibility

What attracts us to others? According to an age-old phrase and various facets of popular culture that perpetuate this phrase, it is believed by many *that opposites attract*. Research has consistently shown this is not the case as a large degree of opposite and contrasting qualities, both in quantity and severity, in fact *do not* lead to healthy, stable relationships. Rather, it is through a high degree of various similarities that attraction builds and is maintained (Miller, 2012).

For starters, the first thing we notice about someone is often how that person looks, as a beautiful face immediately results in a positive evaluation of that person the moment we first lay eyes on them (Cheng, Ferguson, & Chartrand, 2003). While physical attraction is often cited as a crucial initial form of attraction when first meeting someone, individuals are ultimately attracted to more than just a person's physical qualities (McCroskey & McCain, 1974). Some of the most rewarding relationships people possess with others are ones in which they share a high degree of similarities (Fehr, 2008). It's simple, really; similarity is attractive. We like those who are like us. This "rule of similarity" is "one of the most basic principles of attraction" (Miller, 2012, p. 92).

Miller (2012) outlines three primary types of similarities, ranging from 1) demographic, to 2) attitudes and values, to 3) personalities. Demographic similarities include sex, age, race, religion, education, and social class (Hitsch, Hortacsu, & Ariely, 2010). As for attitudes and values, the more agreement there is between two people regarding the values they have and the personal attitudes they share, the more they will in turn like each other, and have a close, positive regard for one another (Byrne & Nelson, 1965). Lastly, there is the attraction of having similar personalities. Numerous studies have shown that those who possess similar traits and styles often

not only get along well with each other but also get along far better compared to those individuals with whom they share a lot less in common with (Cuperman & Ickes, 2009; Tenney, Turkheimer, & Oltmanns, 2009). This is important for not just close friendships, but also romantic relationships as spouses with similar personalities have happier marriages compared to those with dissimilar personalities (Gaunt, 2006). Shared similarities are important in close relationships since they signify compatibilities in the areas individuals deem most important, which for many of us include our demographic, attitudinal, and personality preferences, which often reflect our own demographics, attitudes, and personality (Miller, 2012).

Fatal Attraction

Whereas similarities often bring people together, differences can often either keep them apart in the first place, or lead to eventual turmoil and dissolution of the relationship later on (Miller, 2012). Differences, which can be seen as incompatibilities if they conflict with something the person values and closely identifies with, can either be outright ignored or go unnoticed early on in a relationship (Miller, 2012), or they can be misperceived entirely as desirable qualities. When the latter occurs, it is known as fatal attraction (Felmlee, 1995, 1998, 2001, Felmlee, Orzechowicz, & Fortes, 2010).

Fatal attraction takes place when a particular behavior, trait or characteristic that is *initially* perceived to be attractive is *later* perceived to be a defining reason as to why the individual is not a good romantic match for the other. The quality that was first seen as desirable in the potential partner has not changed, only that the other person now perceives it to be a detriment to the relationship (Felmlee, 1995, 1998, 2001; Felmlee, Orzechowicz, & Fortes, 2010). For instance, a person who is first drawn to someone's carefree, relaxed, laid-back attitude may later find that same person to be lazy and unmotivated even though that person has

not changed at all. Differences, not similarities, are the most common type of fatal attraction (Guerrero, Andersen, & Afifi, 2013).

As this chapter has shown, relational red flags can signal dissimilarities, incompatibilities, violated expectations, and even physically, emotionally, and psychologically destructive qualities, behaviors, characteristics, states, and traits. How exactly though do individuals identify, process and ultimately handle these relational red flags when they arise during the early stages of romantic interest? This leads to a fourth and final research question for this dissertation.

RQ4: How do individuals identify and process relational red flags when they emerge?

Conclusion

Signal Detection Theory provides an understanding of our decision-making processes (Green & Swets, 1966; Swets, 1964). We make countless decisions every day and we make these decisions amidst varying levels of noise and uncertainty based on signals we receive, miss, and misinterpret (Krantz, 1969). Our ability to accurately detect a signal is influenced by not only its trajectory (Coffman, 1997), but also its strength, as strong signals are typically received far more than weak signals, even though both can carry valuable information (Robinson, 2012).

Signals, when received, can be labeled as either positive or negative. Many negative signals are labeled as such because they violate our expectations in a negative way and in doing so are labeled appropriately. Expectancy Violation Theory helps us understand how individuals react to these unexpected violations of our social norms, and our personal and cultural expectations (Burgoon & Hale, 1988; Burgoon & Jones, 1976). Violations of our expectations may be based on either what we anticipate should be expected according to social and group norms, or they operate as a violation of our own personal expectations and preferences.

Violations of our relational scripts may also be labeled as negative. Relational scripts are our expectations for how certain events are expected to unfold (Abelson, 1976, 1981; Tomkins, 1979, 1987). They are important because they help guide our understanding of expected behaviors in relationships (Scott, Fuhrman, & Wyer, 1991) based off the information derived from prior experiences (Andersen, 1993). It is not only violations that can signal undesirable qualities, but also incompatibilities. These incompatibilities can arise from dissimilarities in the areas we hold in high regard. Dissimilarities in demographics, attitudes, and personality often force people apart (Miller, 2012).

All in all, very little research has been conducted on applying these aforementioned topics to relational red flags in initial romantic encounters, with most of the research that has done solely concerning caution relating to violence. Further still, while violence can manifest itself in many ways in interpersonal relationships, most of this research has been conducted on physical violence and not on other forms, which may include emotional or psychological violence. Signal Detection Theory is a useful theoretical framework for understanding that these relational red flags are signals of undesirable qualities that can manifest in many forms and should be detected if the goal is to find an ideal romantic partner who shares a high level of compatibility and similarity and to avoid any unnecessary conflict that may stem from the presence of the undesirable qualities.

Research Questions

Based on the review of the literature presented in this chapter, the following research questions are presented to guide this dissertation. Hypotheses, as they specifically relate to each of the two studies conducted for this dissertation, will be presented appropriately in their respective chapters.

RQ1: What are the most common relational red flags that people communicate and detect in initial romantic encounters?

RQ2: Do some relational red flags differ based on gender?

RQ3: Which relational red flags are perceived to be the most severe?

RQ4: How do individuals identify and process relational red flags when they emerge?

The first three research questions will guide Study 1 by establishing a quantitative, statistical foundation for understanding relational red flags while the fourth research question will guide Study 2 through a deeper, more qualitative analysis of how relational red flags are specifically identified, processed, and handled when they emerge. In summation, based on the literature presented in this chapter, and the theoretical and practical importance presented in the previous chapter, a specific scholarly focus was adopted and series of research questions have been put forth. As it relates to empirical works regarding relational red flags, much is still not known. The following chapters, which present this dissertation's two studies, seek to shed light on this untapped area of relational communication.

CHAPTER 3
STUDY ONE

This researcher asserts that while some relational red flags are relative, there are many that are near universal. There are certain relational red flags that would be viewed as undesirable qualities by a majority of the population, making the study of them beneficial to the social sciences. For instance, someone who wishes to marry their date while on a first date would likely be considered by most to be a relational red flag. Other common red flags would likely include deviant behaviors that are outside of the norm. I posit that these deviant behaviors could likely include alcohol abuse and dependency, drug use and dependency, criminality, and physical violence, as well as other forms of violence. Indeed, for what little research that has been done on detecting caution in romantic relationships, the vast majority of that research has been done on becoming aware of whether you are in an abusive, violent relationship.

That however only affects a small percentage of all romantic relationships that are currently occurring. Only 20% of dating couples reported some type of physical violence in their relationship (Bureau of Justice Special Report: Intimate Partner Violence, 2000), leaving the overwhelming majority of dating relationships, 80%, free of physical violence. What though are the relational red flags that do not include physical violence?

Most of us have been on a number of dates throughout our adult lives with a wide range of individuals. And most if not nearly all of those individuals that we tried to get to know romantically were not violent. And even though they did not display any violent tendencies, the vast majority of those initial romantic encounters still did not lead to an established romantic relationship. I am asserting this is because, even in the absence of emotional, psychological, and physical violence, we saw undesirable qualities in them that we would not want in a romantic

partner. What were those relational red flags that we noticed that made us decide that we did not want to pursue a romantic relationship with them?

This chapter will provide a foundational understanding of relational red flags through the identification of the various types of red flags that are communicated in initial romantic interactions. Signal Detection Theory will be used as the theoretical framework for this first study. An outline of Study 1's hypotheses will be presented, the deduction of which will appropriately stem from the relevant literature previously mentioned in Chapter 2. Methods and results of this primary study will also be detailed, followed by an explanation and discussion of the results. Limitations will also be discussed, some of which will be addressed through the results of Study 2, which is presented in Chapter 4.

Signal Detection Theory

The study of signal detection in romantic relationships has been limited, just as the study of costly signals has been in romantic relationships, outside of the narrowly focused aforementioned handicap principle and conspicuous consumption. There needs to be a conceptualization of signals that violate expectancies and symbolize dissimilarities as relational red flags that should be accurately detected and assessed in initial romantic encounters. This detection should in turn cause "an incitement to action" (Dawkins & Krebs, 1978, p. 380). For the betterment of one's survival and chances of successful reproduction and overall relational happiness with a superior romantic partner, that incited action should be the termination of any further romantic development with the offending individual.

However, that action cannot take place if the most common relational red flags are not known. Individuals cannot know what signals to label as a relational red flag if they are not aware of the most common relational red flags.

This leads to the primary research question.

RQ1: What are the most common relational red flags that people communicate and detect in initial romantic encounters?

While I anticipate that many relational red flags, such as drug use and dependency and alcohol abuse and dependency, will be shared by both sexes, there may very well be gender differences regarding other relational red flags. Indeed, the literature in Chapter 2 has shown that men are typically ready to have sex before women are (Buss & Schmitt, 1993), which causes them to have different, more sexually-focused romantic goals compared to women whose goals are less sexually-focused early on (Mongeau, Serewicz, & Therrien, 2004).

Given that the research has also shown that men are more likely to perceive women as being more physically romantically available than they really are (Haselton & Buss, 2000; Maner, Kenrick, Becker, Robertson, Hofer, Neuberg, Delton, Butner, & Schaller, 2005), and that men are more likely to seek out and be open to immediate sexual activity (Herold & Mewhinney, 1993), it would be worthwhile to investigate whether there are differences among the sexes regarding relational red flags.

This leads to the second research question.

RQ2: Do some relational red flags differ based on gender?

An initial hypothesis is gleaned from the literature.

H1: Women are more likely than men to perceive rapid attempts at physical intimacy as a relational red flag.

Violations of expectations can also result in relational red flags if they are labeled as negative violations. As Pryor and Merluzzi (1985) revealed, men and women share a similar cognitive script for first dates, where each gender is expected to perform certain actions and not

others. This dissertation's first study will also show whether people identify the violations of these expected scripts as relational red flags. This author anticipates that given the fundamental importance of these social norms and personal expectations, that violations of these scripts will indeed be identified as relational red flags.

This leads to this dissertation's second hypothesis.

H2: The violation of certain relational scripts will result in relational red flags, which based on the nature of the script will differ based on gender.

I also anticipate there being some violated scripts that will be identified as relational red flags by both sexes, given the broad importance of the script. For example, it is expected that when two individuals go out on a date, that they will each put their best foot forward and behave in an appropriate fashion. If either sex is, for example, rude, violent, or inappropriate, these actions would likely be labeled as a relational red flag by the offended individual since they violate the script of what is expected on a first date.

This is because we have societal norms and expectations for not only how one should act on a date, but also how people should behave in romantic relationships. Fehr and Sprecher (2009) identified a number of qualities, behaviors and characteristics that research shows we expect of individuals in satisfying romantic relationships, which they referred to as features of compassionate love. Some of the primary features include being caring, trustworthy, honest, kind, a good listener, selfless, respectful, open, nonjudgmental, gentle, and sincere. Since we expect our ideal romantic partner to embody these qualities, I assert that the opposite of these will be identified as relational red flags, given that they violate our expectations of what a good romantic partner should be. These violating behaviors and qualities include, but are not limited

too, being rude, untrustworthy, dishonest, unkind/mean, a poor listener, selfish, disrespectful, secretive, judgmental, abrasive, and insincere, respectively.

This results in the ensuing hypothesis.

H3: The violation of compassionate love features will result in relational red flags that are shared by both genders.

While I expect that the violation of compassionate features will be seen as undesirable by both sexes, I also believe there will be a gender difference regarding the accumulation of valuable resources and wealth. Evolutionary theorists have long argued that it is more important for a woman to find a mate who possesses wealth and valuable resources than it is for a man to find the same. This is because women are typically seen as the primary caregivers and must ensure that they and their offspring are provided for in the best way possible. Given that the research has shown that women prefer men who publicly display their Veblen goods and engage in conspicuous consumption, resulting in these men having more reproductive success than those who cannot afford such goods (Collins, Baer, & Weber, 2015), another potential gender difference should be considered.

This leads to a fourth hypothesis, which argues that the lack of not only Veblen goods but the outright lack of financial stability altogether will signal a relational red flag for women more so than it will for men.

H4: Women are more likely than men to perceive the lack of financial stability (e.g. unemployment, lives with parents, does not own a car) as a relational red flag.

The first two research questions were aimed at first identifying the most common relational red flags, then identifying whether there are gender differences among these common relational red flags. The next research question is focused on identifying which are the most

severe relational red flags. I assert that not all relational red flags are created equal in their signaling of undesirable qualities. Some qualities, behaviors, characteristics, states and traits are more severe than others. Research has shown that physical, psychological, and emotional violence, control, and abuse are the most severe detriments to any healthy relationship. It should stand to reason, then, that they would also be seen as relational red flags.

The fact that physical violence in particular is the most researched and well-known cautionary signal in romantic relationships speaks to its serious nature. A well-rounded look at the most common relational red flags will likely show similar results in that the most severely rated relational red flags could likely be of the most serious, extreme variety. I anticipate that, along these lines, the most severe relational red flags could include traits and behaviors such as alcohol abuse and dependency, drug use and dependency, criminal activity, any type of physical, emotional or psychological abuse, control or manipulation, and any other generally dangerous behavior.

Based on this reasoning, the following research question is put forth.

RQ3: Which relational red flags are perceived to be the most severe?

Finally, this leads to a fifth hypothesis:

H5: The most severely rated relational red flags will focus on deviant behaviors such as alcohol abuse and dependency, drug use and dependency, criminality, and any type of physical, emotional or psychological abuse, control, or manipulation.

Method

Participants

This dissertation's first study was comprised of data collected through an online survey via Qualtrics® survey software. The survey was completed by 285 participants, 68% of whom

were female (n = 193), and 32% of whom were male (n = 92). The participants reported a mean age of 20 (SD = 3.03) and identified as primarily White (n = 213; 74.7%). All participants were at least 18 years of age. Full demographic information for the entirety of Study 1's participants can be found in Figure 3.1.

Item		Frequency	Percent	Mean	Mode	SD
Biological Sex						
	Female	193	67.7%			
	Male	92	32.3%			
Identity						
	Caucasian/White	213	74.7%			
	Black	36	12.6%			
	Hispanic	15	5.3%			
	Asian	13	4.6%			
	Other	5	1.8%			
	Middle Eastern	2	0.7%			
	Native American	1	0.4%			
Age				20.33	19	3.03
	18	30	10.5%			
	19	94	33.0%			
	20	69	24.2%			
	21	46	16.1%			
	22	20	7.0%			
	23	10	3.5%			
	24	6	2.1%			
	25	4	1.4%			
	26	1	0.4%			
	27	1	0.4%			
	30	1	0.4%			
	33	1	0.4%			
	35	1	0.4%			
	58	1	0.4%			

Figure 3.1. Demographic Information for All Participants - Study 1 (N=285)

Procedures

The participants were gathered through the university's Research Participation System (RPS), an online research portal where enrolled students receive course credit for completing academic surveys. The participants freely selected this study from a list of several studies available to them through the RPS portal. Once the study was approved through the university's Institutional Review Board, the study was made available through the RPS portal. Data collection began in October 2015 and ended in December 2015. A copy of the IRB approval for Study 1 can be found in the Appendix section of this dissertation.

Measures

The purpose of this study was to provide a baseline understanding of the most common relational red flags experienced in initial romantic interactions by answering the aforementioned research questions and hypotheses presented in this current chapter. The survey began by informing the participants that the focus of the survey was to "study how red flags are communicated during the early stages of romantic interest." The definition of a red flag was then provided to the participants, which was the definition presented earlier in this dissertation (a red flag is any undesirable quality which can be a behavior, characteristic, state, or trait that another person possesses that you personally would not want in a potential romantic partner).

The survey instructed the participants to "Please list the 15 most common red flags that YOU have personally experienced while initially getting to know someone new romantically." The participants were then instructed to rate each red flag they provided based on how severe they felt it was to a healthy romantic relationship based on a 5-point Likert scale. The five-point scale was the following: 1 – Not severe at all (easily tolerated or ignored, would not be damaging), 2 – Somewhat severe, 3 – Moderately severe, 4 – Very severe, 5 – Extremely severe

(highly damaging, could cause the most trouble in a relationship). A copy of the survey that was used in Study 1 can be found in the Appendix section of this dissertation.

As validation that relational red flags are well known within popular culture and to the general masses at large, the participants did not have any difficulty generating examples of relational red flags that they had personally experienced. Only 3% of the participants listed less than 10 red flags (n = 9; 3.1%), while 93% of all participants surveyed (n = 265) provided the full allotment of 15 red flags. Indeed, of the entire sample surveyed, each participant listed an average of 14.28 red flags out of the maximum 15 spaces provided. In total, roughly 4,000 relational red flags were provided by the participants (n = 3,977) that were coded and included in the analyzed data set of Study 1.

Results

Through an analysis of the data, several themes emerged. Similar themes were grouped together and precise labeling was drawn from the aforementioned literature presented in Chapter 2. This led to the formation of a relational red flag typology. A total of nine distinct types of relational red flags along with 23 subtypes were identified.

After this typology was identified, it next had to be verified. The author and a research assistant randomly selected 40 participants' responses and coded the same sample of responses using the nine main types and 23 subtypes. A total of 596 red flags were provided by these 40 participants, which were separately coded by the author and the research assistant. To test whether intercoder reliability had been achieved, the two coded data sets were then analyzed through Cohen's Kappa.

Cohen's Kappa is widely considered to be a strong, reliable statistical predictor of intercoder reliability (Cohen, 1960; Landis & Koch, 1977). Cohen's Kappa is a scaled measure

of agreement, ranging from 0 (when the percent of agreement is what would be anticipated to be observed by chance) to 1 (which is seen when there is perfect agreement between the two coders). The kappa statistic is also valuable given that it takes into account chance levels of agreement. The kappa statistic is best used to analyze qualitative (categorical) items, specifically nominal-scaled codes from two raters, which is exactly why it was used in this analysis. Figure 3.2 shows the results from the analysis of the 596 coded red flags through Cohen's Kappa.

Agreement	Expected Agreement	Kappa	Std. Error	Z	Prob > Z
91.28%	13.99%	0.8986	0.0148	60.59	0.0000

Figure 3.2. Analysis of Intercoder Reliability through Cohen's Kappa

The two coders agreed 91.28% of the time (95% CI), $p < .0005$. In addition to this representing a statistically significant value for the kappa statistic, it is also a highly desirable percentage. Indeed, this is considered to display near perfect agreement. The support for this assessment can be seen in Figure 3.3, which draws from the work of Viera and Garrett (2005).

Kappa Value		
< 0.00	Poor	Less than chance agreement
0.01 to 0.20	Slight	Slight agreement
0.21 to 0.40	Fair	Fair agreement
0.41 to 0.60	Moderate	Moderate agreement
0.61 to 0.80	Substantial	Substantial agreement
0.81 to 0.99	Almost Perfect	Almost Perfect agreement

Viera & Garrett (2005) Understanding interobserver agreement: The Kappa statistic. *Family Medicine.*

Figure 3.3. Interpreting Strength of Agreement for Cohen's Kappa

Furthermore, if each coder had made their determination randomly, we would only expect them to agree 13.99% of the time, as seen with the above Expected Agreement statistic in Figure 3.2, further establishing that intercoder reliability had been achieved.

Still, to further validated the strength of our intercoder reliability, the author also analyzed the coded data through Krippendorff's Alpha, which is considered to be an even stronger predictor of inter-rater agreement (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007; Krippendorff, 2004). The results of the analysis can be seen in Figure 3.4.

	Alpha	LL95%CI	UL95%CI	Units	Observrs	Pairs
Nominal	.8986	.8713	.9240	596.0000	2.0000	596.0000

Probability (q) of failure to achieve an alpha of at least alphamin:

alphamin	q
.9000	.5209
.8000	.0000
.7000	.0000
.6700	.0000
.6000	.0000
.5000	.0000

Number of bootstrap samples:
10000

Figure 3.4. Analysis of Intercoder Reliability through Krippendorff's Alpha

Just as a desirably high level of agreement was achieved through Cohen's Kappa, intercoder agreement was also successfully reached through Krippendorff's Alpha. The alpha statistic of .8986 is considered a highly statistically significant value of inter-rater agreement. Indeed, an alpha statistic that is greater than .800 ($\alpha \geq .800$) signifies strongly reliable data (Krippendorff, 2004).

Once a strong level of inter-rater agreement had been achieved through two leading intercoder reliability statistics, the remainder of the data set was then coded. A small number of the red flags listed were unable to be coded. These were labeled as *Uncodable*. They were unable to be coded because they were either 1) too vague, incomplete or did not make discernable sense or 2) they were not at all related to the study's clear topic of romantic encounters.

An example of an actual participant response that was 1) vague or incomplete includes, "Have had bad past experience." It is unclear in any way, shape or form as to what experience

the participant is referring to in this provided response. This response is too incomplete, unclear and vague to be accurately coded. Additionally, two actual participant examples of responses that 2) did not fit the criteria of the survey, include, "On the first day of my job I was being trained and then the owner immediately asked me if I wanted to be the manager on the first day", and "Whenever I was texting and driving and I almost got into a severe accident was a red flag for me." These responses are not remotely related to the survey's clear topic of initial romantic encounters. These participants did not read the instructions carefully. Responses of this nature, though, were few and far between. The vast majority of the participants understood the focus of the survey and had no problem clearly identifying relational red flags as only 2.3% (n = 94) of the total 4,071 red flags listed fell under the *Uncodable* grouping. This left the aforementioned 3,977 usable, coded red flags.

The following results presented in this chapter answer this study's three research questions and five hypotheses. The nature of the data, as seen in the subsequent figures and text, follow a logical, natural progression that answered some research questions and hypotheses before others, i.e. out of order of the numerical sequence presented earlier (e.g. RQ1, RQ 2, RQ3 and H1, H2, H3, H4, H5). Each research question and hypothesis will 1) first be addressed here in this Results section in the order it was answered within the natural progression of the data and then 2) a review of all hypotheses will be given in the Discussion section that follows, presented in the sequential numerical order that was given in the opening section of this chapter.

Research Question 1

The identification of this relational red flag typology answers this dissertation's primary research question of what are the most common relational red flags that people communicate and detect in initial romantic encounters. Figure 3.5 shows this typology.

Deviant Behavior
- General/Unspecified
- Alcohol Abuse/Dependency
- Criminality
- Drug Use/Dependency
- Violent or Abusive

Family and Social Systems
- Children from Previous Relationships
- Conflict with Family System
- Conflict with Social Network

Immediate Intimacy
- General/Unspecified
- Emotional
- Physical

Lacks Financial Stability, Independence

Lacks Similarities
- General/Unspecified
- Demographic
- Attitudes, Values, Interests, and Personality

Lacks or Violated Compassionate Features

Romantic Others
- Interested in Other Romantic Options
- Previous Partners, Relationships

Violated Courtship Norms
- Violated Contemporary Courtship Norms
  - General
  - Cell Phone
- Violated Traditional Courtship Norms

Violated Traditional Gender Roles
- Feminine
- Masculine

Figure 3.5. Typology of Relational Red Flags

In alphabetical order, the nine major types are 1) *Deviant Behavior*, 2) *Family and Social Systems*, 3) *Immediate Intimacy*, 4) *Lacks Financial Stability, Independence*, 5) *Lacks Similarities*, 6) *Lacks or Violated Compassionate Features*, 7) *Romantic Others*, 8) *Violated Courtship Norms*, and 9) *Violated Traditional Gender Roles*.

Nearly every type had several subtypes of different themes that while unique, still related back to the main umbrella theme it was categorized under. Examples of these can be seen in the following figures, which are comprised of actual descriptions given by the participants in the survey based on their personal experiences with these relational red flags.

Descending alphabetically, the first major type of relational red flag concerns *Deviant Behavior.* This was broken up into the five subthemes of *General/Unspecified*, *Alcohol Abuse/Dependency*, *Criminality*, *Drug Use/Dependency*, and *Violent or Abusive*.

This main theme and its five subthemes describe various types of behavior, characteristics, states or traits from the other person that are considered deviant because they lie outside the realm of what is considered normative, acceptable first encounter behavior. These include excessive indulgence, abuse or dependency on alcohol, criminal behavior, illegal drug use or dependency, and any violent or abusive behavior, which may include any type of physical, mental, or emotional abuse or control.

Any type of deviant behavior that was too general or vague to fit into any of these subthemes was coded as *Deviant Behavior - General/Unspecified*. This subtheme also concerned any general “shady”, “sketchy”, or “creepy” behavior. Figure 3.6 has several participant experiences that represent each *Deviant Behavior* subtheme.

General/Unspecified
"Seemed sketchy."
"Stalked all my social media accounts, made me uncomfortable."
"When he shows up at your house unexpected."

Alcohol Abuse/Dependency
"Has a drinking problem."
"Talks about how much they party and drink."
"Date states they are an alcoholic."

Criminality
"She was previously arrested."
"If they talk about their criminal record."
"Breaking the law."

Drug Use/Dependency
"When you go on date and she asks you if you want to do drugs."
"Addicted to drugs"
"If he has a history of doing drugs."

Violent or Abusive
"Controls my free time."
"Physically abusive."
"Abusive to me."
"Emotional/mental abuse."

Figure 3.6. Participants' Experiences - Deviant Behavior

The next major relational red flag type concerns an individual's *Family and Social Systems*. These subthemes include any relational red flag relating to either person's family system or social system. These three subthemes are *Children from Previous Relationships*, *Conflict with Family System*, and *Conflict with Social Network*. Specific relational red flags for this type can be seen in Figure 3.7.

These relational red flags occur when we perceive there to be any type of conflict stemming from the family or social system that may occur on *either* side of the romantic dyad.

This means that you may have an issue with the other person's family or friend group, or that person may have a problem with any aspect of *your* family or friend group, all of which were identified by the participants as relational red flags.

Children from Previous Relationships
"She has multiple children from different fathers."
"When you go out on a first date and they have children or a child."
"He has kids."
"She got kids."
Conflict with Family System
"I've been of a first date where my date elaborated on how racist his immediate family was."
"Dad and brother don't like him."
"Not liking my family."
"They were rude to my family."
"Her family made me uncomfortable."
Conflict with Social Network
"She has too many guy friends."
"Had dated one of my friends."
"She does not like my friends."
"When their friends don't like you."
"Treated my friends badly."
"Your friends hate him."

Figure 3.7. Participants' Experiences - Family and Social Systems

The third major type of relational red flag, *Immediate Intimacy*, has three subthemes, which are *General/Unspecified*, *Emotional*, and *Physical*. Participants' experiences with this relational red flag type are given in Figure 3.8.

This occurred when participants felt the other person was trying to move too quickly by attempting to gain immediate intimacy in either emotional or physical terms. Immediate attempts at intimacy that were too vague or unclear were coded as *General/Unspecified*. A common one that showed up often in this subtheme is any mention of the other person being too "clingy". This

could relate to physical clinginess or emotional clinginess or both, but since it is unclear it was grouped under the *General/Unspecified* heading.

General/Unspecified
"Too clingy."
"They move too fast."
"When he calls or texts you everyday."
"Calling/texting me too many times after first date"
"Persistence in asking to hang out multiple times in a week."
Emotional Intimacy
"A girl was talking about that number of kids and kind of house and stuff she wanted with me."
"Using pet names on a first date."
"Asked what our kids names should be."
"When they talk about love/marriage too soon."
"They want me to meet their family."
"Asking to meet my family."
"Immediately ask me to be their boyfriend on the first date."
"Planning many events early in the relationship in advance."
Physical Intimacy
"Trying to kiss you the first time you hangout."
"The guy is really touchy."
"Uncomfortable touching."
"Mentioned wanting extreme sexual acts."
"When they're too forward sexually."
"Pushy in a sexual way."
"Not respectful of physical boundaries - moving too fast."

Figure 3.8. Participants' Experiences - Immediate Intimacy

However, there were indeed instances where participants said the other person was too emotionally clingy and too physically clingy and given the clear distinctions provided, these were grouped accordingly to *Immediate Intimacy – Emotional* and *Immediate Intimacy – Physical*, respectively. Furthermore, attempts to call, text or hangout with the other person were also labeled as *General/Unspecified* given that the whole point of these actions is to once again

be in the presence of the other person so that they may then achieve some type of unspecified intimacy, be it physical or emotional, or both,

Immediate Intimacy - Physical related to any attempts by the other person to gain physical intimacy with the participant. The participants were not comfortable with these attempts as they did not feel they were appropriate or had been earned at this early stage of romantic development. *Immediate Intimacy – Emotional* meanwhile dealt with attempts to move too fast emotionally to more intimate and established relationship stages that the participants also felt had not yet been properly earned by the other individual. This was commonly seen with communication regarding the labeling of the relationship as a committed pair too soon, as well as the discussion of topics concerning marriage, future offspring, plans to meet each other's families, plans to move away together, and any general plans perceived to be too far into the future given the current early stages of the present, developing relationship.

The next major relational red flag type is *Lacks Financial Stability, Independence*. This type did not have any subthemes. It dealt with any relational red flag where the participants noticed that the other person lacked financial stability or financial independence.

This was often seen with issues relating to the other person still living with their parents, or not owning a vehicle or not having a job or even possessing any source of income whatsoever. Specific relational red flags for this type can be seen in Figure 3.9.

Lacks Financial Stability, Independence
"They say they still live with their parents."
"Doesn't have a car."
"No financial income"
"Does not have a current job."
"Doesn't have a job and doesn't support himself."

Figure 3.9. Participants' Experiences - Lacks Financial Stability, Independence

The fifth major relational red flag type is *Lacks Similarities*. This has three subthemes of *General/Unspecified*, *Demographic*, and *Attitudes, Values, Interests and Personality* (see Figure 3.10). The *Demographic* subtheme dealt with any dissimilarities in the demographic areas of age, race, nationality, religion, education, or social class; dissimilarities that the participants felt were relational red flags.

