

FROM LIVING APART, TO LIVING-APART-TOGETHER: OLDER ADULTS

DEVELOPING A PREFERENCE FOR LAT

A Dissertation

presented to

the Faculty of the Graduate School

at the University of Missouri-Columbia

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

JACQUELYN J BENSON

Dr. Marilyn Coleman, Dissertation Chair

DECEMBER 2013

The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the
dissertation entitled

FROM LIVING APART, TO LIVING-APART-TOGETHER: OLDER ADULTS
DEVELOPING A PREFERENCE FOR LAT

presented by Jacquelyn J. Benson,

a candidate for the degree of

doctor of philosophy,

and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

Curators' Professor Emerita Marilyn J. Coleman

Professor Lawrence H. Ganong

Professor Teresa M. Cooney

Associate Professor Christine M. Proulx

Professor Debra R. Oliver

DEDICATION

For William and Gweneviere — this work is as much a reflection of your own accomplishments as it is mine.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge that this research would not have been possible without funding from the MU Interdisciplinary Center on Aging, for which I am very grateful.

There are several individuals I would like to thank for their unique contributions to this project and efforts in shaping me into a family gerontology scholar. First, I would like to express my deep gratitude to my adviser, Dr. Marilyn Coleman, for always knowing from one moment to the next the exact amount of wisdom, encouragement, and thoughtful critique I needed from her to overcome any challenge I faced during graduate school. Dr. Coleman introduced me to the field of family studies and trained me in the art of qualitative science and academic writing. I will be forever grateful that she helped me acknowledge my strengths and identify research as my career passion. Simply, I would not be where I am today if she had not championed me — and challenged me — so fiercely.

My gratefulness is also extended to the remaining members of my doctoral committee. To Dr. Lawrence Ganong for his sage advice over the years, providing me with a model of superior work ethic and productivity which I hope to emulate in my own career, and for being such an integral part of what has inspired my sense of fortitude and determination. To Dr. Teresa Cooney for being my self-designated gerontology mentor, making sure I was methodologically rounded, helping shape my pedagogy, and exposing me to the life course framework for which this research is guided. To Dr. Christine Proulx for her genuine and collegial mentorship and advice over the years about decorum in higher education, the academic job market, and for introducing me to several key

references on research methods and academic writing that I am grateful to have in my personal library. And last but not least, to Dr. Debra Oliver for teaching me how to write fundable grants (and more importantly instilling in me the belief that I can do it!), for showing me the value of having a collaborative research team, for introducing me to the field of family caregiving research and inspiring in me my love of translational research, and for being a living demonstration of what it looks like to work really hard while also living life to the fullest. She does it better than anyone I know!

I also wish to thank my friends and family for their unwavering support and generous cheerleading. Specifically, I am forever appreciative of my partner, William, for never once questioning whether or not I was capable of this accomplishment, and for always offering words of support in moments I questioned it myself. And to our daughter, Gweneviere — in those moments when I did not know if I could (or would), you served as my reminder that I should.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge those who participated in this study by allowing me to interview them and collect their stories about their romantic lives and histories, and about living-apart-together. To be trusted to share their realities in this dissertation is truly an honor.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ii

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS vi

ABSTRACT vii

CHAPTER

1. BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE 1

2. LITERATURE REVIEW 5

 Labeling and Defining LAT Partners/Relationships

 Reasons to LAT

 LAT Formation and Maintenance

 Theoretical Framework

3. METHODS 20

 Methodological Approach

 Participants

 Data Collection

 Data Analysis

 Data Validation

4. RESULTS 29

 Defining and Labeling — A Process of Trial and Error

 Deciding to LAT — When an Arrangement Evolves into a Relationship

 Core Concept: Reconciling Relationship Beliefs

 Preference for LAT

Modeling the Process of Developing a Preference for LAT	
Relationship Maintenance Strategies	
5. DISCUSSION	65
Salience of the Marriage Institution	
The Nondeliberative and Nondefinitive Decision to LAT	
Family Form versus Family Function	
Theoretical Application	
Study Limitations and Future Directions	
Conclusions	
BIBLIOGRAPHY	76
VITA	85

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Table	Page
1. Sample Description	83
Figure	
1. LAT Preference	84

ABSTRACT

This study explores living-apart-together (LAT) relationships among Midwestern men and women between the ages of 60 and 88. Twenty-five men and women completed genograms and unstructured interviews addressing decision-making processes leading to living apart together, and strategies for maintaining LAT relationships. Grounded theory analyses suggest that deciding to LAT in older adulthood is a gendered process involving seven contributing factors, including: personal and relational goals, age, health, partner factors, relationship history, historical time, and relationship beliefs. Reconciling relationship beliefs represent the core concept because the data demonstrate that reconciling these beliefs — particularly those surrounding commitment and expectations — is key to understanding the process of how older adults decide to LAT. Participants had varied responses regarding their preference to LAT, ranging from opposing the arrangement, being ambivalent, to championing LAT as a lifestyle choice. Two broad relational maintenance strategies were identified: *maintaining separateness* and *redefining commitment*.

CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

As a result of increased life expectancy, rising divorce rates, and declining marriage and remarriage rates, cohorts of older Americans has experienced remarkable changes in norms surrounding patterns of partnering and family formation (Manning & Brown, 2011). The family lives of older Americans demonstrate greater heterogeneity and complexity than those of earlier cohorts (Manning & Brown). New ways of “doing family” have become more prevalent, particularly in terms of how romantic partnerships are enacted and maintained. For the majority of older adults in American society, the only social institution recognized for the enactment of long term romantic relationships was marriage. The most recent decade, however, has seen rapid growth in the prevalence of non-marital cohabitation among older Americans, thanks to the oldest of the Baby Boom cohort turning 60 in 2006 (Brown, Lee, & Bulanda, 2006). Among adults over age 50, cohabitation rates have more than doubled from 1.2 million in 2000 to 2.75 million in 2010 (Brown, Bulanda, & Lee, 2012). Baby Boomers experienced high rates of divorce during middle age, yet remarriage rates declined (Cooney & Dunne, 2001), portending that more and more older Americans will be single as this cohort continues to age. As evidenced by the recent and continuing increase in non-marital cohabitation among this age group, however, interest in forging new romantic partnerships remains. This interest not only applies to older adult divorcees but also widows(ers) (Carr, 2004).

Although non-marital cohabitation has become more commonplace for older adults wishing to re-partner in the United States, older adults in European nations have shown interest in engaging in another form of non-marital partnering – Living-Apart-

Together, or LAT, relationships. LAT relationships are committed intimate partnerships between unmarried individuals who live in separate homes but identify themselves as a couple (De Jong Gierveld, 2002; De Jong Gierveld & Peeters, 2003; Levin, 2004). In some European countries estimates are that up to one-third of older adult (age 50 and older) repartnerships are LAT relationships (De Jong Gierveld, 2004). Indeed, some European scholars argue that older adults are more likely to live apart together than their younger counterparts (De Jong Gierveld, 2004), primarily as a strategy to engage in emotional support while maintaining a level of autonomy and independence not typically afforded in marriage or cohabiting relationships (Karlsson & Borell, 2002).

Some older adults' preference to LAT may be influenced by government policies surrounding retirement benefits. In some countries, engaging in non-marital cohabitation can threaten an older adult's state pension benefits. For example, in the Netherlands, single older adults over age 65 who are living alone are provided with a substantial government pension in order to ensure that they can maintain living independently (J. De Jong Gierveld, personal communication, August 30, 2011). The amount decreases if the older adult lives with *anyone* else - married, cohabiting, or otherwise. Thus, De Jong Gierveld (personal communication, August 30, 2011) claimed it is in the best financial interest of the older adult to be registered as a person living alone and to establish living arrangements that publicly reflect such a status. A similar scenario is true in Australia and New Zealand where cohabiting couples are not differentiated from married couples, and therefore cohabiting older adults receive a smaller state pension than (registered) single older adults (C. Cartwright, personal communication, September 6, 2011). Other countries (e.g., United Kingdom, France) are currently undergoing policy reform to

establish similar restrictions for receipt of state pension benefits based on cohabitation or age of remarriage (J. Haskey, personal communication, August 30, 2011).

In the United States, retired older adults receive government supported retirement benefits (i.e., Social Security) based only on years of employment, not household income. Surviving spousal benefits are only affected if a remarriage occurs before age 60. Thus, for older Americans, cohabitation is an option — at least in terms of ensuring that an individual's retirement income does not decrease. So, why would some older American couples still choose to LAT? It may be that maintaining one's independence and privacy is the primary motive, however, cultural differences surrounding social mores may also explain the choice to LAT vs. marry/cohabit. In the United States, views about partnership formation are generally more conventional than in Europe (Barlow & Probert, 2004; Kiernan, 2004), so it is plausible that living apart together might demonstrate a conservative approach toward partnering for older Americans rather than an expression of liberalism. For example, older adults who espouse conservative religious beliefs regarding sex outside of marriage may prefer LAT to cohabitation because LAT does not — at least visibly — flaunt the existence of a sexual relationship occurring outside the legal bounds of marriage like non-marital cohabitation. Indeed, the phrase “living in sin” inherently implies that an unmarried couple shares a home in order for the relationship to qualify as sinful. Empirical evidence is needed to explain the influence policy and social mores have on the process of forming LAT relationships for older Americans.

