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TOGETHER, AGAIN: WHY COUPLES REUNITE POST-BREAKUP

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## **Abstract**

This exploratory study examines the relationships of seven couples, seeking to understand the significance of breaking up and reuniting. Participants responded to questions regarding meeting their partner, dating, the breakup, pre-marital counseling, obstacles overcome, marriage, and the future. Rusbult's investment model, the life course model, and the enduring dynamics model were examined in relation to couples' thoughts and actions. In the long run, breaking up with one's partner prior to marriage was not found to be detrimental to one's marital relationship if the original reasons for breaking up were addressed. Potential areas of future study are also presented.

Keywords: breakup, reunite, dating

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Dating, divorce, and marriage continue to be prominent components of life in America. *Time* writer Belinda Luscombe (2010) noted, in a joint study with the Pew Research Center, that “neither men nor women need to be married to have sex or companionship or professional success or respect or even children—yet marriage remains revered and desired.” While there has been an increase in the age of marriage—26.1 for women and 28.2 for men—marriage still persists. According to the U.S. Census, “between 80 and 90 percent of men and women age 15 in 1996 are projected to marry by the end of their lives” (Kreider and Fields 2001:16). People continue to engage in romantic relationships which sometimes take the form of marriage. Studies by Edin and Kefalas (2005) revealed that even the poor highly esteem marriage. Furthermore, prior to marriage, dating occurs but not all dating relationships lead to marriage.

The "traditional" view is that couples meet, date, grow closer, get engaged, and then marry. But for some couples, this "linear" upward trajectory is disrupted when couples break up, only to reunite at a later time and resume their relationships. We do not know how common this phenomenon is. Only a large scale survey with a probability sample could answer that question. We also know little about what causes these couples to breakup, why these couples get back together, the meanings that people attribute to these events, and how these experiences may shape the present. These latter questions are addressed in the current study.

This exploratory research aims to better understand marital relationships which have overcome a previous breakup. It will examine possible differences in types of breakups and possible differences among the people who follow these paths. Most importantly, this study intends to explore what factors encourage couples to reunite post-breakup. There will be some

examination of possible benefits of breaking up as confirming the “rightness” of one’s partner or as indicating an unhappy or unhealthy relationship. Furthermore, relationship choices and stability will be examined through a sociological lens, looking at one’s social network and contextual/environmental factors rather than merely individual attributes. My hope is to better understand the path to marriage, especially in light of various bumps in the road.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Theory

At the root, this study hopes to examine why some relationships are pursued over potential others. Relationship formation and duration can be analyzed by a number of different theories. Rusbult's investment model will be examined for its explanations of why some relationships are chosen over others. Houston (1974) noted that "Following initial contact, persons *evaluate immediate rewards and costs* from the exchange and make *forecasts*, or projections, to potential rewards from future exchange. If evaluations and forecasts are favorable, the relationship should continue to grow; if they are negative, the bond should terminate or proceed slowly" (p. 128). Furthermore, the life course model and the enduring dynamics model are examined for their views on the stability and change of relationships over time.

Social exchange theory economically weighs the costs and benefits of relationships in order to maximize one's self interest (Chibucos and Leite 2005). This theory offers insight into the decision making process; it looks at why some relationships are pursued over others. In its original form, social exchange theory is limited because it assumes that all behavior is rational and based on self-interest. Nevertheless, social exchange theory was modified and adapted by other scholars, such as Rusbult, in ways that are more useful to this study.

Rusbult's investment model sought to understand the factors influencing relationship satisfaction, commitment, and dissolution beyond mere costs and rewards. While people pursue profitable relationships where there are more rewards than costs, commitment is the result of satisfaction and investments, with regard to alternatives (Rusbult 1983; Murstein 1986). In this

model, commitment and satisfaction are different and alternatives can range from the possibility of another partner to time being single:

$$\text{Commitment} = \text{Satisfactions} + \text{Investments} - \text{Alternatives}$$

There are three central premises to Rusbult's investment model: (1) commitment will be stronger in more satisfying relationships; (2) commitment parallels investment, both intrinsic and extrinsic; and (3) there should be more commitment when alternatives are seen as poor (Rusbult, Johnson, and Morrow 1986; Rusbult 1983). Interestingly, Rusbult found that "increases over time in rewards led to corresponding increases in satisfaction, whereas variations in costs did not significantly affect satisfaction" (1983: 101). This model may be extended to explain why couples reunite after discovering the true lack of alternatives, especially in light of previous investment in their relationship.

Another central issue at stake is the continuity of relationships. Are the early years of a relationship predictive of the later years? If so, how predictive are they? The life course model and the enduring dynamics model offer differing perspectives. The life course model, which first studied human development and has been expanded toward a focus on relationships, notes that people are influenced by an ever-changing historical context and "changing lives alter developmental trajectories" (Elder 1998:1). This model highlights the dynamic changes—including those within the relationship—which are possible and occur over time (James and Amato, forthcoming; Anderson, Van Ryzin, and Doherty 2010). In regards to marriage, this model presumes that marriages, in general, begin with "high levels of marital quality" (James and Amato, forthcoming: 8)

Offering a different perspective, the enduring dynamics model emphasizes the stability of relationships over time (Anderson, Van Ryzin, and Doherty 2010). The dynamics developed prior to marriage, particularly during the courtship, set the tone for marriage. “Relationship quality is established early in the relationship and remains relatively constant over time” (James and Amato, forthcoming: 7). Based on this model, emphasis would be placed on rejoining—post-breakup and pre-marriage—in order for the marriage to be healthy. Later marriage stability and health depends on earlier relationship stability and health.

### **Relationship Stages**

As dating is a precursor to marriage and it is believed that early stages are important in marriage, the role of dating must be examined at length. The Oxford English Dictionary defines dating as “an appointment or engagement at a particular time; esp. a social activity or meeting with a person in whom one has a romantic interest; a romantic liaison.” (“Date” def. 8). Comparatively, among other definitions, Urban Dictionary—“a veritable cornucopia of streetwise lingo, posted and defined by its readers”—labeled it as “Of a couple, to be in the early stages of a relationship where they go out on dates to find out what each other is like, as a prelude to actually being a fully fledged couple” and as “the modern day battlefield of romance where hearts are won and broken, the not-quite so version of chivalry and wooing, an interview for a lover; the lay down some time and money and see if you get some candy routine; the progressed game of cat-and-mouse; the human courtship ritual; playing baseball for a home run” (“Dating” def. 1, 2). Obviously dating means different things to different people based on age, gender, commitment, interest, religiosity, historical and geographical setting, etc. Paul and White (1990, cited in Arnett 2010) found that adolescents consider recreation, learning, status, companionship, intimacy, and courtship as reasons for forming love relationships.