The *Attitudes, Values, Interests and Personality* subtype included any relational red flags pertaining to dissimilarities in the attitudes, values, interests or personality aspects of the participants and the other person they were trying to get to know romantically. Any relational red flag that fit within the main type of *Lacks Similarities* but was too vague or too general to label was put into the subtheme of *General/Unspecified*.

General/Unspecified
"We had little to nothing in common."
"Too few common interests."
"Didn't feel a connection with them."
"When our interests conflict."
Demographic Similarities
"They're too old."
"He wasn't a Christian."
"Had different religious beliefs."
"Too religious."
"No higher education."
Attitudes, Values, Interests, and Personality
"He didn't like dogs."
"She had more than two cats."
"He showed interest in unhealthy hobbies."
"We had different tastes in music."
"He didn't have any hobbies."
"She does not own a TV."

Figure 3.10. Participants' Experiences - Lacks Similarities

Lacks or Violated Compassionate Features is the sixth major relational red flag type. This occurred when the participants believed the other person either lacked or violated a compassionate feature. As mentioned in the review of the literature, Fehr and Sprecher (2009) identified a number of qualities, behaviors and characteristics that research shows are expected of individuals in satisfying romantic relationships. Fehr and Sprecher referred to these as features of compassionate love. Some of the primary features include being caring, trustworthy, honest, kind, a good listener, selfless, respectful, open, nonjudgmental, gentle, and sincere. Thus when a person is the opposite of these behaviors and is instead rude, untrustworthy, dishonest, unkind/mean, a poor listener, selfish, disrespectful, closed off/cold/secretive, judgmental, abrasive, and insincere, just to name a few, it can be said that this person lacks or violated these compassionate features. Participants' experiences with this relational red flag can be found in Figure 3.11.

Lacks or Violated Compassionate Features
"He was rude about a simple disagreement."
"Being stubborn."
"Lack of trust."
"Compulsive liar."
"When they don't listen to you when you have a problem that is bothering you."
"A secretive past they never want to bring up."
"Thinks cheating is ok."
"Meanness."
"Speaks very disrespectfully."
"Getting jealous easily."
"Selfishness."

Figure 3.11. Participants' Experiences - Lacks or Violated Compassionate Features

Romantic Others is the seventh major relational red flag type. This had two subthemes, which were *Interested in Other Romantic Options* and *Previous Partners, Relationships*. *Interested in Other Romantic Options* occurred when the participants felt the other person was

more interested in pursuing romantic options other than the participants' themselves. This was often seen when the participants reported that the other person was flirting with someone else or showing romantic attention to someone else even though this person was ostensibly on a date with the participant and should have their romantic attention focused in that direction and not elsewhere. *Previous Partners, Relationships* included relational red flags that dealt with the other person discussing their own past relationships or sexual partners as well as any mention of *them* asking about *your* past relationships or sexual partners. This shows that participants were not only uncomfortable with the other person talking about their exes, past relationships, or previous sexual partners, but that participants were also uncomfortable with the other person asking the participants themselves questions concerning their own previous relationships and sexual partners. Participants' responses for this relational red flag can be seen in Figure 3.12.

Interested in Other Romantic Options
"Flirts with other girls."
"She is a big flirt."
"Flirted with the waitress."
"Hitting on other guys."
"Hitting on your friends and you at the same time."
"Talking to/texting other girls."
Previous Partners, Relationships
"Asking about my sexual history on the first date."
"Shaming people for their sexual experiences."
"Telling me every sexual experience they've had."
"If he mentions his ex on the first date."
"Compared me to their ex."
"When they're not over their ex."
"Constantly bringing up past relationships."

Figure 3.12. Participants' Experiences - Romantic Others

The eighth major type of relational red flag is *Violated Courtship Norms*. This had two subthemes, which were *Violated Contemporary Courtship Norms* and *Violated Traditional*

Courtship Norms. *Violated Contemporary Courtships Norms* has its own two sub-subthemes, *Cell Phone* and *General*. The overall theme of *Violated Courtship Norms* occurs whenever participants felt that the norms that govern normal courtship behavior and expectations were violated. It is important to note that these differ based on whether the participants personally preferred traditional courtships norms or contemporary courtships norms (see Figure 3.13).

Violated Contemporary Courtship Norms - General
"He forced me not to pay for my food."
"Ordered for me on the first date. I'm sorry sir but you don't know me."
"Wouldn't let me order whatever I want on the menu."
"Date does not allow me to order my own food/drinks."

Violated Contemporary Courtship Norms - Cell Phone
"Being on her cell phone frequently on a first date."
"Looks at cell phone too often."
"Spent most of the date on his cell phone."
"Playing on phone the whole time."
"Texting at the table."

Violated Traditional Courtship Norms
"He didn't walk me to my door after the date."
"Date asks you to pay for dinner because he 'forgot his wallet.'"
"He didn't open car/restaurant door or pull out my seat for me."
"He asked me on a date but didn't have a plan on what we were going to do."
"He ate like a slob."
"She ordered the most expensive food."
"Not eating what she ordered, ate my food instead."
"She had bad table manners."
"Insisted she pay for her own food."

Figure 3.13. Participants' Experiences - Violated Courtship Norms

Regarding the subthemes of *Violated Contemporary Courtships Norms*, any general violation was grouped under *General*, while any behavior or violation relating to cell phones was placed under *Violated Contemporary Courtships Norms – Cell Phone*. *General* often dealt with violations that did not adhere to the contemporary, modern day view that both genders are

equally capable of embodying independent, self-sufficient roles. A common violation seen was that women were not allowed to order their own food or pay for their own meals if they felt inclined to do so. The traditional courtship view holds that the man had to order for the women and pay for the meal. This however is not the contemporary view. While many men certainly do still offer to pay, this is no longer the only acceptable normative course of action as either sex can order their own food and pay for their own meals or the meals of their dates. While this contemporary view is now commonplace, the data show that the traditional view is one that is still held by many individuals.

Regarding the *Cell Phone* subtype, cell phones are a modern convenience and as such were not a part of traditional courtship behaviors or norms, making them a new addition to our current contemporary courtships norms. A large number of participants mentioned frequent cell phone use as an undesired, annoying, unpleasant intrusion into their romantic encounter, resulting in it being listed as its own relational red flag subtype.

Hypothesis 2

The second hypothesis for this study stated that the violation of certain relational scripts would result in relational red flags, which based on the nature of the script would differ based on gender. This was supported with the identification of the *Violated Traditional Courtship Norms*. Here the reverse of the views seen in *Violated Contemporary Courtship Norms* are experienced as violations. This is the other end of the traditional vs. contemporary dichotomy. Many of the traditional courtship relational red flags that participants reported experiencing were violations of traditionally expected courtship behavior, such as those outlined earlier by Pryor and Merluzzi (1985), which asserted that certain traditional behaviors are expected of men and certain other traditional behaviors are expected of women while on a date.

This bore out in the results, which shows support for the second hypothesis that the violation of certain relational scripts would result in relational red flags, which based on the nature of the script did indeed differ based on gender. As seen in Figure 3.13, many of the female participants expected their male counterparts to open doors for them, pay for their meals, and walk them to their car or home, just to name a few. Additionally, both genders expected the other to display good table manners, which is another long-held traditional courtship norm, that when an individual goes out on a date, they are expected to display their best manners.

The ninth and final relational red flag type is *Violated Traditional Gender Roles*. This had two subthemes, which were *Feminine* and *Masculine*. *Violated Traditional Gender Roles – Feminine* occurred when the participant felt their female date had violated traditional feminine gender roles. Likewise, *Violated Traditional Gender Roles – Masculine* occurred when the other person was perceived to violate gender roles that were expected of men. Figure 3.14 has the participants' experiences with this relational red flag.

Violated Traditional Gender Roles - Feminine
"She emasculated me in front of my friends and hers."
"Her choosing what to do for the date; men do that."
Violated Traditional Gender Roles - Masculine
"When he has no plans in life."
"He had no ambition, goals, or plans."
"He was too feminine."
"Not being a leader as a man."
"He was a weakling."

Figure 3.14. Participants' Experiences - Violated Traditional Gender Roles

Building off the identification of the nine relational red flag types and their 23 subthemes seen in Figure 3.5, the next statistical step is to analyze the prevalence of these relational red flags among the sample population. Figure 3.15 shows statistics of the relational red flag types

and subtypes for the entire sample population of the nearly 4,000 codes derived from the 285 participants.

	Overall Percent of All Types	Percent of Participants Reporting Each Type	Average Severity Rating	T Values (DF)	Severity SD
Deviant Behavior	**10.8%**	**66.3%**	**4.13**		**0.89**
General/Unspecified	1.6%	17.2%	3.84	5.75 (61)***	1.14
Alcohol Abuse/Dependency	2.0%	26.7%	3.86	8.91 (78)***	0.85
Criminality	0.5%	6.7%	4.37	8.72 (18)***	0.67
Drug Use/Dependency	1.2%	14.7%	4.39	12.19 (45)***	0.77
Violent or Abusive	5.7%	43.5%	4.23	22.53 (224)***	0.81
Family and Social Systems	**4.5%**	**41.8%**	**3.59**		**1.11**
Children from Previous Relationships	0.5%	6.7%	3.45	1.58 (19)	1.25
Conflict with Family System	2.2%	23.9%	3.66	5.19 (85)***	1.18
Conflict with Social Network	1.8%	20.0%	3.54	4.63 (71)***	0.99
Immediate Intimacy	**12.9%**	**73.3%**	**3.42**		**1.16**
General/Unspecified	4.5%	41.1%	3.18	2.22 (177)*	1.08
Emotional	4.0%	31.9%	3.32	3.30 (156)**	1.21
Physical	4.5%	44.9%	3.76	8.84 (176)***	1.14
Lacks Financial Stability, Independence	**1.2%**	**12.3%**	**3.74**	**5.17 (46)*****	**0.98**
Lacks Similarities	**34.0%**	**93.7%**	**3.29**		**1.18**
General/Unspecified	0.5%	6.3%	3.25	1.00 (19)	1.09
Demographic	2.5%	27.1%	3.53	4.63 (98)***	1.12
Attitudes, Values, Interests, and Personality	31.0%	93.0%	3.27	8.04 (1232)***	1.18
Lacks or Violated Compassionate Features	**23.8%**	**88.8%**	**3.78**	**23.42 (947)*****	**1.02**
Romantic Others	**5.0%**	**48.1%**	**3.61**		**1.08**
Interested in Other Romantic Options	1.5%	17.2%	3.52	3.87 (60)***	1.05
Previous Partners, Relationships	3.5%	41.1%	3.64	6.92 (138)***	1.09
Violated Courtship Norms	**6.8%**	**51.2%**	**3.23**		**1.23**
Violated Contemporary Courtship Norms					
General	0.5%	6.3%	2.95	0.15 (18)	1.54
Cell Phone	2.2%	29.1%	3.37	3.27 (88)**	1.06
Violated Traditional Courtship Norms	4.1%	35.8%	3.18	1.86 (162)	1.26
Violated Traditional Gender Roles	**1.0%**	**12.3%**	**3.50**		**1.21**
Feminine	0.1%	0.7%	-	1.00 (1)	-
Masculine	0.9%	11.6%	3.56	2.71 (35)**	1.21

Severity SD refers to the standard deviation of each relational red flag's severity.
One-sample t-test significance, *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001.
(DF) in *T Values (DF)* refers to degrees of freedom.

Figure 3.15. Population Statistics for Relational Red Flags Typology (N = 285)

Statistical Analysis. There are five columns of data running across the top of the Figure 3.15 relating to the nine types and 23 subthemes that are represented in vertical order alphabetically. Of primary importance is the fourth column, *T Values (DF).* A one-way t-test was

performed to examine the mean difference between the hypothesized mean of 3 (which is derived as the mean of the five-point scale of severity range) and the participant's severity ratings. The values of the t-test, their degrees of freedom, and whether they achieved statistical significance, are presented in the *T Values (DF)* column, with the t values presented first and the degrees of freedom following next in parentheses. Asterisks are then presented for each level of statistical significance that was achieved, *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001. This column shows that 18 of the 23 relational red flags were statistically significant at the .05 level or better. This is a considerable finding.

The 18 relational red flags that were statistically significant were 1) *Deviant Behavior – General/Unspecified*, 2) *Deviant Behavior – Alcohol Abuse/Dependency,* 3) *Deviant Behavior - Criminality,* 4) *Deviant Behavior – Drug Use/Dependency,* 5) *Deviant Behavior – Violent or Abusive,* 6) *Family and Social Systems – Conflict with Family System*, 7) *Family and Social Systems – Conflict with Social Network,* 8) *Immediate Intimacy – General/Unspecified*, 9) *Immediate Intimacy – Emotional,* 10) *Immediate Intimacy – Physical,* 11) *Lacks Financial Stability, Independence*, 12) *Lacks Similarities – Demographic,* 13) *Lacks Similarities – Attitudes, Values, Interests, and Personality,* 14) *Lacks or Violated Compassionate Features*, 15) *Romantic Others – Interested in Other Romantic Options,* 16) *Romantic Others – Previous Partners, Relationships*, 17) *Violated Contemporary Courtship Norms – Cell Phone*, and 18) *Violated Traditional Gender Roles – Masculine*. This is a significant result, that 18 of the 23 relational red flags were statistically significant.

Regarding the other data categories, the column *Overall Percent of All Types* refers to the percent that each relational red flag theme was represented in the total sample of the 3,977 total coded red flags. The sum of all nine types and 23 subtypes adds up to 100%, i.e. the entirety of

the relational red flags given in the data set. The percent is given not only for each major type but also each subtheme. For example, the sum of the five subthemes of *Deviant Behavior* makes up a total of 10.8% of all the relational red flags given among the total 285 participants that were surveyed.

Next, the *Percent of Participants Reporting Each Type* column refers to the percent of out 100 of how many unique participants reported experiencing at least one instance of each relational red flag type or subtype. The sum of this column does not equal 100 given that the survey asked each participant to list up to 15 red flags they have experienced in their lives and since 93% of all participants surveyed (n = 265) provided the full allotment of 15 relational red flags, a large number of the 23 subthemes were mentioned at least once by a majority of all participants.

This means that at most each participant could report experiencing a relational red flag from all 9 major themes as well as report experiencing a relational red flag from 15 of the 23 total subthemes. For example, even though the totality of all *Deviant Behavior* relational red flags mentioned made up only 10.8% of the 3,977 red flags given in the data set, over two-thirds of all participants (66.3%) reported experiencing an instance of a *Deviant Behavior* relational red flag while getting to know someone new romantically during an initial romantic encounter. Indeed, seven of the nine major types (*Deviant Behavior*, *Family and Social Systems*, *Immediate Intimacy*, *Lacks Similarities*, *Lacks or Violated Compassionate Features*, *Romantic Others*, and *Violated Courtship Norms*) were mentioned by over 40% or more of all of the participants included in the data set.

The next data column of *Average Severity Rating* refers to how severe each type and subtype was rated by the participants. As mentioned in the Measures section of this chapter, the

the participants were asked to provide and then rate each red flag they had experienced during an initial romantic encounter. They were instructed to rate each red flag on a 5-point Likert scale of 1 to 5. 1 represented *Not severe at all (easily tolerated or ignored, would not be damaging)*, which increased in damaging severity all the way to 5, which was *Extremely severe (highly damaging, could cause the most trouble in a relationship).* For example, as an overall major type, *Deviant Behavior* (which was experienced by over two-thirds of all participants) had an average severity rating of 4.13, meaning it was assessed by the participants as having a severity between *4 – Very Severe* and *5 – Extremely Severe*. The last data column is *Severity SD*, which stands for severity standard deviation. This refers to the standard deviation of the severity ratings for each theme and subtheme.

Research Question 3 and Hypothesis 5

The *Deviant Behavior* grouping in Figure 3.15 answers the third research question, which asked which relational red flags are perceived to be the most severe. The identification of the *Deviant Behavior* type also supported the fifth hypothesis that the most severely rated relational red flags would focus on specific deviant behaviors such as alcohol abuse and dependency, drug use and dependency, criminality, and any type of emotional, physical or psychological abuse, control, or manipulation.

Indeed, there was strong support for this hypothesis, as participants reported that the *Deviant Behavior* type had the five highest severity ratings of all 23 subthemes, which did include topics of general deviant behavior, alcohol abuse and dependency, drug use and dependency, criminality, and any type of emotional, physical, or psychological abuse, control, or manipulation. These subtypes and their severity ratings, based on a 5-point scale with 5.0 signifying *Extremely Severe*, in descending order of most severe, were *Drug Use/Dependency*

(4.39), *Criminality* (4.37), *Violent or Abusive* (4.23), *Alcohol Abuse/Dependency* (3.86), and *Deviant Behavior – General/Unspecified* (3.84).

Research Question 2

My second research question inquired if there were gender differences in the data regarding relational red flags. The answer is yes, there are several gender differences. This can initially be seen in Figure 3.16, and later in Figure 3.17. Figure 3.16 shows statistics of the various relational red flag types for the entire sample population based on the participants' sex. The data columns of *Overall Percent of All Types*, *Percent of Participants Reporting Each Type*, *Average Severity Rating*, and *Severity SD*, as previously given for the sample population data in Figure 3.15, are also given for the gender breakdown of each type and subtype in Figure 3.16. All instances of *M* and *F* along the top data row of Figure 3.16 refer to the entirety of all male and female participants, respectively.

Hypothesis 3

There was also strong support for the third hypothesis, which stated that the violation of compassionate love features would result in relational red flags that are shared by both genders. The support for this can be seen under *Lacks or Violated Compassionate Features* in Figure 3.16 as 89% of all of the women that were surveyed and 88% of all of the men that were surveyed reported experiencing an initial romantic encounter where the other person lacked or violated a compassionate feature, which they deemed to be a relational red flag.

Hypothesis 4

Next, there was also support for the fourth hypothesis, which posited that women would be more likely than men to perceive a lack of financial stability (e.g. unemployment, lives with parents, does not own a car) as a relational red flag. Support for this can be seen in Figure 3.16 as

women reported experiencing this relational red flag more often than men. What is most telling however, is that the women rated a lack of financial stability, independence as significantly more severe than the men, giving it a 3.95 severity rating compared to just a 3.00 by the men. These findings show that women not only experienced this relational red flag more than men did but that women also rated it as significantly more severe than men did, both of which show support for the fourth hypothesis.

	Overall Percent of All Types		Percent of Participants Reporting Each Type		Average Severity Rating		Severity SD	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Deviant Behavior	**6.4%**	**13.0%**	**54.3%**	**72.0%**	**4.04**	**4.15**	**0.81**	**0.91**
General/Unspecified	0.8%	1.9%	12.0%	19.7%	3.70	3.87	1.10	1.14
Alcohol Abuse/Dependency	1.8%	2.1%	23.9%	28.0%	3.78	3.89	0.72	0.90
Criminality	0.3%	0.6%	4.3%	7.8%	4.00	4.47	0.71	0.62
Drug Use/Dependency	0.9%	1.3%	12.0%	16.1%	4.50	4.35	0.65	0.80
Violent or Abusive	2.6%	7.1%	29.3%	50.3%	4.12	4.25	0.72	0.83
Family and Social Systems	**4.5%**	**4.5%**	**40.2%**	**45.2%**	**3.40**	**3.69**	**1.17**	**1.07**
Children from Previous Relationships	0.6%	0.5%	7.6%	6.2%	3.88	3.17	1.27	1.14
Conflict with Family System	1.7%	2.4%	17.4%	26.9%	3.05	3.88	1.26	1.07
Conflict with Social Network	2.2%	1.6%	25.0%	17.6%	3.52	3.56	1.00	0.97
Immediate Intimacy	**10.4%**	**14.1%**	**65.2%**	**77.2%**	**3.44**	**3.42**	**1.12**	**1.18**
General/Unspecified	3.9%	4.7%	42.0%	41.5%	3.14	3.20	0.91	1.14
Emotional	4.4%	3.7%	32.6%	31.6%	3.54	3.19	1.23	1.17
Physical	2.1%	5.6%	26.1%	53.9%	3.78	3.75	1.10	1.14
Lacks Financial Stability, Independence	**0.7%**	**1.4%**	**9.8%**	**13.5%**	**3.00**	**3.95**	**0.94**	**0.90**
Lacks Similarities	**48.5%**	**27.0%**	**97.8%**	**91.7%**	**3.33**	**3.26**	**1.15**	**1.20**
General/Unspecified	0.9%	0.3%	12.0%	3.6%	2.83	3.88	0.99	0.93
Demographic	2.9%	2.3%	31.5%	25.9%	3.24	3.69	1.15	1.07
Attitudes, Values, Interests, and Personality	44.7%	24.4%	97.8%	90.7%	3.27	3.21	1.16	1.20
Lacks or Violated Compassionate Features	**19.4%**	**26.0%**	**88.0%**	**89.1%**	**3.60**	**3.85**	**1.02**	**1.02**
Romantic Others	**4.9%**	**5.1%**	**50.0%**	**47.2%**	**3.64**	**3.59**	**1.04**	**1.09**
Interested in Other Romantic Options	1.1%	1.8%	10.9%	20.2%	3.71	3.47	1.22	0.99
Previous Partners, Relationships	3.9%	3.3%	44.6%	39.4%	3.62	3.65	0.98	1.14
Violated Courtship Norms	**5.0%**	**7.7%**	**45.7%**	**53.9%**	**3.37**	**3.18**	**1.23**	**1.22**
Violated Contemporary Courtship Norms								
General	0.2%	0.6%	3.3%	7.8%	3.00	2.94	1.63	1.52
Cell Phone	2.5%	2.1%	32.6%	27.5%	3.55	3.27	1.16	0.99
Violated Traditional Courtship Norms	2.2%	5.0%	23.9%	41.5%	3.21	3.18	1.24	1.27
Violated Traditional Gender Roles	**0.1%**	**1.3%**	**2.2%**	**17.1%**	**2.50**	**3.56**	**0.50**	**1.21**
Feminine	0.1%	0.0%	2.2%	0.0%	2.50	-	0.50	-
Masculine	0.0%	1.3%	0.0%	17.1%	-	3.56	-	1.21

The repeated column headings of M and F refer to the data concerning all male and female participants, respectively.
Severity SD refers to the standard deviation of each relational red flag's severity.

Figure 3.16. Gender Statistics for Relational Red Flags Typology (N = 285)

To further analyze the data based on gender, a multivariate discriminant analysis was performed based on a relational red flag breakdown between the sexes. Specifically, a linear discriminant analysis was performed, which is a generalization of Fisher's linear discriminant. This analysis illustrates whether there is a linear combination of features that separates or characterizes two or more groups (Fisher, 1936). In this case, this statistical procedure is appropriate in modeling the differences between the sexes as they relate to the features that are the 23 relational red flags. The identification of these linear combinations, if any in fact do exist among the variables, is used to best explain the data by showing how the two groups may or may not differ, which in this case are the male and female participants.

As for the results, regarding a summary of canonical discriminant functions, an examination of the group centroids revealed values of -.679 for the males and .324 for the females, as evaluated at the group means. The canonical correlation was .426. A crucial component of discriminant analysis is its statistical ability to provide classification accuracy estimates (Pedhazur, 1997). The function was accurate in classifying 89% of the females compared to 39% of the males, with an overall classification accuracy of 73%, which is far above the expected theoretical 50%. This shows that these relational red flags were successful at classifying females and both genders overall, but poorly predicted males by themselves. Additionally, a MANOVA revealed a significant multivariate effect for gender F (5, 279) = 12.34, p< .000, Wilks's Λ = .82.

Furthermore, the discriminant analysis did reveal several primary differences between the genders. Specifically, five relational red flags in particular out of the total 23 showed a significant gender difference between the sexes. These five were *Deviant Behavior – Violent or Abusive, Immediate Intimacy – Physical, Lacks Similarities – Attitudes, Values, Interests, and*

Personality, Violated Courtship Norms – Traditional, and *Violated Gender Roles – Masculine*. Linear combinations of these variables revealed that these five relational red flags were critical for women. However, there were no critical predictors for males. The findings for these five relational red flags regarding their group statistics for their mean, standard deviation, classification function coefficients, and their standardized canonical function coefficients can be found in Figure 3.17.

	Mean		Standard Deviation		Classification Function Coefficients		Standardized Canonical Function Coefficients
	M	F	M	F	M	F	
Deviant Behavior							
Violent or Abusive	1.93	2.61	1.48	1.70	0.67	1.04	.610
Immediate Intimacy							
Physical	1.73	2.55	1.36	1.63	0.58	0.90	.503
Lacks Similarities							
Attitudes, Values, Interests, and Personality	3.13	2.96	0.80	1.06	2.83	2.40	-.430
Violated Courtship Norms							
Violated Traditional Courtship Norms	1.53	1.93	1.09	1.34	0.53	0.90	.461
Violated Traditional Gender Roles							
Masculine	1.00	1.45	0.00	1.11	0.92	1.51	.538

Classification Function Coefficients: Fisher's linear discriminant functions

Figure 3.17. Multivariate Discriminant Relational Red Flag Analysis based on Gender (N = 285)

This is a significant finding as it provides a critical profile of the two sexes. It not only unequivocally answers the second research question by proving there *are* indeed gender differences, but more importantly this finding shows *how* the genders differ. Hence, the accurate classification of a female paints the following profile: A female's primary relational red flags are noticing five key undesirable qualities in the other person, which include emotionally, mentally or physically violent or abusive behaviors, too much immediate physical intimacy, a lack of similarities in attitudes, values, interests, and personality, as well as violations of traditional courtship norms (e.g., not opening the door, not paying for the meal, and not displaying appropriate manners), and not appearing masculine enough, which may include appearing

effeminate or lacking ambition and overall general leadership qualities. Conversely, the relative inefficient classification accuracy for men means that they do not see as many primary red flags compared to women.

Hypothesis 1

The presence of *Immediate Intimacy – Physical* among these five critical predictors for women (as seen in Figure 3.17) strongly supports this dissertation's first hypothesis, that women are more likely than men to perceive rapid attempts at physical intimacy as a relational red flag. Additional support for this hypothesis can be seen in Figure 3.16 under *Immediate Intimacy - Physical*, as over half of the women surveyed (54%) mentioned a rapid attempt at physical intimacy as a red flag compared to only a quarter of the men surveyed (26%).

Additional Analysis

A few additional results concerning Figure 3.15 and Figure 3.16 should be addressed. Even a cursory analysis shows that there were two themes in particular that dominated the responses in Figure 3.15 and naturally by extension in Figure 3.16 as well. These were *Lacks Similarities – Attitudes, Values, Interests and Personality* and *Lacks or Violated Compassionate Features.* These relational red flags were mentioned by nearly every participant. Indeed, 89% of all participants surveyed reported experiencing an instance of a *Lacks or Violated Compassionate Features* relational red flag while 93% of all participants reported experiencing an instance of a *Lacks Similarities – Attitudes, Values, Interests and Personality* relational red flag.

Given that these two relational red flags had been experienced by the overwhelming majority of the participants, further analysis of the data was done, which revealed new, additional subthemes to these two relational red flags. A further breakdown of *Lacks Similarities*

– *Attitudes, Values, Interests and Personality* and *Lacks or Violated Compassionate Features* are given in Figure 3.18 and Figure 3.19, respectively.

As Figure 3.18 shows, *Lacks Similarities – Attitudes, Values, Interests and Personality* was further divided into three subsections of *Attitudes and Beliefs*, *Values*, and *Personality*, with the most frequent, common experiences for each given under these three subsections. For example, *Attitudes and Beliefs* included the relational red flags of *Homophobic*, *Racist*, and *Sexist*, as these are personal attitudes and beliefs that individuals carry with them that were deemed by the participants to be relational red flags if they felt the other person was indeed homophobic, racist, or sexist. These three subtypes made up a very small percent of all relational red flags that were experienced as it appears nearly all participants had initial romantic encounters that were free of homophobic, racists and sexist comments and behavior.

Next is *Values,* which included the five subsections of *General/Unspecified*, *Appearance*, *Health*, *Hygiene*, and *Non-Family Oriented*. *General/Unspecified* was used for vague or unclear responses such as, "Our values were different" and "We had different moral values." *Appearance* was next, which dealt with any undesirable quality relating to the other person's appearance that the participants felt was a relational red flag. Examples included anything relating to clothing style, weight/body type, attractiveness, piercings, tattoos, hair color, hair style, height, facial features, and voice. Next was *Health*, which dealt with any relational red flag pertaining to the other individual's health. This specific subtype often included topics regarding laziness, general inactivity, lack of exercise, preference for smoking, and frequent preference for fast food.

Lacks Similarities

Attitudes, Values, Interests, and Personality

Attitudes and Beliefs:
Homophobic
Racist
Sexist

Values:
General/Unspecified
Appearance
Health
Hygiene
Non-Family Oriented

Personality:
General/Unspecified
Arrogance
Emotional
Immature
Insecure
Lack of Eye Contact
Little to No Friends
Profanity
Sense of Humor

Figure 3.18. Lacks Similarities - Attitudes, Values, Interests, and Personality

Hygiene was the second to last area under *Values*, which often dealt with body odors, bad breath, and issues pertaining to personal cleanliness. *Non-Family Oriented* was the last area under *Values*, which pertained to the perception that the other person was not interested in a family life down the road, or did not possess family values, or a general leaning towards a positive family-orientation. In summation for this subsection, people cared about their potential partners' appearance, health, hygiene and whether or not they were family-oriented. These were values the participants had that were important to them, which is why they were listed under *Values*.

Personality is the next subsection heading of *Lacks Similarities – Attitudes, Values, Interests, and Personality*. This had nine subsections mentioned, which were *General/Unspecified*, *Arrogance*, *Emotional*, *Immature*, *Insecure*, *Lack of Eye Contact*, *Little to No Friends*, *Profanity*, and *Sense of Humor*. *General/Unspecified* dealt with any vague or general mention of dissimilar personalities, such as "She has a bad personality" and "We had very different personalities." Next was *Arrogance*, which included any relational red flag pertaining to "arrogance," "bragging," "overconfidence," "conceitedness," "cockiness," and any tendency to "not stop talking" about oneself in an inflated way. *Emotional*, meanwhile, dealt with relational red flags were the other person was simply deemed "too emotional" or "overly emotional" or "emotionally dramatic." The next two subsections of *Immature* and *Insecure* dealt with any relational red flags where the participants felt the other person was immature and insecure in any way, respectively.