Although European scholars have led the charge in examining LAT relationships among older adults, there remains a dearth of research on this topic, particularly in the United States where estimates of LAT relationships for any age group are not available.

A single U.S. study (Strohm, Seltzer, Cochran, & Mays, 2009) and an onslaught of recent media attention on the subject (ABC News, 2006; Augustin, 2013; Joel, 2013; Krishnan, 2013; Levy, 2013; Moggach, 2013; Rosenblum, 2013) however, suggests that older Americans may be on the precipice of social change with regard to the way American couples perform romantic partnerships. Living-apart-together may be a particularly attractive option for those who can afford to live separately, yet want to experience the benefits of an intimate relationship while maintaining some autonomy — ideals commonly cited as sought after and valued by members of the Baby Boom cohort (AARP, 2011).

Considering the growing interest but lack of empirical understanding surrounding LAT relationships, the purpose of the current study is to broadly explore LAT relationships among older adult (age 60 and older) men and women in the United States using grounded theory methods. Grounded theory is a qualitative research methodology specifically suited to the exploration of phenomena and experiences about which little is known. This study is guided by the following research questions: 1) How do older adults define and label their relationships and partners? 2) What is the decision-making process leading to LAT among older adults? 3) What strategies do older adult LAT partners use to maintain their relationships?

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Labeling and Defining LAT Partners/Relationships

Much uncertainty exists in terms of how individuals in LAT relationships should be labeled or defined. For example, survey questions intended to identify LAT relationships have used the terms: *main romantic partner* (General Social Survey), a *relationship partner* (Cal-QOL), or *intimate relationship* (2001 Canadian Social Survey) (Strohm et al., 2009). It is not known whether LAT couples actually use these terms to describe their partners or whether these terms are created and implemented by researchers.

In their small qualitative study of 12 middle-aged LAT couples in Britain, Haskey and Lewis (2006) found that for some respondents the term friend was preferred over partner, even though respondents felt they were in a relationship. The definition of LAT may also cause some older adults in LAT relationships to exclude themselves from self-identifying as participating in an LAT partnership. Several of the respondents in Haskey and Lewis's study did not agree with the notion that they were part of a couple, even though they agreed that others viewed them as such. These respondents felt that being part of a couple required sharing all of their lives – family, finances, and leisure time – which they did not do. Further, Haskey and Lewis acknowledged that some terms used to define LAT relationships (e.g., an intimate relationship) might infer a sexual relationship. Inference of a sexual relationship may preclude some older adults in LAT relationships from being accurately identified in research if their relationship is based more on

companionship (Roseneil, 2006) or if it is shrouded in secrecy (Koren & Eisikovits, 2011).

The absence of an established terminology used to describe LAT relationships makes it difficult for researchers collecting data using survey methods to operationally define what an LAT relationship is, and hence, accurately quantify the prevalence of individuals in romantic relationships that are LAT, or accurately understand the role of LAT relationships across the life course. This is of particular importance to researchers in the United States, where there are no agreed upon terms or phrases to label or describe LAT relationships. In many parts of Europe, the idea of an LAT relationship is a well-established concept. The term LAT was first used in 1978 to describe couples living apart together in the Netherlands — the word *lat* in the Dutch language means *stick* (Levin, 2004). In France, *cohabitation intermittente* is used to describe LAT couples, and in the Scandinavian countries the term *sarbo* is used (*sar* = apart, and *bo* = live; Levin; Karlsson & Borell, 2002). Although some American scholars and media personnel alike have borrowed the term LAT to describe such living arrangements between romantic partners, we do not know if individuals participating in such unions identify with this term. Manning and Smock (2005) interviewed 115 young adult men and women with recent non-marital cohabitation experience and found that there was no universally accepted language to reference their partners or relationship. All of their participants were averse to using the term unmarried partner, and most of them were confused by what the term meant — stating that the term does not accurately convey how cohabiting partners feel about their partners, nor does it capture the true meaning of the relationship. Manning and Smock argued that their findings signaled a lack of institutionalization

(Cherlin, 1978) of this family form in the U.S. Based on the European evidence cited above, the same could be suggested of LAT unions.

Reasons to LAT

Currently in the United States no data exist describing the reasons why older romantic partners form living-apart-together unions. Several European researchers, however, have explored the reasons individuals provide for being in an LAT relationship — the meaning of the relationship or what it represents — resulting in differences by age and gender. In general, older Europeans LAT by choice and younger Europeans LAT due to constraints.

Constraint vs. choice. For most young adults, reasons for being in an LAT relationship are due to circumstances outside of their control (e.g., financial constraints, job market, housing market, educational pursuits, caregiving responsibilities), rather than viewing the LAT arrangement as a lifestyle choice (Levin, 2004; Milan & Peters, 2003; Regnier-Loilier, Beaujouan, Villeneuve-Gokalp, 2009). Conversely, middle-aged and older adult LAT couples explain their reasons for being in an LAT relationship as a way to balance intimacy and autonomy while continuing to maintain relationships with and responsibilities toward others (Karlsson & Borell, 2002). LAT relationships may be viewed as a legitimate family form for older adults, rather than a common transitional stage of steady dating that precedes future cohabitation or marriage for younger adults (de Jong Gierveld, 2004; Haskey & Lewis, 2006; Levin, 2004). Indeed, the majority of older adults in LAT relationships do not wish to cohabit or marry their partner in the future (Regnier-Loilier et al., 2009). Duncan and Phillip's (2010) study utilizing data from the 2006 British Social Attitudes Survey supports this age distinction. In their study,

they distinguished between 119 *dating* LAT couples vs. 196 *partner* LAT couples. Partner LAT couples were defined as “those who see themselves as belonging to a couple” (p. 113). Dating LAT couples were defined as those “who do not regard themselves as an established couple, and more resemble traditional steady/special girl or boyfriends” (p. 113). Only 3% of dating LATs in Duncan and Phillip’s study were aged 55-64, and none of the dating LAT partners were in the 65 and over age group. To summarize, compared to younger adults LAT relationships appear to differ in both form and function for older adults.

Gender. Research on older adult LAT couples in Sweden has shown that the reasons for being in an LAT relationship also vary by gender. Karlsson and Borell (2002) found that the reasons for LAT provided by their female participants were clear — they wanted to maintain autonomy by continuing to live alone in their own home and avoid the gendered division of labor that often accompanies sharing a household. The reasons provided by men were more nebulous. Other studies found that many women ascribed meaning to their LAT relationship based on having experienced a troubled past relationship (Haskey & Lewis, 2006). For older divorced women in the United Kingdom, living-apart-together represented a type of relationship that provided them the opportunity to maintain control of their lives and do things differently from how they had been done in a previous marriage (Haskey & Lewis). The fact that women appeared more resolute about their reasons for being in an LAT relationship suggests that women play an instrumental role in the decision-making process surrounding the establishment of such unions. Until the present study, however, the decision-making process leading to LAT had yet to be empirically explored.

LAT Formation and Maintenance

The process of deciding to LAT. Although we are beginning to understand the meaning of and the reasons why older adults are in LAT relationships (especially in Europe), we do not know *how* these relationships come to be established. In essence, is living-apart-together the desired arrangement from the outset? Previous research on older adult LAT couples in Europe demonstrated that the current LAT arrangement represents the desired end-state for the relationship. In other words, the majority of older adult LAT partners do not intend to cohabit or marry. It cannot be assumed, however, that the LAT arrangement was the initial motive. A case in point: recent evidence in cohabitation research on young adults points to non-deliberative transitions into cohabitation – an experience described by researchers as sliding or drifting into cohabitation, rather than deciding (Lindsay, 2000; Manning & Smock, 2005). Similarly, it is plausible that sliding into the status of living-apart-together might be a common explanation provided by older adults in LAT relationships to describe how their LAT arrangement came to exist.

Maintaining LAT relationships. The study of relational maintenance is relatively new, and personal relationships scholars continue to debate over definitional issues and explaining maintenance processes (Canary & Dainton, 2006). In this study, maintenance is viewed as strategic, cognitive or relational actions that sustain or enhance the partnership (Canary & Dainton). Our current theoretical understanding of relationship maintenance among married and dating partners is that romantic partners maintain their relationships by engaging in specific strategies that are both cognitive (e.g., thinking one's relationship is better than most) and relational (e.g., participating in shared activities) in nature. It is this latter relational context that has received the most frequent

focus in maintenance research.

Stafford and Canary (1991) identified five strategic behaviors or interactions utilized by couples (married and dating) to maintain their relationships. They involved positivity, openness, assurances, shared tasks, and social networks. Since this initial work, other strategies have been added, involving: joint activities, affection, avoidance, antisocial, small talk, and focus on self (Canary, Stafford, Hause, & Wallace, 1993). Other scholars have identified alternative actions. Utilizing a dialectical approach, Sahlstein and Baxter suggested (2001) that partners manage several contradictory tensions in their efforts to maintain/sustain their relationships. Less research has focused on examining maintenance in the contexts of social networks and cultural beliefs and values. Although scholars have recognized that social networks play a role in the stability of romantic relationships, few studies have examined how people utilize their social networks to sustain their close relationships (for exceptions, see Stafford & Canary; Canary & Stafford, 1992, 2001). We know even less about the ways maintenance is achieved in cultures outside the mainstream White, middle-class population in the United States (Stafford, 2003), or among individuals in nonnormative relationships, such as individuals in LAT relationships.