## **History of Dating**

In the early 1900s, courtship in the United States took the form of “calling” when a young man would visit a young woman in her home, at her request. By the 1920s a “problematic new practice for the middle classes” (Bailey 2004:23) emerged: the date, whereby the young man would take the young woman out, paying for the date (Arnett 2010: 244, Bailey 2004: 23). Among contributors to this change were the shift to urban areas and increased availability of cars (Arnett 2010: 244). In the 1930s and 40s, dating was a manner of expressing social rank where “the marriage and dating system were two different things. Dating was about competition within the peer culture of youth; marriage was the end, not the culmination, of participation in youth culture” (Bailey 2004: 24). The 1950s saw more monogamy in dating (“going steady”) and, parents argued, increased difficulty for the woman to refuse necking and whatnot, yet few of these exclusive couples saw their relationship as a precursor to marriage (Bailey 2004: 25). It was not until the 1960s that the system of exchange began to break down as well and “since the early 1970s no completely dominant system of courtship has emerged, and the existing systems are not nearly so clear in their conventions and expectations as were the old systems of dating” (Bailey 2004:25). There is no consistent connection between dating and marriage. Marriage usually follows dating, but dating does not always lead to marriage.

## **Breakup**

Studies on the nature of breakups are insightful, yet have room for advancement. Couples may break up due to boredom and lack of common interests (Sprecher 1994) as well as insecurity and loss of intimacy (Field et. al, 2011). These reasons for breakup can be categorized

as referring to self (I want to be independent), the partner (My partner became bored with the relationship), or the couple's interaction (We had communication problems) (Sprecher 1994).

There are gender differences in each stage of the relationship as well. Murstein (1986) highlighted the greater importance of attractiveness to men and emotional aspects to women. "Women tended to be more sensitive than men to problem areas in their relationship and women were more likely than men to compare their relationship to alternatives, whether potential or actual" (Hill, Rubin, and Peplau 1976:161). Furthermore, in a longitudinal study of romantic couples, Sprecher found that "women's commitment was the strongest predictor of relationship stability" (2005: 165)

Murstein (1986) skillfully explores the concept of breaking up. Physical separation, often due to a new job or school, "weakens the common bond because it is drained of shared new experiences" (p. 93). Duck (1984) outlines the five stages of the death of a relationship: the breakdown period (relationship less rewarding), intra-psychoic period (partners individually brood over relationship), dyadic phase (dissatisfactions discussed with partner), social phase (consult social network), and grave-depressing phase (discussion and agreement publicly of relationship death) (Murstein 1986). The placement of the breakdown period and intra-psychoic phase is noteworthy in that they are before the dyadic phase; the individual has spent some time "brooding and recriminating about their partner and the relationship" (p. 94) prior to discussion with their partner (Murstein 1986).

A study of college dating relationships found a relationship between the timing of the breakup and the school calendar. May-June, September, and December-January were the most common times for breakups to occur (Hill, Rubin, and Peplau 1976). On the less scientific side,

*TIME* magazine featured an article which charted a compilation of 10,000 Facebook statuses mentioning “broke up” or “broken up” over the year. People were most likely to breakup before Spring Break and summer vacation and least likely to breakup on Christmas (Luscombe 2010b). Time-sensitive life transitions outside of the relationship, such as leaving for summer vacation or leaving for college, may trigger breakups.

The couple was more likely to remain friends if the breakup was mutual or initiated by the male (Hill, Rubin, and Peplau 1976; Murstein 1986). Rejected women may be able to redefine their romantic relationship as a friendship or acquaintance; men have more difficulty doing so (Hill, Rubin, and Peplau 1976). This sheds some light on potential reasons for few reunifications. Women are more likely to initiate the breakup and men respond accordingly to the rejection, resulting in a permanent split in the relationship.

### **Relationship Deepening**

There are several factors involved in deepening the commitment in dating relationships. Reiss (1960) developed the Wheel Theory of the Development of Love by which rapport, self revelation, mutual dependency, and personality need fulfillment influence each other in a cyclical manner. In this, similar social and cultural background (education, class, and religion) allow the individuals to reveal intimate aspects of their lives (hopes, fears, sexual behaviors). This self revelation allows the development of interdependencies where one, for example, feels the need to tell the other a joke or share an experience with. Mutual dependency, after rapport and self revelation, encourages personality need fulfillment—such as the need to be loved, appreciated, shown affection, and have someone to confide in. However, this wheel can spin both ways—an argument or conflicting interests can unwind it, whereas positive rapport

increases the strength of the bond of love. This theory offers insight into the process of how partners gradually growing closer.

For dating couples, some continue onto marriage while others part ways. This is a normal process which, some argue, validates the importance of a good marriage. However, some couples part ways only to later reunite and continue onto marriage. This study seeks to understand how and why some couples choose to breakup, reunite, and marry. Why did they breakup? What caused them to get back together? Have the breakup or the reasons behind it impacted their engagement and marriage? How is timing related to breakups?

## **Chapter 2: The Current Study**

### **Expectations**

Divorce has been studied extensively, yet insufficient attention is paid to breakups. I will base some of my hypotheses upon findings in cases of divorce. Elsewhere, my expectations draw from studies of marriage or relationships in general.

Clements, Cordova, Markman, and Laurenceau (1997) argued, "the positive factors that draw people together are indicative of marital choice, but not marital success. Instead, how couples handle differences is the critical factor" (p. 352). Couples were selected for this study due to their history of breaking up with their spouse; this may point to difficulty in resolving conflict. Because good conflict resolution is vital in healthy relationships, I paid attention to the reuniting stage prior to marriage, noting how difficulties are discussed. Additionally, I will look at how other conflicts, since marriage, have been addressed.

Based on findings by Amato and Previti (2003) that women are more likely to initiate divorce, I expected women to be more likely to initiate the breakup. Some have argued that this is because women must be more selective as they "cannot afford to fall in love too quickly...or stay in love too long with the wrong person" as they have a shorter time of "marriageability" due to economic reasons (Hill, Rubin, and Peplau 1976: 163-4). I believe the stronger case to emphasize is that "women tend to monitor their relationships more closely, become aware of relationship problems sooner, and are more likely to initiate discussions of relationship problems with their partners" (Amato and Previti 2003: 603). Just as women are more likely to begin the discussion and actions resulting in divorce, I believe women act similarly in ending a dating relationship.