Lack of Eye Contact regarded instances where participants felt concerned that the other person was averting their gaze and not holding proper eye contact with them throughout the initial romantic encounter, while *Little to No Friends* dealt with instances where participants felt concerned that the other person had little to no friends, which was deemed by the participants to be a relational red flag. The final two subsections of *Personality* regard the topics of *Profanity* and *Sense of Humor*. *Profanity* concerned any instance where the participants noticed that the other person engaged in "profane", "foul" or "coarse" language, where they "cussed," "cursed" or "swore" or were "vulgar" with their words, while *Sense of Humor* dealt with any incompatibility or dissimilarity between the two people in their personal sense of humor style, all of which were deemed to be relational red flags.

In summation for this subsection of *Personality*, arrogance, emotionality, immaturity, insecurity, profanity, and sense of humor all relate to one's specific personality. So too does the established, repeated pattern of how a person communicates with their gaze and lastly, the size of a person's friend group also often speaks to their specific personality. After all, personality-based traits such as extraversion, introversion, self-esteem, and self-concept relate to how we see ourselves and how we interact with others, which can directly affect the size of our social network.

Figure 3.19, meanwhile, deals with the additional analysis that was performed on *Lacks or Violated Compassionate Features*.

Lacks or Violated Compassionate Features

- Disinterested
- Infidelity
- Jealousy
- Lying/Dishonest
- Mean/Unkind
- Poor Listener
- Rude/Disrespectful
  - General/Unspecified
  - Rude to Mother
  - Rude to Waitstaff
- Secretive
  - General/Unspecified
  - Keeping Relationship Secret from Family/Friends
- Selfish
- Stubborn
- Untrustworthy

Figure 3.19. Lacks or Violated Compassionate Features

This had the 11 subsections of 1) *Disinterested*, 2), *Infidelity,* 3) *Jealousy*, 4) *Lying/Dishonesty*, 5) *Mean/Unkind*, 6) *Poor Listener*, 7) *Rude/Disrespectful*, 8) *Secretive*, 9) *Selfish*, 10) *Stubborn*, and 11) *Untrustworthy*. These 11 subthemes directly relate to a lack of a

compassionate love feature or a violation of a compassionate love feature (see Fehr and Sprecher, 2009). For example, when the compassionate love feature of trust is violated, it means the other person is untrustworthy. When these compassionate features are violated they result in relational red flags.

These 11 commonly violated compassionate features, as seen in Figure 3.19, are fairly straightforward and direct. For instance, *Jealousy* was reported whenever the participants felt the other person was exhibiting signs of jealousy. Similarly, *Lying/Dishonesty* was mentioned as a relational red flag whenever the participants' felt the other person was lying or being dishonest, and so on.

However, in particular, three of these 11 violated compassionate features deserve further explanation. First, is *Disinterested*. This was reported whenever the primary individual felt the other person was showing disinterest towards them and generally was not interested in getting to know them or even interested in being on the date in the first place.

Next are *Rude/Disrespectful* and *Secretive*. *Rude/Disrespectful* had three subthemes to it. These subthemes were *General/Unspecified*, *Rude to Mother*, and *Rude to Waitstaff*. *General/Unspecified* dealt with any vague or general mention of the other person being "rude" or "disrespectful." Beyond general rudeness afflicted at them, many participants noticed when the person they were trying to get to know romantically was rude or disrespectful to two particular groups of people. These two groups were the other person's own mother and the waitstaff at a restaurant.

Secretive had two subthemes of *General/Unspecified*, and *Keeping Relationship Secret from Family/Friends*. Participants did not like it when they felt the other person was being "secretive", "keeping secrets", or was generally "hiding something" from them. All instances

relating to this experience were categorized under the relational red flag of *Secretive – General/Unspecified*.

Interestingly, participants also frequently mentioned many instances where they felt the other person was trying to hide the participant and keep them from getting to know the other person's family and friends. Participants did not like being kept away from the other person's family and social systems as they took issue with the perception that the other person was keeping the relationship secret. All instances of this experience were categorized under *Secretive - Keeping Relationship Secret from Family/Friends*.

Statistical breakdown of the subthemes seen in Figure 3.18 and Figure 3.19 can be seen in Figure 3.20. The previously mentioned data columns of *Percent of Participants Reporting Each Type*, *Average Severity Rating*, and *Severity SD* are also given here for each subtheme.

There are many subthemes here worth noting. In particular, are *Values – Appearance* (24%), *Values – Hygiene* (28%), and *Personality – Arrogance* (27%), all of which were reported by roughly one-in-four or more of all of the participants surveyed. Another subtheme, *Rude/Disrespectful – General/Unspecified* (22%) was nearly mentioned by as many participants as well.

This is remarkable given that these are already sub-subthemes, meaning that they are already subthemes within subthemes, in that these belong to the larger subtheme of *Attitudes, Values, Interests, and Personality*. This subtheme itself belongs under one of the larger main nine relational red flag types of *Lacks Similarities*. A further breakdown of these various subthemes based on gender are given in Figure 3.21.

	Percent of Participants Reporting Each Type	Average Severity Rating	Severity SD
Lacks Similarities			
Attitudes, Values, Interests, and Personality			
Attitudes and Beliefs:			
Homophobic	0.7%	4.50	0.50
Racist	6.7%	4.47	0.60
Sexist	5.3%	4.33	0.87
Values:			
General/Unspecified	3.9%	4.00	0.95
Appearance	23.9%	3.20	1.19
Health	11.6%	3.49	1.30
Hygiene	28.1%	3.70	1.19
Non-Family Oriented	7.7%	3.64	0.93
Personality:			
General/Unspecified	6..3%	4.21	0.95
Arrogance	26.7%	3.46	1.02
Emotional	6.3%	2.89	1.10
Immature	10.5%	3.13	0.95
Insecure	11.6%	3.15	0.98
Lack of Eye Contact	6.0%	3.17	0.90
Little to No Friends	4.6%	3.08	1.21
Profanity	9.5%	3.25	0.87
Sense of Humor	15.5%	3.25	1.25
Lacks or Violated Compassionate Features			
Disinterested	8.1%	3.29	1.17
Infidelity	19.3%	4.55	0.73
Jealousy	13.7%	3.69	0.79
Lying/Dishonest	27.0%	4.19	0.86
Mean/Unkind	9.1%	3.65	1.21
Poor Listener	6.7%	3.35	0.75
Rude/Disrespectful			
General/Unspecified	21.8%	4.11	0.86
Rude to Mother	7.4%	4.05	0.90
Rude to Waitstaff	12.3%	3.74	1.02
Secretive			
General/Unspecified	10.5%	3.80	0.83
Keeping Relationship Secret from Family/Friends	6.7%	3.84	0.81
Selfish	6.3%	3.72	0.87
Stubborn	10.5%	3.47	0.85
Untrustworthy	12.3%	4.17	0.94

Figure 3.20. Population Statistics for Lacks Similarities - AVIP and Lacks or Violated Compassionate Features (N = 285)

	Percent of Participants Reporting Each Type		Average Severity Rating		Severity SD	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
Lacks Similarities						
Attitudes, Values, Interests, and Personality						
Attitudes and Beliefs:						
Homophobic	0.0%	1.0%	-	4.50	-	0.50
Racist	7.6%	6.2%	4.43	4.50	0.73	0.50
Sexist	0.0%	7.8%	-	4.33	-	0.87
Values:						
General/Unspecified	3.3%	4.1%	3.33	4.25	1.25	0.66
Appearance	42.2%	15.0%	3.34	3.00	1.14	1.24
Health	17.4%	8.8%	3.50	3.47	1.21	1.38
Hygiene	44.6%	20.2%	3.95	3.44	1.13	1.19
Non-Family Oriented	5.4%	8.8%	3.60	3.65	0.80	0.97
Personality:						
General/Unspecified	10.9%	4.1%	4.09	4.38	0.90	0.99
Arrogance	17.4%	31.1%	3.75	3.39	0.83	1.06
Emotional	10.9%	4.1%	3.10	2.63	1.14	0.99
Immature	8.7%	11.4%	3.22	3.09	1.03	0.90
Insecure	14.1%	10.4%	3.31	3.05	0.99	0.92
Lack of Eye Contact	5.4%	6.2%	3.00	2.92	0.63	0.95
Little to No Friends	5.4%	4.1%	3.00	3.13	1.10	1.27
Profanity	8.7%	9.8%	3.50	3.15	0.71	0.91
Sense of Humor	27.2%	9.8%	3.48	2.95	1.20	1.23
Lacks or Violated Compassionate Features						
Disinterested	4.3%	9.8%	2.60	3.47	1.02	1.14
Infidelity	18.5%	19.7%	4.71	4.47	0.46	0.82
Jealousy	9.8%	15.5%	3.78	3.67	0.79	0.79
Lying/Dishonest	22.8%	29.0%	4.19	4.18	0.85	0.87
Mean/Unkind	10.9%	8.3%	2.90	4.13	1.30	0.86
Poor Listener	6.5%	6.7%	3.50	3.54	0.96	0.63
Rude/Disrespectful						
General/Unspecified	15.2%	24.9%	3.71	4.23	0.80	0.85
Rude to Mother	2.2%	9.8%	4.00	4.05	0.00	0.94
Rude to Waitstaff	9.8%	13.5%	4.00	3.65	0.67	1.11
Secretive						
General/Unspecified	6.5%	12.4%	3.67	3.83	0.75	0.85
Keeping Relationship Secret from Family/Friends	0.0%	9.8%	-	3.84	-	0.81
Selfish	6.5%	6.2%	3.50	3.83	1.12	0.69
Stubborn	7.6%	11.9%	3.00	3.61	0.76	0.82
Untrustworthy	15.2%	10.9%	3.79	4.43	1.08	0.73

Figure 3.21. Gender Statistics for Lacks Similarities - AVIP and Lacks or Violated Compassionate Features (N = 285)

Discussion

The data show that relational red flags are a very serious issue. It is paramount to understand that not a single one of the nine major types of relational red flags had an average severity rating below 3.00 (which can be seen in Figure 3.15), with the lowest being the 3.23 exhibited by *Violated Courtship Norms*. This means that all nine major relational red flag types

were deemed by the total population to be well above the 3.00 rating of *Moderately Severe*. This shows that participants felt these issues they were reporting, these relational red flags, were not just minor inconveniences or tolerable annoyances, but rather serious signals that should be heeded. If they were not as serious, they would have average severity ratings in the 1.00 or low 2.00 range. However, they all rest comfortably in the moderately severe or higher rating.

Furthermore, only one of the 23 total subthemes had an average severity rating below 3.00, which was *Violated Contemporary Courtship Norms – General/Unspecified*, which barely missed the 3.00 threshold at 2.95, as also seen in Figure 3.15.

This is rather telling that not only were the nine main types all rated as *Moderately Severe* or higher, but that all but one of the subthemes were also rated as *Moderately Severe* or higher, with the one that did miss did so by just by 0.05%. Indeed, not only were 21 of the 22 primary relational red flags subtypes rated 3.18 or higher (discounting *Violated Traditional Gender Roles – Feminine,* which did not garner sufficient replies), but the average rating of all relational red flags for the entirety of Study 1 was 3.57, which denotes a severity rating between *Moderately Severe* and *Very Severe*, with the average leaning closer to the *Very Severe* range. This shows that whether they are taken individually or even collectively as a whole, the data are clear that these most common relational red flags are considered quite severe and potentially damaging to a healthy, stable romantic relationship.

Furthermore, not only was the total average of all relational red flags closer to the *Very Severe* rating, but 14 of the 22 total relational red flag subthemes (again, discounting for the insufficient replies of *Violated Traditional Gender Roles – Feminine*) were also closer to the *Very Severe* or *Extremely Severe* rating (which were all five *Deviant Behavior* subthemes, *Family and Social Systems – Conflict with Family System* and *Conflict with Social Network,*

Immediate Intimacy – Physical, Lacks Financial Stability, Independence, Lacks Similarities – Demographic, Lacks or Violated Compassionate Features, both *Romantic Other* subthemes, and *Violated Traditional Gender Roles - Masculine*), as denoted with an average rating of 3.5 or higher, with several in the 4.0+ range. Further still, one of the remaining eight relational red flag subthemes barely missed the 3.5 average rating by 0.05% (which was *Children from Previous Relationships*), showing that a vast majority of all relational red flags types and subtypes were considered by the participants as signals that they deemed significantly severe and worthy of detection.

The severity of these relational red flags is not only telling, but so is their exposure. In addition to relational red flags being considered quite harmful to a potential romantic relationship, they were also frequently experienced by a large percentage of the participants surveyed. Indeed, as Figure 3.15 shows, seven of the nine major relational red flag types (*Deviant Behavior*, *Family and Social Systems*, *Immediate Intimacy*, *Lacks Similarities*, *Lacks or Violated Compassionate Features*, *Romantic Others*, and *Violated Courtship Norms*) were experienced by over 40% of all participants and as much as over 90% of all participants. These findings show that these relational red flag types and subtypes are 1) both individually and collectively viewed as severe signals that should be heeded and 2) they are commonly experienced by a high degree of individuals.

Review of Hypotheses

This sub-section will elaborate on the support for this current study's five hypotheses that was briefly explained in the Results section of this chapter. As can be seen with the collective data derived from this first study, all three of the research questions were answered and all five of the hypotheses were supported.

Supported Hypotheses: Hypothesis 1. There was support for this dissertation's first hypothesis, which stated that women would be more likely than men to perceive rapid attempts at physical intimacy as a relational red flag. As Figure 3.16 shows under *Immediate Intimacy - Physical*, this was observed in the data as over half of the women surveyed (54%) mentioned a rapid attempt at physical intimacy as a red flag compared to only a quarter of the men surveyed (26%). Therefore, this hypothesis is supported as women were indeed more likely to perceive rapid attempts at physical intimacy as a relational red flag given that more than *twice* as many women as compared to men reported experiencing an instance where the other person made an immediate attempt at achieving physical intimacy, which they deemed as a relational red flag. Furthermore, additional support for this hypothesis can be seen in the discriminant gender analysis in Figure 3.17, which showed that *Immediate Intimacy – Physical* was one of only five relational red flags that were a critical predictor for women, but not for men i.e. an empirically-supported gender difference.

Supported Hypotheses: Hypothesis 2. There was also support for the second hypothesis, which asserted that the violation of certain relational scripts would result in relational red flags, which based on the nature of the script would differ based on gender. The support for this hypothesis can be seen in the multivariate discriminant data in Figure 3.17, which shows that the violation of traditional courtship norms is one of the five statistically significant gender differences. This specific relational red flag, along with four others that were previously mentioned, proved to be a critical predictor for women, but not for men, i.e. a gender difference.

Support can also be seen in the participants' experiences which show the difference in gender in the *Violated Courtship Norms* type in Figure 3.13, particularly in the participant data under *Violated Traditional Courtship Norms*.

As the literature in Chapter 2 has shown, there are expectations and relational scripts for how first date encounters are traditionally expected to proceed. As Pryor and Merluzzi (1985) note, these anticipated first date behaviors can differ based on gender. For example, the man is expected to meet the woman at her residence, and then take her to the location of the date, and so on. The identification of the *Violated Traditional Courtship Norms* type, as supported by the responses given by the participants, show that when these first date expectations are violated, they are indeed seen as relational red flags.

The specific behaviors that the women cited as being relational red flags, pertaining to a violation of traditional courtship norms, as seen in Figure 3.13., involved the other person not opening doors for them, not paying for the female participant's portion of the meal, or expecting the female to pay for the entire meal, not having plans for what to do on the date, and displaying generally poor manners during the date. All of these experiences are violations of traditional first date behaviors that the man is expected to perform for the woman.

In addition to *Immediate Intimacy – Physical* and *Violated Traditional Courtship Norms*, there were three other statistically significant relational red flag gender differences. As Figure 3.17 shows, a linear discriminant analysis revealed the accurate classification of a female as noticing five crucial relational red flags, which they deem to be the dominant undesirable qualities in the other person. These include emotionally, mentally or physically violent or abusive behaviors, too much immediate physical intimacy, a lack of similar attitudes, values, interests, and personalities, violations of traditional courtship norms (e.g., not opening the door, not paying for the meal, and not displaying appropriate manners), and not appearing masculine enough, which may include appearing effeminate or lacking ambition and overall general leadership qualities.

Supported Hypotheses: Hypothesis 3. There was also strong support for the third hypothesis, which stated that the violation of compassionate love features would result in relational red flags that are shared by both genders. The support for this can be seen in Figure 3.16 under *Lacks or Violated Compassionate Features*. Support is also shown in Figure 3.21, which shows a more detailed look at this main type based on gender. Nearly every participant, regardless of gender, mentioned that they experienced a relational red flag that was a violation of a compassionate feature. Indeed, 89% of all of the women that were surveyed, compared to a near identical 88% of all of the men that were surveyed, reported experiencing a violation of a compassionate feature, which shows clear support for this third hypothesis.

Supported Hypotheses: Hypothesis 4. Next, there was support for the fourth hypothesis, which posited that women would be more likely than men to perceive a lack of financial stability (e.g. unemployment, lives with parents, does not own a car) as a relational red flag.

Figure 3.16 shows that not only did women indeed report a lack of financial stability and financial independence as a relational red flag more often than men, but that women also rated it as significantly more severe than men (3.95 severity for women compared to 3.00 for men). That is a remarkable one-full severity rating higher. That means that women who have experienced this relational red flag view it as *Very Severe* whereas the men who experienced the same relational red flag only rated it as *Moderately Severe*, which shows support for this fourth hypothesis that women do indeed view this specific relational red flag as more egregious than men.

Supported Hypotheses: Hypothesis 5. The fifth and final hypothesis from Study 1, like the previous four hypotheses, was also supported. The fifth hypothesis assumed that the most

severely rated relational red flags would focus on deviant behaviors such as alcohol abuse and dependency, drug use and dependency, criminality, and any type of emotional, physical, or psychological abuse, control, or manipulation.

There was strong support for this hypothesis, as can be seen in Figure 3.15, as participants reported that the five *Deviant Behavior* subthemes were the most severe relational red flags out of all 23 total subthemes. Indeed, the five highest severity ratings of all 23 subtypes were the five *Deviant Behavior* relational red flags, which included *Drug Use/Dependency*, which was rated 4.39 out of 5, followed closely by *Criminality* at 4.37, *Violent or Abusive* at 4.23, *Alcohol Abuse/Dependency* at 3.86, and *General/Unspecified* at 3.84. The sixth highest severity rating among the 23 subthemes was the relational red flag type *Lacks or Violated Compassionate Features* at 3.78. Furthermore, as can also be seen in Figure 3.15, not only were the five subthemes of *Deviant Behavior* rated as the most severe of all relational red flags, but the overall theme itself, *Deviant Behavior* (4.13), was the highest rated, most severe relational red flag theme out of the total nine. *Deviant Behavior* was also the only major relational red flag of the nine main types to have an overall group rating above 4, marking it as *Very Severe*.

Noteworthy Findings Beyond the Hypotheses

Beyond the aforementioned hypotheses, several specific areas of Figure 3.15 and Figure 3.16, which serve as two of the primary findings for Study 1, are worth noting. First and foremost is *Deviant Behavior*. It is quite interesting that even though this main type only made up 11% of all the relational red flags that were reported, this main type was still experienced by two-thirds (66%) of all participants surveyed. So even though it represents an overall low percentage of all the possible relational red flags one may experience, it is still widely experienced by most individuals nonetheless, even if only briefly and infrequently. This finding

shows that while it may not be experienced often by those in initial romantic encounters, deviant behavior and its many forms will still likely be experienced to some degree in at least one way, shape or form, for most of us. We may not experience it frequently, but many of us will indeed still experience it at some point during frequent exposure to initial romantic encounters.

It is also worth noting that, as seen in Figure 3.16, there is a great disparity in the exposure to deviant behaviors between the sexes. More than half of both genders reported experiencing a deviant behavior relational red flag, but while the men were just at slightly more than half (54%), the women were at a nearly three-quarters exposure (72%), meaning that practically three out of every four women reported experiencing an instance of a relational red flag that involved a deviant behavior. The women surveyed also reported higher severity ratings in four of the five deviant behavior subthemes (*General/Unspecified, Alcohol Abuse/Dependency, Drug Use/Dependency,* and *Violent or Abusive*), showing that they believed these same deviant actions that both genders experienced were perceived to be more severe to them.

Lastly, the women surveyed also reported a significantly higher level of exposure to violent or abuse relational red flags as only 29% of the men reported experiencing this relational red flag while 50% of the women reported experiencing it. Even though there were some instances of physical abuse mentioned, many of the responses given under this subtheme of *Violent or Abusive* had to do with the other person exerting or attempting to exert other types of violence or abuse, particularly emotional or psychological control or manipulation over the participant. This was often seen with responses such as, “Tried to control when I could see my friends,” or “She was too controlling,” or “He had to control everything” or “He ordered me a bunch of drinks, was trying to get me drunk.”

While significantly more women reported experiencing an instance of violence or abuse compared to the men, the remaining deviant behavior areas of *Alcohol Abuse/Dependency, Criminality* and *Drug Use/Dependency* had closely similar levels of exposure, with neither gender experiencing one of these relational red flags by a difference of greater than 4% as compared to the other gender.

Family and Social Systems was another main relational red flag type that warrants discussion. Over 40% of all participants experienced some conflict relating to either their family and friends or the other person's family and friends, as relational red flags concerning *Family and Social Systems* was experienced by roughly 42% of the participants (see Figure 3.15). It is also interesting that of the three *Family and Social Systems* subthemes, that the *Conflict with Family System* was experienced by not only the highest percent of individuals surveyed, but that this particular subtheme also had the highest severity rating of the three at 3.66. This is in line with research that shows that our family members are among our closest and most loved individuals in our lives, and thus when conflict occurs regarding them that it is deemed quite harmful. Indeed, about one-in-four individuals (24%) reported experiencing a conflict with the other person regarding the family system, whether it was their family system or the other person's.

The gender breakdown of the *Family and Social Systems* relational red flag (see Figure 3.16) shows that while both genders reported experiencing similar exposure to getting to know someone who had a child from a previous relationship, the men gave it a significantly higher severity rating than the women, with 3.88 compared to 3.17. So while a similar percent of both sexes experienced this relational red flag, it was the men who felt it was a much more damaging signal that the other person they were getting to know romantically had a child from a previous

relationship, as the men's severity rating was just short of the 4.0 range of *Very Severe* while the women rated it significantly lower at just slightly into the 3.0 range of *Moderately Severe*.

Regarding a gender difference in *Conflict with the Family System*, the women not only reported experiencing this relational red flag more than the men, but the women also rated it as significantly more severe, with a 3.88 rating compared to the men's 3.05 rating. This suggests that the women surveyed believed any conflict relating to either person's family system was considered quite severe, with it just short of the 4.0 range of *Very Severe*, while the men rated this same experience as only *Moderately Severe*. Both genders though had nearly identical levels of severity rating regarding conflict with either person's social network, which they both rated as between *Moderately Severe* and *Very Severe* (3.56 for the women compared to 3.52 for the men).

The *Immediate Intimacy* main theme also deserves some attention. Nearly three out of every four participants surveyed (73%) experienced an instance of a relational red flag relating to the other person's rapid attempts at achieving intimacy. This was one of the three most experienced relational red flag types out of the main nine (with only *Lacks Similarities* and *Lacks or Violated Compassionate Features* experienced by more individuals).

This speaks to our human nature. We are social creatures and we desire to grow close to others (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). We do this because it is not only one of our most basic interpersonal needs (Schutz, 1958), but one of the the most powerful and fulfilling driving forces in our lives (Aron & Aron, 1994; Baumeister & Wotman, 1992; Clark & Pataki, 1995), as some even call it the most fundamental of all human needs (Montague, 1970).

Because of these reasons, it can be difficult when this desire to grow close to others is not shared by the other person, making it just as equally upsetting from the other side of the dyad when someone attempts to achieve a deeper level of intimacy that we are not ready to share with

them just yet, if ever at all. This is what is seen in this relational red flag type. The most severe and most widely experienced of these three subthemes was an attempt at *physical* intimacy, which had a severity rating of 3.76 as determined by nearly half (45%) of all participants in the study who had experienced it (see Figure 3.15).

Furthermore, while both genders did experience rapid attempts at *emotional* intimacy to nearly identical levels (33% for men compared to 32% for women; see Figure 3.16), it was the men who reported it as noticeably more severe than the women, with the men giving it a 3.54 rating compared to a 3.19 rating for the women. This shows that the men felt it was more severe and damaging to a potential romantic relationship when the other person made unwanted, rapid attempts at achieving emotional intimacy too soon, attempts that the data showed would often include references to marriage, children, a committed future, and a desire to meet each other's family in the near future.

Further gender differences can be seen in Figure 3.21. Most of the participants had closely similar levels of exposure and severity ratings for many of these subthemes, supporting the notion that men and women are not that different in most of the things we as humans all look for in a potential mate. However, a few gender differences do exist. Looking at the *Values* subsection of *Lacks Similarities – Attitudes, Values, Interests, and Personality*, it can be seen that men rated the other person's appearance and their hygiene as far more important, as their severity levels for these relational red flags were more than a third to even over a half of a severity rating higher than the women. Indeed, the men rated undesirable aspects of the other person's appearance as a 3.34 compared to just a 3.00 for the women, while the men also rated unpleasant aspects of the other person's hygiene as a 3.95 compared to just a 3.44 for the women.

Men also rated relational red flags concerning the other person's arrogance, emotionality, insecurity, and sense of humor as significantly more severe than the women did. Regarding *Arrogance*, while the men rated it as significantly higher in severity (3.75 for the men compared to 3.39 for the women), it was only experienced by 6% of the men surveyed while the women reported experiencing it at over 21% of the time. This shows that while women reported experiencing arrogance from the other person at more than three times the rate of exposure that the men experienced it, when the men *did* experience this relational red flag, they felt it was much more severe than the women did.

Further gender differences can be seen in Figure 3.21 under *Lacks or Violated Compassionate Features*. The women surveyed reported experiencing relational red flags relating the other person showing disinterest in them to a higher degree than the men (10% compared to 4%), with the women rating it as significantly more severe, with a rating of 3.47 compared to 2.60 for the men. Women also rated the other person as being mean or unkind as significantly more severe (4.13 for women compared to 2.90 for men).

There was marked consistency across the three sub-subtypes of *Rude/Disrespectful*. Women reported experiencing all three areas of rudeness considerably more than the men did. This includes general rudeness from the other person (25% for the women compared to only 15% for the men), rudeness by the other person to that same person's own mother (10% for the women to 2% for the men), and rudeness by the other person to the waitstaff (14% for the women to 10% for the men). Regarding their severity ratings, *Rude to Mother* had closely similar levels for both genders (4.00 for the men to 4.05 for the women). Each gender then displayed higher ratings compared to the other in one of the next two *Rude/Disrespectful* subthemes, as it was the men who reported a much higher severity for rudeness to the waitstaff (4.00 for the men

to 3.65 for the women), while the women reported a much higher severity rating for overall general rude behavior (4.23 for the women compared to 3.71 for the men).

Regarding the subtype of *Secretive*, it is quite interesting that 10% of the women surveyed reported experiencing the relational red flag where the other person was trying to keep their budding relationship a secret from their family and friends while none of the men reported a single instance of this happening. The women also rated this subtype, *Keeping Relationship Secret from Family/Friends,* as quite severe at 3.84.

A few findings in the main type of *Romantic Others* also warrant discussion (see Figure 3.16). Both genders experienced a nearly identical level of exposure to this main type (50% of all men compared to 47% of all women) as well as the subtype of *Previous Partners, Relationships* (45% for the men to 39% for the women). Furthermore, neither gender enjoyed the other person discussing their own past relationships and sexual partners or prying into the participants' past relationships and sexual history, as both sexes gave similar severity ratings for this subtype (3.65 for the women to 3.62 for the men).

However, *Interested in Other Romantic Options* presented something different. Nearly twice as many of the women surveyed reported experiencing an instance where the other person seemed more interested in pursuing a romantic relationship with someone other than the participant while the men who did experience this rated it as more severe than the women (3.71 for the men compared to 3.47 for the women).

Lastly, this Discussion section will briefly review a few noteworthy results in the *Violated Courtship Norms* main type. Cell phones are a major concern for many individuals during first dates. The data reveal that showing significant attention to one's cell phone during an initial romantic encounter is a frequent undesirable quality experienced by many. Indeed, a third

of the men surveyed (33%) and more than a quarter of the women surveyed (28%) cited this as a significant relational red flag. While neither gender liked the other person being on their phone during the time they should be spending getting to know the participants, the men rated the *Cell Phone* subtype as more severe than the women (3.55 to 3.27). Finally, while both genders rated the violation of traditional courtship norms as similarly severe (3.21 for the men to 3.18 for the women), it was the women who reported they had experienced significantly more of these violations, nearly 20% more in fact (42% for the women to 24% for the men).

Limitations

There are a number of limitations regarding the current research. First and foremost is the sample. While the nearly 300 participants provided a wealth of scholastic information to many areas of this author's dissertation, there are still a few potentially valid concerns that should be addressed. The majority of the survey's 285 participants were primarily white (74.7%, $n = 213$) female (67.7%, $n = 193$) college students who lived in the Southeast region of the United States. Furthermore, nearly all of the participants (94.3%, $n = 269$) were between the ages of 18 - 23, with only 5.7% of them older than this five-year span. This study's findings may indeed be typical of both genders and all races throughout the country, but such assertions cannot be made without further research that is more representative of this nation's population, especially with regard to males, minorities, and individuals living in other portions of the United States. The role relational red flags play across the lifespan should also be researched, given that this study primarily focused on individuals who ranged in age from 18 to 23.

Additionally, given that outside of the narrow topic of violent and abusive signals, relational red flags had not been properly studied in-depth at the scholastic level, so it was not known how well participants would be familiar with the term "red flag" as it pertains to initial

romantic interactions. The results from Study 1 however showed that the participants were quite familiar with the term within the romantic relational context. Familiarity with the topic was clearly seen as the participants did not have any difficulty generating examples of relational red flags that they had personally experienced. Indeed, 93% of all participants surveyed (n = 265) provided the full allotment of 15 relational red flags. Future research on this topic should account for this and either allow for more than 15 responses from the participants or simply allow for an open-ended option for listing which allows the participants to list as many relational red flags as they can.

While the allotment of the 15 responses that generated roughly 4,000 usable codes was helpful in generating this foundational study, the fact that nearly all participants could have easily mentioned more relational red flags would have allowed for more robust results in all areas. It can be assumed that the percent of participants that reported experiencing various relational red flags would have increased given the allotment of additional responses. Statistical values may have also changed for a few data areas, particularly for average severity rating and severity standard deviation, given a much larger resource of responses. Statistical values may have also changed for various relational red flag types and subtypes. In particular, this could affect *Violated Traditional Gender Roles – Feminine*, which was the only one of the 23 subthemes that did not garner sufficient replies, as it represented only 0.1% of all responses given and was experienced by only 2.2% of the men surveyed.