One relevant exception to the dearth of maintenance research on LAT relationships is Karlsson and Borell's (2005) study on the ways women create boundaries to manage their LAT relationships. The notion that time and space boundaries are established by LAT partners as a strategy for maintaining their relationships is sensible because such boundaries are what distinguish LAT couples, in an operational sense, from other committed intimate partners that share a household. Karlsson and Borell (2005)

examined how the home was used as a resource for women's boundary making among four elderly women in Sweden. Their research focused on how women maintained their LAT relationships by establishing time-zoned or time-sectioned relationships with their respective LAT partners. For example, one woman whose LAT partner used to be somewhat jealous of her relationship with her female friends, maintained her LAT relationship by establishing boundaries around the content of her conversations with her partner — to eliminate her partner's jealousy, she avoided talking to her partner about her contact with friends. Having keys to one another's home proved to be a sensitive issue for another woman and her LAT partner. At first, both partners had keys to one another's home, but eventually the keys were returned after the female partner became frustrated by her partner's unannounced visits. This same woman chose to keep her LAT relationship separate from her other social relationships, and she viewed this separation as a way to maintain continuity in her previously existing relationships with friends and family. She and her partner did not together discuss their extended families or friends, nor did they visit them together. Other women preferred a more integrated relationship, alternating between meeting with their friends and families separately from their partners and together as a couple. Although this pioneering study provided important insight into how women in LAT relationships establish boundaries as a way to maintain their autonomy in the context of living-apart-together, it is limited by a few cases of only female respondents. In response, the present study explores similar relationship boundaries among a U.S. sample of older LAT partners. In my study I asked participants several questions about how they shared time and space with their partners. For example, I asked them to describe when and how they spent time with their respective partners, how they

incorporated their partners into their relationships with others, and how they shared space in their homes.

Social support for LAT relationships. Understanding the role older adults perceive their family members or friends to play in supporting their pursuit of a romantic relationship can provide further insight into the decision-making process surrounding the formation of an LAT relationship, the boundaries negotiated, and the overall maintenance of the relationship. In one recent qualitative study including older adults in LAT relationships the authors directly assessed social network (dis)approval of older adult romantic relationships. Koren and Eisikovits (2011) interviewed 20 older adult (age 66-92) Israeli couples about their experiences with re-partnering in old age (remarriage, cohabitation, or LAT). They found that offspring approval was used as justification for re-partnering for several respondents, and this approval was perceived to help strengthen the older adult's new romantic relationship. Other respondents in this study shared that their friends also encouraged their pursuit to re-partner. The re-partnerships of the older adults were also met with disapproval. One respondent acknowledged the fact that a family member (a sister-in-law) disapproved of her LAT relationship, but it did not deter her from being explicit about her relationship with her LAT partner. In fact, another woman from this study expressed that she gained satisfaction from the fact that her family disapproved of her LAT lifestyle – she said she would never remarry because it was “great fun to live in sin.” (p. 58). Conversely, other respondents chose to live in secrecy about their partnerships. Although they did not state that others expressly disapproved, their concern for this possibility kept them from explicitly telling others that they were in a romantic relationship. Indeed, one woman in this study stated that she

referred to her LAT partner as her “house friend” when she discussed him with her son, and when her partner was in her home in the presence of her son, he behaved like a guest (p. 57).

Koren and Eisikovits’ (2011) research is certainly telling of how social network (dis)approval can influence how older adults enact their LAT relationships. Israel, however, is more traditional than the U.S. in terms of societal expectations surrounding romantic partner formation (Lavee & Katz, 2003). To understand whether these findings translate to an American population I asked participants in this study to describe how members of their social networks helped or hindered the formation and/or maintenance of their LAT relationships.

Declining health. The relevance of declining health to the lives of older adults suggests it is a crucial factor to consider when explaining the process of relationship formation and/or maintenance. This is because a change in the patterning of interactions between romantic partners is oftentimes necessary in order for a couple to maintain their relationship when experiencing a negative life event or stressor (Baxter, 1994). Indeed, one aspect of successful long-term marriages is the incorporation of both continuity and change in spousal interaction in terms of the relationship maintenance strategies that are used (Weishaus & Field, 1988).

The vast majority of the literature linking changes in health with romantic relationships has considered the negative impact that relationships can have on health, with an overwhelming focus on the impact of poor marital relationships (Carr & Springer, 2010). It is well established that high quality marriages are linked to individual health and subjective well-being (Connidis, 2001; Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001;

Proulx, Helms, & Buehler, 2007), especially for older adults (Umberson, Williams, Powers, Lui, & Needham, 2006). Some studies have examined the reverse impact – considering instead the effect of declining health on marital quality, demonstrating that declines in health are related to poorer marital quality over time (Booth & Johnson, 1994; Fitzpatrick & Vinick, 2003; Kaufman & Taniguchi, 2006; Yorgason, et al., 2008). Spousal health and gender are key — spousal health is a stronger predictor of marital quality than self-rated health, and it is more detrimental to the marital quality of women than men. These results were found among both younger and older married individuals (Bulanda, 2011; Johnson, 1985; Yorgason et al., 2008). More recently, the impact of spousal health was found to vary by gender depending on the dimensions of marital quality that were measured by researchers. In a recently published study, Bulanda (2011) found that spousal health was positively related to marital happiness for men, but not women. Conversely, spousal health was positively related to marital interaction for women, but not men. Taken together, the findings from these studies clearly indicate that declining health takes a toll on marital relationships, regardless of age or gender. Applying these findings to my study, I asked older adults in LAT relationships to describe how health changes impacted (or might impact) their LAT relationship, including their decision to LAT and future plans to provide care.

Caregiver commitment. As health declines for older adults, the need for caregiving becomes salient. Most older adults receive caregiving support from a married partner (Connidis, 2010). For older adults in non-marital partnerships, an important question is whether or not they can rely on their partner as a potential source of caregiving support as their health declines. Researchers in Sweden examined this topic

among 116 older adults in LAT relationships (Karlsson & Borell, 2002). They asked participants to envision a future scenario where their partner becomes seriously ill, and then describe how they would handle the situation. Findings indicated that older adults in LAT relationships were committed to providing care for their partner if their partner should become ill. This commitment to provide care, however, was limited. Participants said that they would consider caring for their ill partner for a few days per week or hours per day, but rarely full-time. Only men said they would consider providing full-time care. The men were also more likely than women to say they would care for their partner for a few hours per day. These gender differences may not be surprising considering the motivations women have for being in a LAT relationship. As previously described, older women are motivated to be in LAT relationships as a way to maintain autonomy and independence (Karlsson & Borell). Having likely been married before, older women may choose LAT relationships as a way to eschew the demands of marriage — including the role of spousal/partner caregiver, as they may have fulfilled this role before. Thus, it comes as no surprise that when asked if they would be willing to care for an ill LAT partner on a daily basis, the women were hesitant to say they would do so.

We cannot, however, assume that Karlsson and Borell's (2002) findings are representative of all older adults in LAT relationships. In contrast to the United States, Sweden offers its older adult citizens high-quality public care and service. In the U.S., the burden to provide support to aging adults is primarily shouldered by family members (Connidis, 2010). Therefore, compared to Americans, Swedish citizens may feel fewer obligations to provide care to aging loved ones overall. Due to these differences, it is important to consider how commitment to provide care to a romantic partner might differ

in a U.S. sample of older adults in LAT relationships.

Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by the life course perspective. This perspective places emphasis on historical context and time, orienting the researcher toward a contextualized understanding of the complexities of individual lives from birth to death. The relationship between time and human behavior is understood by looking at the ways chronological age, social relationships, life transitions, and social change shape people's lives (Hutchinson, 2010). In addition to time, individual characteristics and the lived environment are also important dimensions of explaining human behavior. Continuity and change, social structures, and the relationships among person, environment, and time as contexts for developmental processes are foci of the life course perspective. The life course perspective has six distinct principles: (a) time and place; (b) life-span development; (c) timing of lives; (d) linked lives; (e) agency; and (f) diversity in life course trajectories (Elder, 1994; Shanahan, 2000). Within my study these life course principles guided the development of the interview protocol and were drawn upon for later theorizing of the results.

The principle of *time and place* applies to the interplay of human lives and historical time. Individual and couple development can be understood by considering how historical events present opportunities and constraints that affect birth cohorts in different ways. *Life-span development* is characterized by the view that experiences with early life transitions or events can subsequently impact transitions and events in later life. Earlier life experiences may result in cumulative advantage or cumulative disadvantage — either protecting the life course trajectory or putting it at risk. *Timing of lives* refers to

the chronological ordering of roles and behaviors. Social transitions such as marriage are organized, in part, around age. Life course scholars focus on examining behaviors and roles as they occur based on social norms or shared expectations about the timing of common life events or transitions. The life course perspective also emphasizes the principle of *linked lives* — the interdependence of lives and the ways humans are connected. This principle highlights how social networks influence individual behavior. *Agency* involves the use of personal power in decision-making to achieve one's goals. This principle recognizes how individuals participate in the construction of their own life course by making choices or taking actions within the context of the opportunities and constraints that history or certain social circumstances present to them. Finally, the principle of *diversity in life course trajectories* serves as a reminder that much variability exists in the patterning and sequencing of life course transitions as a result of cohort variations, social class, culture, gender, and human agency. These six principles of the life course perspective — along with the key concepts of trajectory, transition, and turning point — are commonly used to describe phenomena of human development.