Additionally, I expected that due to the breakup, the couples would need a time of proving affections and/or discussing the breakup in order for the transition to marriage to occur well. This could be a time where one needed to “woo” the other and affirm that his or her affections were true, a time of re-stabilizing. I assumed that each couple broke up for a valid reason; in order for the relationship to be healthy and to later transition to marriage, there should be time of serious discussion. The reasons for breaking up would need to no longer exist or at least be greatly minimized in order for there to be a healthy transition to and stability in marriage. Because my sample consisted of married couples, I examined what this meant for each couple. This is tied to the enduring dynamics model which sees early stages of a relationship as vital in setting the trajectory for the relationship.

I believe pre-marital counseling to be valuable and was consequently interested in the role it played or did not play for each couple. I hypothesized that only half would attend some form of premarital counseling because it is more commonly associated with religious institutions and religiosity has decreased in America, especially in the college and post-college demographic. I sought to understand how valuable the experience with pre-marital counseling was. I expected those who took premarital counseling to have a healthier relationship.

I also looked at how the participants discussed their relationship overall. I was interested to see what type of language they used to describe their spouse, relationship transitions, and current marriage. Given their current marital status, I hoped the participants would be positive and complimentary.

My sample was middle-class, college educated, and currently employed. Although my sampling methods were not aiming for religiosity as an important variable, six of the seven

participants discussed religion as being important. Due to the mentioned characteristics of my sample, I expected breakups to be caused more frequently by life transitions and the associated demands than from personality differences, infidelity, or physical or mental abuse. Due to my recruitment strategies and limited sample size, I did not expect to study any couples of lower socio-economic status. Kitson's (1992) studies of divorce found differences in rationale by socioeconomic status. Those with high socioeconomic status are more likely to cite commitment to work, one's partner being self-centered, gender role conflict, being too young at marriage, change in interest or roles, incompatible, and lack of communication as causes for divorce; comparatively, those of low socioeconomic status cite physical or emotional abuse, out with boys/girls, neglect of home duties, lack of job, no sense of family, sexual problems due to health, and gambling or criminal activities as causes for divorce (Kitson 1992; Amato and Pravitit 2003:604). I expected reasons for breakup to align with Kitson's list for those of high socioeconomic status such as commitment to work, lack of communication, and young age.

## **Methods**

As my study is qualitative in nature, I interviewed seven married individuals about their experiences with dating, breaking up, and marriage. Beginning with a convenience sample, a snowball sample was collected. Participants were found through a variety of methods including word of mouth, referrals, and advertisement in the local newspaper. Participants were contacted and interviewed by phone between September and December 2011. For their privacy, all names have been changed, including the names of their spouses. I obtained approval from Penn State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct my study.

I chose a qualitative study rather than quantitative because I admire the richness of data that qualitative work produces. Because relationships can be tricky to define, I wanted to be able to hear how each participant discussed stages of the relationship in their own words, rather than choose from oversimplified options. I acknowledged that the participants were the best judges of their experiences. This study was also exploratory in that my knowledge of potential reasons for breaking up and reuniting were limited; I wanted to know what their reasons were. Due to limited time, financial backing, etc., I only interviewed seven participants. But with interviews lasting 25 to 48 minutes, the data contains great depth and insight into the path to marriage for these seven couples.

Each participant was mailed a consent form and a time was arranged to conduct the interview via phone. At the start of each interview, the consent form was read and upon verbal agreement, the interview conducted. A copy of the signed consent form was also mailed back to me. Each participant was asked 12 predetermined questions as well as additional probes when clarification was necessary; the participant was allowed to skip or discontinue any question he or she wished. Using Skype, I was able to record the conversations which were later transcribed for analysis. A copy of the consent form can be found in Appendix A. Participants responded to questions regarding meeting their partner, dating, the breakup, pre-marital counseling, obstacles overcome, marriage, and the future. James and Amato (forthcoming) provided an excellent example of measuring relationship and marital quality by looking at happiness, interaction, problems, conflict, and divorce proneness. I incorporated their methods into my examination of participants' marriage. Appendix B lists the questions asked of respondents. After the interview, each participant was asked if they knew anyone else who fit the requirements of the study and might be willing to participate.

## Findings

Of the seven participants, six were female and one was male. The average age was 30.8 years old with a range of 25 to 40 years old. At the time of the interview participants had been married for at least 2 years. This allowed me to assume that all of the relationships were out of the “honeymoon period”; by this point it was expected that each couple had experienced some of the ups and downs of marriage. At the time of the interview, the average length of marriage was 6.36 years and within a range of two to sixteen years. All of the participants completed additional schooling after high school and the majority graduated from a four-year college or university. Two completed or were in the process of completing graduate work. Three participants met their spouse while in high school, three met their spouse in college, and one met her spouse after college.

In regards to breaking up, findings looked very different from couple to couple. In the couples studied, five of the breakups were initiated by women and two by men. Interestingly enough, two of the participants broke up with their partners twice. In these instances, I will focus more on their second breakup as, for both, the second was more significant in longevity as well as emotional turmoil and reflection on relationships. The rationale for breaking up varied for each and is later elaborated upon.

The timing of the breakup also appeared to be key: two breakups occurred as one partner was leaving to start college, two breakups occurred around the time of graduation from college (for one and both partners), and one occurred at the start of summer break from college. The timing for two of the participants was not elaborated upon as being a variable involved in the

breakup. Previous literature has also noted the relationship between the school calendar and the time of breakup among college students (Hill, Rubin, and Peplau 1976).

The couples had been dating for at least six months prior to the breakup (and up to three years), which may have contributed to them getting back together. In line with Rusbult's investment model, an investment had been made prior to the breakup. By dating for at least six months before the breakup (and perhaps being close friends before that), a sense of the other person was established enough for one partner to miss the other. Emily noted "That distance apart made me think like about who he was, and his character and how much fun he was to be with and the friendship we had and the talks we had. And I thought, 'that's big, that's huge in a relationship.'" The previous investment was strong enough to allow and even encourage a second chance.

Hill, Rubin, and Peplau (1976) noted that couples were more likely to stay together "if they were relatively well-matched with respect to age, educational plans, intelligence, and physical attractiveness" (p. 153). Among couples studied, all completed similar levels of education and most were of similar ages. Virginia was five years younger than her husband, but the majority was closer in age.

## **Breakup**

For the sake of this study, I will assume some thought was put into this decision prior to breakup. Among the seven participants studied, two themes emerged as rationales for breaking up: being at different stages, and the partner or relationship lacked something. Being at different stages included not being ready for a relationship and being scared of the direction of the relationship. This view focused on personal thoughts regarding the relationship, placing the

emphasis on a disjoint between oneself and the path of the relationship. Comparatively, in instances where it was seen that the partner or relationship lacked something, the blame so to speak was placed on one's partner rather than oneself.