There is also the issue of fragmentation, which can be addressed in one of two ways. In addition to allowing for more responses from the participants, the number of participants themselves should also increase in future research, given the identification of the 23 subthemes. This high number of subthemes to the nine main relational red flag types led to deep

fragmentation of the data. Given that only 15 blank spaces were given for responses, participants could not have listed more than 15 of the 23 subthemes. This leaves out a considerable quantity of subthemes that may have been listed by participants if they were allowed more responses. The allotment of more responses could again in turn easily lead to a higher percent of relational red flags that had been experienced, just as a larger pool of participants surveyed could also do the same.

Another approach beyond allowing for more responses or a larger sample could be the conduction of a series of studies on each of the nine main relational red flag types. This would help solve the issue of fragmentation. It would achieve this by ideally allowing for greater scientific inquiry into each of the main types and subtypes.

This could prove particularly helpful to providing even stronger empirical results to the already established subtypes of *Lacks Similarities – Attitudes, Values, Interests, and Personality*, and *Lacks or Violated Compassionate Features*. The nearly 4,000 data points of responses provided are clear in the formation of the nine main types and 23 subtypes, however, within each of these aforementioned two types of *Lacks Similarities – Attitudes, Values, Interests, and Personality*, and *Lacks or Violated Compassionate Features* were several more sub-subtypes, which again speaks to the issue of fragmentation. Given that these specific responses are categories within categories within potentially more categories, while the overall main types have been established, further subtypes may very well exist between these two types, especially given that these two themes were the two largest of the nine main types experienced by the participants, which thus resulted in further analysis and in turn further fragmentation.

This may also be true given that individuals' specific attitudes, values, interests, and personality types are seemingly endless. The same can be said for the violation of compassionate

features, as the main responses within the already fragmented divisions were reported, but other violations relating to the type may also exist. This may only be revealed with either 1) larger sample sizes, 2) the increased allotment of responses, and/or 3) centrally focused, detailed studies that hone in on these and other specific relational red flag types and subtypes.

Conclusion

This study sought to examine the undesirable signals that are communicated in initial romantic interactions in hopes of setting a foundational understanding through which all future inquiry into this specific topic of relational research can build. The results of this study revealed the relational red flags that were experienced by the participants when they were trying to get to know someone new romantically. There was support for all five hypotheses presented in this chapter.

Women reported experiencing immediate attempts at physical intimacy as a relational red flag more than twice as often as the men did (H1). Also, the violation of certain relational scripts did result in relational red flags, which based on the nature of the script did differ based on gender, with women reporting the violation of several gender-based traditional courtship behaviors as relational red flags (H2). These two red flags in particular, 1) the desire for immediate intimacy and 2) the violation of traditional courtship norms, along with 3) a lack of similarities in attitudes, values, interests and personality, 4) any emotionally, mentally or physically violent or abusive behavior, and 5) the violation that derived from not embodying a traditionally masculine gender role, proved to be significant critical predictors of relational red flags for women. This finding revealed that there are statistically significant gender differences between men and women regarding relational red flags.

Furthermore, the violation of compassionate love features did result in relational red flags that were shared by both genders to a near universal degree as nearly every participant, regardless of sex, reported experiencing the violation of a compassionate feature as a relational red flag (H3). Additionally, women were more likely than men to perceive the lack of financial stability (e.g. unemployment, lives with parents, does not own a car) as a relational red flag, which they also rated as considerably more severe than the men did when experiencing the same relational red flag (H4). Lastly, the most severely rated relational red flags did focus on deviant behaviors such as alcohol abuse and dependency, drug use and dependency, criminality, and any type of physical, emotional, or psychological abuse, control, or manipulation (H5), as well as any general deviant behavior. These five relational red flags had the highest severity ratings of all relational red flags throughout the study and thus are seen as the most severe.

This dissertation's first three research questions were also answered in Study 1, as the 23 most common relational red flags were identified and categorized into a formal typology made up of nine main types (RQ1). The identification of these nine main relational red flags types serves as the foundation for this dissertation. The nine most common relational red flag types are 1) *Deviant Behavior*, 2) *Family and Social Systems*, 3) *Immediate Intimacy*, 4) *Lacks Financial Stability, Independence*, 5) *Lacks Similarities*, 6) *Lacks or Violated Compassionate Features*, 7) *Romantic Others*, 8) *Violated Courtship Norms*, and 9) *Violated Traditional Gender Roles*. This is further supported by the finding that all nine relational red flag types were mentioned by participants of both genders, showing that these are dominant, serious issues that are experienced by men and women alike.

Additionally, quantitative analysis revealed that 18 of the 23 relational red flags were statistically significant at the .05 level or better. These significant relational red flags were 1) *Deviant Behavior – General/Unspecified*, 2) *Deviant Behavior – Alcohol Abuse/Dependency,* 3) *Deviant Behavior - Criminality,* 4) *Deviant Behavior – Drug Use/Dependency,* 5) *Deviant Behavior – Violent or Abusive,* 6) *Family and Social Systems – Conflict with Family System*, 7) *Family and Social Systems – Conflict with Social Network,* 8) *Immediate Intimacy – General/Unspecified*, 9) *Immediate Intimacy – Emotional,* 10) *Immediate Intimacy – Physical,* 11) *Lacks Financial Stability, Independence*, 12) *Lacks Similarities – Demographic,* 13) *Lacks Similarities – Attitudes, Values, Interests, and Personality,* 14) *Lacks or Violated Compassionate Features*, 15) *Romantic Others – Interested in Other Romantic Options,* 16) *Romantic Others – Previous Partners, Relationships*, 17) *Violated Contemporary Courtship Norms – Cell Phone*, and 18) *Violated Traditional Gender Roles – Masculine*.

The empirically-supported identification of these relational red flags later led to the discovery of several gender differences across multiple relational red flag types (RQ2). These gender differences were also empirically supported, as a discriminant analysis revealed that five relational red flags in particular out of the total 23 showed a significant gender difference. These five were *Deviant Behavior – Violent or Abusive, Immediate Intimacy – Physical, Lacks Similarities – Attitudes, Values, Interests, and Personality, Violated Courtship Norms – Traditional*, and *Violated Gender Roles – Masculine,* which were critical relational red flags for women.

This current study also revealed which relational red flags are perceived to be the most severe (RQ3). It was determined that the most severe relational red flags pertain to deviant behavior. This includes anything ranging from general deviant behaviors to more specific

behaviors that include alcohol abuse and dependency, criminal behavior, drug use and dependency, and any violent or abusive behaviors, which include emotional, mental and physical abuse and manipulation.

CHAPTER 4
STUDY TWO

This dissertation's fourth chapter will focus on Study 2, which continues on the scholastic path laid out in the empirical results garnered from Study 1. This dissertation's mixed methodology is established in this chapter. Whereas Study 1 mandated a quantitative approach to provide a foundational understanding of the identification and statistical relevance of relational red flags both on a total sample population and a gender difference basis, Study 2 builds off these results by adding a rich qualitative lens.

Qualitative Framework: Phenomenology

Qualitative research is an abundant and diverse methodological avenue of the social sciences. Creswell (2013) identifies eight primary advantages of qualitative research. The first is that this methodology allows researchers to *explore* problems or issues that need to be explained that cannot be easily measured and as such would not fit well with other methodologies. Another advantage is that it allows scholars to better understand *complex* issues that require detailed understanding. It also *empowers individuals* through the telling of their stories. It gives the people a voice. A fourth advantage to qualitative research is that it allows its practitioners to write in a *literary, flexible style* that conveys the peoples' aforementioned voices without being bogged down by the rigid restrictions of formal academic structures.

Qualitative research allows us to understand the *contexts* or settings in which people experience their problems or issues. Context is important as we may not always be able to separate what people say from the place where they say it. Because of this, context has meaning and power. Another advantage is that qualitative research allows social scientists to follow up quantitative research by helping to *explain the mechanisms* or linkages in causal theories or models. This methodology also helps *develop theories* when partial or inadequate theories exist

for certain populations and samples. This particular advantage may also be used when existing theories do not adequately capture the complexity and nuance of the problem being studied.

The eighth and final advantage that Creswell (2013) outlines is that qualitative research is beneficial when quantitative measures and statistical analyses simply *do not fit the problem* being examined. Interactions among people can be difficult to capture with quantitative measures for a number of reasons. For example, quantitative measures can overlook the uniqueness of the individuals being studied. These various advantages not only showcase the strength of the qualitative tradition, but they can also complement quantitative research by granting the researcher greater depth and understanding. Above all else, these eight advantages help us better understand the human condition and its various roles and functions, which, after all, is the ultimate goal of the social sciences.

Phenomenology, in particular, is a powerful qualitative approach that capitalizes on these eight advantages. It is utilized as the guiding qualitative framework for this current study. The phenomenological tradition is one of the primary approaches used in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990).

A phenomenological methodology can add a more well-rounded, contextual approach, one that dives deeper in understanding empirical research. Phenomenology does this through its strength as a qualitative tradition, which is to describe "the common meaning" of a concept or phenomenon by cutting to the core of how people experienced it (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). It seeks to describe the typical lived experiences of the phenomenon by allowing individuals to grasp "the very nature of the thing" being experienced (van Manen, 1990, p. 177). Essentially, the phenomenological tradition is meant to reduce the lived experiences of a phenomenon or concept down to a typical, accurate description of its universal essence (Creswell, 2013).

These strengths make phenomenology appropriate as the qualitative lens needed to analyze relational red flags. In this current study, the concept being experienced is the exposure to relational red flags during the phenomenon of initial romantic encounters. This chapter will explore the lived experiences of identifying, processing and then handling relational red flags within initial romantic encounters by discerning the typical experiences that are common to the core of these undesirable signals.

A primary research question will guide the analysis of these lived experiences by seeking to understand how relational red flags are processed once they are detected. Study 1 in Chapter 3 of this dissertation provided the foundation of the most common and severe relational red flags that are experienced in initial romantic encounters. This study will extend that research. Given that these relational red flags are signals of undesirable qualities and, as mentioned in the review of the literature seen in Chapter 2, given that signals require action on the part of the individual detecting these undesirable signals, this chapter will take the analysis of relational red flags one step further by exploring how individuals specifically identify, process, and ultimately handle relational red flags when they emerge. This leads to this study's primary research question and this dissertation's fourth and final research question.

RQ4: How do individuals identify and process relational red flags when they emerge?

Method

Participants

Purposeful sampling was used to identify the participants for Study 2. It is important to use purposeful sampling for one's data set when the decision of whom to select is crucial to what is being studied, so that the participants chosen "purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon" being addressed (Creswell, 2013, p. 156). For this

study, given that the lived experiences of individuals who have had exposure to relational red flags in initial romantic encounters is the central focus, participants who have had very little to no experience with this phenomenon would not serve as strong candidates for inclusion, given that their exposure to relational red flags would be limited and thus they would not be able to provide the necessary, typical lived experience of the phenomenon needed for analysis.

As a result, the minimum requirements for inclusion into this study mandated that the participants have experienced at least five or more distinct first dates, i.e. first dates with five or more *different* individuals, since the participant turned 18. Among the many different types of purposeful sampling available in qualitative research, this particular sampling strategy is criterion sampling. This occurs when all participants meet the study's specific criteria to ensure "quality assurance" that the phenomenon being studied has been appropriately experienced by all participants (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 28). In this case, the criterion is the aforementioned minimum threshold of experiencing at least five distinct first dates since turning 18.

Furthermore, given that the topic of relational red flags is a crucial area of romantic communication for both genders, an equal sampling of men and women were included in the study. In qualitative research, sample sizes are typically smaller than the standard quantitative study, given that many qualitative methodologies mandate the significantly smaller sample size. Whereas it is not uncommon for a typical quantitative study to include several hundred to even several thousand participants, a large number of qualitative methodologies recommend data sets of participants in the low double to even single digit range. Indeed, when it comes to the phenomenological approach, Dukes (1984) recommends a general range of 3 to 10 subjects.

Given that the participants were equally divided among men and women, six members of each sex were chosen to participate in Study 2 for a total of 12 participants. The participants

reported a mean age of 22 (*SD* = 2.19) and identified as primarily White (83%; *n* = 10). The participants ranged in adulthood dating experience from going on a few as five different first dates to as many as 23 with 75% of the participants having been on at least seven or more distinct first dates, with an overall average of more than nine first dates experienced by all participants (9.33, *SD* = 4.80).

Furthermore, it is important to note that Pryor and Merluzzi (1985) defined individuals who had dated six or more people as *dating experts*. Ten of the 12 subjects included in this study qualified as *dating experts*, with an equal number of five males and five females having met this high level criterion. Additionally, given that Dukes (1984) recommends a range of 3 – 10 subjects as the minimum ideal range, this study's sample achieved academic rigor with its inclusion of 10 subjects comprised of five men and five women, all of whom qualified as *dating experts*. To further strengthen the overall qualitative results, two additional subjects were included for an even number of six men and six women taking part in the study.

While the other two participants fell short of achieving expert status by just one date, they still possessed what Pryor and Merluzzi (1985) would consider deep knowledge of the overall dating process, given that they possessed knowledge far beyond that of *novice daters*, who they defined as those who had only experienced three or fewer dates. In total, the entire sample utilized for this current study not only included the optimal full range of 10 *dating experts*, of which men and women were equally represented, but all participants possessed strong, quality dating knowledge exceeding that of mere *novice daters*, making them ideal for inclusion into this study. Lastly, all participants were at least 18 years of age. Full demographic information for Study 2's participants can be found in Figure 4.1.

Item		Frequency	Percent	Mean	Mode	SD
Biological Sex						
	Male	6	50%			
	Female	6	50%			
Distinct First Dates						
	Male			7.70	10	1.89
	Female			11.00	7	6.08
	Total Sample			9.33	7	4.80
Identity						
	Caucasian/White	10	83.3%			
	Hispanic	1	8.3%			
	Biracial: White/Black	1	8.3%			
Age				21.83	19, 20, 21, 22	2.19
	19	2	16.7%			
	20	2	16.7%			
	21	2	16.7%			
	22	2	16.7%			
	23	1	8.3%			
	24	1	8.3%			
	25	1	8.3%			
	26	1	8.3%			

Figure 4.1. Demographic Information for All Participants - Study 2 (N=12)

Procedures

The participants for Study 2 were gathered through the university's Research Participation System (RPS). Once Study 2 was approved through the university's Institutional Review Board, it was made available through the online RPS portal. The participants freely selected this study from a list of several available studies, and in return received course credit. Only participants who met the aforementioned criteria of having experienced five or more distinct first dates since turning 18 were granted access to sign up for and participate in this study. Data collection began in January 2016 and ended in February 2016. A copy of the IRB approval for Study 2 can be found in the Appendix section of this dissertation.

Measures

Following the main tenants and methodological construction of a phenomenological study, this current research was comprised of a single one-on-one interview between the author and each individual participant. The interviews took place one at a time in the author's office on the university's campus. The length of the interviews averaged just under 50 minutes, but were no shorter than 40 minutes and no longer than one hour. All interview sessions were recorded on a digital audio recorder for later transcription and analysis.

To answer this current study's research question of how relational red flags are identified, processed and then handled when they emerge in initial romantic encounters, participants were uniformly asked a series of open-ended questions. These questions were designed to get to the heart of the lived experiences of detecting, processing, and handling relational red flags. To accomplish this, an interview protocol was created. The interview protocol for this current study can be found in Figure 4.2, as well as in the Appendix section of this dissertation.

An interview protocol is a vital procedural piece to conducting qualitative interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The interview protocol includes the planned questions that are asked of all participants. As is often the case with conducting interviews in qualitative research, additional follow-up questions naturally emerged that were organic to the conversation taking place between the researcher and the participant. Complete transcripts of two of the actual interviews included in this study can be found in the Appendix section of this dissertation. These transcripts include one male and one female interview that were typical of the overall interviews conducted for this study.

Date of Data Collection: January 2016 – February 2016

Location: Louisiana State University campus, Coates Hall

Interviewer: Richard C. White

Interviewees: Per IRB approval, participants' identities will remain confidential. They are identified in official study transcripts and subsequent analysis as Participants 1-12, in chronological order of their participation in the study.

Position of Interview: Seated, facing each other with a comfortable distance of space between.

Project Purpose: To assess how relational red flags are identified, processed and ultimately handled in initial romantic encounters.

Questions:

1. What has been your personal experience with red flags when first getting to know someone new romantically?
2. What contexts or situations do you feel have most influenced and affected your experiences with red flags when first getting to know someone new romantically?
3. How do you personally become aware of these red flags?
4. How have you personally handled red flags when they emerge?
5. In your personal experience, what is the best way to handle red flags?
6. In your personal experience, what is the worst way to handle red flags?
7. Have what you consider to be red flags changed from when you were 18 to now?
8. Do you think what you currently consider to be red flags will change as you get older?
9. Why do you personally feel it is important to detect red flags when first getting to know someone new romantically?
10. In your personal experience, what has happened when red flags go unnoticed?
11. In your personal experience, what has happened when red flags are ignored?
12. What are some of the things you have personally learned about red flags?
13. Is there anything else about red flags that you feel is important, that people should know?

Figure 4.2. Interview Protocol for Study 2

Results and Discussion

Given the qualitative nature of this study's methodology and by natural extension its very results, the results and discussion portions of Study 2 will be presented jointly in this section as much of the discussion of the results is inherently intertwined in the very introduction and explanation of those results. After the findings are discussed, the limitations of this study will then be presented in this section.

Review of Research Question

This study sought to answer the following research question.

RQ4: How do individuals identify and process relational red flags when they emerge?

Through an analysis of the data, several findings emerged and several themes were identified. Following the proper methodology of analyzing and presenting data in a phenomenological study, the participants' interviews were analyzed, at which point *significant statements* were identified, which were later grouped into the broader *themes* they represented. The significant statements are presented in this section as quotes from the participants, taken from the transcripts of their interviews. Lastly in this section, a composite *textural* and *structural description* that accurately represents the participants' typical experience with the phenomenon will be given. Textual and structural descriptions detail *what* was experienced and *how* it was experienced, respectively. These components, the significant statements that make up the larger themes of the experience which are later comprised into a composite textual and structural experience of the phenomenon, are the defining features of the analyzed data that result from a phenomenological study (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994).

It became clear in the analysis of the data that there are many similar components that are experienced by individuals regarding their detection and handling of relational red flags in initial

romantic encounters. Among the results of Study 2 was additional support for the key findings of the results of Study 1 presented in Chapter 3, which were that 1) there are many common relational red flags that are widely experienced (as expressed in the relational red flag typology in Figure 3.5), that 2) there are different levels of relational red flags depending on severity, and that 3) other than the primary 23 flags identified in the typology, that relational red flags are largely relative and may differ based on individual preferences of personal expectations, similarities, and compatibilities.

New findings in this study built on this last point to reveal that many relational red flags are not only largely relative, but are also conditional and evolving. Indeed, one primary new theme that was revealed is that relational red flags change and evolve across young adulthood, specifically based on an individual's dating experiences and personal development. Other primary results from the participants' experiences reveal that one's social network and family system can often play a large role in the identification and processing of relational red flags, as well as the finding that there are three primary communication-based strategies that individuals choose when deciding how to handle relational red flags when they emerge. These three choices revealed a step-by-step decision-making process that illustrates how individuals handle relational red flags, with one of these three choices presenting a new conceptualization of an existing approach. Lastly, the best and worst ways to handle relational red flags were also identified in the results.

Each of these significant findings, which are the identified themes that 1) relational red flags change across young adulthood, 2) that an individual's family and social systems can play an important role, 3) that there is a sequential step-by-step decision-making process comprised of three primary choices that individuals rely on to handle these undesirable qualities when they

emerge, and 4) an identification of the best and worst approaches to handling relational red flags, will now be discussed in further depth in the following subsections with the accompanying significant statements that represent each theme.

The Evolution of Relational Red Flags

There is an ever-changing nature to relational red flags as experienced by the study's participants. This is largely due to an individual's specific dating experiences and their personal development. This core concept is best illustrated when Participant 6 (male) said, "The way that you look at red flags, they have to do with where you are in your life. I think they change for everyone."

Indeed, the participants' lived experiences revealed that what they considered to be relational red flags had not only changed from when they were beginning their adult life at 18 to their current age now just a few years later, but also that many of them anticipated their relational red flags to continue to change over the course of their lives as they get older. To show how their relational red flags had changed from when they were 18 to where they are now, Participant 8 (female), stated, "When I was 18, I was really into the fun things, but I'm going to be 25 in about two months. Not that age matters, but at this point I'm not going to waste my time dating someone that I don't like and is probably not going to fully like and embrace me."

The male participants felt the same way. Their values had also changed from when they were 18 to now. Participant 3 said his focus has undeniably changed as he has gotten older.

> I know before, a couple of years ago, that a lot of the things that I strongly believe in now aren't the same as what I believed in then. It was foolish or childish dating and now it's a little bit more serious because you start looking at your future, your job, your home, your household, your children, things like that.

It is very interesting that what the participants deem to be relational red flags have changed from age 18 to now. The participants also revealed that they anticipate their current relational red flags to continue to change as they get older.

Participant 5 (female) said she is fully aware that her criteria for relational red flags is currently evolving.

> As you grow, your values and your beliefs change. Things you look for in people change as well. Again, with your experiences, you learn what you like in a person and what you don't like in a person and that type of thing. Yeah, it definitely changes and will continue to change.

Participant 6 (male) admits his view of what he considers to be relational red flags is far from firmly established. As he puts it, "I definitely think that they'll change as I get older and I get a little bit smarter I guess, because right now I'd say that I'm pretty dumb when it comes to it. When you're this young it's like, you can always learn more, always."

As these experiences show, the evolving nature of relational red flags has to do with how values, attitudes and standards change as individuals age. This is a result of natural changes in personal growth. It is also due to the sheer volume of increased dating experiences, which can change one's criteria. Participant 3 (male) said he expects his relational red flags to continue to evolve and increase not only as he gets older, but also as he experiences more first dates and thus has more exposure to countless, varied dating experiences.

> I also feel like I haven't developed all the red flags that I may because I haven't dated more than so many women. There are some things I might have encountered that I don't know that's a red flag for me. I definitely do think that. Just because I'm strong willed and what are red flags for me right now will always be red flags for me. That's not to say that you can't get more because when you date more people you get more examples of stuff that turns you off that you would have never known by dating a small group of girls.

In addition to how an individual's attitudes, values and standards change as they get older and how the experience that comes with developing numerous romantic relationships can also

affect a person's preferences, the participants also noted that the allocation of certain valuable resources heavily contributes to what they consider to be relational red flags. Participant 11 (male) typified this sentiment when he said the granting of his time, money and energy are precious resources he does not want to squander, which has led him to place more importance on detecting relational red flags as he has gotten older.

> When I was 18, it was like "Who can I sleep with? Sure, she may do this or do that, but she's way hot; it's okay, not that big of a deal. She has a little red flag or two," versus now this is somebody who I'm spending my time with, a lot of time and a lot of money on, and possibly the rest of my life with, so I'm more picky now.

Lastly, regarding how relational red flags change across young adulthood, the participants realized that it was acceptable to not have all the answers right now. They understood that while society, family or friends may put pressure on them to couple up and find their partner at an early adult age, they ultimately realized it is better to be a discerning dater when it comes to relational red flags. As Participant 4 (female) says, "It's okay to not settle. It's okay to not have to find somebody to date right now. Like, I'm 22 years old. It doesn't matter. In five years, I'm going to be a completely different person probably."

The Role of the Family and Social Systems

In addition to revealing how relational red flags change across young adulthood, which depends on an individual's dating experiences and their personal development, the participants also expressed how their family and social systems can significantly affect their initial romantic encounters. The results show that these two systems, the individual's family system and their social network, have played a significant role in their initial romantic encounters by helping them identify relational red flags that the individual's themselves had not even detected. Participant 8 (female) says her parents have been a driving force in the detection of relational red flags during the early stages of romantic development.

> My mom has. My mom is really good at it. It's really annoying actually. My mom can tell me before, even though I don't want to believe it…Then my dad has this gift where if I tell him about a guy, even if I really like the guy, he'll say, "Really? That guy?", and he does this face. For some reason, after that I'm usually like, "Oh," and I start to see their flaws. That's his gift in life, to ruin all relationships for his daughter.

Male participants also cited their parents as influential figures who have helped them become aware of relational red flags they themselves may not have noticed for a variety of reasons. Participant 3 (male) says, "Me and my mom, we got into arguments about it because she kept telling me, 'You don't see that she is doing this to you because you are love blind.'"

In addition to their family, the participants also received assistance from their friend group. Participant 1 (female) says, "I get influence from other people, like my peers. Things that they see as maybe a red flag and I'm like, 'Yeah, that definitely should be a red flag.'"

Participant 11 (male) says he relies on his social network to help him decipher his dating experiences in nearly every instance.

> I would say for 95 – 99% of all of the dates that I go on, I would spend like two to three hours with my friends after the date, and we just talk about everything that goes on. I'll tell them "Hey man, she did this and this and this. That was all good, but she also did this and this, which is bad, a red flag." Then we just keep talking about the date and keep talking. They might say like, "Oh man, she did this?", and they might bring something else to my attention that I didn't catch.

The results also showed that the type of friend you share this information with makes all the difference. The participants asserted that the closer you are to that friend, the better that individual knows you and how happy or unhappy you would be with the particular person you are dating. The quality of the friend matters. Participant 7 (male) illustrates this point by saying, "The friends that know you the best, they can give the best advice on what to do about red flags."

Whether it is an individual's family or their social network or both, the participants agreed that the support group of their loved ones and closest friends often played a significant role in the detection and handling of relational red flags during the courtship process. A major

reason for this is not only because the information is coming from someone the individual deeply trusts, but also because the detection is coming from someone who is on the outside looking in and is not directly a part of the two-person dating dyad.

Participant 3 (male) sums up this sentiment, saying, “A red flag, you shut that away because you want to be with that person in the relationship and feel what you feel, but this outsider is not in the relationship so they are not feeling that intimate connection that you have in your head.”

Participant 5 (female) agrees, citing this outside influence as a crucial necessity to successfully navigating through the courtship process.

> Yeah. It’s a lot better to get an outside perspective sometimes, because you don’t realize it. You’re so deep in the situation that you don’t see it as a bad thing, but then someone else points it out to you. Now, that I reflect back to it, I’m like “Okay, that’s something that I don't want.”

The data also revealed that an individual’s family and friends do not always have to be used for relational red flag detection in order for them to be beneficial to the courtship process. Even if the individual does not use their family and social systems as a resource in their decision-making process, the individual may still rely on these systems. They do this because it grants them an opportunity to vent, to use their family and friends as a sounding board or a general stress-relieving chance to get their thoughts out in the open. Participant 8 (female) explains this perspective.

> It’s just fun to talk to your friends, especially when you get a really bad date. It’s funny to go, “You’ll never guess what happened”, and it ends up being hilarious. They’ll laugh at you and it’ll usually end up being an inside joke that will last a good, solid two months that comes out of it.

This overall finding that individuals rely on their family and social systems partially answers this current study's primary research question, which asked how individuals identify and process relational red flags. In addition to consulting with these two systems, the individual also works through a sequential decision-making process.

Identification and Decision-Making Process

In addition to the identification of the crucial relational red flag themes of how they change across young adulthood depending on one's own dating experiences and personal development and how they are affected by one's family system and social network, a composite experience of detecting and then handling relational red flags in initial romantic encounters revealed that there is a typical sequential process that is experienced. The step-by-step process can be seen in Figure 4.3.

The figure shows a sequential process that the individuals follow based on the choices they make of how to handle the relational red flags when they emerge. The specific construction of this figure is consistent with the preferred flowchart standards regarding use of symbols, as rectangles show steps in the process, diamonds illustrate a decision based on a question, and ovals denote an endpoint in the process, with circled letters A and B representing connecting points that continue those particular paths later in the figure, respectively, with A connecting to A, and B connecting to B (American National Standards Institute, 1971; Tague, 2004).

The results showed that there are four potential phases to the identification and decision-making process of how individuals identify, process and then handle relational red flags. These four phases, in sequential order, are the identification of the relational red flag, the labeling of relational red flag severity, the handling of the decision to terminate, and lastly, the choices presented if the other individual reaches out to continue relational development.

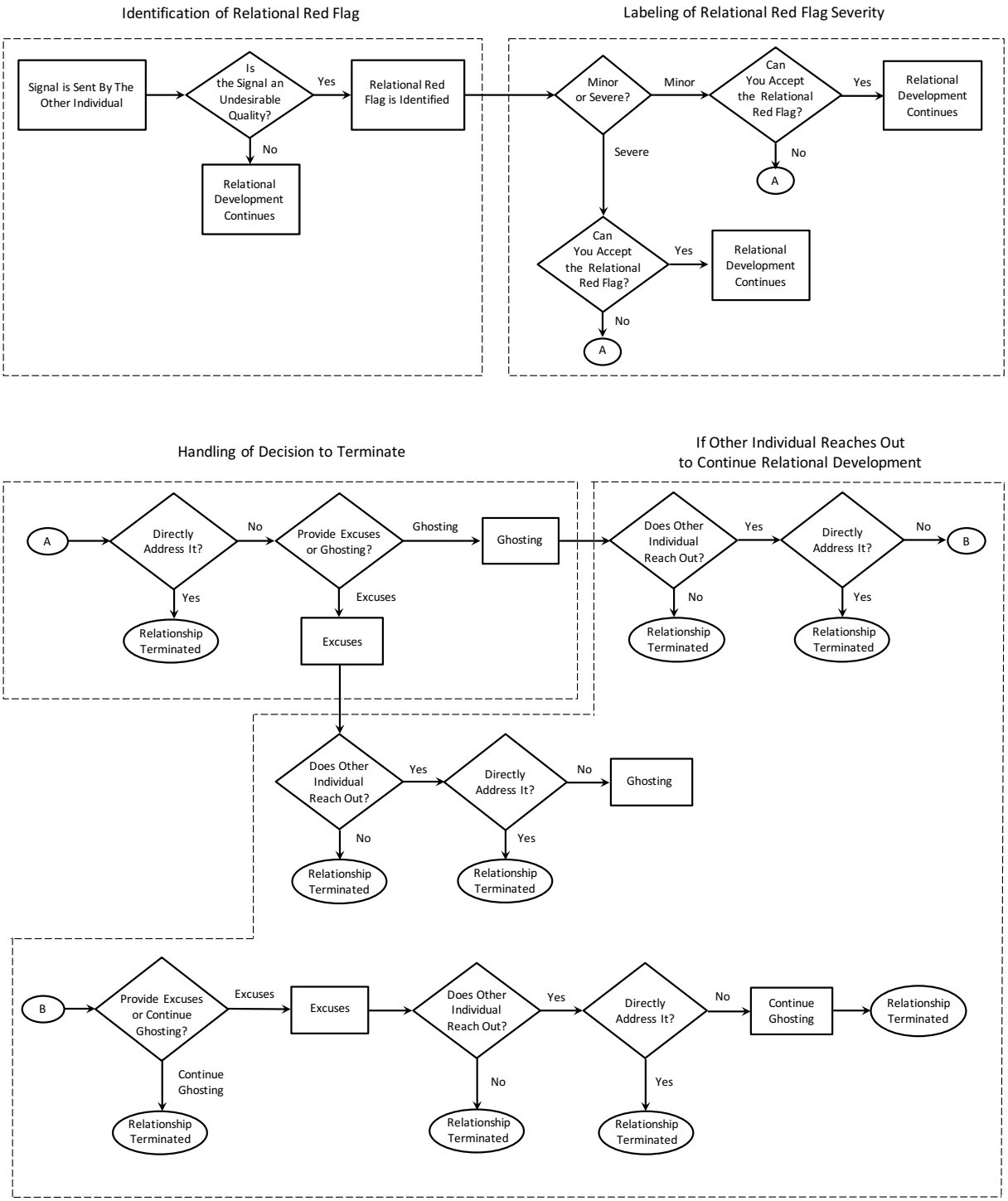

Figure 4.3. Relational Red Flag Identification and Decision-Making Process

Each section is outlined in the figure with a dotted box surrounding the components exclusive to that section. The steps in the relational red flag identification and decision-making process will now be discussed in their sequential order.