Trajectories offer a long-term view of the life course and represent the pathways or a series of transitions in a given life domain. Examples include career trajectories, educational trajectories, and parenting or marriage trajectories. *Transitions* are entry points or exits of roles within trajectories. These represent gradual changes associated with acquiring or relinquishing roles representing the positions people occupy within various social institutions, such as marriage. *Turning points* involve abrupt and significant change resulting in substantial adjustments in certain life trajectories. Transitions represent off-time or on-time shifts in role acquisition or relinquishment

whereas turning points represent sudden, unexpected shifts that derail an individual from his or her current life trajectory — for better or for worse.

Rather than offer a predictive framework, the principles and concepts of life course perspective provide grounded theory researchers a philosophical basis or theoretical lens for their projects, as well as insight or perspective on understanding and explaining phenomena (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In my study the key concepts and principles of the life course perspective guided the research process from development of the research questions, interview protocol, and in later theorizing of the results. For example, the principles of linked lives and life span development influenced my suppositions about potential factors that may influence older adults' decisions to LAT versus marry or cohabit. As well, the features of older adults' past romantic relationships along with current relationships with their LAT partner and the influence of their social network were deemed important for understanding why older adults form LAT relationships and how they maintain them. Thus, interview questions were crafted in such a way as to elicit conversation with participants about the possible ways past relationship experiences, current relationships and roles, social mores, policy, and individual factors related to biological, psychological, social and spiritual development impact the process of developing and maintaining an LAT relationship.

The principles and concepts underlying the life course perspective merely reflect my epistemic values, which guide all scientific research. Thus, the tenets of the life course perspective are well suited to grounded theory research where preconceptions are to be set aside and research does not start with a theory to prove or disprove. Rather, the life course perspective provided me with an initial organizational structure — or ideas for

exploration — to use during data collection and analysis/theorizing. Recalling the principles and concepts of the life course perspective during the theory building process served as a way to help me extend and broaden my thinking about my data and the subsequent theory of LAT Preference that I developed from this research.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Methodological Approach

I conducted my study using the grounded theory method of qualitative inquiry (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Unlike some qualitative methods that are purely descriptive (e.g., phenomenology), grounded theory utilizes a systematic set of procedures to explain processes related to social phenomena, allowing for the development of a substantive theory on a specific area of interest (Morse & Richards, 2002). The grounded theory approach assists researchers in the development of new ideas. It is an inductive approach, meaning that grounded theorists move from specific observations to the discovery of patterns among those observations (Corbin & Strauss). The purpose of grounded theory research is not to test hypotheses. Rather, the result of grounded theory research is the generation of hypotheses, which are developed as grounded theorists discover patterns in their data during data collection and analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The result of this method is a theoretical explanation of a social process. Thus, this method was well-suited to understanding the decision-making process of how older adults in LAT partnerships came to be in LAT relationships, as well as the process of how older adults maintain such relationships.

Several theoretical underpinnings of grounded theory must be understood. First is theoretical sensitivity. Theoretical sensitivity “indicates an awareness of the subtleties of the meaning of data” and “allows one to develop a theory that is grounded, conceptually dense, and well integrated” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 41, 42). According to this assumption, researchers bring to their research projects various levels of sensitivity based

on the previous literature they have read, their theoretical perspectives, and the research they have conducted within the scope of the project. Strauss and Corbin (1998) noted that researchers are in continual development of their theoretical sensitivity. This sensitivity constantly develops as the researcher continues to work with his or her data, and it encourages the researcher to be fully conscientious about nuances of meaning within the data (Piantanida, Tananis, & Grubs, 2004). In my study, the principles of the life course perspective are reflected in how I collected and analyzed my data. For example, I asked participants to describe their past relationship histories — past marriages or non-marital cohabiting relationships — because the life course perspective suggests that prior experiences impact later ones. Later during analysis, this life course principle led me to assess these experiences as units to code and analyze. In other words, I was sensitized to examine participant quotes for any mentioning of past relationships.

Second, the conceptual idea of constant comparison is necessary to explain in order to understand how the data in this grounded theory study were collected and analyzed. The constant comparison method is relevant to the development of theoretical sensitivity. When I assigned codes to units of data, I simultaneously compared those to other units of data in order to detect different properties and dimensions of the code – this is the constant comparison method (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Constant comparison allowed me to grasp meanings that might have otherwise seemed obscure due to a lack of theoretical sensitivity. This method is what enabled me to move from description to analysis, by identifying patterns within the data. Continuing with the example from above, if a participant discussed a previous marriage experience I highlighted this unit of data, or block of text, and coded it as ‘relationship history.’ As additional transcripts were

coded I compared relationship history codes within and across transcripts, looking for patterns in the data to explain if and how relationship history impacted participants' current LAT relational experiences as they pertained to my research questions regarding LAT relationship development and maintenance.

Finally, theoretical sampling is a sampling technique germane to grounded theory methods. Unlike random sampling techniques that are used by quantitative researchers, this type of sampling is data driven in that it guides the researcher in both deciding what data to collect, and from whom (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Its purpose is to test and refine the concepts and categories that the researcher has begun to identify within the data. Thus, in order to flesh out an emerging concept or category, theoretical sampling can involve a change of the interview protocol, or inclusion of additional interviews with previous or new participants, in an attempt to validate, or nullify, the developing theory. Thus in this project, ongoing analysis of interviews meant that I modified some of my interview questions as I collected new data. For example, I revised the interview protocol to help me better understand how ideas surrounding partner obligations and expectations related to LAT relationship development and maintenance. My initial interview protocol did not include questions about obligations or expectations, but participants in early interviews spent considerable time talking about these two concepts when I asked them about commitment. To ensure I had proper data to thoroughly examine these concepts, I changed my interview protocol to include questions explicitly asking participants to describe how they were obligated to their partners and what expectations they had for their relationships/partners. Final interviews were adjusted further as analysis continued. As I discovered patterns in the data regarding the ways LAT partners felt obligated to one

another or how expectations were related to relational maintenance strategies, I adjusted final interviews so that questions about obligations and expectations elicited (dis)confirmatory responses from participants about the developing theory, or until theoretical saturation of the data occurred. Reaching saturation refers to the point when a sufficient theory has emerged from the data and new data no longer substantially contribute to further explanation of the theory (Corbin & Strauss). For my study, theoretical saturation occurred after 25 participants were interviewed.

Participants

Criteria for inclusion. Twenty-five older adults (age 60 or older) who lived alone and self identified as being in an LAT relationship participated in this study. The sample was limited to those aged 60 or older to help ensure that the data collected were unique to late life experiences. Age 60 is also significant because in the United States this age signifies the time that widowed or divorced adults can remarry without loss of Social Security spousal benefits received from a former spouse's record (Socialsecurity.gov, 2011). Therefore, limiting the sample in this way helped ensure that participants were not in an LAT relationship simply as a way to avoid financial loss. Relationships formed prior to age 50 were excluded from this study because, in the U.S., age 50 is traditionally associated with the empty nest. Empty nesters are better able to focus on developing new romantic partnerships for the sake of meeting their own needs of intimacy, and not for the sake of rebuilding a conjugal family (Spalter, 2010). Aside from these age restrictions, I did not exclude participants' based on their sex, sexual orientation, race, socioeconomic status, parental status, geographic location, or work status. Grounded theorists seek a sample with as much variation in the subject of interest as possible in order to gain a

range of data from which to provide a thorough explanation of the processes of interest (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Consequently, I wanted to interview older adults with a range of characteristics in order to extrapolate how these differences could lead to variation in how participants described their LAT relationship experiences.

Recruitment. An LAT relationship was defined as any romantic relationship between committed unmarried individuals who maintain separate homes, and identify themselves as part of a couple. Participants were recruited via advertisements delivered through a University campus email listserve, an online social networking site (e.g., Facebook), and via snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a convenience method whereby initial participants refer others to participate who fit the inclusion criteria for the study. This sampling technique is necessary for recruiting hidden populations that cannot be accessed through existing datasets (Lee, 1993; Spalter, 2010). All participants were recruited directly through the email listserve, or by word of mouth. See Appendix A for a sample of the study advertisement. Consistent with theoretical sampling, gaining a diverse sample was more important than adhering to strict eligibility criteria. Two LAT partners (a couple) were currently cohabiting to provide care, and another pair was engaged for marriage. I retained these interviews for analysis because their stories offered valuable insight into the factors affecting the decision to LAT and how caregiving is negotiated between LAT partners.

Sample description. The sample consisted of 25 men and women residing in the Midwestern United States. Twenty of the 25 participants represented 10 couples. Participants ranged in age from 60-88, with an average age of 71 years. Twenty-three participants were non-Hispanic white, one was African American, and one was Hispanic.

Seventeen had a college degree; of those 11 had a graduate or professional degree.