For the five participants who can be categorized as being in different stages, there were different levels of commitment to the relationship which were sometimes enhanced by a life transition. Chloe noted that "I think we were just at different stages. I think one of us wasn't ready for a relationship, or really committed at that point." Jason, who broke up with his partner twice, said of the first time that "I got really scared. It was really intense for a 16 almost 17 year old, talking about marriage and stuff" and of the second breakup that "It was kinda like a freakout moment." Jessica's boyfriend Matt felt it was "just time to be apart," especially because he was graduating. This also included differences in clarity between partners about the relationship's future. For Madison, who had been dating her partner for three years and recently graduated, she had no desire to marry him and needed to take a break to gain clarity.

Comparatively, two participants broke up with their partners because something was lacking in the other, which was often reflected by the relationship lacking something. Emily enjoyed and appreciated her partner, but "I wasn't overly attracted to him" and he was "going way too fast" physically. Diane was annoyed by her partner's drinking and partying. In these instances, there are undertones of looking for better alternatives, whether that meant being single or being with someone else.

For the two participants who broke up twice with their partners, both breakups were due to similar reasons: being scared of a serious relationship, and one wanting to be too physical

when the other was not ready. For both, the second breakup appeared to carry more emotional weight; this was especially noted when the couples reunited.

## **Timing**

Hill, Rubin, and Peplau (1976) noted that “the pattern of breakups suggests factors external to a relationship (leaving for vacations, arriving at school, graduation, etc.) may interact with internal factors (such as conflicting values or goals) to cause relationships to end at particular times” (p. 156). This is most clearly stated by Jessica when she talked about her boyfriend, Matt, breaking up with her. Matt was a year ahead of her in college.

He felt it was time for us to be apart. Being a senior, when I was a senior I understand how much different it was than facing it as a junior. Looking ahead, looking at a job. It’s like that. It was just hard to understand one another. It was hard to understand where he was. Our communication had really been not so great towards the end of our relationship. It was the first serious dating relationship for the both of us and we were too afraid that we would say something that would offend the other person that we kept a lot of thoughts inside. And that just lead to bad communication because when we finally had something to say, all this stuff came out. It was time for us to part ways at that point.

For Jessica and Matt, communication problems were present but graduation helped facilitate the breakup process. For Jason, it was a little different as he had just graduated high school and was about to leave for college, the same college his partner Hannah, of about one year, attended.

I had always heard, had always felt like, like I was going to find my wife at (college). I was like, ‘O my gosh, maybe I’m doing something wrong, maybe I’m

going to hinder myself from getting to know all these different girls at school.’ It was kinda like a freak-out moment and I was like, ‘we need to break up.’

For Jason and Hannah, this breakup was their second and followed several months of rebuilding and reassuring the other of their commitment. However, going off to college can be a major transition and a time of questioning. Jason had invested in the relationship, but the potential alternatives outweighed that investment. Virginia similarly broke up with her boyfriend Scott, of one year, before beginning college. Madison broke up with Drew, her boyfriend of three years, at the end of a below-par summer which “wasn’t a bad summer but it wasn’t one of our shining moments.”

In each instance, there appeared to be internal factors which were influenced by environmental factors, resulting in a breakup. External factors helped trigger a breakup when the relationship had been deteriorating to an extent.

### **Time Apart**

The time apart during the breakup was different for each participant. The breakups lasted from one month to eight years and involved varying levels of contact. For the majority of couples, the breakup occurred without any intention of getting back together. The only exception of this was Madison.

Madison, a recent college graduate who had been dating her boyfriend Drew for three years, was unique in that she took a “fast” from her boyfriend during which they only saw each other on two or three social occasions because they had the same friend group. At the start of their breakup/fast they set up a date to meet and discuss their thoughts on the relationship’s

future. On different occasions she referred to the time apart as a “fast,” a “breakup,” and “not a breakup.”

I liked him, but I had no desire to be engaged or married. It felt like it had been long enough (3 years) that I wanted to either be more sure and excited to move in a direction or break up. Not hangout in a relationship. It really bothered me that I didn't want to marry him. I wasn't quite sure. It wasn't that I disliked him. I think it came out of the blue. He was pretty taken back.

Comparatively, both Chloe and Jason occasionally talked with Aiden and Hannah, respectively, via AIM and the phone, and hung out regularly with the same group of people. Virginia and Scott (her later husband) would periodically include the other in group emails to catch up on each others' lives through the eight years they were broken up. For a year Jessica, however, did not talk with her ex at all, though he tried occasionally to communicate.

Furthermore, some went on dates with other people. During Jason's first breakup, he talked with another girl for a bit but ended up not dating because she did not feel like it was right. During Jason's second breakup, it was when Hannah started to date someone else that “it was so clear to me that I loved (Hannah) and if I didn't, I was like ‘oh my gosh, this is stupid.’ So I called her up and asked her if we could go to coffee.” For Emily, it wasn't until she went on a date with another guy that she “realized” what a great guy Shane was; the comparison to another guy started her thinking about his many positive qualities, while wondering about how attracted she was to Shane. For some, going on a date with another person caused them to turn back towards their previous partner. This is an excellent example of Rusbult's investment

model; alternatives were found to be lacking, resulting in a return to the relationship and increased commitment to it.

Two participants were very serious with a new partner during the time apart. Diane seriously dated another who even proposed to her. During that time, she thought only a little of her current husband Jack; “I was so immature that it made me feel like, that ‘look at me now.’” After the rejected proposal, Diana broke up with him and he left for the service. Diana did not elaborate on why she turned him down; however, this breakup did not appear to stem from thoughts of possibly reuniting with or thinking of Jack. Similarly, during Virginia’s eight years apart from her now partner, Scott, both of them pursued a few different relationships. Of Virginia’s experience:

I had two or three serious relationships during that time frame and lived with a man during that time frame. Not the best decision I’d ever made. (pause) I was graduated and lived in New York and then had a fall out with a bad relationship there and then I learned a lot. I was very naive and the other man, (pause) I kind of needed to be treated badly to appreciate how well I had it with (Scott). I actually said, I told my mom, ‘you know if (Scott) and I ever had to do it again it would end up very differently.’

For these two participants, there was some comparison while apart, but not in a way which propelled them to return to their previous relationship. Both Diana and Virginia moved on during the breakup. It appears that getting back together could be almost seen as a new, unique dating experience. When Diana and Virginia reunited with Jack and Scott, respectively, it was seen as a new relationship, not an advanced stage of

their previous dating relationship. But, there was something about their previous investment which encouraged them to return, rather than move on to another partner.