Relational Red Flag Identification Process. The first step in the process occurs when the individual identifies a signal as a relational red flag. This can be seen in Figure 4.4, which isolates this step from the whole of Figure 4.3.

This begins when a signal is sent by the other individual. The individual receiving the signal must then decide if it is an undesirable quality. If they answer "No", deciding that the signal is not an undesirable quality, then the relational development continues between the two individuals in the courtship process given that there was nothing undesirable, upsetting or unpleasantly unexpected that occurred. If, however, the individual decides that "Yes", the signal that was received is an undesirable quality, that signal now becomes a relational red flag.

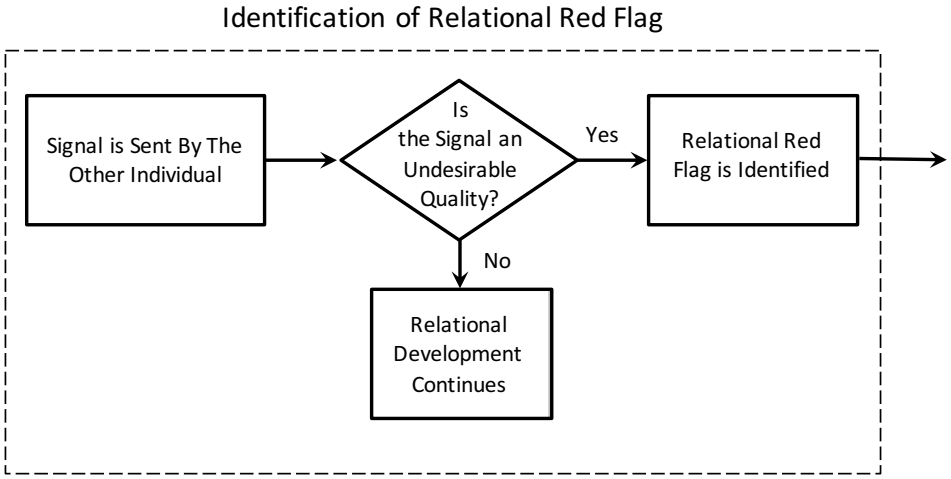

Figure 4.4. Relational Red Flag Identification Process

Participant 9 (female) illustrates this process of whether to continue moving forward or not when she says, "When you see red flags, you either continue to go on dates with them, or you stop. Usually, if I see one red flag, I just stop right then and there."

As the results of Study 1 showed, and as Study 2 also further supports, relational red flags cannot be avoided in the courtship process. If a romantic relationship is being developed, relational red flags will occur. As a result, the detection of them, as illustrated in this first step, is vital. Participant 4 (female) discusses this point of how relational red flags are inherent to who we are as unique individuals as our differences are better suited to some individuals and not others, when she says, "If people weren't able to pick out red flags, they would just date the first person they meet, because nothing would bother them about that person."

Participant 8 (female) echoes this sentiment, stating that this step is not only a vital one, but a beneficial one to both individuals. She sees the very existence of relational red flags as a good thing since it helps an individual know what works for them and what doesn't.

> When you're able to detect them, you can rule out already that this person might have something that you don't like so severely that it's just not going to work. If there were no such thing as red flags I think you could just be with anybody and it wouldn't even matter at that point, but you have red flags to make sure that that person fits who you are and vice versa for them.

For many, the decision of whether a signal is a relational red flag is often an easy and automatic one. As Participant 1 (female) says, "If something's bothering me it's not something I have to think about twice. I'm like, well, I don't like that, that's a red flag."

Participant 8 (female) agrees that the detection of relational red flags is often a quick, simple process, one that is so abrupt and upfront that she likened it to a car crash.

> Yeah. It's almost like when you see a car crash on the side of the road, and it's bad, and you know it's bad, and you don't want to look, but you can't help but look. It makes everything tense, like, "Oh no." That's how it feels. Everything tenses up and you feel like you just watched a car crash.

However, not all relational red flags are detected. As Figure 2.1 in Chapter 2 illustrates, some signals that are sent are missed by the receiver (i.e. go unnoticed) while others are accurately detected. This identification and decision-making process can begin at any point in the

development of a relationship, even for relational red flags that had previously gone unnoticed for an extended period of time.

As Participant 4 (female) notes, while it can often be easy, it is *not always* easy to detect relational red flags, particularly when they are minor. As she explains, "I don't really notice little things until something big happens. Then, it makes me look back and think, 'Oh, that was probably an issue when it started.' I feel like I tend to miss them if they're not poking me in the face."

Relational Red Flag Labeling Process. After the undesirable signal is identified as a relational red flag, the individual must then determine its severity. The mixed-methods results from both Study 1 and Study 2, which included a combined data set of nearly 300 individuals (n = 297) established that relational red flags differ based on severity. There are different levels of relational red flags. Based on the participants' responses, some are "minor", "small" or "little" while others are "severe", "big" or "major". The individual must decide if the relational red flag that he or she has detected is minor or severe.

As Participant 3 (male) states, "There are different levels of red flags. I've learned that there are things that are more severe than others. There are some red flags that can be thrown up that are small and you can overlook."

Both genders recognized that not all relational red flags are created equal. Participant 5 (female) says the labeling of relational red flags is important to understanding what is personally preferred, but it is also important because it speaks to the individual's ability to be aware of their own relational limitations.

> I've learned that there are some bigger ones that are definitely things you need to avoid. I've also learned that there are some that are smaller that are less significant, that you can accept. I've learned that there are certain things I need to avoid and certain things that are within my ability to handle, like "I'm okay, I can deal with that" or "I can't."

This is seen as the first step in the second phase of Figure 4.3, which can be seen in more detail in Figure 4.5.

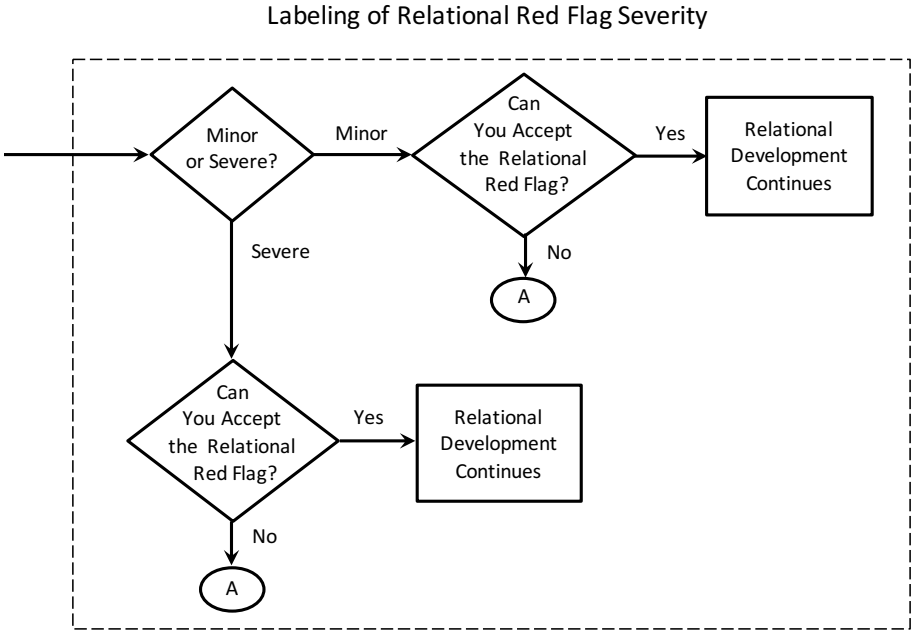

Figure 4.5. Relational Red Flag Labeling Process

The labeling of relational red flags is a crucial step in the identification and decision-making process. This is because the decision of whether a relational red flag is minor or severe can often be the determining factor in whether the relationship continues or not. As Participant 8 (female) states:

> I think that there's smaller red flags that maybe are just annoying things that wouldn't require you to change that person, or them to change you. It's just something you would have to get over or fix. Then there's the big things that you just know it's not going to work.

Just as the decision of whether a signal is a relational red flag or not is often a quick mental process, the labeling of its severity is also often just as immediate and effortless. When asked if the process in determining whether an undesirable signal is a minor or severe relational red flag, Participant 8 (female) mentioned that there is a clear, drastic difference between them. As she explains it, "Yes, immediately. The small ones are like a paper cut. It's like, 'Ugh.' It's

not pleasant, but it's like, 'Okay, you can still do what you need to do.' The big ones are like getting your hand cut off. That's a stopping point. You're done."

This finding was shared by both genders as Participant 11 typified the male participants' response with, "From the instant it happens, I know right away if it's big, and if it's not, then it's not that big."

While the labeling of a relational red flag's severity is often an automatic cognitive process, at times it can occasionally be more difficult. As Participant 9 (female) says, "It can be kind of difficult at first. Before I've thought that a small red flag was a really big one, I just exaggerated it. Then, when I go back and think about it, or look back on it, it wasn't a big deal."

As the next step in Figure 4.3, and by extension Figure 4.5, shows, after the individual decides if the relational red flag is minor or severe, he or she must then determine if they can accept it regardless of its severity. Most of the time this will come down to whether the undesirable signal is severe or not as minor relational red flags are often accepted while severe relational red flags often signal the end of the developing relationship. Participant 9 (female) illustrates this point when she says, "There are little red flags that you can definitely get over, and then there are big ones that you will probably never get over."

Participant 8 (female) agrees, saying this is her default operating procedure, to accept minor red flags and reject severe ones, stating, "A baby red flag, yeah. Not a big one though."

It is worth noting that while this is often the case, it is not always the case. The participants revealed that both minor and severe relational red flags can be accepted just as either can also on its own lead to the end of the courtship process.

Participant 6 (male) says minor relational red flags can often be the trickiest to process given that they may not seem all that destructive. As he explains, "Try to notice them as hard as you can, because even if they're small, they're still important."

Participant 11 (male) understands this point very well as he said it was the presence of minor relational red flags, and not severe ones, that eventually led to the end of what he thought was the ideal relationship. As he put it, "Everything I valued she had. It was just a few little things, and I was like 'Oh, those aren't that big,' but it doesn't matter. The smallest things add up."

Just as minor relational red flags can signal the end of a budding relationship, the reverse of both aspects is also true as severe relational red flags can be accepted.

Participant 9 (female) says a determining factor in whether a severe relational red flag is accepted is based on how much has already been invested into the developing relationship.

> If you have enough emotion invested in that person, like you really love them and care about them, then you probably would learn to accept it, no matter how big it may seem, like accepting someone's flaws. If you don't care about them that much, then you probably won't.

These findings show that both degrees of severity can be accepted just as both can also signal the end of the relational development.

Participant 9 (female) explains why this step in the process, the decision of whether the relational red flags can be accepted or not, is so crucial. As she states, "It's important that you don't waste your time, and that you don't waste your emotions. You don't want to get invested in somebody that turns out to not be a good person, or at the very least not the best person for you."

Handling of Termination Process and Additional Strategies If the Other Individual Reaches Out to Continue Relational Development. As seen in Figure 4.3, the data reveal that signals are deemed relational red flags if they are seen as undesirable qualities. After that, their

severity is determined, along with whether the relationship can continue with the presence of the relational red flag. Next comes the handling of the decision to terminate since the individual at this point in the process has decided the relational red flag or flags cannot be accepted and has chosen to instead end the courtship process, i.e. terminate the development of the relationship.

As Figure 4.5 shows, the two paths created by answering "No" to whether the relational red flag, regardless if it is minor or severe, can be accepted or not, merge together and continue in a singular path in Figure 4.6. The two paths are now united in the figure given that the decision-making process for both, whether the individual decides "Yes" or "No", is the same since it does not matter at this point if the relational red flag is minor or severe. That is inconsequential since the individual has already decided to terminate the relationship. This is illustrated with the circled A symbols in Figure 4.5, which continue with the circled A symbol in Figure 4.6. Now that the individual has decided that they cannot accept the relational red flag, they must now decide how to terminate the developing relationship.

A significant finding in this study is found here. This figure specifically addresses how relational red flags are handled when they emerge. The data show that individuals have three primary communication-based strategies for how to handle the decision to terminate the developing relationship. The three main strategies are to *Directly Address It* (directly address the decision to terminate the relationship with the other individual), *Provide Excuses* (to provide excuses to the other individual), or *Ghosting* (to ghost the other individual). The latter two options do not directly address the primary individual's decision with the other person and as a result can often lead to the other person reaching out to continue relational development.

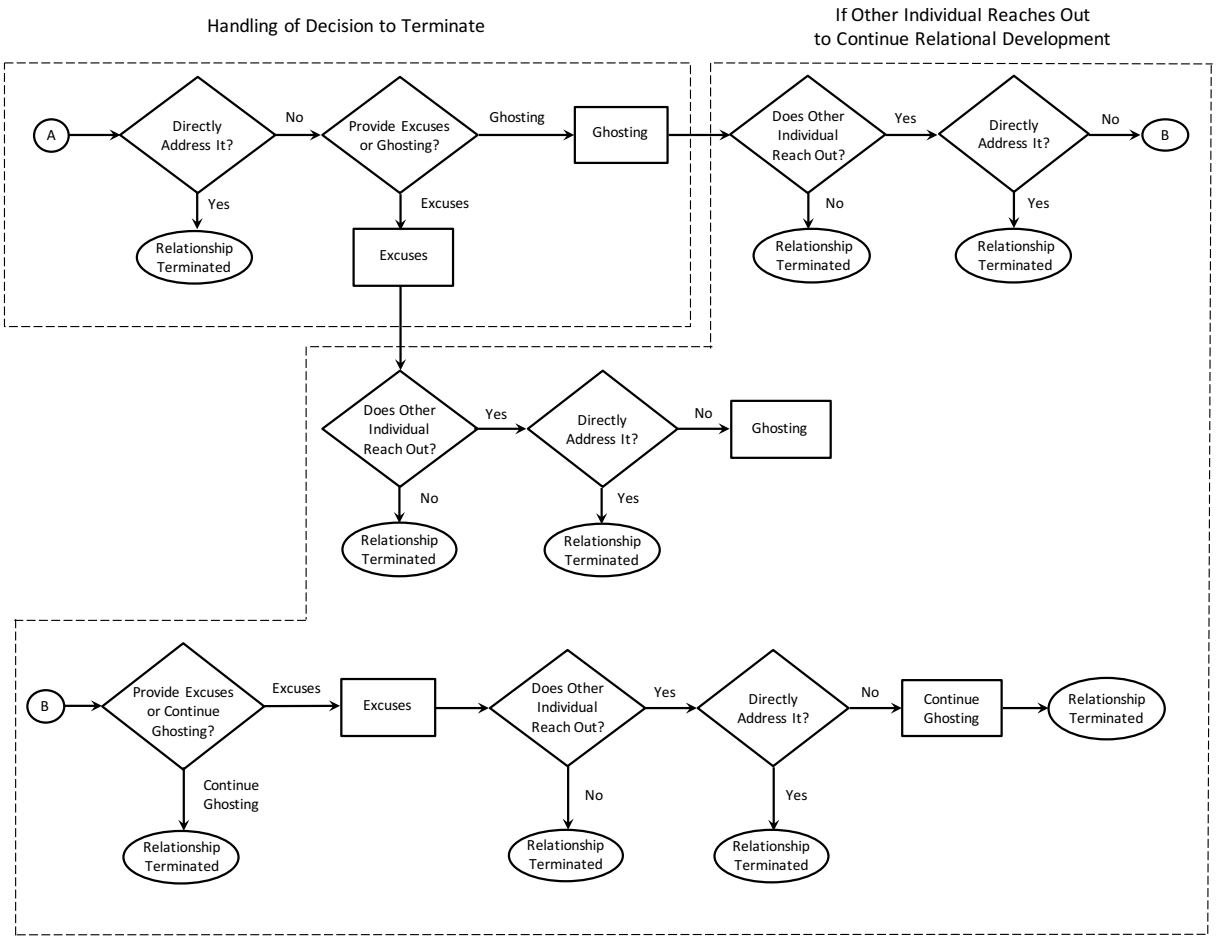

Figure 4.6. Handling of Termination Process
and Additional Strategies If Other Individual Reaches Out to Continue Relational Development

These findings are consistent with the work on communication strategies used to terminate interpersonal relationships. These strategies vary along a Confrontation-Avoidance dimension, which identified confrontation and avoidance as primary strategies used in relational disengagement and termination. Confrontation-Avoidance strategies were originally developed by Baxter (1979), Baxter and Philpott (1980, 1981), and Davis (1973). The strategy of *Directly Address It* would be on the far end of the confrontation side, with *Provide Excuses* lying somewhere in the middle and *Ghosting* lying on the far end of the avoidance side.

Collins and Gillath (2012) expanded on this Confrontation-Avoidance literature, identifying seven strategies individuals use to terminate their relationships. However, this work

focused on established romantic relationships and not on new, developing romantic relationships that may only include a single, initial encounter. As such, many of the strategies Collins and Gillath (2012) outlined are not germane to this focus. Indeed, strategies they provide, such as initiating fights with the other person to encourage a breakup, or utilizing manipulative tactics, such as using mutually shared friends to help facilitate a breakup in a circuitous manner, or blaming oneself for the breakup and trying to get the other person to agree, were not remotely present in the Study 2 data in the slightest, as these advanced strategies are more indicative of established romantic relationships and not early stage courtship experiences.

Other strategies mentioned by Collins and Gillath (2012) were conflated by the participants in Study 2 into the three strategies mentioned earlier. For example, the two Collins and Gillath (2012) strategies of openly confronting your partner, or using text message, email or Facebook are expressed in this study's data as a single strategy of *Directly Address It*, as long as the communication was clear and direct that the developing relationship had ended. Also, de-escalating methods, which could include the individual expressing a desire to take a break or blaming the break on factors other than the relationship, are seen in a similar way with this study's finding of *Provide Excuses*. And lastly, the complete avoidance and withdraw tactic is seen with *Ghosting*. Further detail on each of these three will now be discussed.

The first decision the individual must make in Figure 4.6 is whether to directly address their decision to terminate the development of the relationship with the other person. If the individual answers "Yes", then the relationship is terminated as they have clearly and directly confronted the issue with the other person, informing them that he or she does not want to continuing seeing them anymore.

The exact method of communication in this step can vary. In addition to in person face-to-face communication, other options can include text messages, emails, phone calls, or video messaging through Skype, FaceTime or other video calling services. The method of delivery is largely based on which form of communication the primary individual is most comfortable with; however, regardless of the specific method selected, this step is only enacted when the communication taking place is clear and direct with regard to the individual's desire to terminate the courtship process with the other person. As Participant 8 (female) says, "It's so awkward! I usually will type about 30 texts that I don't send, and then I'll decide to be an adult and just call them."

Participant 8 (female) believes it is best to hear the other person's voice and speak to them directly. She prefers this method over texting, feeling the former is more respectful while the latter can do more harm than good.

> As a girl, if you send me a text that basically in 250 characters says, "You suck. I'm not interested in you," I'm going to go back and read it when I'm drunk. I'm going to be all sad about it. That's just going to happen. Why would you give somebody a script of why they're terrible for them to go back to? It's easier if you just say the words, you hang up, and that's it.

Participant 9 (female) says that relational red flags should not only be directly addressed, but that they should be addressed as soon as they occur.

> As soon as you see one, just don't wait to talk about it. Just as soon as it happens be like, "This bothered me." If it's a first date, just be honest and say, "I don't think that we're right for each other," or like "We're not going to work out. I just don't see us as a good fit." That way they can move on, and not worry, and not be confused, or not second-guess themselves.

If the individual does not directly address it, he or she then has two other options to consider. They can either provide excuses to the other individual or they can ghost them. When excuses are chosen as the option, the other individual is not directly told the development of the

relationship has ended, but rather they are given innocuous and potentially believable excuses that state how busy the primary individual is and how they have other obligations, priorities or interests that are unfortunately preventing them from seeing the other person in the immediate future. Similar to the strategy of directly addressing the situation, the strategy of providing excuses can also vary in the exact method of delivery as it can occur in face-to-face communication, or text messages, emails, phone calls, or video messaging. It is most often employed, however, through text messaging, or if confronted, then a face-to-face approach or phone calls may be used.

Participant 10 (female) said some common examples she has used for this strategy of *Provide Excuses* include, "Oh, thanks. Yeah, I had a really good time, too. I'm just really busy this next month. I'm really busy right now, but I will definitely contact you when my schedule lightens up a little bit."

The data also reveal that the participants admit that providing excuses is not the best approach to handling the decision to end a developing relationship, but it is however one of the two easiest and most convenient approaches, with the other approach being ghosting. As Participant 3 (male) says, "Maybe come up with an excuse, which I know is wrong to do, but come up with an excuse to break things off with that person and don't give them the actual reason just to protect them personally."

Participant 4 (female) agrees and believes providing excuses is a kinder alternative to directly telling the other person you do not want to see them again since excuses ideally will not hurt the other person's feelings, or at least not as much as directly telling them why you do not wish to see them anymore.

> I don't think they need to know why you don't think it's going to work out unless you're seriously dating them, and they're asking you, "Why didn't it work?" If you went on a couple dates, they don't need to know the details if it's going to hurt their feelings. I think that's a bad way to handle it.

The third and final option that can be exercised if the individual does not want to directly address the decision to end the relationship and also does not want to provide excuses is to ghost the other individual. The participants mentioned *Ghosting* as a common approach to terminating the development of an emerging relationship. It can also be used in more established relationships, as well.

Ghosting is the new, and increasingly commonplace, pop culture term for what is conceptualized as complete avoidance on the Confrontation-Avoidance dimension. Based off the previous conceptualization of complete avoidance and the specific manner in which the participants confessed to enacting this approach, this study's data revealed that ghosting is the decision to terminate an interpersonal relationship by ceasing all communication with the other individual, without providing them an explanation. As the data of the participants' composite experiences illustrate, the term gets its name from the general feeling the individual who is on the receiving end of the unexplained and immediate suspension of communication feels, as the person they thought they were developing a relationship with has now suddenly become a ghost, with no trace of them in sight.

The data revealed that ghosting is an increasingly popular strategy used to terminate a developing relationship when relational red flags are deemed to be too overwhelming. The term is well-known in the vernacular of teenagers and young adults and even has its own Urban Dictionary page. Its presence on social media is frequent. Every one of the participants in Study 2 said they have either ghosted someone before, been ghosted themselves, or have friends who frequently ghost others or have been ghosted.

A sampling of the participants' actual experiences with the ghosting strategy can be seen in Figure 4.7.

Participant 1 (Female)
"I typically go silent, I would the majority of the time. I would just let it kind of roll over and let the time pass and let it just kind of handle itself."

Participant 2 (Male)
"Some girls I just completely drop off the face of the Earth. I don't respond to anything, don't contact them, and I take them off of social media if they're on there."

Participant 4 (Female)
"I don't do well with confrontations so I usually just stop answering."

Participant 6 (Male)
"I just never text them back or call them or anything and I try to avoid them on campus. I feel like, most people would feel bad about that, but I feel it's pretty mutual at that point."

Participant 9 (Female)
"I'll just stop talking to them. I just stop responding to texts or phone calls. Eventually they give up. They just kind of let it go, as well. That was just one date, and then I just kind of stopped responding."

Figure 4.7. Participants' Experiences - Ghosting

Participant 8 (female) says ghosting and providing excuses, particularly through text, are the primary strategies that most of her friends employ.

> I have a lot of friends that will just be like, "Oh, I'm just going to ghost him and not talk to him," or they'll send a text. I always will just make fun of them. I will mock them and tell them, "Hey, I love you, but you're a piece of shit for that, just so you know."

Ghosting, which is complete and sudden avoidance, can often illicit strong reactions from individuals on the receiving end as it is such an immediate and drastic step. Imagine it: In one moment, two individuals are communicating and building a new romantic relationship, having spent personal time together on at least one if not several occasions, and then suddenly, seemingly out of nowhere, the other person vanishes, like a ghost.

As Participant 8 (female) puts it, "Ghosting is when you just disappear like a ghost. You cut off of all communications. You take them off of Instagram, take them off of whatever other crap you have them on, and that's it. They just never hear from you again."

Participant 12 (male) has been ghosted before, but promises to never ghost someone himself as he finds the approach to be highly disrespectful, saying, "I think that's fucking crazy. I don't like it. I think that you should afford the respect to tell that person that you're not interested anymore. It can't hurt."

Participant 8 (female) agrees, as she too is disgusted by the strategy of ghosting and what it communicates both to the other person and about the primary individual themselves.

> I think it's so rude. I think it's so childish, too. Something a little kid does…. I think it's our generation. I don't think we're shitty people as a whole, but it's almost acceptable. Everything is texting…It's convenient. I think everything we do now is about convenience, the way we shop, the way we do everything. I think even the way we break up with the people or break things off with people is about convenience, but they don't consider that it's selfish. You're not being the nicest human being right now, but karma is a bitch. I always tell them that.

The other participants shared this sentiment, citing the convenience and ease the strategy offers for why they choose to employ ghosting over directly addressing the situation or even providing excuses. As Participant 9 (female) says, "I hate confrontation. I don't like to be confrontational, like, 'Look. This is why I don't like you.' I don't like being that honest with somebody."

The participants acknowledge that while ghosting is the preferred method for many of them, they nonetheless understand how this strategy makes others feel. As Participant 1 (female) puts it, "It sucks. It makes you overthink things, like, 'What is it about me that he doesn't like? Did I say something? Did I do something?'…It definitely does make me second-guess things and overanalyze and think about things a lot."

Participant 2 (male) cites the lack of closure as the reason why ghosting is so uncomfortable for the individual on the receiving end, saying, "It bugs you. You're like, 'But why?' You need closure. It's like, 'What did I do that you don't like?'…It makes you feel insecure, that you're not obviously good enough for somebody."

Once one of these three strategies is employed, the development of the relationship is terminated as long as the other individual does not reach out to attempt to continue the relationship. Sometimes an initial strategy, whichever one it may be, will work and the other individual will not reach out once they were ghosted or received excuses. These can be effective, initial strategies.

Participant 6 (male) says ghosting has always proved to be a successful strategy for him. As he explains, "No one has ever texted me, 'Why did you take me out on a date and never text me back?', so I didn't really feel bad about it. I just cease communication all together and it usually works out. I find that it works itself out in the end."

However, this is not always the case for others. When the other individual does reach out, it often occurs because *Provide Excuses* or *Ghosting* was the strategy used initially. These strategies do not explicitly communicate the desire to end the developing relationship and as such some individuals will naturally believe the opportunity is still open to continue the courtship process.

Participant 5 (female) says the motivation to continue the relationship is understandable given that the lack of a definitive answer explaining why the relationship cannot continue was never provided.

> At the beginning, I would feel hurt, like, "Oh, why isn't he texting me or why isn't he letting me know what's up?" I would probably be the crazy girl texting them like 10 texts in the row, like, "Hello, are you there? What's going on?" But then, eventually, I would get the hint like, "Oh, he doesn't want to talk to me, okay. That's over."

If the other individual does reach out, there are a number of strategies that can then be used, which can be seen both in the last portions of Figure 4.3 and in greater detail in Figure 4.6. If the other individual does reach out after ghosting occurred or excuses were given, the primary individual then has the option to choose one of the two remaining strategies they had not yet used. If excuses were initially given, the individual can then directly address it or begin ghosting. If ghosting was the initial strategy and the other individual reaches out to continue the relational development, the primary individual has the option to continue ghosting or directly address it or provide excuses.

Participant 1 (female) says she has ghosted someone before and after the other individual kept reaching out, she decided to finally address it.

> I stopped responding and he was like "Did you not have fun on our date?", so I was like, okay I actually have to say something, I can't just ignore the text messages. So I said, "Yeah, I just felt like you were really pushy on our date and I didn't have a good time." I just told him straight up.

Participant 2 (male) has chosen a different path. He says ghosting is his preferred strategy as he not only ghosts the other individual initially, but he will also continue to ghost even when the other individual reaches out to reestablish contact. As he puts it, "I just keep ignoring it. I mean eventually it stops. I've never had anybody just keep going like trying to text me down the road."

If, however, ghosting is the first strategy and excuses are provided as the next strategy, if the individual *still* continues to reach out (since he or she still has yet to be directly told the relationship has been terminated), the individual has the final option to finally directly address it or continue ghosting. This is illustrated as the final portion of Figure 4.3 and in greater detail in Figure 4.6.

Participant 1 (female) has specifically experienced this path as she has initially ghosted someone, then provided excuses when the other person reached out, then finally decided she had to directly address it once and for all. As she says, "After a little while if that's not working (ghosting and then providing excuses) I guess that's when I confront it head-on and I'm like, 'Listen XYZ, this is why I'm not into you anymore."