Participants' LAT relationships ranged in duration from seven months to 27 years with an average duration of seven years. Overall, 92% (n =23) of the sample had been previously married at least once; 14 previously married participants had experienced divorce. Only one participant had ever previously experienced an LAT relationship. See Table 1 for a detailed sample description.

Data Collection

Participants were recruited to participate in a single face-to-face interview lasting approximately 90 minutes, with the potential for follow-up. Each person was told that follow-up interviews would last approximately 30 minutes. Initial interviews ranged in length from 60-120 minutes. Two were conducted by phone. Nine follow-up interviews were conducted, ranging from 30-60 minutes. All but one follow-up interview were conducted via phone.

Prior to beginning the initial interview, I sought both written and verbal consent to participate in the study. During the consent process, full disclosure of the project goals was shared with participants. I ensured them that they could discontinue their participation in the study at any time, without penalty. When both members of an LAT couple participated in the study, I conducted their interviews separately. I assured all participants that their interview data would remain confidential and would not be shared between partners or other people in the study.

All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed by Secretarial and Office Support at the University of Missouri. Confidentiality was ensured by using pseudonyms for all participants and by keeping all hard copies of transcript files locked in a filing

cabinet, with digital copies stored on a password-protected computer. Each person received \$50 for his or her participation.

Interviews began with a collection of demographic information. Next, I completed a genogram with each person in order to briefly document his or her family/social network. Opening the interview with the completion of a genogram also helped me establish trust and rapport.

Following the completion of a genogram, I proceeded with the interview by asking a general set of questions derived for the intent of collecting data to address each research question. This part of the interview was semi-structured allowing me to thoroughly examine each persons' experiences by beginning with a general set of questions and pursuing prompts based on the responses (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Data Analysis

Coding procedures. Guided by the traditional grounded theory approach, I used three steps in the coding of my data. First, using a data management software called Dedoose, I began examining the data via open coding – a line-by-line microanalytic approach in which I coded for indicators (individual words, phrases, or sentences) that identified concepts (i.e., a label or symbol associated with one or more indicators). Next, I organized clusters of concepts and created categories (i.e., variables), along with their descriptive properties or characteristics (LaRossa, 2005). This type of coding is primarily descriptive and involved little analysis. The codes developed during open coding provided the variables to be analyzed in the next step of coding.

Secondly, I did intense analysis of one category (or variable) at a time by identifying the six C's: causes, contexts, contingencies, consequences, covariances and

conditions (LaRossa, 2005). The goal of this step was to identify relationships between or among the variables (i.e., building hypotheses) that I developed during open coding. I did this simultaneously with open coding as categories were developed and refined.

Finally, I explicated a story line by identifying the core variable, or concept (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The core concept is the primary variable with analytic power - it was the key variable that I used to connect all categories together to provide a comprehensive and theoretical explanation of the phenomenon I was studying.

Data Validation

Several steps were taken to validate the data and findings. I checked each transcript against its corresponding digital file for transcription accuracy. Additionally, I wrote field notes about each interview, and I wrote initial memos after reading each transcript. Field notes are completed after each interview while the interviewer is still in the field. They are data containing some conceptualization and analytic remarks on behalf of the interviewer (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). I used these notes to help me develop lengthier analytical memos after I left the field and began coding the transcripts for analysis. Memos begin by providing an account of the researcher's basic representations of thought about how the data fit together to explain the phenomenon of interest. They vary in length, content, and degree of conceptualization depending on the phase or goal of analysis (Corbin & Strauss). For example, memos may include diagrams that provide a visual representation of relationships between concepts in order to develop categories. My dissertation chair, Dr. Marilyn Coleman, also read a selection of transcripts and reviewed my memos. We engaged in bi-weekly meetings to discuss coding procedures and ideas about emerging theory. These discussions also served the purpose of

establishing coding reliability checks. Finally, I engaged in member checking throughout the data analysis process (Morse & Richards, 2002). I contacted participants in follow-up interviews to confirm accuracy of the findings by comparing my perceptions about the data to their own. In this study, member checks provided confirmation that the conclusions drawn about LAT relationships in older adulthood were valid for those living the experience.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to broadly explore living-apart-together (LAT) relationships among an older adult population (age 60 or greater) in the Midwestern United States. Specifically, my study had three goals. First, I sought to understand how older adults define or label their LAT relationships and partners. Second, I proposed to generate a grounded theory of the decision-making process leading to living-apart-together among older adults. Third, I explored the ways older adults in LAT partnerships maintain their relationship. What follows is a detailed description of the results as they relate to each of the study goals. Quotes from participant interviews are included to support the findings.

Defining and Labeling — A Process of Trial and Error

Partner labels. Participants used many terms and phrases to label their LAT partner, including: boyfriend or girlfriend, partner, life partner, boy toy, significant other, lover, friend, man friend, lady friend, BFF (best friend forever), companion, traveling companion, and fiancé. The experience of choosing a label for their partner was not simple, it was indicative of a trial and error process. Many participants described “trying out” different labels until they found one they were most comfortable using. The following excerpt from Jill’s interview illustrates this process:

Interviewer: Did you find it difficult to decide what to refer to him as, early on in your relationship?

Jill: [Nods in agreement] It was kind of like, hmmm, you know?

Interviewer: What do I call him?

Jill: Yes, what do I call him to other people, you know?

Interviewer: Did you ever test out different words?

Jill: Yeah, umm hmm.

Interviewer: Yeah? Would you sometimes try 'boyfriend'?

Jill: Yeah. We said that quite a bit at first, and it's funny cause for a while I called him my boy toy. I thought that was funny.

The terms 'boyfriend' and 'girlfriend' were commonly used, but also common was the sentiment that these terms were inappropriate for older adults. Many participants felt they were "too old" to use the term, and that the terminology was "juvenile," "adolescent," "sophomoric," or "high school." When asked how she felt about using the term 'boyfriend' to describe her relationship with her partner, Gabby said,

I don't like boyfriend for adults. I just don't like boyfriend. I mean, it's like there has to be another term for adults because I don't like boy. I mean, he's not hardly a boy and I'm not hardly a girl. I say, well, if somebody asks, 'Do you have a friend?' It's like, 'Yeah.' 'Are you seeing somebody?' 'Yeah.' But otherwise I'll just say my friend.

Similarly, when Anita was asked how she referred to her partner, Gary, to her adult daughter, Elise, she responded, "a 61-year-old boyfriend is a weird thing to say. You know, a boyfriend is what [my daughter] had when she was in high school, as a teenager. I mean, he's a man. I feel like boyfriend's a weird term."

The terms 'boyfriend' or 'girlfriend' were often used early on in relationships and rejected later as the relationship developed and became more serious, and partners more committed to one another. Still, the terms were difficult to reject entirely as several participants stated that their friends or family often used the terms to reference their partners. When asked if she ever introduces her partner to others as her boyfriend, Gwen said, "no, we just call each other, you know, by our names . . . but other people do."

Similarly, Gabby stated that, “[My church family] look at him as my boyfriend, and the people that I know refer to him as my boyfriend, but I just refer to him as my friend.”

Lisa alluded to actually correcting her friends’ speech when they use the term boyfriend to refer to her partner, Brad. She said, “I wouldn’t let them (her friends) say boyfriend. It’d be man friend, if anything.”

Participants deemed the terms “partner” and “friend” more age appropriate and several participants in long-term (together 5 years or more) LAT partnerships preferred these labels, however, they were troublesome in their own right. Family members often rejected the label of ‘partner.’ In describing the process of settling on the phrase life partner to refer to her LAT partner, Ben, Jill experienced rebuff from her daughter:

We decided kind of together we’d call each other our life partner, and my daughter said, ‘Mom, you better say something different.’ You know, she was afraid [others] would think, people would think I was gay, you know. So I said, ‘Well, okay, I’ll say my life partner, Ben.’

While Jill and Ben liked the idea of being one another’s partner, other participants thought this term was inaccurate for LAT relationships. Eli felt that the term partner sounded “so much like being married” and another participant, Gabby, also thought partner was inappropriate because she felt that the term implies a couple is living together.

It became apparent that most participants vacillated between using several labels, depending on the context. However, when it came to introductions most resorted to just introducing their partner by his or her name. During his interview, Ben shared this very sentiment. When he calls or visits his partner at work, he identifies himself as “just Ben” to the receptionist. The nature of their relationship is either already known, or left unexplained. Other participants also shared that they introduced their partners or

themselves by name only, leaving the true nature (e.g., romantic, friendship, family) of the relationship unexplained. The resolve of utilizing a name-only approach was especially common among long-term couples. When I asked these LAT partners how they knew if others understood the nature of their relationship to their partner they either replied that they lacked any concern for what others thought or understood, or they assumed that the nature of the relationship was obvious to others. Celia — a teacher who has been in an LAT relationship for 10 years with her partner, Mitch — uses the term B.F.F (i.e., best friend forever) when she references her partner in front of her students. When I asked what her students thought of the term B.F.F - if they understood that Mitch and she are a romantic couple – she replied,

Celia: I don't know. The kids seem to accept that (laughs). My students seem to think that's just fine. That makes sense to them. Other adults, I guess we've been together so long, they just think of us as a couple.

Interviewer: So, it's clear to [your students] that it's a romantic relationship? Do you provide a description beyond B.F.F?

Celia: I don't choose to provide beyond that.