## **Reuniting**

The couples studied are unique from others in that after the breakup they decided to reunite and continue their relationship again. Instead of cultivating a new relationship or continuing to be single, these individuals returned to their previous partner. For some, this included a period of proving and/or discussing the reasons for the initial breakup. This section has the most elaboration and details because I believe this is a key stage in determining the future stability of the relationship. Reuniting is what sets these breakups apart from many others.

For some, seeing each other regularly and recognizing similarities from a fresh perspective were important. For Chloe, “we just realized that we just made sense. Our personality types. It just worked out... I think we, at some point, we kind of started to talk again and then it just kind of evolved into what it was before. It just, um, yeah, happened.” Chloe and Aiden also joined the same Bible study group causing them to be “hanging out on a consistent basis.” But the breakup made them more “aware” and caused them really evaluate if marriage would be next, and if marriage was not next, “we should just breakup.” Chloe noted that they talked about it enough and after that “it (marriage) was just a matter of timing.” Reflecting on Rusbult’s investment model, because they evaluated their satisfaction and other alternatives, in light of previous investment, they were able to return to the relationship with a stronger level of commitment.

Jason got back together with Hannah because, due to the breakup and her going on a date with another guy, he realized he really loved her. Jason called Hannah and they went out to coffee where he told her his true feelings. Despite the pain of the breakup and jealousy, they knew “we really are compatible, we really are good for each other.” Their previous investment allowed him to see this compatibility. While Hannah agreed to being together, she set conditions:

‘We’re not going to call ourselves a couple until you prove to me that this is what you want and this is what you want to do.’ So I spent the next couple months proving to her and her friends—because they were even worse....they challenged me a lot, asking me a lot of questions. The grilling gauntlet.

But they were able to work through lots of “pain,” “communication issues,” and “all that stuff” because they “realized” that they were “really good for each other.” While Jason had examined alternatives—namely being without Hannah—she had not similarly evaluated her satisfaction or investment with him in light of alternatives. Consequently, it took Hannah longer to recommit.

For Emily, a number of factors contributed to reuniting with Shane. “I think God changed me. God brought to light who (Shane) really was at heart.” Additionally, there was the comparison of another guy she dated, the distance, and that she “just always kept thinking about (Shane).” After being apart for three months, Emily really missed him, so she called him up and asked him to dinner. “That night, it was there...I realized this guy is a gem.” Yet, despite Emily’s glowing appreciation of Shane and dating again, “he was hesitant (to say “I love you”) because I broke up with him twice...he loved me but he didn’t want to say it because he was nervous about it, a little insecure about me saying ‘uh, I’m done’ again. He was a little bit gun

shy.” Emily originally cited his moving too fast (physically) as a major reason for breaking up but did not mention if things had changed in that regard. Perhaps her increased attraction toward him was enough to balance it. Renewed commitment was the result of poor alternatives, in light of previous investments and refreshed satisfaction.

Madison and Drew met on the day they had predetermined at the start of their fast/breakup.

‘I think we should stay together’ and he was like ‘I think we should break up.’ I was like ‘okay, you go first.’ That was he did have a few reasons. He was like, ‘I think we should break up unless these (issues) aren’t a big deal.’ So we talked about it, ‘I think I can do that.’ Things like that. So I talked him out of that pretty quickly.

They decided to stay together and had “a bunch of really good conversations about things that had come up in that month.” The following month involved “regaining trust and rebuilding,” with more emphasis on “fully coming back together” than on “reassurance.” They discussed how good they were for each other. In line with Rusbult’s investment model, thoughtful consideration was given to alternatives (namely, not being together) and found to be not significant enough. Madison noted several times while describing this time of transition that their relationship and conversations were “more serious.”

For Jessica, the breakup was a time of very minimal communication with Matt. He had tried to communicate, but she refused because being friends “wasn’t fair.” However, after a year apart, she saw him and decided she had dealt with it and it was “time to be friends” if he still wanted to. They approached each other and talked some, and because “it didn’t go quite as well

as I had hoped” they emailed and he visited solely to talk with her about “everything we’d been dealing with” since they hadn’t talked in so long. “We just decided to become friends again.” A little later he “expressed his feelings and asked if I would consider the possibility of dating again. I told him ‘no, absolutely not.’” Jessica then left for a month long youth camp where she “took that time to really process it” and felt her heart was being “guided” in a different direction. She knew her friends would be upset, but her mom encouraged her to forgive. They decided to start dating again. Of the choice, “I can’t say it was a very logical decision” but “it felt like what both our hearts were telling us to do.” This time around, they focused much more on communication, especially being open; Jessica attributes many new positives in their relationship as “stemming off of us communicating better.” The alternatives—namely not being together—were not as good, allowing a greater investment to be made to the relationship.

Diane reunited with Jack because “He swore he would change and be responsible and buckle down and he actually did.” They had broken up due to “growing pains” and his partying lifestyle and immaturity; but he changed. For about six months, he “started wooing me again” by calling, stopping by, and bringing her flowers. “He was sincere and kind and gentle and really, really, really cute.” New satisfactions began to outweigh alternatives. When asked about any lingering issues or questions about being together again, Diane said, “it was actually a pretty smooth transition back.” They were apart for about a year.

Virginia and Scott had the longest breakup of those interviewed—eight years. After returning from being stationed in Japan, Scott emailed a group of friends and Virginia responded in a “friendly, but very generic” manner. They happened to both be in Georgia so they met for lunch (at the prompting of Scott’s then girlfriend) and “all of a sudden we had a lot more in common...all of a sudden we had a great time. We laughed. We enjoyed each other’s company.”

Scott broke up with his then girlfriend and continued talking with Virginia. They met up for a football game—Virginia knew this would be a determining point—and from that point on were exclusive. It “progressed very naturally...very casual.” The football game was in November, they moved in together over in January, and were engaged in February.

We both truly believe God gave us a second chance—here you go, don’t screw this one up...It progressed very rapidly after that. We got back together and we just knew. It was perfect. We tried other relationships. Nobody worked. And now, you’re perfect.

Other alternatives were found to be poor, and newfound satisfaction (with hints of previous investment) made this commitment worthwhile. Their situation was also influenced by their jobs. Scott was in the military and set to be deployed within the year, and Virginia worked as a travel nurse and was set to leave for Hawaii shortly after they reunited. “If this doesn’t work I can always go later, but if I don’t give this the chance that it needs, I’ll never know.” Virginia and Scott were eager and willing to jump into deeper investment, especially due to the consideration of poor alternatives.