As Figure 4.3 and Figure 4.6 show, the development of the relationship can be terminated anytime the situation is directly addressed with the other individual or anytime the other individual decides to stop reaching out to continue the relationship, either of which can occur in any stage of the termination process, or after potentially multiple combinations of the three primary strategies. Lastly, it is important to note that an individual may rely on their family system or social network at any point in the entire four-phase sequential process seen in Figure 4.3. While family and friends, if they are utilized by the primary individual, are often most heavily relied on early in the sequential process, it is not uncommon for them to be used for support and advice throughout any phase of the process.

Best and Worst Approaches to Handling Relational Red Flags

In addition to these three primary strategies, the answer of how individuals process relational red flags is further understood by what are seen as the best and worst approaches to handling them. The participants agreed that while ghosting and providing excuses may be easier, more convenient and overall less confrontational, and may even be their preferred method or methods, they still acknowledged that honest, direct, and clear communication is the best way to handle relational red flags. They also agreed that ignoring the undesirable qualities is the worst way to handle them.

Directly Addressing Relational Red Flags. While many of the participants admit they rarely employed this approach, they agreed that the most respectful, ideal, and best way to handle relational red flags is to directly and honestly address them with the other individual.

As Participant 1 (female) explains, she prefers to enact ghosting, but when she is on the receiving end she would rather individuals directly address the situation with her. As she says, "I guess it's kind of like a double standard in a way. It's shallow as far as I can do whatever I want, but if a guy does it to me (ghosting instead of directly addressing it), it's messed up."

Participant 5 (female) agrees that it is ideal to directly address the decision to terminate the developing relationship with the other individual. However, this is an approach she, too, rarely employs.

> I should probably explain it to them, be like "This is something that I don't want to deal with" or that kind of thing. Explain to them how I'm feeling, instead of just cutting it off, because that's harsh. But I'm a harsh person when it comes to that. I just ... I don't know. I'm kind of selfish, so whatever I want, goes.

Participant 11 (male) also admits to ghosting others while simultaneously hoping that no one will perform these same actions on him ever again. He recognizes that because of this, he is "hypocritical in a way, double standards, definitely have double standards there. I mean that's a fault. It's not good, and it's not taking into consideration the other person on the other end of the date, the ceasing of communication."

These last three statements reflect the admitted hypocrisy that exists between a person's own needs versus the needs of the other individual. These particular participants, as well as others who were interviewed, acknowledge it is acceptable for them to ghost others, but they themselves would not want this same strategy used on them. As the above statements illustrate, the participants readily concede that they are "hypocritical", and that this is a "double standard", one that is "shallow", "selfish", "harsh" and "messed up," and yet they still choose to enact this

strategy because ultimately it is a more convenient and personally easy approach, even if it does not reflect well on them.

Participant 6 (male) explains why the best approach to handling relational red flags is to directly and clearly communicate one's feelings and desire to end the courtship process. As he says, "I'd say the best way would be to address it like the one time that I did, instead of not saying anything at all, because if you don't say anything at all, then it leaves you wondering like, are we really on the same page."

Ignoring Relational Red Flags. The participants not only agreed on the best way to handle relational red flags, but they also agreed on the worst way to handle them, which is to ignore them. Participant 6 (male) explains why this is the worst approach an individual can take. As he puts it, "I'd say the worst way is to ignore them so much that you get so far along the way, that you start dating a girl and then you realize you're in way over your head. Now you're locked in and if you want to get out of it, you're going to have to hurt somebody."

The data show there are many reasons why individuals choose to ignore relational red flags and how they convince themselves it is for the best to ignore them. Some believe that if you ignore it long enough, the undesirable quality will fail to resurface.

As Participant 11 (male) says, "An ignored red flag, you're bottling emotions. You're bottling what you feel about, 'This person does this, and it just pisses me off. So I'll ignore it and ignore it and ignore it.'"

A primary reason why relational red flags are ignored is because an individual feels the other person's better qualities will even-out their undesirable qualities. Another primary reason is because the individuals are not being honest with how severe the relational red flags truly are. This may occur because they are desperate to have this developing relationship work for a

variety of reasons. This then causes them to cast aside any legitimate threat to the contrary, no matter how destructive it may be.

Participant 2 (male) likens ignored relational red flags to an uncontrollable blaze.

> You're burning a fire that's going to eventually blow up in your face. People can ignore things about others just because they really do truly like them, but there's just that one thing that you really, really don't like but you're just like, "Okay, I'm just going to let it go. I'm not going to be picky about this. You know what? I'll see if it goes away." But it doesn't.

The participants revealed that ultimately relational red flags cannot be permanently ignored. They must be accepted or the relationship must be terminated. If they cannot be accepted and the relationship continues in spite of these relational red flags, then they will continue to resurface and could likely lead to a difficult, painful dissolution of the relationship.

As Participant 8 (female) explains, "You're lying to yourself. It's like putting a Band-Aid over a bullet wound. It's still there. You're going to have to deal with it at some point. I've had friends who have blamed it on love, like, 'But I love him!' Okay, well, no, it's not going to work."

It is not only severe relational red flags that can cause difficulty if ignored, but also minor undesirable qualities can also be the driving force that ends an emerging romantic relationship. As Participant 9 (female) states, "If you ignore it, whether it's something really little or really big, it's just going to eat away at you, until you finally address it honestly and truthfully."

The Essence of Experiencing Relational Red Flags

Following the standard presentation of results derived from a phenomenological study, a composite *textural* and *structural description* that represents the participants' typical experience with the phenomenon will now be given. This is an essential component of the qualitative methodology of the phenomenology tradition. The purpose of providing this composite textual

and structural description of the lived experiences is to convey the overall *essence* of the phenomenon, so that others who have not experienced the phenomenon can now have a strong understanding of its common components and themes (Creswell, 2013; Polkinghorne, 1989).

The essence of experiencing relational red flags during an initial romantic encounter can be typified as the description in the following two paragraphs:

An individual goes out on a date. During the date, the individual begins to gradually notice a few things. The other person has said or done some things that the individual finds alarming. The individual has decided they do not prefer these statements or behaviors, some of which are perceived as minor while others are seen as severe. While the individual can accept some of these undesirable qualities, they feel they cannot accept them all. Before or soon after the date has ended, they have decided that they no longer want to see or be romantically involved with the other individual anymore. They must now decide how to handle this decision.

He or she may also discuss the situation with their family and friends before or after they have decided to terminate the developing relationship, but once the decision to do so has been made, they must now either directly address this decision with the other individual, or provide excuses to them, or they may even ghost them by outright and completely avoiding and ignoring the other individual. Regardless of which strategy is used, the developing relationship comes to an end as long as the other individual does not reach out in hopes of continuing the relationship. If this does occur, the primary individual can repeat the initial strategy or he or she may use one of the other two strategies, any three of which may be repeated in any combination until the other individual ceases their attempts to see the person again. The qualities this person has identified as undesirable are important because they signal personal dissimilarities, incompatibilities, and violated expectations and as a result are perceived as a detriment to achieving a health, stable

relationship. What this person considers to be undesirable qualities, however, may change as the individual gets older and sees their own attitudes, values and standards change and evolve.

Altogether, these subsections and composite description make up the main findings of this current study as they reveal the typical lived experience of detecting and handling relational red flags during an initial romantic encounter. The main findings include how relational red flags change across young adulthood, how a person's family system and social network can play a vital role in the detection and processing of relational red flags, how individuals themselves detect, label, and process relational red flags and the strategies they use to terminate the developing relationship, and lastly, an identification of the best and worst approaches to handling relational red flags.

Limitations

There are pertinent limitations to the current study that should be addressed. Similar to one of the limitations mentioned for Study 1 in Chapter 3, most of the participants for Study 2 were primarily White. It would be beneficial to see if these findings are consistent across all racial identities. Furthermore, also similar to Study 1, all of the participants were gathered from the Southeast region of the United States and as such, it would also be beneficial to investigate if these findings also remain consistent across various geographical regions.

Additionally, one of the major findings of this current study was that relational red flags change and evolve across young adulthood, depending on an individual's specific dating experiences and personal development. Every participant revealed that their relational red flags had indeed changed from when they were 18 to their current age now. While the youngest participants were 19, the mean age was 22 with several ranging from 22-26. It is telling that the participants' relational red flags had changed so much in just one year's time for two of them or

four or more years' time for most of them on average. While what they consider to be undesirable qualities has changed throughout their young adult life, the participants also all anticipated that their current relational red flags will continue to change as they got older.

It would be interesting to see if this is indeed the case. Perhaps a longitudinal study could be conducted where participants are tracked from their young adult lives into middle-age and older to see if and how their relational red flags continued to change. Perhaps relational red flags become more permanent in young adulthood, or perhaps this does not occur until much later; or perhaps still they continue to evolve across the lifespan. Perhaps relational red flags do not become stable, consistent constructs until well past middle-age, if even at all.

While a longitudinal study would be best, these studies often can be quite difficult for a number of reasons. Common obstacles include the allocation of continued research funding over the long span of the study, as well as the unsuccessful retention rate of participants that is inherent to longitudinal studies as fewer and fewer continue on the longer the study persists. If a longitudinal study cannot be developed, researchers could instead survey individuals at different stages of life, such as interviewing several individuals in their 20s, several in their 30s, several in their 40s, and so on.

The researchers would ideally ask the participants to recall if their relational red flags had changed over the years and if they are still changing now or if they have become stable, unchanging states. If their relational red flags have changed or if they have become more permanent stable states, it should then be asked at what age did this occur. Studies similar to this that look at how relational red flags change across the lifespan, if at all, beyond young adulthood, would be beneficial to better understanding the roles that these undesirable qualities play in various phases of our lives.

Other limitations of this study include the sequential decision-making process illustrated in Figure 4.3. This is a detailed response that represents how individuals typically handle relational red flags and the primary strategies they employ to reach this end. It is assumed that when individuals directly address the situation that it will not lead to the other individual reaching out to continue relational development. While this often will indeed signal the end of the developing relationship, this is not always the case for some as the other individual could continue to reach out even after they have been directly and clearly told that the relationship will no longer continue.

The same can be said for any step illustrated in the final phase of Figure 4.3, which specifically concerns additional strategies that can be used if the other individual reaches out to continue the relational development. The primary individual could be forced to use the three primary strategies one after the other, on and on, again and again, for a fifth, tenth, or even twentieth time, if the other individual does not accept that the relationship has ended. This of course would be impossible to illustrate as an endless possibility of repeated strategies could be used to no end. Such a figure would be deeply fragmented and likely be several pages long in depth.

Such repetition, while a possible reality for some, is not the typical case and as such is not represented in the figure presented in this study. The figure presented is merely a composite of the most common and most likely actions to take place for most individuals in most instances. While this figure does achieve the primary phenomenological goal of describing the typical lived experiences of how individuals handle termination strategies as a result of relational red flags, it should not be seen as an all-encompassing figure that can be applied in every possible instance. It does not represent the endless reality of countless repeated strategies that do little to deter a

persistent, if not stalker-like, individual who refuses to accept that the developing relationship has ended.

Conclusion

The results from this current study are clear. If not addressed or accepted, relational red flags will often be a harbinger of hard times to come. When properly detected, labeled and addressed, relational red flags can signal a quick and satisfying end to what would otherwise be an ill-fated relationship.

It was discovered that individuals handle relational red flags differently based on their specific dating experiences as well as where they are in their own personal development of young adulthood, given that what they consider to be relational red flags evolve and change as they get older. Individuals may handle relational red flags by relying on their family and social systems for advice and support. A sequential identification and decision-making process was identified that explains how individuals detect and label relational red flags and then how they decide to handle them with regards to continuing or terminating the developing relationship. If termination is chosen, individuals have three primary strategies that can be employed to signal the end of the courtship process. Lastly, the best and worst approaches to handling relational red flags were identified.

The Evolution of Relational Red Flags

These findings show that many relational red flags are not only relative to each individual's own personal preferences, but that they also change as one's preferences change. As an individual gets older and their attitudes, values and standards change, so too can their relational red flags change to reflect these personal changes.

What someone once considered to be important before may not be as important or even important at all now that they are older, just as what they considered to be insignificant before is now of great significance later in their life as they grow and mature. Since what we view as desirable and undesirable changes as we age, so too will what we deem to be relational red flags change, since they are defined as signals that represent these undesirable qualities. There is a flexibility to relational red flags within each person. Their growth coincides with that of our very own interpersonal and intrapersonal maturation processes.

The Role of the Family and Social Systems

People do not endure relational red flags on their own. While some may choose to work through the process by themselves, most will not and will instead seek assistance from those they know and trust the most. An individual's family system and their social network can often play a vital role in their detecting and processing of relational red flags. Individuals rely on their family and friends to help them identify undesirable qualities with the individuals they are beginning to date. These often include relational red flags that the primary individual did not even notice themselves and may not have detected at all if not for the assistance from these close support systems.

The closer the relationship is between the individual and their family member or friend, the more successful that family member or friend will be in aiding the individual in the detection and processing of these relational red flags. The quality of the relationship being relied on matters. The more intimate and close the primary individual is to their family member or friend, the more accurate the other person will be in knowing how incompatible or dissimilar the primary individual's new dating interest is for them, given that the close family member or friend often has a strong and deep relational history with the primary individual.

Individuals also seek the assistance of their family and social systems for more than just the detection and handling of relational red flags, but also merely sometimes for the opportunity to get their concerns spoken aloud, often for the first time. It is important that they have someone to talk to even if a solution is not sought or offered. The simple act of communication itself can be cathartic or enjoyable for the primary individual as they look to possibly relieve stress or enjoy shared moments of laughter by expressing their disinterest or difficulty with their current developing relationship and the relational red flags therein.

Identification and Decision-Making Process

Individuals have a number of decisions they have to make when they encounter a relational red flag. First the signal has to be identified as an undesirable quality. This is often an effortless cognitive process that happens instantly. Some signals, though, may warrant additional time before they are labeled as relational red flags. However, this is not often the case as the identification of most relational red flags is a simple, immediate mental process for many.

Next, comes the labeling of the signal's severity as it must be decided if the relational red flag is minor or severe. This too, is often an automatic cognitive process, although it too is not uncommon for there to be instances where deeper contemplation is required. After the relational red flag is labeled as minor or severe, the individual must decide if this is a relational red flag that they are willing to accept. If they can accept it, then the relational development continues. If, however, they cannot, the emerging relationship comes to an end.

Three primary strategies are used as different options that may be employed to terminate the relationship. These strategies are *Directly Address It*, *Provide Excuses*, and *Ghosting*. *Directly Address It* occurs when the individual communicates in a clear and direct way that the relationship will not continue. *Provide Excuses* is enacted when the individual chooses not to be

clear and direct and instead offers believable excuses that are meant to show how busy the primary individual is and how other obligations are preventing them from seeing the other person, with the hope that the other person will ultimately "get the hint." Lastly, *Ghosting* occurs when the primary individual suddenly ceases all communication with the other person, with no explanation provided to them as to why this is occurring.

Some of these strategies can be repeated or others used for the first time after an initial or even secondary strategy has failed. This primarily depends on whether or not the other individual reaches out to continue developing the relationship after the initial strategy has been used. If the other individual does not reach out, then the developing relationship has been successfully terminated. If, however, the other individual does reach out, then additional strategies may be employed to signal the end of the courtship process.

Best and Worst Approaches to Handling Relational Red Flags

The primary strategy that leads to the most success in achieving immediate relational termination is directly addressing the issue with the other individual. By explaining to them in a clear and direct manner that the emerging relationship will no longer continue, the other individual is significantly less likely to pursue efforts to continue the relationship. If one of the other strategies is used, such as *Provide Excuses* or *Ghosting*, then the chances that the other individual will seek to continue the relationship are far more likely, given that they have not been directly told that the courtship process has ended. They may get the hint initially, or only after additional strategies are employed or repeated.

The worst approach to handling relational red flags is to ignore them. If the individual knows the relational red flag cannot be accepted, and instead ignores it, it will often continue to be a point of contention in the developing relationship. Ignored relational red flags rarely simply

fade away. They often persist and continue to cause distress until they are finally and directly dealt with in some form or fashion. Ignored relational red flags, no matter how big or small, no matter how minor or severe, can spell the end of a promising relationship if they are not either accepted or discussed with the other individual.

Overall Thoughts

Dating can often be a messy, complicated, stressful process. Relational red flags are a major component to the distress and difficulty many experience. This is because these incompatibilities, dissimilarities, and violated expectations wreak havoc on our thought process of whether or not these undesirable qualities can be accepted and if not, then what is the best approach to handling the situation, for their sake, or for our own sake, or for both.

Each individual has to make their own decision of what he or she feels is the best strategy of the three to employ. Which of the three makes you the most comfortable? Will this strategy also make the other individual feel good about themselves? Would you want them to use this same strategy on you? Whether it is to directly address with them the decision to terminate the developing relationship, or to provide excuses to them in hopes that they will quickly get the hint, or to ghost them altogether by outright ignoring and avoiding them in every possible way, each person must discover which strategy is right for them.

While relational red flags are often conceptualized as a negative construct, they actually serve a vital and beneficial purpose to the courtship process. If properly detected, processed, and handled, relational red flags can save individuals from enduring months to even years of heartache and dissatisfaction in an incompatible relationship to possibly even preventing exposure to an unhealthy and emotionally, mentally or physically abusive relationship. Relational red flags are needed to successfully navigate through the choppy waters of

interpersonal relationships. As Participant 10 (female) explains, relational red flags should be embraced.

> It's okay to have a lot of red flags. It's okay to have minor red flags and major red flags. It's okay to have as many red flags as you want because it's your personal preference, it's your time that you're investing in going on these dates, and if you feel like there were too many minor or major red flags for you to go on a second date with that person, then don't do it.

While the courtship process of trying to find a lasting relationship with someone new can often be fraught with many unforeseen obstacles, what is most important is that individuals do not lose track of who they are. It is important that they remain true to themselves and what they know they can and cannot accept in a partner. It can be stressful to admit that what you feel would otherwise be a great potential match is actually someone who possesses irreconcilable relational red flags. As Participant 2 (male) explains, the process of dating becomes easier to handle when individuals are honest with themselves.

> When I was younger I tried to be somebody who I wasn't than try to be somebody who I was…I feel like people need to be themselves and just act like who they are. If that right person is there, they're going to accept who you are. They're going to talk to you. If you try to be somebody who you're not to get that person, it's obviously going to end up with them being like, 'Oh well, that's not obviously you' and that's going to end things.

Individual should not ignore relational red flags that they know they cannot accept. Nor should they rush into an incompatible relationship by trying to make something work that they know cannot work because of the presence of certain relational red flags. Both instances could easily lead to a considerable amount of wasted time, money, and effort, or worse, as they could include emotional, mental and possibly even physical harm. As Participant 10 (female) explains, forced relationships will rarely end well.

Just be patient when going on first dates and meeting people because it's not always going to work out perfectly. Sometimes, if you're not patient, you're going to want it to work out, and you're going to force it. When things are forced, then it's not usually going to be as successful as something that happens organically where you feel really good afterwards and things are pointing that that is a good relationship for you.

CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

This fifth and final chapter will provide an overall discussion of the results of Study 1 and Study 2 of this dissertation in regards to the research questions presented in Chapter 2. Relevant limitations of these two studies will also be discussed along with implications for future research relating to this dissertation's main topic. Lastly, this concluding chapter will close with my final thoughts on this dissertation and the topic of relational red flags and the detection and handling of these undesirable signals in initial romantic encounters.

Discussion of Results

The first major contribution this dissertation makes to the relational communication literature is the formation of a formal definition for red flags. That definition conceptualizes the formal term of relational red flags as any undesirable quality, which can be a behavior, characteristic, state or trait that a person possesses that the other individual would not want in a potential romantic partner. This is because these relational red flags are signals that represent the undesirable qualities that people identify as being costly to a stable, healthy relationship. Relational red flags are seen as undesirable qualities because they conflict with the individual's own expectations, similarities, and compatibilities.

Study 1

This dissertation's first and primary research question inquired as to what are the most common relational red flags that people communicate and detect in initial romantic encounters. An analysis of nearly 300 participants (n = 285) revealed that there are 23 primary relational red flags that comprise nine main themes or categories (see Figure 3.5). The nine most common relational red flag types are 1) *Deviant Behavior*, 2) *Family and Social Systems*, 3) *Immediate Intimacy*, 4) *Lacks Financial Stability, Independence*, 5) *Lacks Similarities*, 6) *Lacks or Violated*

Compassionate Features, 7) *Romantic Others*, 8) *Violated Courtship Norms*, and 9) *Violated Traditional Gender Roles*.

A quantitative analysis of these results revealed that 18 of the 23 relational red flags were statistically significant (see Figure 3.15). These 18 were 1) *Deviant Behavior – General/Unspecified*, 2) *Deviant Behavior – Alcohol Abuse/Dependency,* 3) *Deviant Behavior - Criminality,* 4) *Deviant Behavior – Drug Use/Dependency,* 5) *Deviant Behavior – Violent or Abusive,* 6) *Family and Social Systems – Conflict with Family System*, 7) *Family and Social Systems – Conflict with Social Network,* 8) *Immediate Intimacy – General/Unspecified*, 9) *Immediate Intimacy – Emotional,* 10) *Immediate Intimacy – Physical,* 11) *Lacks Financial Stability, Independence*, 12) *Lacks Similarities – Demographic,* 13) *Lacks Similarities – Attitudes, Values, Interests, and Personality,* 14) *Lacks or Violated Compassionate Features*, 15) *Romantic Others – Interested in Other Romantic Options,* 16) *Romantic Others – Previous Partners, Relationships*, 17) *Violated Contemporary Courtship Norms – Cell Phone*, and 18) *Violated Traditional Gender Roles – Masculine*.

Research Question 2 asked if relational red flags differ based on gender. A multivariate discriminant analysis revealed that they in fact do. Gender differences existed for five relational red flags. It was discovered that these five were *Deviant Behavior – Violent or Abusive, Immediate Intimacy – Physical, Lacks Similarities – Attitudes, Values, Interests, and Personality, Violated Courtship Norms – Traditional*, and *Violated Gender Roles – Masculine* (see Figure 3.17). This finding reveals that the accurate classification of a female fits the following profile: The primary relational red flags that women identify as the leading undesirable qualities in the other person include violent or abusive behaviors, too much immediate physical intimacy, a lack of similarities in attitudes, values, interests, and personality, as well as violations of traditional

courtship norms (e.g., not opening the door, not paying for the meal, and not displaying appropriate manners, among others), and not appearing masculine enough, which may include appearing effeminate or lacking ambition and overall general leadership qualities.

In addition to these empirically significant findings derived from Research Question 1 and 2, additional key results were found by answering the third research question. Research Question 3 asked which relational red flags are perceived to be the most severe. It was revealed that relational red flags are not created equal and do in fact differ in severity, ranging from degrees of minor to severe. Of the 23 relational red flags identified in Study 1, the five that dealt with the main theme of *Deviant Behavior* had the highest severity ratings of all the relational red flags (see Figure 3.15). These five most severely rated relational red flags included general deviant behavior, alcohol abuse and dependency, drug use and dependency, criminal behavior, and any type of emotional, physical or psychological abuse, control, or manipulation. The next most severe relational red flag out of the remaining 18 dealt with a lack or violation of compassionate features.

Study 2

The qualitative methodology employed for Study 2 built off the quantitative foundation of Study 1 to provide a richer, more contextual understanding of the lived experiences of how individuals detect, process, and handle relational red flags. This study was guided by this dissertation's fourth and final research question of how do individuals identify, process, and ultimately handle relational red flags when they emerge.

It was discovered that individuals identify and handle relational red flags differently based on their specific dating experiences as well as where they are in their own personal development of young adulthood. What an individual considers to be a relational red flag

evolves and changes as they get older. This shows that many relational red flags are not only relative to each person's own individual preferences and experiences, but that they also change as an individual's preferences change. As a person gets older and their attitudes, values and standards evolve, so too can their relational red flags evolve to reflect these personal changes.

Individuals also identify and process relational red flags by relying on their family and social systems for advice and support. A person's family and friend group can play a vital role in the detection and processing of relational red flags by helping the individual identify undesirable qualities in others, qualities of which the primary individual was previously unware. The closer the relationship is between the individual and their family member or friend, the more helpful that person will be in the detection and processing of relational red flags given the deep relational history and personal knowledge they share with the primary individual. People also seek support from their family and social systems for more than just the detection and handling of relational red flags. People also use these support systems for the purpose of being able to recount their dating experiences for either catharsis or stress reduction, or even just for personal shared enjoyment with their family and friends.

While it was revealed that relational red flags change across young adulthood and that individuals rely on family and friends for help with relational red flags, the primary finding from Study 2 was the development of a sequential identification and decision-making process that directly explains how individuals first detect, label and then handle relational red flags with regards to continuing or terminating the developing relationship (see Figure 4.3).

If termination is chosen, individuals have three primary strategies that can be employed to signal the end of the courtship process. These strategies are *Directly Address It*, *Provide Excuses*, or *Ghosting*. These findings build on the existing literature concerning the

Confrontation-Avoidance dimension of communication strategies used to terminate interpersonal relationships.

Ghosting, it should be noted, is the new, commonplace, pop culture term for what is conceptualized as complete avoidance on the Confrontation-Avoidance dimension. Based off the previous conceptualization of complete avoidance and the specific manner in which the participants in Study 2 enacted this approach, the data revealed that ghosting is the decision to terminate an interpersonal relationship by ceasing all communication with the other individual, without providing them an explanation. As the composite experiences of the participants in Study 2 illustrate, the term gets its name from the general feeling the individual who is on the receiving end of the unexplained and immediate suspension of communication feels, as the person they thought they were developing a relationship with has now suddenly become a ghost, with no trace of them in sight. Ghosting is a popular strategy used to terminate a developing relationship when relational red flags are deemed to be too overwhelming. The term is well-known among teenagers and young adults and its presence on social media is frequent.

The best and worst approaches to handling relational red flags was also identified. The best way was identified as directly and clearly addressing the situation with the other individual. However, this is often an unpleasant experience and as such while it is seen as the ideal and most respectful strategy that many individuals admit they themselves would want used on them, it is not always utilized given its direct confrontation-based nature. Individuals who do no employ this approach instead choose avoidance-based strategies that are seen as easier and more convenient, such as providing excuses or ghosting the other individual.

Conversely, the worst approach to handling relational red flags is to ignore them. While it may seem like an easy solution early on, if the developing relationship is to continue, the ignored

relational red flags will likely continue to resurface until they are either finally dealt with and accepted, or until they cause the relationship to dissolve and terminate. Ignored relational red flags rarely simply fade away. Even minor relational red flags, if ignored, can cause irreparable harm to a potentially promising new relationship.

Limitations

There are several limitations that relate to the two studies presented in this dissertation that must be addressed. Specifically, these areas refer to aspects related to the age, sex, and race of the participants that were studied. Certain aspects regarding the measures that were used will also be discussed.

First, there are the samples used in the two studies. As mentioned earlier in the Limitations sections of Chapters 3 and 4, most of the participants in both studies identified as primarily White and most of the participants in Study 1 were primarily female (Study 2 did not have this limitation as an equal number of men and women were used in the study). Additionally, all participants from both studies were recruited from the Southeast region of the United States. The primary findings of this dissertation may indeed be typical of both genders and all races throughout the country; however, such assertions cannot be made without further research that is more representative of this nation's population, especially with regard to males, minorities, and individuals living in other portions of the U.S.

Lastly, regarding the sample, most of the participants used in both studies were between the ages of 18-26. While adult-age teenagers and young adults in their 20s were well represented in this dissertation, very little from the other age ranges were represented. Because of this, the role that relational red flags play across the lifespan should be researched to see if these findings are consistent for older age groups beyond just young adults. This would solve limitations in

both studies and could be achieved through either longitudinal research or through self-reports of individuals in various age ranges.

Next, regarding the measures and procedures used, the issue of fragmentation should also be addressed. As mentioned in the Limitations section of Chapter 3 for Study 1, in addition to allowing for more responses from the participants, the number of participants themselves should also increase in future research, given the identification of the 23 relational red flag types and subtypes. This high number of subthemes led to deep fragmentation of the data, given that only 15 blank spaces were allowed for responses, meaning that participants could not have listed more than 15 of the 23 subthemes. This left out a considerable number of additional subthemes that may have been provided if more responses had been allowed. As also mentioned in Study 1, another approach beyond allowing for more responses or a larger sample could be the conduction of a series of studies on each of the nine main relational red flag types. This would additionally help solve the issue of fragmentation as there were relational red flag themes within themes within possibly even more themes. Greater depth and understanding of this research topic could be achieved through additional scientific inquiry into each of the main types and subtypes.

Future Research

Ideally, future research into relational red flags will include a sample of participants that is representative of this country's male and female population as it pertains to all races and adult ages across various regions. Such studies should include measures that utilize not only self-reports, but also longitudinal procedures designed to follow individuals as they age to track their first-hand accounts of their experiences with relational red flags across the lifespan in the truest sense. Measures should also include a study design that allows for open-ended responses where needed, rather than a fixed set of maximum responses allowed.

Future studies should also include more detailed research into each of the nine main relational red flag types. Additional research that is specifically tailored to studying one or two main types rather than all nine main types and 23 subtypes will ideally produce more robust empirical results that provide deeper understanding beyond the foundation provided here in this dissertation. Each of the nine main relational red flag categories is ripe with various research opportunities that can only be achieved through a more narrow research focus.

Most importantly, however, is that future research into relational red flags should expand its focus beyond initial romantic encounters. While they may be most appropriate and relevant in this setting, this is only the beginning of the scholastic inquiry that should follow regarding this line of research. Relational red flags are not exclusive to the initial romantic encounters inherent to the early stages of the courtship process. The increased study of relational red flags should include how they are detected, labeled, handled and overall conceptualized in various other aspects of interpersonal communication.

How relational red flags operate in interpersonal interactions beyond developing romantic relationships should be considered. This should include, but is not limited to, the study of relational red flags in friendships, professional work relationships, and acquaintanceships. Research into these areas could result in a number of valuable theoretical and practical applications to not only academia but to many areas of everyday life and interpersonal interaction.

Implications

The implications derived from the empirically-supported results of this dissertation should call attention to the unhealthy production and consumption of romantic misinformation that pervades our society. Social media, and popular films, television shows, music, and books

all perpetuate gross inaccuracies about romantic relationships, particularly regarding dating and the overall, general courtship process. Too often does the general public rely on these pop culture tropes and baseless romanticized assertions of love that are not only factually inaccurate when compared to the social sciences literature, but are also harmful as they lead people to believe and act on information that is simply not true. By understanding relational red flags and the role they play in initial romantic interactions, we can begin to dispel the myths that exist and the misinformation that permeates romantic relationships, first dates, and the general incompatibility and dissimilarities between individuals during the courtship process.