Defining the LAT relationship. Like Celia, most participants described a lack of compulsion to provide definitions of their LAT relationships to anyone — denying that a definition of their relationship is ever requested of them. For example, when I asked Miles what he says to friends or co-workers when they ask him what is going on between him and Betsy he replied, “I don't know. I don't, you know, it never comes up, you know, it never comes up.” Later on in the interview Miles attempted to offer further definition of his relationship with Betsy by explaining,

Miles: “...it's kind of like I'm *with* [emphasis added] Betsy. . .”

Interviewer: So, you're not dating Betsy, you're *with* her?

Miles: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I think so. Maybe that, maybe that'd be the best way to put it.

Betsy's attempt to define her relationship with Miles was similar. When asked what she would say if someone asked her to describe her relationship she offered this response,

'This is the man who I'm seeing now.' I would say it that way, and I wouldn't even say 'now.' 'This is the man I am seeing,' because I'm not, I'm not in the market for another relationship.

A lack of clarity or uncertainty about how to define one's LAT relationship was common for participants. As one exasperated participant said to me, "It (our relationship) just exists. Does that make sense?" Most LAT partners offered nebulous definitions of their relationships by inductive reasoning or negative affirmation — describing what something is by explaining what it is not — and by discussing the negative aspects of marriage or cohabitation, inferring that their LAT relationship is superior to these other forms of committed relationships. As Ben concluded, "it just makes so much sense to me that it's hard to imagine that not being an ideal for people." My interview with Eli was especially illustrative of an inductive approach to defining an LAT relationship.

If you're married you often include them, your husband or your wife, in something without asking their permission. I think a lot of marriages are like that . . . I think that's part of the contract. That's one of the things I don't want to do... Another thing I don't like about marriage is that you, after all, you swear, you know, 'until death do you part' and all that stuff. I just don't like to be hemmed in about anything by anybody. And I don't want to swear to something I'm not sure I can live up to . . . There's a loss of individuality in marriage that I definitely do not like.

In general, participants defined their LAT relationships by describing how it is not a dating relationship. All of the interviewees rejected the notion that they were in dating relationships. For example, Eli was adamant to dismiss that his 10-year LAT relationship

with Denise is like a dating relationship. He said, “It’s not dating. Dating implies something temporary. It (an LAT relationship) is more serious than dating.” Several LAT partners echoed Eli’s sentiment that their LAT relationships are “more serious” and “less temporary” than dating. In general, LAT partners felt dating was solely about engaging in shared activities (e.g., dinner and a movie). Compared to their own LAT relationships, they perceived dating relationships to involve less intimacy. When asked if she and Gordon were in a dating relationship, Gabby sighed, then paused, and replied:

I would call dating, I mean, I’ve been asked out since I’ve [moved] here, and if I was to accept it I would call that dating to where I’d just go to dinner, I’d go to a movie and that’s it, no more to it than that.

Miles shared how his relationship with Betsy is not a dating relationship because of the level of intimacy that exists within his relationship.

I’d say our relationship is more serious than just dating. . . Yeah, I’d say so. I mean, once you date and you’re sleeping together and you’re, you know, you’re breaking bread together and all this stuff, it’s probably gone beyond, well, ‘maybe I’ll call you and maybe I won’t’ kind of thing.

Most LAT partners acknowledged that their living apart relationship status might potentially be permanent, the end-stage living arrangement for their current partnerships. However, participants varied in their level of acceptance or preference for enacting their romantic partnerships within the boundaries of separate living arrangements. Next, I present a grounded theory model describing how participants come to view their living apart relationships as a (potentially) permanent way of “doing” romantic relationships.

Deciding to LAT — When an Arrangement Evolves into a Relationship

The data demonstrate that deciding to LAT evokes a process involving a change in perception regarding the relationship’s functionality. What begins as separate living

arrangements – the telltale structure of virtually all beginning dating relationships – evolves into living-apart-together. In essence, a shift in cognition occurs whereby partners decide that living apart can be perceived as a way of “doing family.” Living apart is both function *and* form. Generally speaking, for the older adults in this study, living-apart-together was not a deliberate goal at the outset of their relationship. Separate living arrangements unconsciously evolved into living-apart-together as a way of maintaining a committed relationship similar to marriage or cohabitation.

Deciding to LAT is a gendered process involving seven contributing factors, including: personal and relational goals, age, health, partner factors, relationship histories, historical time, and relationship beliefs. LAT partners discussed relational and personal goals most often, suggesting that these goals may be viewed as the most salient factors motivating partners toward a preference for LAT.

Relational goals. Almost all (n = 20) the persons interviewed shared that at the outset their relational goals did not include eventual marriage or cohabitation. Although all mentioned that having someone to rely on for emotional support or certain instrumental tasks (e.g., “someone to call when something goes bump in the night”) was a benefit to having a committed partner, in general they were not looking for security beyond knowing their partner would not have to be dependent on them (financially or for caregiving), and vice versa. In sum, all the people in the study were looking for the same thing: *intimate companionship*. They described wanting a “friend” or “confidant” — someone to accompany them to the movies, or to dinner. Although sexual intimacy was important it was secondary to the intimacy they desired via companionship. Those participants willing to divulge information about the quality of their sexual relationships

(n = 18) described them as satisfying, but perhaps less important than when they were younger. Here Betsy compares her current sexual relationship with Miles to her previous boyfriend, Ned, with whom she shared a home for 9 years:

With Ned it was, the relationship was really very sexual cause my marriage was really pretty cold and, and there's that in my relationship with Miles, but it's not, it's fine, but to me it's not the best part. It's all, I mean, I guess it's not the best. I don't think of it as it's not the best part, and I like how things, I like how things have evolved in the relationship.

Not all the people in the study confirmed they were having sexual intercourse with their respective partners. For those who explicitly stated they were abstaining (n = 12), their reasons were often due to male impotency or health issues (n = 10), but not exclusively. Religious convictions (identified as a personal goal in the following section) were also cited as a reason for abstaining from actions that might tempt them to have sex (e.g., stayovers, Jamison & Ganong, 2011) or publicly pronounce that a sexual relationship (presumably) exists (e.g., cohabitation). Only women expressed this concern. For example, a former minister's wife, Lisa, felt fairly certain about not wanting to get married again, but she missed some of the closeness afforded to those who share a home together. However, because of her religious convictions, cohabitation was not an option for Lisa because she did not feel comfortable with cohabitation outside of marriage.

I go back to this old feeling of, of shacking up together, you know, back in the back of my head. I don't like that, and I find myself in that in a way, and so I'm, I have to fight with myself a little . . . I have struggled with that from the beginning, yeah, the values thing has bothered me although, like I say, my family's fine with it, we are fine with it together, and yet it's back there.

Interestingly, those citing religious reasons for their abstinence often confessed later in their interviews to having sexual intercourse with their partners early on in the

relationship (or trying to), and ceasing due to male impotency/health issues. For example, when I asked Delilah if her partner, Bruce, ever spent the night, she replied,

I don't believe in living together without being married. For a while Bruce would stay over here at night, but I didn't feel comfortable with it. So I told him, "Look, I love you, I want to be with you, but this is not right. You know it, and I know it. So, okay, you're gonna have to start going home at night." So he wasn't upset about it. He just, you know, he knew, he knew as well as I did that it was wrong in the sight of God.

Later in the interview when I asked Delilah explicitly if she and Bruce had a sexual relationship she replied:

Delilah: Nope. (laughs)

Interviewer: And has that been the case all four years or was there [one] early on?

Delilah: We tried, but we're too old. It's the best.

Interviewer: Tell me about that. What does that mean 'it's the best'?

Delilah: (laughs) Well, the best way to say it is what can't get up can't get out. (laughs)

Although some participants abstained from sexual intercourse for religious or health reasons, their relationships were certainly romantic and were not entirely devoid of sexual intimacy. Several abstinent partners talked about other intimate activities they engaged in to stimulate sexual arousal, such as kissing, cuddling, giving massages, or engaging in oral sex or manual stimulation.

Personal goals. In addition to relational goals, interviewees described other decisive types of goals regarding their motivations to live apart. These other goals were personal rather than relational. As indicated above, the personal goal of maintaining long established religious convictions surrounding one's attitudes about non-marital cohabitation served as a motivation to live apart for some participants. However, personal

goals chiefly centered around the desire to maintain and/or establish autonomy via the continuance of roles (e.g., friendships, familial roles/obligations, work roles), traditions/rituals (e.g., holiday celebrations; weekday or weekend rituals) and hobbies that most often predated the LAT relationship. For example, Ben explained his preference for his LAT relationship by sharing how the arrangement allows him the ability to preserve his alone time. He stated, “I really do enjoy my own company, by and large, so that’s a force.” Like Ben, other participants extolled how their LAT relationships allowed both they and their partners the ability to “maintain life as usual” by being able to continue their pre-established routines. Indeed, many participants shared versions of the following sentiment: “He has his life, and I have mine.”