There was minimal or moderate discussion of how the breakup affected one’s partner. Madison mentioned how Drew referred to their time apart as “The Dark Month.” Jessica only noted that Matt wanted to be friends during the breakup but she was unwilling. Emily discussed how Brad was “mad at me, sort of” for the first breakup and was slower to say “I love you” but did not mention how the two breakups affected him specifically or in depth. As for Jack and Diane, Jack is noted as “not liking the fact that I was dating somebody else.” Little mention is paid to what prompted Jack to woo Diane back or what the time apart was like for him. Virginia

noted how “there were hurt feelings. I guess there was more hate and discontent because he’s glaring at me now (from the next room). We stayed friends and it worked out.” In the interviews, the focus was mainly on one’s own experience. While participants often used “we” when describing being together, time apart, and the process of reuniting, these transitions were primarily reported from one’s personal perspective.

## **Marriage**

All of the couples studied chose to marry their partners and were still married at the time of interview. Additionally, all of the couples participated in some form of premarital counseling though they cited differing levels of its usefulness. At the time of the interview participants had been married for at least 2 years. The average length of marriage at 6.36 years was within a range of two to sixteen years. Happiness, interaction, problems, conflict, and divorce proneness were examined, following James and Amato’s (forthcoming) methods of studying the quality of marriage.

## ***Happiness***

All participants reported being pretty satisfied or very satisfied in their marriage. Jason said “I’m very satisfied. I mean, if there’s a scale one to ten I’d say probably eight and a half because there’s always room for growth.” Jessica noted “I’m thrilled to be married...I’m very happy with how things are now.” Five of the seven participants explicitly noted that they were “very satisfied” while the remaining two were “pretty or very satisfied.” This sample appeared very content in their marriages.

## ***Communication/Interaction***

Participants were asked to describe the time spent with their spouse and their communication. (Describe the time you spend together. How much time do you spend together? How often do you see each other? What sorts of things do you do together? Can you tell me about how you two communicate?) Levels and types of communication varied by couple. While there were differences in amount and type of communication, all reported being pleased with their current levels of communication.

Due to the nature of open-ended questions, responses varied some. However, several themes emerged. All seven participants noted areas of difficulty in communicating. For four of them, schedules and/or their own or their spouse's job were mentioned as an area of difficulty. For example, Jason said,

Even though I see her every morning and mostly every day there are times where I have to go away for the weekend and I don't get to talk to her on the phone. There's months where I just have event after event after event and we don't see each other much. She asks me to give a little time off, take a day off or something because I have the days available and I don't and that causes conflict.

Diane mentioned how little time is spent together because, "I work three jobs. He works about 80 hours a week. The time we have at night is really all we have if we work the same shift. And the other time is taken up by kids."

It appeared that all made some effort to be together, especially seen by how, in general, all participants saw their spouses daily. Modern technology was useful for some: five mentioned texting their spouse, four mentioned calling during the day, and two emailed their spouses. Additionally, three mentioned stopping by their spouse's work to say hello. Four mentioned

eating meals together. All mentioned sharing an activity/spending time together in a non-date setting such as volunteering, church, hiking, or cooking. Four discussed their strategies for communicating details like bills, grocery lists, evening plans, and kids. Four mentioned trying to have a date night; however, the frequency of dates varied greatly from once a week to once or twice a year. Of the four participants who had children, all mentioned the impact of their children on the couples' communication. Emily described it as:

When he gets home from work and we sit down and have dinner the girls are always talking and I want to tell him stuff too, but I kind of have to hold it until the girls go to bed and we sit on the couch after the girls go to bed and that's when he tells me stuff and I tell him stuff. But sometimes we don't get a chance to do that for whatever reason and that's what our dates are for—"Oh I forgot to tell you this. This happened last week."

While imperfections in communication were noted, all had many positives to say about how they communicate with their spouses. Furthermore, participants offered strategies they used to help better their communication (driving to work together, calling during the day, going on dates, etc.). Communication can be tricky in today's society, but these couples tried different strategies in order to maintain positive communication.

### ***Conflict***

We were talking about vacation, we had these vouchers and we were going to go on a trip and I think, I don't know how it even came up, but apparently I was like "I don't even want to go on vacation with just the two of us. We need other people. We would not do well." Thankfully that was a temporary thing. Definitely

a test in our marriage... I know, what an awful comment. Yeah I think he agreed, we were just having a rough few weeks and the idea of going on vacation, we just couldn't make decisions without disagreeing or something... I didn't remember, he brought it up this past summer when we were like, "ah we could do this." We talked about it again and recalling how much things had changed. (Madison)

Couples were asked "What types of conflict do you have?" and "Can you describe to me any events or circumstances since you were married that have tested or strengthened your relationship?" Conflict and unfortunate circumstances are different, but because I am looking at their *response* to the conflicts and unfortunate circumstances, they are grouped together. This area was of particular importance because the couple had broken up before. Seeing how a couple handled various conflicts was important in determining the strength and stability of the relationship. I wanted to see how well the couples maneuvered during times of conflict, specifically to see if any remnants of their past breakup re-emerged. Will potentially better alternatives continue to intrigue them? All seven participants, regardless of the length of their marriage, had gone through various types of conflict or unfortunate circumstances.

I always wanted to have kids and be a mommy. When we started to have kids it wasn't happening. And I wasn't getting pregnant. And also my mom was very, very sick. My mom was dying of diabetes. She was at the end of her life and I wasn't having a baby and was upset about that. But together, we were a team. (Shane) and I prayed together and our marriage became stronger because of it. And we became closer to the Lord in that time that we really needed to lean on God and he got us through that. Seeing my mom deteriorate, (Shane) was so supportive through that because he knew I needed to be with my mom at that time

too. My Mom died and (Shane) was just, he was my rock. He's so good. He's so good... That really made us stronger, made our marriage stronger. (Emily)

The types of conflicts and difficult circumstances mentioned varied greatly due to the nature of open-ended questions and personal differences among participants.

Schedules, money, kids, jobs, and moving were each mentioned twice. Family and sickness were each mentioned four times. Other issues included dealing with infertility, being co-workers with one's spouse, moving on past a comment/misunderstanding, being apart from one's spouse due to external circumstances, having a family member move in, and arranging holidays with extended families. All participants mentioned at least three areas which challenged them as a couple. Interestingly, participants often noted how their marriage/relationship was "stronger" because of it and cited positive ways their spouses helped with the situation. One noted, "He was there the whole time (during stroke and recovery)... I mean he loves me after all this time looking, being lopsided and giant and (laughs)." Chloe said,

I was a little stressed over a few things and just, him being able to calm me down, get me to see different perspectives definitely helped with the situation, and again because it's both of us, not just one that are having to deal with it. Come together more. Talk through it more, see different sides, work together. I really think that's the case because that was last year, right, last year, and I can definitely see how we're a little bit stronger because of that.