Conclusion

As the results from the two studies presented in this dissertation have shown, relational red flags are an unavoidable part of romantic courtship. They are often initially detected on first dates and while they may be suppressed, hidden, unnoticed, or ignored, if the relationship continues to develop, they will continue to appear and may increase in both frequency and severity. As a result, they must in turn be addressed if the relationship is expected to continue in a healthy and mutually-satisfying manner, if it is even to continue at all. It is clear that relational red flags are a serious issue and while some relational red flags can be accepted, others however cannot as their very emergence can often signal the demise of a once budding romantic relationship.

This may be due to either the fact that the particular relational red flag or flags is one of several generally deemed to be the most severe and destructive or it may be because the relational red flag in question is of personal importance to the offended individual. This finding shows that while there are several commonly severe relational red flags, the nature of many of them is relative as what may be preferred by one individual is abhorred by another, and vice

versa. This is particularly true of relational red flags that relate to dissimilarities and personal preferences in attitudes, values, interests and personality.

Relational red flags are by no means restricted to merely initial romantic encounters (be it formal or informal first few dates or random, chance interactions) which accompany romantic development, but their study could indeed be of the most use here in these early stages of courtship. By detecting relational red flags, individuals can save themselves months to even years of time, money, and effort and simultaneously avoid severe stress and heartache by terminating what could at the very least have been an unsatisfying relationship and at most could have been an unhealthy, dangerous relationship where the afflicted individual endured physical, mental, and emotional distress. Unsatisfying and unhealthy relationships could be avoided if individuals are aware of the main relational red flags that exist as well as how to identify and handle these relational red flags when they emerge.

This dissertation addressed both these areas by first developing a formal definition for the concept itself, which was later built upon by two studies dedicated to understanding the core aspects of relational red flags as well as how to identify, process and handle them when they are detected. The results from the first study provide an understanding of what relational red flags are by creating an empirically-supported typology that identified the 23 primary relational red flags. Further important findings from this study were discovered once the typology was established, such as which of these relational red flags are perceived to be the most severe, in addition to revealing statistically significant gender differences, which detailed how there are five specific undesirable qualities that were identified as critical for women.

This dissertation went on to address how relational red flags are identified, processed and ultimately handled in initial romantic encounters through the results of the second study. The

results included a decision-making process that reveals that there are three primary communication-based strategies used to address relational red flags when deciding to terminate the developing relationship. Among these three strategies was the relabeling of an established concept through new meaning (ghosting) into the relational communication literature.

In summation, it is important that relational red flags are studied given that they are inherent to basic interpersonal interaction. Relational red flags are warning signs that should be heeded. They are signals of undesirable qualities that we would not want in a potential romantic partner and likely even qualities we would not want in a friend, coworker, or even a regular acquaintance. They are undesirable in their very nature because they can signal dissimilarities, incompatibilities, violated expectations, and even physically, emotionally, and psychologically destructive qualities, behaviors, characteristics, states, and traits.

Their study and understanding can be beneficial in a number of ways, perhaps most importantly in their application to developing romantic relationships as it is here in these initial romantic encounters that we begin the journey to find romantic partners. These are people with whom most of us will build our closest, most intimate relationships in life, relationships which often come to characterize if not outright define countless memories, moments, experiences and even entire chapters of our lives. The understanding of relational red flags through proper detection and handling will be the telling mark of whether our defining, most intimate relationships will be satisfying, rewarding, and interpersonally-fulfilling experiences, or whether they will be dissatisfying, costly and potentially dangerous and destructive experiences.

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APPENDIX A: SURVEY ITEMS FOR STUDY 1

IMPORTANT:

This survey is anonymous. The information collected is for academic research purposes.

Your identity will remain confidential.

Thank you.

SURVEY

This survey will study how red flags are communicated during the early stages of romantic interest.

A red flag is any undesirable behavior, characteristic, state, or trait that another person possesses that you personally would not want in a potential romantic partner.

INSTRUCTIONS

Please list the 15 most common red flags that YOU have personally experienced while initially getting to know someone new romantically.

Then rate each one ranging from how severe you think it is to a healthy romantic relationship. The scale ranges from **1 – Not Severe at All** (easily tolerated or ignored, would not be damaging) all the way to **5 - Extremely Severe** (highly damaging, could cause the most trouble in a relationship).

1. _____

1	2	3	4	5
Not Severe at All	Somewhat Severe	Moderately Severe	Very Severe	Extremely Severe

2. _____

1	2	3	4	5
Not Severe at All	Somewhat Severe	Moderately Severe	Very Severe	Extremely Severe

3. _____

1	2	3	4	5
Not Severe at All	Somewhat Severe	Moderately Severe	Very Severe	Extremely Severe

4. _____

1	2	3	4	5
Not Severe at All	Somewhat Severe	Moderately Severe	Very Severe	Extremely Severe

5.

1	2	3	4	5
Not Severe at All	Somewhat Severe	Moderately Severe	Very Severe	Extremely Severe

6.

1	2	3	4	5
Not Severe at All	Somewhat Severe	Moderately Severe	Very Severe	Extremely Severe

7.

1	2	3	4	5
Not Severe at All	Somewhat Severe	Moderately Severe	Very Severe	Extremely Severe

8.

1	2	3	4	5
Not Severe at All	Somewhat Severe	Moderately Severe	Very Severe	Extremely Severe

9.

1	2	3	4	5
Not Severe at All	Somewhat Severe	Moderately Severe	Very Severe	Extremely Severe

10.

1	2	3	4	5
Not Severe at All	Somewhat Severe	Moderately Severe	Very Severe	Extremely Severe

11.

1	2	3	4	5
Not Severe at All	Somewhat Severe	Moderately Severe	Very Severe	Extremely Severe

12.

1	2	3	4	5
Not Severe at All	Somewhat Severe	Moderately Severe	Very Severe	Extremely Severe

13.

1	2	3	4	5
Not Severe at All	Somewhat Severe	Moderately Severe	Very Severe	Extremely Severe

14.

1	2	3	4	5
Not Severe at All	Somewhat Severe	Moderately Severe	Very Severe	Extremely Severe

15.

1	2	3	4	5
Not Severe at All	Somewhat Severe	Moderately Severe	Very Severe	Extremely Severe

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR STUDY 2

Date of Data Collection: January 2016 – February 2016

Location: Louisiana State University campus, Coates Hall

Interviewer: Richard C. White

Interviewees: Per IRB approval, participants' identities will remain confidential. They are identified in official study transcripts and subsequent analysis as Participants 1-12, in chronological order of their participation in the study.

Position of Interview: Seated, facing each other with a comfortable distance of space between.

Project Purpose: To assess how relational red flags are identified, processed and ultimately handled in initial romantic encounters.

Questions:

1. What has been your personal experience with red flags when first getting to know someone new romantically?
2. What contexts or situations do you feel have most influenced and affected your experiences with red flags when first getting to know someone new romantically?
3. How do you personally become aware of these red flags?
4. How have you personally handled red flags when they emerge?
5. In your personal experience, what is the best way to handle red flags?
6. In your personal experience, what is the worst way to handle red flags?
7. Have what you consider to be red flags changed from when you were 18 to now?
8. Do you think what you currently consider to be red flags will change as you get older?
9. Why do you personally feel it is important to detect red flags when first getting to know someone new romantically?
10. In your personal experience, what has happened when red flags go unnoticed?
11. In your personal experience, what has happened when red flags are ignored?
12. What are some of the things you have personally learned about red flags?
13. Is there anything else about red flags that you feel is important, that people should know?

APPENDIX C: IRB APPROVAL FOR STUDIES 1 AND 2

ACTION ON EXEMPTION APPROVAL REQUEST

Institutional Review Board
Dr. Dennis Landin, Chair
130 David Boyd Hall
Baton Rouge, LA 70803
P: 225.578.8692
F: 225.578.5983
irb@lsu.edu | lsu.edu/irb

TO: Richard White
Communication Studies

FROM: Dennis Landin
Chair, Institutional Review Board

DATE: October 13, 2015

RE: **IRB#** E9545

TITLE: CMST - Exposing Relational Red Flags

New Protocol/Modification/Continuation: New Protocol

Review Date: 10/12/2015

Approved X **Disapproved**_____

Approval Date: 10/12/2015 **Approval Expiration Date:** 10/11/2018

Exemption Category/Paragraph: 2a

Signed Consent Waived?: Yes

Re-review frequency: (three years unless otherwise stated)

LSU Proposal Number (if applicable):

Protocol Matches Scope of Work in Grant proposal: (if applicable)

By: Dennis Landin, Chairman _____

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING –
Continuing approval is CONDITIONAL on:

1. Adherence to the approved protocol, familiarity with, and adherence to the ethical standards of the Belmont Report, and LSU's Assurance of Compliance with DHHS regulations for the protection of human subjects*
2. Prior approval of a change in protocol, including revision of the consent documents or an increase in the number of subjects over that approved.
3. Obtaining renewed approval (or submittal of a termination report), prior to the approval expiration date, upon request by the IRB office (irrespective of when the project actually begins); notification of project termination.
4. Retention of documentation of informed consent and study records for at least 3 years after the study ends.
5. Continuing attention to the physical and psychological well-being and informed consent of the individual participants, including notification of new information that might affect consent.
6. A prompt report to the IRB of any adverse event affecting a participant potentially arising from the study.
7. Notification of the IRB of a serious compliance failure.
8. **SPECIAL NOTE:**

**All investigators and support staff have access to copies of the Belmont Report, LSU's Assurance with DHHS, DHHS (45 CFR 46) and FDA regulations governing use of human subjects, and other relevant documents in print in this office or on our World Wide Web site at http://www.lsu.edu/irb*

ACTION ON EXEMPTION APPROVAL REQUEST

Institutional Review Board
Dr. Dennis Landin, Chair
130 David Boyd Hall
Baton Rouge, LA 70803
P: 225.578.8692
F: 225.578.5983
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TO: Richard White
Communication Studies

FROM: Dennis Landin
Chair, Institutional Review Board

DATE: December 14, 2015

RE: **IRB#** E9703

TITLE: CMST - Exploring Relational Red Flags

New Protocol/Modification/Continuation: New Protocol

Review Date: 12/14/2015

Approved X **Disapproved**_____

Approval Date: 12/14/2015 **Approval Expiration Date:** 12/13/2018

Exemption Category/Paragraph: 2a

Signed Consent Waived?: No

Re-review frequency: (three years unless otherwise stated)

LSU Proposal Number (if applicable):

Protocol Matches Scope of Work in Grant proposal: (if applicable)

By: Dennis Landin, Chairman _____

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING –
Continuing approval is CONDITIONAL on:

1. Adherence to the approved protocol, familiarity with, and adherence to the ethical standards of the Belmont Report, and LSU's Assurance of Compliance with DHHS regulations for the protection of human subjects*
2. Prior approval of a change in protocol, including revision of the consent documents or an increase in the number of subjects over that approved.
3. Obtaining renewed approval (or submittal of a termination report), prior to the approval expiration date, upon request by the IRB office (irrespective of when the project actually begins); notification of project termination.
4. Retention of documentation of informed consent and study records for at least 3 years after the study ends.
5. Continuing attention to the physical and psychological well-being and informed consent of the individual participants, including notification of new information that might affect consent.
6. A prompt report to the IRB of any adverse event affecting a participant potentially arising from the study.
7. Notification of the IRB of a serious compliance failure.
8. **SPECIAL NOTE: When emailing more than one recipient, make sure you use bcc.**

**All investigators and support staff have access to copies of the Belmont Report, LSU's Assurance with DHHS, DHHS (45 CFR 46) and FDA regulations governing use of human subjects, and other relevant documents in print in this office or on our World Wide Web site at http://www.lsu.edu/irb*

APPENDIX D: FEMALE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT – STUDY 2

Participant 8

CMST – Exploring Relational Red Flags
Principal Investigator: Richard C. White

Note: This participant is a Hispanic 24-year-old female who has been on 23 distinct first dates.

Researcher:	How would you define the phrase "red flag"?
Participant 8:	Definitely a stopping point when that thing pops up that you're not going to look it over more than likely, so just a big negative. It's basically when you're getting to know someone and they have either a trait, or a habit, or a view that you can't really change, you can't get past. Maybe if you're really into politics and they're the opposite party, you just know it's never going to go anywhere after that pops up. You try sometimes, but it usually won't work.
Researcher:	What are some specific examples of red flags that you personally have experienced in your dating history?
Participant 8:	My biggest one is when I'm on a date and they're rude to the waiter or the waitress. Second they do that I'm already checked out. I'm not into it. The other one where they bring up the ex-girlfriend on the first date or religion on the first date, and they're really heavy into it. I can't. I already know I'm done.
Researcher:	What has been your personal experience with red flags when first getting to know someone new romantically?
Participant 8:	I grew up in a nicer area, so a lot of people are entitled. In a restaurant, when they don't say please, they don't say thank you, or make any rude joke about the person, I just can't. Already I already know I can't stand them as a person, so I usually won't call them again after that or speak to them again. I'll just dismiss it. Another one was I had a guy on our first date offer to pray with me. I had no problem with that, but then he kept pushing, like, "Why don't you go to church? You should go." I was ... Just turned me off completely. Even as a friend, I was like no, too pushy, too much.

Researcher: What contexts or situations do you feel have most influenced and affected your experiences with red flags when first getting to know someone new romantically?

Participant 8: I think my parents are really big on being respectful and being nice to everyone you meet, so I think just my family values that I have. Those are what set up my red flags. Then, just my personality. I'm free-spirited/out there. Whenever someone's ... I can tell whenever I think someone's going to suppress that, I'm already checked out.

Researcher: Why do you say that?

Participant 8: I'm not at an age where I'm rushing into marriage, but I'm at an age where I think I'm going to eventually meet that person probably in the next couple of years. That's probably what would happen, or hopefully what would happen. Once I know somebody isn't going to appreciate me for me or they might want to change me in any kind of way that's going to be not what I want, I just ... There's no point. I'm going to waste both of our times.

Researcher: Why do you see it as a waste of time?

Participant 8: It's not going anywhere. When I was 18, I was really into the fun things, but I'm going to be 25 in about two months. Not that age matters, but at this point I'm not going to waste my time dating someone that I don't like and is probably not going to fully like and embrace me.

Researcher: How do you personally become aware of these red flags?

Participant 8: The tension. It's like it happens. They drop this thing, whatever it is in that situation, and you just immediately feel tense about it. It makes you uncomfortable. You're sitting there, "Oh wait, that wasn't good." Usually I'll try to put out a feeler to see if they're being serious. If they're serious I'm like, "Okay." I just accept it usually at that point.

Researcher: You said you notice it through the tension. What do you mean by that?

Participant 8: Yeah. It's almost like when you see a car crash on the side of the road, and it's bad, and you know it's bad, and you don't want to look, but you can't help but look. It makes everything tense, like, "Oh no." That's how it feels. Everything tenses up and you feel like you just watched a car crash.

Researcher: Would you say there are different levels of red flags or are all red flags similar?

Participant 8: There's different levels. I think that there's smaller red flags that maybe are just annoying things that wouldn't require you to change that person, or them to change you. It's just something you would have to get over or fix. Then there's the big things that you just know it's not going to work.

Researcher: Can you talk a little bit more about the smaller red flags?

Participant 8: I guess what makes the small ones small is just you as a person. It really bugs me when people chew with their mouth open, but if that's the worst thing that someone does, that's their big issue, that's a small red flag. I know that eventually if I dated them I'd be like, "Why don't you just try to chew with your mouth closed?" I think that's a small one. It's not major. It's going to drive me nuts, but it's not major and you can bring that up at some point when you're a little bit more comfortable.

Researcher: You're willing to accept minor red flags?

Participant 8: A baby red flag, yeah. Not a big one though.

Researcher: Are there medium red flags?

Participant 8: None that I've experienced, so I don't really know if they're ... I'm sure there is for some people, but I'm extreme about stuff. There's going to be something that really, really bugs me, that I can't deal with it or something that bugs me and I can deal with it.

Researcher: What are some of the big ones that you "can't deal with"?

Participant 8: Again, being rude to people. It really, really bugs me a lot. I think too, another issue I have is the whole when men are like, "I'm a man, this is my role. You're a woman, this is your role." I don't mind pulling out a chair, paying for a first date. That's nice, but I've been on some first dates, more so ... In certain parts of the country it's more prevalent, but they're very ... I don't know how to explain that. Stereotypical. They expect you to be a lady and do this and that. I don't like that either. That's a big one. Rude and that one is probably my two big ones.

Researcher: Is it difficult for you to discern immediately if a red flag is big or small?

Participant 8: No. It's easy. That's really easy. Usually if it's a small red flag I'll notice it, let's say it's a date, I'll notice the rest of the date and probably until I tell them about it. When it's a big deal, I know myself pretty well, so immediately I just am checked out of the situation and I've already written them off.

Researcher: It's easy for you to tell the difference when a red flag instantly emerges? You don't need time to process it, you instantly know that it's going to be a big one or that it's going to be a small one?

Participant 8: Yes, immediately. The small ones are like a paper cut. It's like, "Ugh." It's not pleasant, but it's like, "Okay, you can still do what you need to do." The big ones are like getting your hand cut off. That's a stopping point. You're done.

Researcher: Has your social network helped you in your ability to identify red flags with people you're dating that maybe you would not have noticed?

Participant 8: I guess you could say they help me because when someone has a red flag I'll go talk to them about it, but I'm not really talking for their advice. I'm just talking to say it, almost like to talk ... It helps me to hear. Sometimes they'll give me feedback, but in all honestly it's not like I don't care, I just want to talk to them about it, but I don't actually need their input. I already have my mind made up. I'm really stubborn, so once my mind's made up, it's pretty much it.

Researcher: What does talking with your friends help you achieve if not a decision? What purpose does that serve for you?

Participant 8: I don't know. I just like to hear myself talk. I just like them being in the loop I think so that they know why something's ending or why something didn't work out. Again, I don't really look for their input, but whenever they think that they have someone in mind for me I'd rather them know what stuff was already there that will bug me so that they don't match me with somebody ever that's awful.

Researcher: In your experience your friends have not identified red flags for people you've been dating that you didn't notice at first?

Participant 8: My friends haven't. My mom has. My mom is really good at it. It's really annoying actually. My mom can tell me before, even though I don't want to believe it. "Oh, you're going to go hang out with that guy." I don't know how she'll know these people either, but her friend or someone will know them somehow and my mom's like, "I just don't think he's good for you." Then my dad has this gift where if I tell him about a guy, even if I really like the guy, he'll say, "Really? That guy?", and he does this face. For some reason, after that I'm usually like, "Oh," and I start to see their flaws. That's his gift in life, to ruin all relationships for his daughter.

Researcher: Your parents have helped you see red flags with people you're dating that you did not notice at first?

Participant 8: Yeah, my parents have. They definitely have. They know me better than anyone though, so I would expect that they would have a good idea about that.

Researcher: Even though your friends haven't helped you identify them, you still seek your friends for conversation and to discuss the people you're dating and the red flags right?

Participant 8: Yeah. It's just fun.

It's just fun to talk to your ... I don't know. It's just fun to talk to your friends, especially when you get a really bad date. It's funny to go, "You'll never guess what happened," and it ends up being hilarious. They'll laugh at you and it'll usually end up being an inside joke that will last a good solid two months that comes out of it.

Researcher: Do your friends also share with you their red flags in their dates?

Participant 8: Yeah, we all talk about it. It's like a running joke. Anybody we like at all, we'll just call them "Tinder Fail" for the first month just because it's Baton Rouge and there's a lot of Tinder fails. We just think it's funny.

Let’s say, I'm dating someone now. They all referred to him as Tinder fail even though the date went great just because it was funny to them. All of our relationships are just messy and we just make a big joke out of everything. He has a name now.

Researcher: There were no red flags, things did go well, but they still called him that?

Participant 8: They still called him Tinder fail because they were waiting for it.

Researcher: What do you think that says that they were waiting for the red flags to emerge?

Participant 8: We're in Baton Rouge and it's all college students. Most college students that I know aren't looking to take you out to dinner and treat you like a nice lady. Most of them want to hang out at Fred's and just do other stuff. I guess that's why ... I don't expect to meet anyone in a college town realistically. I think that's why we all just make a joke of it, so that we never really get let down.

Researcher: You had said that you and your friends are waiting for the red flags to emerge. Do you feel that people can hide their red flags?

Participant 8: No, I think they'll come out eventually. I think the first three or four months of a relationship, the first month you're trying to be yourself, but

eventually some situation will come up that will bring it out of them. I think it's just human nature. You can't change yourself, otherwise we'd all be perfect.

Researcher: Why do you feel it's hard to notice them initially when you first get to know someone new romantically?

Participant 8: Most people, and some people are really bad at it, most people ... You try to put your best foot forward. You wouldn't want to go on a first date ... I think that's why people don't ... They always say you don't bring up politics, religion, all that stuff on a first date because you want to come with your best foot forward. I think their intention is, "I'm going to be a good person," but we all have flaws and eventually it's going to come out. Either the person that you're with can handle those flaws or it will be a red flag to somebody else. You don't know which one it's going to be.

Researcher: Have you had any personal experience with someone who has hidden their red flags pretty well?

Participant 8: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah, I've have people do that. Again, it didn't last long. It was three months in a lot of them. Around that time, I would say something that would piss them off or there would be some kind of situation that didn't go their way, just something like that, and you just see a different person. Then, there's your red flag right there, and you're like, "Oh no." It's uncomfortable.

Researcher: Would you say you are a picky person or are you more lenient when it comes to identifying red flags?

Participant 8: Picky, but I'm also specific. It's not like I have a lot. I just have a decent amount of deal breakers automatically. I am picky as far as ... Also, I can tell whether I'm going to like somebody usually in the first five minutes. Even if a red flag pops up later on, I'll still know immediately whether I want to get to know them, which is kind of weird, but that's just how I work.

Researcher: Why do you say you're picky?

Participant 8: I think I just have different values. I don't know what a lot of people's red flags, I don't want to judge people's red flags, but I know I have a lot of friends back home where money is a big deal to them. Money is a big red flag for them. They want someone that has a lot of it. For me though, that's not a red flag. I just want somebody that is a good person. That's my biggest thing. I'd say I'm picky just because I'm really particular about what I want in a person. It's not going to be things that a lot of people do

want. Security is great, but I don't need $1 million. Anything after $75,000 doesn't make you happy. I think that's proven.

Researcher: Why do you feel that way?

Participant 8: I have no desire to get a divorce or do any of that stuff. I have no desire to be with somebody that I can't stand. There's no amount of money that you could pay me to do it; so for me I just feel like whoever I end up with, as long as they're a good person, and they're a good guy, and they're a good husband, that's what I want.

Researcher: Have what you consider to be red flags changed from when you were 18 to now?

Participant 8: 100%

Researcher: In what ways have they changed?

Participant 8: 100%. When I was 18 I dated older guys and I thought it was really cool. I look back now and like, "That should have been a red flag." At the time though I thought it was so cool. 13 years older than an 18-year-old, what are you doing with an 18-year-old? If I met that guy now I'd be like, "What the hell are you doing?" I think back then I don't think I ... My filter wasn't very good. I was just like, "He's 30 and he's hot. Okay, cool." Now I'm like, "Ew." I would not want a 30-year-old to date an 18-year-old.

Now my red flags are more ... I think I go a little deeper with them. I never understood why anyone cared about politics. I didn't think it mattered. I thought money was awesome when I was younger. Now as an adult though my red flags are more about are you a decent human being. If I see you treat someone like shit for no reason just because you think you're above them, disgusted immediately. I think that's my red flag now, whereas back in the day I was just like, "He's cool. He has a fast car." Those were cool to me.

Researcher: You're saying that you have become more picky in your adult life since you turned 18?

Participant 8: Yes. I think I like my ... The values I look for are a lot harder to find too. They're not as superficial. They're unfortunately ... Sometimes I do have to date someone for three months or so to find out, "Okay, this didn't work out." I don't want to waste that time, but now those are the things that matter. Instead of staying in something for a long time just because I want it to work, I have to really make sure that they don't have those red flags.

Researcher: Do you think what you currently consider to be red flags will change as you get older?

Participant 8: I think they're going to change. I don't know about more lenient or more ... I don't know which way it would go. I feel like though just my wants ... Right now, I want to date somebody awesome who's educated and doing that stuff, is a good person. I think in the future I'm going to want somebody who is a good husband. I know a lot of ... There's a lot of infidelity and it's becoming more common. That's not going to be okay. A good father, that's what I'm going to want I think. We'll see though.

I guess I would just say I'd be more picky. Again, in my future I do want a family, so I'm not going to be picky just for my self's sake. I'm going to be picky for my kids, and for my husband, and so forth.

Researcher: How have you personally handled red flags when they emerge?

Participant 8: Argumentative a little bit. I can be confrontational. For me, I was in the military, and then I remember I went on a date with a guy and he informed me that women had no business in the military. Instead of just gracefully respecting his opinion and not calling him again, I instead was like, "What have you done for your country? Not shit, so you don't get to talk. You're not allowed." That didn't go well. Then, again, if somebody's rude to a waiter or waitress, I don't know why that's happened to me so many times too, but it's a thing, I always check first, but when they do that I can't just sit there and be nice, and be like, "Okay, no." I have to call him out for it right there. Usually I'll be an even bigger pain in the ass and be like, "You need to say sorry." If they don't say sorry at all, then they're completely written off. If they do say sorry I might give it another try, but even so they'll probably still be the same way unintentionally.

Researcher: After the first date, or two, or three, if you have decided that it's not going to continue because of the red flags, how do you handle it then?

Participant 8: It's so awkward! I usually will type about 30 texts that I don't send, and then I'll decide to be an adult and just call them. Usually I'll call them on the phone just because I don't want to do the in person thing. If they're a really ... If I'm not into it and I feel guilty about it, I'll go see them in their face. I'll go and be like, "Hey, I just don't think it's going to work." If I don't feel that guilty and I'm like, "This guy is a total douche bag. I don't care," I'll give him a call and be like, "Hey." Next time they ask me to hang out, I'll just tell them, "I don't think it's going to work out. I just think we're on different pages." That's how I'll usually handle it.

Researcher: You typically call them or see them in person?

Participant 8: Yes.

Researcher: Do you ever typically send texts or does that not happen?

Participant 8: No, I think it's gross. I just think it's rude.

Researcher: Why is it gross and rude in your opinion?

Participant 8: They're still a human being. I think it's ... I just think texting somebody that you're not interested in them is ... It's just impersonal. The fact that you at least know them as a human enough to have gone on a date with them, spent some time eating with them, to send a text, again, I just don't think it's right. I think it's nasty. Also, what if you run into them? As a girl, if you send me a text that basically in 250 characters says, "You suck. I'm not interested in you," I'm going to go back and read it when I'm drunk. I'm going to be all sad about it. That's just going to happen. Why would you give somebody a script of why they're terrible for them to go back to? It's easier if you just say the words, you hang up, and that's it.

Researcher: It sounds like you almost always address the situation directly.

Participant 8: Yeah. I would want people -- I would want someone to tell me what I did wrong. If it was something like chewing with my mouth open, maybe next time I go on a date I'll remember that and chew with my mouth closed.

Researcher: Have you ever not addressed the situation? Have you ever, I guess, ceased all communication with that person and just ignored them and not directly addressed that there wasn't going to be another date?

Participant 8: There was a guy on Tinder. Embarrassing that I was ever on Tinder, B-T-W. There was a guy on Tinder and I was supposed to go on a date with him, and then he made fun of me for being Mexican, but it wasn't funny Mexi-jokes. It was really rude. I was just like, "Ef this guy." I never responded to him. He kept on trying to get in touch with me and I was just like, "Ew. Absolutely not."

Researcher: You hadn't met in person though?

Participant 8: No, I hadn't met him in person. That's the only person I think I've ever had a plan or been like, "Okay, I'm going to hang out with you," and then just not. Everyone I've actually hung out with I'll give it a closed ended.

Researcher: You always do directly address it in some way?

Participant 8: Yes.

Researcher: Are you familiar with some of your friends or other people who have chosen to cease all communication and not give an explanation?

Participant 8: Yes.

Researcher: What do you think about that?

Participant 8: They're awful. I have a lot of friends that will just be like, "Oh, I'm just going to ghost him and not talk to him," or they'll send a text. I always will just make fun of them. I will mock them and tell them, "Hey, I love you, but you're a piece of shit for that just so you know."

Researcher: What was that term you said they use?

Participant 8: Ghosting.

Researcher: Explain that.

Participant 8: Ghosting is when you just disappear like a ghost. You cut off of all communications. You take them off of Instagram, take them off of whatever other crap you have them on, and that's it. They just never hear from you again.

Researcher: What do you personally think about that approach?

Participant 8: I think it's so rude. I think it's so childish too. Something a little kid does. I don't know. It's like when you like a boy and you hide from him every time you see him, it's ridiculous. Just tell him you're not interested. It's going to be okay. There's billions of people on this planet and I'm sure he'll get over you.

Researcher: Why do you think people do it though?

Participant 8: I'm going to sound so old right now, but I think it's our generation. I don't think we're shitty people as a whole, but it's almost acceptable. Everything is texting and ... I don't know. You see these kids walking around and they're running into people on their phones. It's almost like, "Oh okay, I'm just going to send this." It's convenient. I think everything we do now is about convenience, the way we shop, the way we do everything. I think even the way we break up with the people or break things off with people is about convenience, but they don't consider that it's selfish. You're not being the nicest human being right now, but karma is a bitch. I always tell them that.

Researcher: That's the main reason why you have chosen never to choose that approach in your adult life?

Participant 8: Yeah. I've had it done to me, and it doesn't feel good, so why would I do that to somebody else if I already know? There's people that I could care less about, but I still in the back of my mind, "I wonder why he did that." I think as a human being too you blame yourself. You're like, "What did I do? What did I do?" Maybe they just got back with their ex-girlfriend but you'll never know because they just stopped talking to you.

Researcher: In your personal experience, what is the best way to handle red flags?

Participant 8: I think just tell the person just straight up. The best thing too is when you have one of those, that's an awkward first date because something happened, you already know. There's always that moment of, "Nice to meet you," or, "We should hang out again," that closing. I think if you can, it's the best time, if you already know, just to be like, "I really enjoyed our time. I just don't want to waste your time. I don't think this is what I'm looking for." That person hasn't invested in you too much and they're probably not going to care that much because you've just met them. I just think it's always good to tell them, just tell them what was wrong.

Researcher: In your personal experience, what is the worst way to handle red flags?

Participant 8: Ghosting them is pretty bad. Ignoring them is pretty bad as well. I think either of those. Just ignoring somebody and not ever giving them an explanation of what happened is the worst.

Researcher: Why do you personally feel it is important to detect red flags when first getting to know someone new romantically?