For some of the LAT partners, their relationships were enacted within fairly specific boundaries/domains (e.g., time together delegated to weekends only, family holiday routines are kept separate, or expenses are split evenly), while others experienced more integrated boundaries and incorporated their partners in most aspects of their lives. All of the participants felt their routines were flexible to some degree. Highly important was the desire to avoid spending time with a partner out of obligation or based on preconceived expectations borne out of previous relationship experience. Thus, for the most part established routines between these LAT partners developed organically, with an understanding that they could be adjusted should certain circumstances require a change. For example, Jill and Ben have a regular routine of seeing each other on specific days of the week. When asked why this routine was established each partner echoed the other, stating that his or her shared routine was based on the fact that one partner was retired and the other continued to work part-time. Their routine, therefore, developed out

of necessity because, as Ben stated, “Jill was not available much in the evenings [during the week] because [she doesn’t] get off work until five o’clock.” When asked if this routine was flexible, both partners responded affirmatively, reiterating that their visitation routine developed merely by convenience. As Jill stated, “we’re not so strict that we won’t change it (the visitation schedule) for some good reason.” Like Jill and Ben, several other participants organized their time with their partners based on work obligations.

In combination with the relational and personal goals described above, age, health, partner factors, relationship histories, and historical time were identified as additional factors motivating these older adults to LAT. These five factors are explained below, followed by a presentation of the core concept of the study.

Age. Advanced age was commonly cited as a reason to LAT rather than to cohabit or marry. Interviewees described being “too old” to get married (again, or for the first time), believing “marriage is for young people raising children.” They viewed dating in later life differently than dating in young adulthood. Dating in youth was recalled as the necessary first step toward eventual marriage in order to establish security for building a family. For most, dating as an older adult was not future-oriented or family-centric. Regarding future planning, most participants described having a carefree (or trying to have a carefree) approach. They expressed keeping expectations at bay and simply just letting their relationships “exist,” or as Betsy explained about her relationship, “It’s something I do one day at a time.” As well, when Celia was asked about the long-term view of her relationship with Mitch, she replied:

We don't, we don't have those kinds of conversations. We're not, I don't know how to explain it. We don't talk in depth, we don't talk about our relationship; it just exists.

And, as the following three quotes suggest, dating relationships in older adulthood lack a family-centric focus:

Jacob: I think relationships develop differently when you're aged than they are when you're young, and my daughter's just getting ready to get married so I think she's looking at, you know, it's time to get married, it's time to have some kids, it's time, you know. Well, it's not happening with me . . . I'm well beyond being a dad at 64, and I'm not entirely sure I see any substantial point in being married other than, than having kids.

Lisa: I reasoned it [sex outside of marriage] out that, you know, if we were starting, if we were young people going to start a family, I would not do this. I would never have done this before marriage and neither would he, as a young person. But it's different because, you are not, it's not affecting the family whatsoever. You're not gonna have children, but you need this, you need this loving, and I had not had much [in my marriage].

Phyllis: Marriage? At my age? That's, well, that's one of the problems. I don't see that there is a huge benefit. At my age we're not going to have children. We're not, I mean, we can share a home without marriage, and it's perfectly acceptable to have a contractual arrangement in this day and age. And the hippie factor, it's not necessary. We're both, now I'm gonna use that word committed to a monogamous and exclusive relationship, so I don't really see the point in marriage right now. And I don't want to marry for my financial stability, and I don't want a marriage because it's some social dictum, my Judeo-Christian friends who think that, you know, that's sinful. I'm not, that's ridiculous. I don't believe in that dogma. And so I don't see the point at this stage in life. I don't see the point. Maybe that will change.

The quotes above demonstrate how older adults in LAT partnerships meaningfully consider age as a factor influencing their decision to LAT. Jacob, Lisa, and Phyllis believed their advanced age negated what they perceived marriage could offer as a benefit over LAT — a legally sanctioned sense of (financial) security. LAT partners felt that young couples with children need this security, but older adults who “have their own families,” have launched their children, own their own homes, and have a reliable source of income are no longer in need of the security marriage can offer. Without a need for this security, (re)marriage in late life is superfluous at best, and at worst a risky proposition due to the legal and financial ramifications that can occur when a spouse needs to be institutionalized due to deteriorating health, or upon his or her death. By not getting married, LAT partners, especially women, believed they were protecting their assets in terms of time, finances, and even their emotional health.

Health and other partner factors. In marriage, the expectation to care — physically, financially, and emotionally — for one another “until death do us part,” is strong. The LAT partners in this study were not averse to providing some level of care to their partners should their partner’s health status require it. However, LAT partners were cautious about making indefinite “for better or for worse” promises like the ones often recited during marriage vows. For example, Denise was adamantly against the idea of marrying her LAT partner, Eli, because it would put her at legal obligation to physically and financially provide for him. She stated,

Marriage is a problem when you’re older because, okay, if Eli and I got married now, what happens if he goes into a nursing home and if suddenly my assets are his assets because we’re married and it sucks it all away, and the money that I intended for my nursing home is now gone. Or if I managed to have assets still intact at the time of my death, it would go to my son. What if I’m married? No, then it goes to the partner. You know, there are

complications there and, and legal, and financial entanglements that for me, I just feel like unless the guy's really wealthy so that what I have is nothing, marriage is just not an option, and I would think that's a problem with an awful lot of people, especially if they're looking toward taking care of themselves in their old age and/or leaving something to their children.

Like Denise, most LAT partners felt strongly about avoiding any legal obligation to provide for their partner, yet they wanted to be able to offer as much support to their partner as they deemed possible. In other words, any caregiving provided would be offered out of love and the desire to care, rather than due to an obligation dictated by the court system. What and how much support they were willing to provide hinged mostly on partner factors, such as the amount of care their partner required (round-the-clock vs. a few hours/day) or their partner's willingness or ability to reciprocate support. For example, Anita's decision to LAT appeared to be greatly influenced by partner factors, such as her partner, Gary's, financial security. When faced with the hypothetical of having to someday care for Gary, Anita replied:

I hate to have it all come down to money, but I wouldn't get to the point where I was paying for round the clock nursing care because he needed that care because he certainly can be saving, preparing, knowing how to do that, and he's just not doing it. I don't feel like it's my financial obligation when he's choosing not to do that [demonstrate personal financial responsibility]. I even told him that if we got married he could be on my health insurance that's a fantastic policy but that he would, he would have to make the financial commitment to, that I knew that I was giving up the [alimony] and I was, to have to go through all that, the possibility of trying to get the annulment that he would have to make that commitment that he was gonna contribute financially, and he never will.

Throughout her interview Anita demonstrated high levels of ambivalence about being in an LAT relationship. Her uncertainty about marrying her partner was almost exclusively due to the fact that she felt he was not a financially responsible person. She was not

willing to risk forfeiting her alimony payments if she remarried her partner unless he was capable of filling the financial gap:

Oh, he'll say things like "You know, I told you I would do [it]" and I said "Really, and how are you gonna do that if the amount of money you have is just enough for you to do what you're doing now? How are you gonna give more? Where is it gonna come from? You know, are you gonna get another job? Are you gonna work during those periods of time where you're not doing the taxes?" And he never will.

Only female participants — and a minority at that — talked about the need to maintain a sense of reciprocity in their LAT relationship. Like Anita, these women were quick to point out how uncertainties regarding their partner's level of commitment played a role in their decisions about providing care. For example, Betsy described how it had been frustrating to care for her partner, Miles, after his recovery from hip surgery because she felt she was "giving too much." She said,

It was difficult because it was very lopsided because he was needy, and I was taking care of him, and I wasn't getting anything back . . . [so] this business of caring for him and stepping up if he needs something, that aspect is there, but I don't know how big it is, I haven't been tested except for his hip surgery. That's not like a diagnosis of cancer.

However, Betsy immediately followed up these remarks saying, "it sounds like I could leave in a wink, and I've thought about it, and I can't leave in a wink, I wouldn't leave in a wink. I don't think, I don't think, but."

All participants were willing to — at varying degrees — consider cohabitation in the event that their respective partners would need physical caregiving, but most anticipated this on a temporary basis only. Like Betsy's quote indicates, participants often struggled with making any definitive decisions about what choice they would make should their LAT partner need (more) intensive caregiving. Although several participants had cohabited with their partners on a temporary basis to provide care, only four

participants (two couples) described having explicitly discussed with their partner what they would do should one of them require intensive or 24-hour care. However, these discussions did not necessarily mean that clear plans were made. For example, Eli was vehement about his plans to move to a retirement home as soon as his health deteriorated to a point where he could no longer live alone. Inversely his partner, Denise, seriously contemplated the possibility of having Eli move in with her. Jill and Ben were another LAT couple that had explicitly discussed caregiving. When asked what they would do if one of them need round the clock care, Jill responded,

We've expressed to each other if it gets to the point where one of us can't take care of the other one or doesn't feel comfortable taking care of the other one, we would not expect them to, and we would either go to a care facility or make some arrangement because it comes to a point where at your age you can't take care of a person, if they're really, really ill. So we understand that, and we wouldn't expect it. If he would get or I would get dementia or Alzheimer's or something, we would not expect the other one to keep the other one at home because we just wouldn't. I mean, I think we respect each other too much to even ask that.

When Jill was asked to explain under what circumstances she would care for Ben in her home, she replied, "It depends on what kind of care he needed. If he needed physical care, I probably couldn't do it. I mean, I couldn't lift him." Like Jill, other participants described a willingness to provide some level of care to their partner for an ambiguous amount of time or for whatever amount they were physically able. Only one participant was able (or willing) to consider how increasing cognitive or physical disability on her partner's behalf might impact the stability of her LAT relationship. Although Jill possibly alludes to this chance by her mentioning of dementia and Alzheimer's disease in the above quote, only Linda was willing to recognize that her relationship with Jack may dissolve if she or he was diagnosed with dementia and needed to be in a care facility.