While conflict and difficult circumstances are different types of issues, what is important is that the couples remained together and continue to work together through

issues. My goal was to inquire if the couple had remained together when a trying circumstance came their way or if their relationship was still fragile. As their relationship history includes an instance of “flight” in the midst of a rough patch, it was important to see how other, often more difficult, issues were handled. In general, the couples did well.

### ***Divorce Proneness/Looking Forward/Expectations***

I think within five years we will have a child, at least one. Hopefully own a house, but probably, hopefully be in the same city, same church, same friends, same community. Yeah. I know it’s kind of cheesy and, what’s the word, typical, but every year has gotten so much better. It was never bad. So I’d say the future will be better. I’m excited. I think that it will definitely be different...I’m sure we’ll have to evolve, grow, and change there but I think it’s great. I feel like we’re really, we just learn so much about talking when we have conflict that I’m not really worried about it. Yeah. (Madison)

Respondents were asked “What do you expect your relationship to be like over the next five years? Do you foresee any changes?” The majority of participants (six) saw their relationships as improving over the next five years. Six of the seven participants mentioned areas which would be challenging or new in a positive light. For Virginia, “I don’t see anything, we have the normal struggles over the next five years with job changes and relocations and all that kind of stuff. But our marriage staying just as strong as it is now.” Jason answered, “We’re having our second child. That’s a big change in the works. I expect it to continue to grow and change and continue to move and for us to grow closer to each other and closer to the Lord... I

see a lot more of knowing how to support one another coming into play. Being a stronger couple in that way.”

Jessica was the only one to not specifically mention her relationship expectations; instead she mentioned their upcoming life transitions.

I’ll be done with school by then. Hopefully we’ll be ready to have a child by then. We’re not ready yet, it’s a little too stressful with me going to school. We’re still living in New Jersey because (Matt’s) job’s out here and I’m going to school here, but it’s not where either of us want to settle down out here. We would expect to be moving somewhere. And ideally we would be moving to Texas. I’ve always wanted to be closer to my family and he’s been very encouraging with that.

In general, couples were optimistic of their relationship over the next five years and also aware of upcoming life hurdles.

## Chapter 4: Discussion and Further Study

Breakups often look very different in different instances and there is still room for increased knowledge. However, based on the qualitative interviews of seven participants, more is known on the matter. Among this sample, breakups were more often initiated by women and were more likely the result of different stages highlighted by life transitions than deficiencies in one's partner. However, one could argue that all breakups are similar in that a difference between partners is identified as being "enough of a problem." The participants dated their partner at least six months prior to the breakup which may, in some way, help differentiate this relationship from others.

For six of the seven couples, the breakup was seen and treated as final. Diane viewed it as "No turning back, I'm doing fine. There's always another one waiting." After a year, Jessica's ex-boyfriend "contacted me and kind of expressed his feelings and asked if I would consider the possibility of dating again. I told him 'no, absolutely not.'" Reuniting with a previous partner is unique in that it is viewed as a new relationship, but also builds on some of the previously established relationship foundation. Rusbult's investment model—commitment is the result of satisfaction and investment in light of alternative—was a very useful tool in analyzing relationship transitions.

Areas of marital conflict point toward both the life course model and the enduring dynamics model. The life course model emphasized change in a relationship over time while the enduring dynamics model notes relationship stability and consistency over time. For example, Madison originally broke up with Drew because she was not sure where the relationship was going and did not feel strongly about marrying him after three

years of dating. Once married, they experienced conflict over her comment about not wanting to go on vacation with just him, hinting at the life course model's consistency of relationships, but also noted how "each year has gotten so much better" exemplifying the enduring dynamics model. It may appear that both stability and change can co-exist.

Similarly, Virginia broke up with Scott because of a lack of closeness, feeling more like pen-pals than boyfriend-girlfriend, and because she was headed to college soon. However, after eight years apart, they met up and had a great time laughing and enjoying each other's company. Because Scott works for the military, their marriage faced issues due to relocating and his time overseas, but Virginia noted how "I'm very, very blessed, that's for sure. He's everything I ever wanted, I just didn't know it was him." Virginia spoke of relying and depending on each other, and boasted about their communication skills. Their first dating relationship (lasting about a year) was not similar to their second time dating or to their marriage. Once reunited, their steadfast commitment became characteristic of their relationship. Virginia and Scott provide a good example of the enduring dynamics model in that their relationship, after reuniting, appears to be consistent and stable in communication and closeness.

Among the couples studied, marriages following a prior breakup appeared stable. All were satisfied in their marriage and the majority was very satisfied. Communication appeared to be positive and strategies for overcoming difficulties in communication were offered. Each participant mentioned areas of conflict which they had handled with their spouse; troubles were often faced together as a team. All couples expected to continue to be together and many mentioned expectations of greater relationship strength.

Six of the seven participants spoke at length of the importance of faith in their lives. Traditionally, this decreases the likelihood of later divorce. Future study could examine differences in reuniting among religious and non-religious couples.

While this study offered insight into different stages of relationships, there are many areas of improvement. “Memory is a dynamic, continuing process and recall can be rerecorded” (Cairns and Cairns 1994:151). Given that the participants are currently married, they could have slightly reconstructed the past in order to better align with their current marital status. Ideally, a longitudinal study would be conducted beginning with 10<sup>th</sup> grade students and continuing analysis until age 50, for example, looking at how different partners affect one’s dating experience and the prevalence of getting back together with a previous partner. I would ideally include urban, suburban, and rural high schools of different socioeconomic statuses, allowing me to also follow those who do not pursue a college degree. This would allow for advancement in the understanding of breakups, relationships which take breaks, and, hopefully, more accuracy in reporting. One of the shortcomings of this study is that “memories of personal life experiences tend to be selective, projective, and inventive” (Cairns and Cairns 1994:10). By conducting more frequent interviews, data would be more accurate. Furthermore, it would be interesting to follow couples with prior breakup further in their marriage; perhaps divorce is still more likely than with couples who never broke up.

It would be intriguing to study the inability to sever all ties with one’s past partner. Does communication slowly wane, end dramatically and permanently, or end dramatically but later come back? Does the likelihood of breaking up and reuniting differ by social class? By race? By birth cohort? How does geographic mobility influence reuniting with one’s past partner?