Participant 8: I think you need to because you have to know what you like and what you don't like. When you're able to detect them, you can rule out already that this person might have something that you don't like so severely that it's just not going to work. If there were no such thing as red flags I think you could just be with anybody and it wouldn't even matter at that point, but you have red flags to make sure that that person fits who you are and vice versa for them.

Researcher: In your personal experience, what has happened when red flags go unnoticed?

Participant 8: It's not good. Like I said, usually if they go unnoticed it's typically because the person was trying to put their best foot forward, so it's ... My experience, they've been hidden, intentionally hidden. When you find out, depending on how much you've invested in that person, it just makes it harder because now you're in this situation where you're like, "Okay." You have these feelings and you guys have spent enough time together. You have to shut it down, and you've dragged it out even though you didn't

mean to. There's more feelings involved. There's more time involved. You probably slept with them, so there's that, and now you're like, "Never mind."

Researcher: In your personal experience, what has happened when red flags are ignored?

Participant 8: It still doesn't work. I know there's one guy that, he was not the best, but he was really cute. I was like, "I could deal with it." No I couldn't. I couldn't deal with it. If it's a red flag to somebody, you can ignore it for a small amount of time, but you're not going to just completely get over it.

Researcher: Why is it bad to ignore them?

Participant 8: You're lying to yourself. It's like putting a Band-Aid over a bullet wound. It's still there. You're going to have to deal with it at some point. I've had friends who have blamed it on love, like, "But I love him!" Okay, well, no, it's not going to work. If it's a red flag, and it's a red flag for you, it's always going to nag at you because it's there. It's probably going to blow up in your face if you ignore it.

And this guy that I said was not the best but was really cute -- Oh my God, I'm going to sound horrible right now. I don't want to use the term "meat head". I feel like that's the only thing I can think of. Just didn't care about what was happening anywhere. Didn't care about how I was feeling. He just wanted to work out and wanted to talk about his workouts. It was paying off, so good for him, but it was just, "I don't care," and I didn't care about his workouts. I just didn't. He was like, "You should go to the gym." I was like, "No. Don't say that to a girl they should go to the gym. Don't say that."

Researcher: What are some of the things you have personally learned about red flags?

Participant 8: That people have them about me. That's going to sound odd. I don't know where I got this idea. I think it started when I was young. I was like, "No. If I'm just nice to people, and I just try to be a good person, you're not going to have red flag about me." I really believed this. I was mental about it I guess. People have red flags about me too. As much as I'm like, "This bugs me. This bugs me," someone could think I talk too much and that could be a red flag for them. That made it helpful because not everybody does what I do and tells people why something didn't work out. For me, it made it easier for me to just be like, "Okay, I probably did something that they didn't like and that's just it."

I have also learned it’s best to deal with them. Definitely deal with them. Don't try to ignore them. There's no science behind this, but your gut

instinct is usually right. I think there's been so many times where I've seen my friends, and I myself, have tried to go against that gut feeling for whatever reason and you've just got to trust it. If it's going to work out, it's going to. If everything is telling you it's not, you might just want to walk away from it for a little bit. You can go back if it's still something you want to pursue, but I'd say that is what I have learned.

Researcher: What are some of the red flags that you personally emit?

Participant 8: I talk a lot. That's definitely one. I can be really crass, and I don't mean to, but I think it's funny. I know that some men are very turned off by that. I'm in a really weird place in my life, so as a guy dating me right now I think you have to accept it because I really like a smart, educated man. That, to me, is the most attractive thing. I'm not an educated woman yet, so it's hypocritical of me. I guess for somebody who meets me, they could think, "Why are you 25 and still getting your undergrad?" Maybe that's unattractive to them. I don't know. I guess I could see that. I know that some of ... The person that I'm dating now, some of his friends found that out about me, my age and what I did, and they were like, "What's wrong with her?" Then they found out I was in the military and they were like, "Oh, okay." I didn't have their approval until they knew that, which is annoying because I didn't ask for it.

Researcher: Do you feel there are any red flags of your own that you can work on and should work on?

Participant 8: I'm working on the education thing now. The other two, no. I'm always going to talk a lot. I'm Hispanic. That's just what's going to happen. As far as me being crass, I have a really dry sense of humor, so if whoever I'm with doesn't like it, understandable. It's a time and a place thing, so I would never meet someone's mother and throw F-bombs; but if someone upsets me I use the C word a lot. I think it's hilarious. Some people are like, "Whoa, that's a really harsh word." I'm not going to fix that. I call men and women that, but it’s the C word that refers to women.

I think it's funny. I would never get into an argument with someone though and be like, "You ..." If someone annoys me, I'll be like, "What a big ..." It's funny.

Researcher: What personal advice would you give to others about red flags?

Participant 8: Before anyone's going to seriously date anyone, if they're just dating for fun, have fun. If you're going to seriously date people, someone that you want to be with for awhile, know what your red flags are before. I think if you know what they are and you go to date somebody and they pop up, you already know that's what it is; whereas if you don't really know when

you go into it, you're going to have to sit there and battle with yourself on what that feeling really is, and you might end up dragging it out and getting yourself hurt later on.

Researcher: How does that come about? Is that easier said than done?

Participant 8: It's definitely easier said than done, but there's going to be those moments where you'll just know that a red flag pops up. Also, there's going to be ... I find when you reflect on a relationship that's ended, after you're done crying about it, when you're actually really over it, there's things that you'll say, "Oh, I could have never been with this person anyway because of dot, dot, dot, dot, dot." If you can take those and you can apply it, you're going to be a little more cautious in your next relationship.

Researcher: Is there anything else about red flags that you feel is important, that people should know?

Participant 8: I think I already said it, but if this were to be a "how to date" thing, I think people just need to respect other people. If you're going to hurt someone's feelings, you've got to do it. Understandable, but at least give them closure. I think a lot of people don't get that closure and it ends up turning into baggage that they just drag along; whereas if they would have just known why, maybe they could have fixed it. Maybe they would have kept it, but known it. You don't want to leave people with baggage. I think that's my biggest thing.

APPENDIX E: MALE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT – STUDY 2

Participant 11

CMST – Exploring Relational Red Flags
Principal Investigator: Richard C. White

Note: This participant is a Caucasian 22-year-old male who has been on 10 distinct first dates.

Researcher: How do you define the phrase "red flag"?

Participant 11: A red flag to me is something that, as soon as, maybe it's something she says, something she does. As soon as that comes across to me, it catches my attention right away as in something that would quickly cause me to lose interest in the person of interest I might be on a date with. Like I said, it could be something she says, an action, something she doesn't do, maybe. It could really be a bunch of different things.

Researcher: So a red flag, in your experience, comes in different forms.

Participant 11: Definitely.

Researcher: Why is that?

Participant 11: I guess it's all about perception. Examples maybe. Like a response to a question. What are you looking for in life? Something she says. "I just want to marry somebody for money." Red flag, right. If she says she's motivated. She wants to go be a doctor, and it doesn't have to be a doctor. You don't have to be a doctor or astrophysicist, but you have some motive in life, a good thing, versus just saying, "I want to marry for money."

Something she does. We go on a first date, and she's on her phone the entire time. I guess its nothing she's saying, but I guess she is saying through that action that she's disinterested. To me that's discourteous and a red flag, and I don't like that at all. So something she does, something she might not do. I pay for a meal ticket to a really nice restaurant. "Thanks" is really nice. Just a thanks. I don't expect to, not every time, get in your pants every time, but just a thanks. Maybe something she doesn't do as well could be a red flag in that sense.

Researcher: Could you name me a few more red flags that you have personally experienced?

Participant 11: For myself ---and again, I think this is all personal of what you think-- I'm a huge stickler for table manners, especially in a nice restaurant. If we're out somewhere in public, being really loud at a table is a huge red flag to me. It says you want attention, and I don't like that. Just rude in general, I like nice people. I consider myself somewhat of a nice person; I try to be anyway. When we walk into the restaurant, hello to the waitress, hello to the server. Being nice, if I see she's just rude in general, not even just towards me, to other people, another big red flag. This could go on for a while. When dinner conversation is strictly about her the entire time, "Me, me, me, me." Not that I want to be that person, but it should never be that way. I guess you could say if she loves herself and loves to talk about herself, and herself only.

Other red flags. I guess physical traits. Not to seem shallow, but I value physical wellness and health. That's what my major is, so I don't mean physical appearance: "She's not tan; that's a red flag," but if she doesn't seem to take care of herself, that could definitely be a red flag to me. Through conversation she just reveals that she's the most lethargic and sedentary person, and she laughs at the idea of fitness, for me that's a red flag. That's probably not going to go anywhere past that point.

Researcher: What has been your personal experience with red flags when first getting to know someone new romantically?

Participant 11: My overall personal experience, depending on the severity if you could give a rating to a red flag, most times honestly for myself, it's hard to get past them. If I see one or two that are maybe not so big, maybe I could let go of it. I guess there's certain standards I have in my head, or I guess it's a way of a mental checklist. Not that she does this or has this, but "I know this gets on my nerves, and I know I don't like this, and I know I don't want to be with somebody like that." If that's the cause of the red flag, it's probably not going to go past the first date.

Researcher: You used the term severity. Are you saying that you believe red flags differ on how severe they can be? Some are more severe than others?

Participant 11: I do believe so. Again, I think that's about personal perception and what your pet peeves might be. Like I said, the tables manners thing, if she has her elbow on a table, that's not huge. That's proper etiquette. Elbows on a table, not that big of a deal. If she's eating with her mouth open, talking with a full mouth, that's a more severe red flag, a bigger red flag. That one would definitely throw me into the probably not going to go on a second date direction.

Researcher: When a red flag first comes up, is it easy or hard for you to know whether it's big or small?

Participant 11: I think repetition makes it easier. If it's something really ridiculous like if she was just a bitch, that's a red flag. If she was just rude and terrible, like yeah that's very easy to differentiate. Just a very subtle thing, again, that kind of goes back to the severity of it.

I guess right away, yeah it is easy to know if it's big or small. Right away, it would be. In saying that, it would say like "Holy hell, that's a big red flag. I'm going to avoid that," or "Hmm, that may not be anything. Let's pursue this further." That is an easy differentiation.

If I think about it, yeah. From the instant it happens, I know right away if it's big, and if it's not, then it's not that big.

Researcher: What contexts or situations do you feel have most influenced and affected your experiences with red flags when first getting to know someone new romantically?

Participant 11: One on one dates. Typically, more private settings.

Researcher: Why?

Participant 11: I think the reason for that would be in a more public setting, someone may be more aware --and when I say someone, the girl that I'm on a date with let's say-- may be more aware that there are other people around, and she might be trying to conform to social norms, not being loud at the table, not talking with her mouth full, not being rude, not being on her phone at the table. Whereas let's say I said "Hey, for our first date, you come to my apartment, and I'm going to cook for us," and we sit at the table where there's no one but she and I. You would hope that she would be conscious of what I'm thinking of her, but I think maybe without the rest of the norm, without other people there to watch her, she may not feel pressured to be normal, you know quote-unquote normal. I think that's why private more than public.

Researcher: How do you personally become aware of these red flags?

Participant 11: It's actually quite funny. I would say for 95 – 99% of all of the dates that I go on, I would spend like two to three hours with my friends after the date, and we just talk about everything that goes on. I'll tell them "Hey man, she did this and this and this. That was all good, but she also did this and this, which is bad, a red flag." Then we just keep talking about the date and keep talking. They might say like "Oh man, she did this?," and they might bring something else to my attention that I didn't catch. I guess in a way, I sometimes can be influenced by other people's opinions.

Researcher: Your friends help you identify red flags that you didn't identify initially?

Participant 11: Correct.

Researcher: How important is it to you to have your friends help you with this, or is it not important at all to you?

Participant 11: On a scale of one to ten, it's like an eight of importance.

Researcher: Why is it important to you?

Participant 11: I guess it's just my mindset, and I think sometimes ... My friends and I are very unique about how we ... It's funny. It's humorous. Say we see a girl, and we went out with a group of friends. We met a girl. I set my sights on her, so before I even ask this girl on a date, I meet with my friends, plan out this whole entire date, go on the date, and then I guess you'd say report back to them. A lot of the times what happens is like my friends pump my head up like "Oh yeah dude, she's so hot. She's so hot." This and that, so I go on the date, and they're like "This girl's so hot," but I might not catch something she does or something she says. Then later I tell my friends. My head might be in a cloud because I'm on a date with this hot girl, and later they kind of clear my vision up, you know, an outside opinion looking in type of thing.

Researcher: How have you personally handled red flags when they emerge?

Participant 11: It really depends on how deep of a level I feel connected or attracted to that person. If it's a shallow date, if I'm just looking to hook up with a girl, I probably just won't talk to her ever again. I would thank her for her time. I won't ever on the spot confront whoever it is. I don't like that, especially if it's in public. I guess in a private setting I might or a little bit after the fact, but I don't think I would ever like confront the person right when it happens. Like I said, if it's more of a shallow date, I won't ever say anything and just never see them again. If it's somebody I feel like I do want to try to establish some sort of relationship with, then I would bring it up to them and talk about it. I'm a straightforward person, so I'd just tell them straight up, "I don't really like this too much. I'm not asking you to change, but maybe you don't realize you do that. Maybe it comes from some past relationship that you slipped in some complacency about how you were or who you are and what you do," just trying to feel them out if there can be some resolution. Then it may go forward to another date. If not, I'll just stop right there.

Researcher: You said a few times you'd stop right there, or you would cease all communication. By that, do you mean once the date ends you don't text her, you don't call her, you don't reach out at all?

Participant 11: I would give a thank you, and it probably would be in person. I probably wouldn't text her. I would tell her at the end of the date, "Thank you for your time. I really enjoyed it. I'll see you around some time."

Researcher: But after that no more communication?

Participant 11: No, cut off.

Researcher: How do you think that makes them feel, not hearing from you again?

Participant 11: Some girls, I know I did it to girls, and they have reached out to me. I've never replied back to them in any way, whether they call me to talk to me about whatever. I really think it depends on where their mind was at in the date. I know some girls I've done it to, they wake up the next day, they don't get a text from me. They may think about me for a day or so, but I don't think that it affects them in any way. Then there are some other girls who it wasn't necessarily the very first date when I ceased all communication, but like I said it was somebody I was a little bit deeper interested in. Had a red flag on a first date, made it to the second date, still struggled with the red flag. Cease communication. Then there was a little time between there where we kept communicating between first date, second date, and then cease. I think some girls are affected by it. It depends on the personality of the girl and what she was looking for in the situation.

Researcher: Have you ever gone on a date with a girl, and you liked her, but she did that to you? She just ceased all communication with you?

Participant 11: Yes.

Researcher: How did that make you feel?

Participant 11: One occasion made me feel just terrible. "What's wrong with me?" That kind of thing. Then that's where I feel there's more involvement on my end than her end, so I was more interested than she was. That's how I felt anyway. I also had a girl do that to me, and it doesn't bother me at all. In those cases, again, that was more of a shallow thing.

Researcher: You said if it's a shallow first date, you're not going to contact them afterwards. Why do you choose to do that versus letting them know it's not going to work?

Participant 11: Because if it's just a shallow thing, for me it, in my mind, it never was going to go to any serious relationship level. I think some girls -- I say girls, I don't want to be sexist. I mean boys and girls, this could be some people -- if confronted in that way, I think in certain situations if it

happened to me, "Well, let's talk about it. Let's try and fix it. I can do this." It's a shallow thing, I don't want to go that far. It's kind of sad.

Researcher: You had said that you think they don't take it well, and you admitted that when that happens to you, you don't like it either. What do you think that says?

Participant 11: That I am hypocritical in a way, double standards, definitely have double standards there. I mean that's a fault. It's not good, and it's not taking into consideration the other person on the other end of the date, the ceasing of communication.

Researcher: Do you think that's common among your peer group, your age group, for people to do that, to cease all communication with people they're talking to?

Participant 11: Can I put it on a continuum, or is it like a white and black thing...

Researcher: Sure.

Participant 11: One to ten, I'll say four.

Researcher: With ten representing “all the time” and one representing “never.”

Participant 11: Yes. I’d say it’s a four.

Researcher: So it happens almost half the time?

Participant 11: Almost half the time, yeah.

Researcher: Why do you think those in your peer group choose that almost half the time? Why do you think they don't just directly address it?

Participant 11: I think it's easier to cut, dry, turn away. That's the kind of person I am, so just cut, dry, turn away, cease communication rather than drag it on for a week or so, however long, saying "Maybe we can fix this. Maybe we can pass this red flag." Then both members become taxed by that. Especially for the person who doesn't have the interest, they don't want to be taxed by it, so they just cut, dry, and if the other person takes it well, great. If they don't, I guess it's their problem. I think that would be the reason behind that.

Researcher: In your personal experience, what is the best way to handle red flags?

Participant 11: Wait for the most appropriate time to bring it up, if you feel it is even appropriate to bring it up at all. I guess that all depends on the person

dealing with the red flag, but like I was saying earlier about whether there was something you would want to deal with or try to, and some are just so big that you don't even want to deal with it. If you want to deal with it, wait for the most appropriate time. I think a huge thing about that, you're bringing up something that you consider somewhat of a flaw for the other person, so any time that I have brought up red flags, I try to be as sensitive as possible in the wording. Make sure my wording is on point and I'm not coming off as rude or mean, not like I'm trying to take a shot at the person. I think that's the biggest thing when you bring up a red flag to somebody is to make sure you're not trying to bring them down, almost like you're making a recommendation for their person.

Researcher: In your personal experience, what is the worst way to handle red flags?

Participant 11: It's not good to ignore them. That's pretty bad. Another bad way is…let's see. I can give an example. We were kind of seriously drinking, not like in a club but more like in a bar, just seriously drinking and talking to some girls. I have a buddy, this is just his personality, but she said one thing that he didn't agree with. I can't remember right now exactly what it was, but he just looked at her, and he was like "I don't want to see you again. Don't talk to me" and he just turned and walked away. To me, that's an example of the absolute worst. That's just horrible. I don't condone that. I have never done that, and I don't think I would ever do that. That's just really cut and dry, so I think that would be an example of one of the worst ways to handle that.

He didn't even point out what she did or say what was wrong. He just turned and looked at her and said "I will never talk to you again" and walked away. Not even discussing, not even giving a reason why you don't want to talk to them or why you're going to cease communication, that's terrible. Making them think there's something wrong with them for what they did, I don't think that would be a very good way at all to handle a red flag.

Researcher: Do you feel that people try to hide their red flags during first dates?

Participant 11: I think for the most part that people try to hide them. I think that leads to a lot of issues down the road. Obviously, if you hide who you are in the first few dates, the person is going to want to keep seeing you. You hide your faults and they think, "Oh, this is all great about them. They don't have any red flags." You keep going, and they slowly pop up. I think that does happen often. I think people tend to do it because it's a nervousness thing. I went on a first date like last week with a new girl, and I was really nervous about it, but halfway through the date, I just reminded myself, "Be yourself." Even I did it. I was doing it for the first half of the date. I was just really reserved, watching every move I made. Then I reminded

myself, "Be comfortable, be yourself, because eventually you will be yourself, and if she doesn't like it, you're going to have formed this attachment to this girl, and she'll be gone because you weren't yourself on the first date and didn't give her a chance right from the get-go to say 'not interested.'" To answer your question, I think people do hide their flags a lot.

Researcher: In your experience, why do people try their best to hide them?

Participant 11: They want to be accepted. They feel interested in the other person, and they are hoping to get that second date. They don't want the person to think any less of them. They want people to think, the person they're on a date with, to think as highly as possible of them. I go on a date with this girl. I like to drink. Not to say I get crazy drunk all the time, but I like to have a drink or two with every meal if I'm eating somewhere, eating out. If a girl doesn't like that, or I'm afraid she thinks I'm an alcoholic or a drunk, then I may not want to get a drink, but no, I *should* get the drink.

Researcher: Do you feel people can hide their red flags or do you feel they will always eventually come out?

Participant 11: I think at some point they will come out. You can hide them for a long time, but they will come out in the end every time.

Researcher: Why do they always come out?

Participant 11: Emotions can take over, and I think that's a huge reason why. You can be conscious about what you do about hiding your red flags today, but at some point -- some people may be better at controlling emotions than others, but I think at some point -- emotions will take over one day, and you might drop something that you were hiding forever, bringing that up to the surface.

Researcher: Have what you consider to be red flags changed from when you were 18 to now?

Participant 11: I've probably become more picky.

Researcher: Why?

Participant 11: When I was 18, the intentions of my date were a lot different than what they are now. I'm 22 now; I'm going to graduate in May, and I'm fixing to go to graduate school, so I need somebody stable with me. I need a relationship, and I'm looking for somebody who's like that, so I'm going to be a little more picky about it because I'm 22. Not to say there's any age you need to get married and I don't plan on getting married anytime soon,

but my relationship right now, the intent why I'm in a relationship is possibly considering getting married to the person, so I'm going to be way more picky in who I select. When I was 18, it was like "Who can I sleep with? Sure, she may do this or do that, but she's way hot; it's okay, not that big of a deal. She has a little red flag or two," versus now this is somebody who I'm spending my time with, a lot of time and a lot of money on, and possibly the rest of my life with, so I'm more picky now.

I've been in enough relationships to know exactly what I like and what I don't like, and I feel that there is going to be somebody who isn't going to have all these red flags with them, and everyone's going to have red flags, but there's going to be someone who doesn't have immense red flags. The few that she does have are going to be outweighed by the good in the person that she is. I think that I'm picky because I'm not in a rush to be with someone. I want to make sure when I decide I want to settle down, it's with the right person, so there are a lot of filters to get through to say "Okay, I can see myself potentially being with this person."

Researcher: Would you say you are as picky as most of your friends, or more picky or more lenient?

Participant 11: I'm more picky than my closest friends.

Researcher: Why is that?

Participant 11: Because most girls that I have ceased communication with, my friends are all like, "Why did you stop talking to that one? Why did you stop talking with that one? Why did you stop talking?" They're like "She was a good girl." I'm just like "She wasn't good for me. She wasn't, not to say good enough. She wasn't good for me." Also, for a few of my closest friends, not to be boasting or anything but, I guess you'd say the standard, I feel mine is a little bit higher than some of my friends. Some of the girls that my buddies would take on dates, I just wouldn't. They don't look cute to me, so I guess my standards are a little bit higher.

Researcher: Do you think what you currently consider to be red flags will change as you get older?

Participant 11: I don't see myself becoming any more picky. Across my adult lifespan, if I didn't find someone, I'm sure at some point my standards would drop, or I would become lonely. I say that because there's a fear of loneliness, like "Oh, hey am I going to get lonely? Do I just want to be with somebody?" I say that, but I take that back. I'm sorry. I don't think I would lose my standards and be less picky, because I don't believe in settling for anything, so, "Oh, I'm lonely. I need somebody in my life, so I'm going to take somebody a little bit less than I wanted to be with." Then that leads to

unhappiness, so no I don't think that. I wouldn't become any more or less picky with my standards.

Researcher: Why do you personally feel it is important to detect red flags when first getting to know someone new romantically?

Participant 11: It could save you misery, sadness, and hurt down the road. You pick out red flags on the first date, something that you don't like that may cause issues right away, and you can stop before a connection is made, before feelings really grow strong and you start to love the person. If you detect those things early, you can separate. You can stop it early before you get that involved in that relationship, whereas if you don't try to pick out these red flags, if you don't find a few things wrong with it and try to deal with it from the get go, eventually it's going to bite you in the ass. It's going to come back and can cause a lot of issues.

Researcher: You had said one of the main reasons was it's important is so that you do not to waste time, right?

Participant 11: Correct. Time is money, and I don't have a lot of either. I don't have a lot of money. Being a college student, I have enough for myself. I hate to sound selfish, but I hate to dish out meal after meal after meal after meal if the relationship's not going anywhere. To me, that's pointless, and just like I said, time is money. I don't have much of either. My time, I come on campus really early in the morning, and I usually leave around this time in the afternoon. I'm here all day, and when I get home, I do schoolwork. I go to sleep. My TV never comes on. I don't have much time at all throughout the week, and on the weekends if I have a little bit of time, I don't mind spending it with a person if I think it's worth it, but I'm not going to dish out my personal time that I do have if I don't think it's going anywhere.

Researcher: In your personal experience, what has happened when red flags go unnoticed?

Participant 11: Going back to the severity statement from earlier, if it's a more severe thing, I think it eventually the relationship can end. I do think that if they go unnoticed, you start to form that bond, those strong feelings. If it's not some great big ordeal that the red flag is just a small red flag, I would feel more compelled to maybe work through it or overlook it, because at this point our feelings are strong. We've made it this far. We've come this far, to say, "Let's try and work this out, because we've got this much invested in this relationship already." On the other hand, like I said, if it's a big red flag, I think it could create some huge issues.

Researcher: In your personal experience, what has happened when red flags are ignored?

Participant 11: Misery, sadness, pain, hurting for both people in the long run, every time. To me, an unnoticed red flag and an ignored red flag are two totally different things. An unnoticed red flag, you just fail to notice something. It pops up. Hey, it's new at that time. Let's deal with it. An ignored red flag, you're bottling emotions. You're bottling what you feel about, "This person does this, and it just pisses me off. So I'll ignore it and ignore it and ignore it." Eventually, you're giving a false persona, false who you are to that person, because they think that they do this thing and it's fine. Eventually, you're going to get fed up with it, and it's just going to implode. Personal experience, it has never gone well for me. The last relationship that I was in ended exactly because of that.

I ignored red flags from her, because I felt she had all these great things about her. Everything I valued she had. It was just a few little things, and I was like "Oh, those aren't that big," but it doesn't matter. The smallest things add up.

Researcher: In your personal experience, why do people ignore red flags?

Participant 11: Because you see something you value so great in that other person. Personal experience: I'm a very religious person; she was very religious. Loved that about her. I like blondes, she was blonde. She was very attractive. She was very athletic. She taught cross-fit classes and was motivated person who loved to hunt and fish. Everything I valued, she shared, so we were very, very compatible. For a long time, I told myself everybody has something. You spend enough time with somebody, you can find something they do that aggravates you, so get over it, get over it, get over it, but it never went away. I don't know if it was just those things that she did or if that's something for everybody, but it never went away. Like I said, it came back, and the relationship just blew up.

Researcher: It sounds like what you said is you wanted it to work so badly you ignored the red flags.

Participant 11: Correct, that is exactly right.

Researcher: What are some of the things you have personally learned about red flags?

Participant 11: Like we were just talking about, don't ignore them because they'll come back to bite you in the ass. Also, on the opposite end of the spectrum, don't be so crazy critical about them, because you never know what can cause someone to do one thing. The very first date she does something, and just because she did it that one time, you cut her off because she did it that one time, she might never do it again. Don't ignore them. On the flip side, don't be so critical of them.

Researcher: How do you achieve that balance of now is when I need to be critical versus now is when I need to be more patient and accepting?

Participant 11: I guess it would depend on the other things that that person has to offer. If she has all these great characteristics, then I'm probably going to tend to be more lenient towards a red flag than if ... Not to say she has all these bad characteristics, but she hasn't shown anything really. And if I don't feel connected at all, nothing, no real attraction even at this point, then that's a red flag, and I'm not compelled to overlook it or even work it out. I would be more critical then.

Researcher: What are some of the red flags that you emit?

Participant 11: Over-assertive and the whole drinking thing I mentioned earlier. I think everybody is in different opinion on that. That's too specific, but drinking, especially on a first date or something. I think some people kind of look down on that. Rambler, I think that could be a red flag. I just get to talking and talking and talking, and I don't mean necessarily talking about myself, but I just talk and don't give them an "in" in the conversation. That's something. Maybe if I'm on a date with somebody and she says something that just doesn't interest me one bit, I have a lot of trouble hiding my disinterest, so that can definitely be a red flag.

Also, being too critical. I think that could come off as a red flag. Not necessarily critical to them but just super critical like if we go on a date, and I'm just like, "The waitress did this, and the waitress did that. I'm disappointed in this. Oh, this is aggravating me. The service is terrible." I can definitely do that way too often, and I think that can be a red flag to somebody, not being so critical of them specifically but just everything. That would be a red flag to me, so yeah. I do that for sure.

And focusing on my interests too much. Yeah, I guess that's a broad way to put it, focusing on my own interests rather than theirs in many aspects. Like during the first date and we're going to go eat, "I don't want to eat this. We're going to go eat this," rather than "What would you like to eat?" on the first date. I think that would be a red flag. I've done that.

Researcher: Do you think you will try and work on these red flags?

Participant 11: I try to. If I ever get criticism from people, I try to do my best to work on it, and there's some things everybody is set in their own ways on. There are some things that I think are a continuing process to work on, but I do like to put effort toward working on losing those things.

Researcher: What personal advice would you give to others about red flags?

Participant 11: Beware of these things: this, this, this, and look for that. Also, look for this in a good way. Back to what I said about being lenient versus critical, when to be lenient, when to be critical, like we talked about that. Advice on that, like "Man, if she does this, that's not that big of a deal," but "Hey, if she does this, look out for that."

Researcher: Is there anything else about red flags that you feel is important, that people should know?

Participant 11: Ignoring red flags, I know I elaborated on that, but I just want to make clear if I was giving advice to somebody about red flags, that would be the awesome thing to say: Don't ignore them, because like I said, the relationship -- in my opinion -- is going to implode every time. Like I said, it just happened to me with a girl who I saw myself going forever with. It just became terrible, so I would emphasize not ignoring red flags.

VITA

Richard Christopher White, a native of Arlington, Texas, received his bachelor's degree in English literature with a journalism minor from the University of North Texas in May 2008, graduating with Magna Cum Laude honors. His journalism experience first began back in 2004 when he started writing for the UNT student newspaper, the *North Texas Daily*, where he later served as the sports editor before graduating in the spring of 2008. That fall he began pursuing his master's degree in the School of Journalism at the University of Texas at Austin, graduating two years later in May 2010. Over the next several years he continued his career as a professional journalist. During this time, he worked as a sports editor for multiple newspapers and wrote several thousand published news articles in over a dozen cities. His work included coverage of the NFL, MLB, and NBA in addition to other professional sports leagues as well as coverage of prominent NCAA and prep programs. After spending the last nine years in the field of mass communication, he returned to graduate school in the fall of 2013, beginning his second career as an interpersonal communication scholar by pursuing his doctorate in Communication Studies at Louisiana State University. In addition to teaching university courses at LSU, his diverse scholastic research includes a published book chapter, published peer-reviewed journal articles and several papers and presentations at numerous conferences at the regional, national, and international level. He graduated from LSU with his Ph.D. in Communication Studies in the spring of 2016.