How does the opinion of one's family and friends influence whether or not someone reunites with a previous partner?

This exploration is just that—exploratory. It sheds some light on this understudied domain but cannot be generalized to a broader population. It shows that sometimes getting back together with a previous partner is not a bad thing; retrospectively, it can even be a good thing. Jessica noted “I wouldn't have done it any other way even though it was very difficult” and other participants echoed her sentiments. Some even see a breakup as beneficial to the overall relationship. Further study could greatly advance these findings and expand our understanding of the complexities of relationships.

## Appendix A: Informed Consent Form for Social Science Research

The Pennsylvania State University

**Title of Project:** Together, Again: Why Couples Reunite Post-Breakup

**Principal Investigator:** Carrie Wakeley, Undergraduate Student

**Advisor:** Dr. Paul Amato  
306 Oswald Tower  
University Park, PA 16802  
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1. **Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this research study is to better understand marital relationships which have overcome a previous breakup. I am conducting this research for my undergraduate honor's thesis in sociology.
2. **Procedures to be followed:** You will be asked to answer 12 questions in an interview. I also may ask several follow-up questions, depending on your answers.
3. **Duration:** It will take about 30-45 minutes to complete the survey.
4. **Statement of Confidentiality:** Your participation in this research is confidential. The data will be stored and secured at (my apartment) in a password protected computer file. No names or other identifying information will be shown in my thesis.
5. **Right to Ask Questions:** Please contact Carrie Wakeley at cew5109@psu.edu with any questions or concerns about this study.
6. **Voluntary Participation:** Your decision to be in this research is voluntary. Even if you agree to participate, you can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study. If you agree to take part in this research study and the information outlined above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

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Participant Signature

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Date

---

Person Obtaining Consent

---

Date

## Appendix B

### Interview Questions:

1. How did you meet?
2. Tell me about your relationship while dating.
3. Why did you break up? What were the circumstances surrounding it?
4. Tell me about your time apart.
5. Why did you get back together?
  - a. What were the circumstances surrounding it?
  - b. Who initiated it?
6. While you were dating, were there any obstacles you overcame together?
7. Now that you are married, do you ever talk about the break up? In what ways?
  - a. How long have you been married?
8. Did you participate in any type of premarital counseling/education? How has this influenced your relationship?
9. Tell me about your marriage.
  - a. Describe the time you spend together.
    - i. How much time do you spend together?
    - ii. How often do you see each other?
    - iii. What sorts of things do you do together?
  - b. Can you tell me about how you two communicate?
  - c. What types of conflict do you have?
  - d. How satisfied are you in this relationship?
10. Can you describe to me any events or circumstances since you were married that have tested or strengthened your relationship?
11. What do you expect your relationship to be like over the next five years? Do you foresee any changes?
12. How important is religion to you and your partner? Does your religion or faith affect your relationship?

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Undergraduate Assistant (part-time, paid), State College, PA

- Entered and categorized books for review into electronic database
- Assisted with editing reviews for grammar and punctuation; proofread final draft prior to print
- Assisted with managing electronic correspondence with book reviewers and Board of Editors
- Created catalogue for graduate students

##### **Pennsylvania State University, Family Life Project**

Jan. – Aug. 2011

Independent Study/Undergraduate Assistant, University Park, PA

- Conducted phone interviews with participants and assisted with filing and mailings
- Learned about various elements of a large, longitudinal study including coding, home and school visits, applying for funding, and determining study measures

##### **Centre County Youth Service Bureau**

May-August 2011

Part-Time Volunteer Intern with Burrows Street Youth Haven and Streetworks, State College, PA

- Lead and assisted with life-skills, therapeutic, and recreational activities at voluntary teenager shelter
- Assisted with recreational activities and outings at youth center and in designated neighborhoods

##### **Allegheny Center Alliance Church**

May-August 2010

Part-Time Volunteer Intern with Community Resources and Counseling Ministry, Pittsburgh, PA

- Worked with Director of Community Resources to interview clients regarding needs for utility assistance, shelter, and/or food; completed corresponding paperwork
- Assisted with office management duties including filing, data verification and faxing

##### **AmeriCorps- Knowledge to Empower Youth to Success (KEYS) Service Corps**

May-Aug. 2009

Americorps Member, Pittsburgh, PA

Citizens Against Domestic Apartheid (CADA)—Summer Day Camp

- Served 16 energetic, at-risk community students grades K-5
- Planned and taught educational, recreational, and social activities for eight-week day camp
- Engaged students in a positive learning environment despite limited space, staff, and budget
- Encouraged self-esteem, positive communication, and good conflict-resolution skills
- Served as teacher, mentor, and role model; performed direct supervision and discipline

### **Leadership Activities:**

**Teaching Assistant**, Sociology of Family, Penn State University Aug.-Dec. 2011

- Maintained attendance records and email correspondence with two classes (193 students)
- Conducted weekly office hours, assisting students with questions regarding class content

**College of the Liberal Arts Mentor Program** Oct. 2010-Present

- Mentored monthly by Vicki Ferrence Ray, Senior Director of Hugh O'Brian Youth Leadership (HOBY)
- Identified goals and steps necessary to achieving them; gained valuable input and career guidance

**Alliance Christian Fellowship (ACF)**, State College, PA May 2009-Present

Head Deaconess for student-run organization on campus with a group size of 300

- Assisted with registration, planning, and execution of bi-weekly gatherings, special events, retreats, and socials
- Assisted in organizing and participated in volunteer activities including a week-long missions trip to Philadelphia
- Communicated weekly with leadership team of 20 via email
- Planned and led weekly Bible Study; mentored underclassmen

### **Volunteer Work:**

**Children's Institute** (Pittsburgh, PA) June-August 2010

**Big Brothers Big Sisters** (State College, PA) Oct. 2009-Present

Ambassador of the Month—January 2012

### **Publications and Written Works:**

“Together, Again: Why Couples Reunite Post-Breakup” (unpublished) Senior Honors Thesis, Advisor Dr. Paul Amato

“The Energy Glut: Climate Change and the Politics of Fatness.” *Contemporary Sociology: A Journal of Reviews* 40 (2011): 509

“Adolescent Online Victimization: A Test of Routine Activities Theory.” *Contemporary Sociology: A Journal of Reviews* 39 (2010): 502-503

“Volunteering and Society in the 21st Century.” *Contemporary Sociology: A Journal of Reviews* 39 (2010): 504

“Shared Obliviousness in Family Systems.” *Contemporary Sociology: A Journal of Reviews* 39 (2010): 504