Linda was the only person interviewed who had been in an LAT relationship prior to the one she was in at the time of her interview. Her first LAT relationship ended because her partner, Robert, was diagnosed with AD and was institutionalized. As Robert's disease progressed and his memory suffered, Linda moved on to a new romantic relationship with Jack, although she still visits Robert "as a friend."

Relationship histories & historical time. The data also demonstrate that relationship histories and historical time influenced participants' decisions to LAT. These two factors were often considered in tandem with one another as participants considered decisions they made about prior relationships and how those decisions reflected the time period in which those relationships occurred. For example, Betsy explained how her experience in her prior relationship(s), and (historical) time, motivated her toward wanting to establish autonomy, and self-sufficiency.

When I got married it was absolutely what I wanted to do. . . It wasn't at all what I thought it was gonna be, but that was what I wanted and I did it. And then when I had this [cohabiting] relationship with Ned, Ned was like catching up. That was my adventure . . . then that was done. So I had my dream, my little house and the picket fence, and then I had my adventure and then the last part was what I thought is I need to learn how to live alone . . . I've been left already a couple of times and I don't feel sorry for this. I wouldn't go back on what, on my experiences and all. They were what they were and, and I like, for the most part, where I am right now. And to know that, that I can take care of myself. I mean, to me when I got married one of the things I thought about [with] getting married is, 'well, you marry this man and he takes care of you for the rest of your life and you don't have to worry.' Well, that's how it was back in the 60s (laughs), and it's not that way now. So now, one of the things I've felt I needed to do for myself was to know that I could take care of myself. . . . I wanted to know that I can, that I don't have to rely on a man.

Betsy told a story of how her romantic history and societal norms regarding relationship involvement (i.e., historical time) led to her enactment of a living-apart-together relationship with her current partner, Miles. More specifically, however, her story

provides additional insight into the process of how living-apart-together became Betsy's current relationship-style preference because it demonstrates how certain factors like relationship history and historical time both had an influence in the modification of Betsy's beliefs about relationships or what romantic relationships should 'look (or be) like.' Almost all participants (n =20) shared stories similar to Betsy's indicating how these factors — conflated with their current goals, age, health, and/or partner factors — prompted them to reconcile their beliefs about committed, romantic relationships.

Core Concept: Reconciling Relationship Beliefs

Personal and relational goals, age, health, partner factors, relationship histories, and historical time coalesce in varying degrees to impact participants' relationship beliefs (e.g., about love and sex, commitment, the meaning of marriage, etc.). *Reconciling relationship beliefs* was identified as the core concept of this study. In essence, what participants are 'doing' during the process of deciding to LAT is working to resolve their long-held and often-ingrained beliefs about romantic relationships. The degree to which participants resolve or reconcile their relationship beliefs explains whether or not they view their relationship as merely living apart vs. living-apart-together. In other words, the core concept explains participants' degree of ambivalence — or strength of preference — about being in an LAT relationship.

Preference for LAT

Opposing LAT partners. Although most participants felt marriage was unnecessary at their age, five held expectations for future marriage or cohabitation — with or without their current partners. These five participants were resistant to LAT as a way of 'doing' relationships, but found themselves in such an arrangement due to clear

constraints they perceived prevented them from sharing a home with their respective partners. For the engaged couple, Delilah and Bruce, the constraint was Bruce's house. Delilah refused to marry Bruce until he cleaned out his house from the remaining, hoarded belongings of his deceased wife who had passed away over five years ago from the date of her interview. Sharon and Derrick's constraint was primarily familial. Derrick felt his children needed more time to process their mother's death, which occurred less than one year ago, before he remarried or cohabited with another woman. Finally, Enid's constraint was her partner, Jacob. Enid perceived her partner to be "incapable" of living with someone else. She clearly stated a preference for marriage or cohabitation, and she intended to eventually end her relationship with Jacob if his relationship goals did not soon begin to match her own.

Although five participants desired marriage or cohabitation despite the fact that their current partnership arrangements might have suggested otherwise, the remaining (n = 20) study participants did not expect to marry or cohabit. However, for some these expectations did exist in the beginning. The 20 LAT partners who neither expected to marry or cohabit described experiencing a shift in thinking regarding relationship beliefs surrounding expectations about the enactment of romantic relationships and how committed relationships are operationalized. As Betsy said, "What I thought of all relationships is [that], all relationships if they're good, if they're healthy, [they] end in marriage." Betsy continued to explain how her beliefs shifted over time, and she currently felt that her LAT relationship with her partner, Miles, is,

...kind of a relationship of learning that I can be, that I can live alone, that I can be by myself and I'll be o.k. and I can manage. And maybe also there might be an ego defense mechanism about being rejected . . . I'm protecting myself from being totally vulnerable and I don't know about

that, but I just wonder sometimes. Maybe I'm protecting myself on purpose by not setting as a goal that we should be married.

As depicted in Betsy's comments this shift in thinking regarding expectations for marriage was often met with ambivalence.

Ambivalent LAT partners. Ambivalent participants (n = 9) recognized the benefits of living apart from their partners as they shared how their relationships afforded them a perfect balance of independence, security, and romance. Living-apart-together allowed them autonomy/independence while also offering their primary relationship goal of intimate companionship. However, their ambivalence about being in an LAT relationship indefinitely was made apparent when many of them talked about missing the experience of living with a romantic partner, even though most described themselves as being unsuccessful at marriage or at sharing living quarters with a partner. Ambivalent men (n = 3), however, missed the instrumental benefits marriage or cohabitation afforded them (i.e., a wife to do domestic chores, or sharing living expenses), whereas most ambivalent women (n = 6) talked about the benefits of greater intimacy and closeness. For example, Phyllis spoke of her need to remain in an LAT relationship because she needed time to heal from her previous divorce. However, she also spoke nostalgically about the benefits of marriage (or cohabitation) in terms of someone being around on a daily basis "to witness your life." Interestingly, this idea of having someone around to witness the mundane aspects of life was also touted as a drawback to being in a cohabiting (marital or otherwise) relationship — but only by the ambivalent women (and championing LAT partners, described next). The ambivalent women alleged that an LAT relationship provides partners with the ability to avoid the mundane parts of relationships that they believed cause arguments and stress when cohabiting (e.g., housework;

childrearing). LAT partners do not have to worry about the “heavy things,” as Lisa stated. “You don’t have to worry about all the mundane things that a marriage does, especially in raising the family and that sort of thing.” But, the very mundane parts of relationships were also what ambivalent female partners perhaps felt validated the commitment they felt toward their respective partners. For example, when asked if there was anything appealing about the idea of living with her partner, Lisa replied,

Sometimes here when I’m cooking I think oh, I wish he were here, I’d fix him this and that, and I’ll call him and tell him I’m baking bread and I’ll want to take care of him, you know, I want to do things together with him, and I’m thinking that would be nice to be in a place where we’re together all the time that’s not just a trip or a weekend or something, a natural setting. But then I think of the times when we are together and like I said I need to be apart. . .it’s an ambivalent feeling.

Sharing in the mundane is what ambivalent partners felt made the bond in marriage or committed cohabitation unique and special, even if they perceived themselves as never having been successful in either type of relationship. Indeed, negative relationship histories were not enough motivation for ambivalent partners to completely discontinue harboring reverent feelings toward the institution of marriage and believing marital relationships represent the ultimate expression of commitment and love.

Championing LAT partners. Although many participants were ambivalent about their LAT relationships, most (n = 11) championed the notion of being in one. They held less conventional relationship beliefs that were more flexible than those expressing ambivalence. LAT champions not only recognized the benefits of LAT, they viewed LAT as superior to marriage or cohabitation. Indeed, rather than revere marriage most champions abhorred it and questioned why anyone with negative marital experiences would desire it again. For one LAT champion, even avoiding interactions

that resembled marriage was important to him. In sharing a story about how his partner, Denise, had taken liberties to make plans without consulting him, Eli demonstrated anxiety over what Denise's behavior represented:

Eli: She's trying to make a family member out of me.

Interviewer: She is?

Eli: Yes.

Interviewer: Oh.

Eli: That's what I feel. You know, if you're married you often do stuff like that with, about your husband or your wife and you include them in something without asking their permission. I think a lot of marriages are like that . . . married people tend to, that's I think part of the contract. That's one of the things I don't want to do. (laughs).

One woman in this group, Jill, detested marriage less so, even stating that she had enjoyed parts of her previous marriages, yet she was resolute about her LAT preference because she viewed it as the perfect arrangement. Sharing in her conviction about the merits of LAT Jill's partner, Ben, was also less loathing toward marriage even though he felt he was not good at being married. "It [LAT] seems so just perfectly natural to me," Ben said, "I'm prejudiced. [LAT] just seems better [than marriage/cohabiting]." Ben described himself as incapable of monogamy in his prior marriages, but in retelling of his experiences he neither revered nor abhorred marriage. Simply, marriage did not work for him. Importantly, however, LAT champions were not in LAT relationships to avoid commitment. Regardless of their intent to be in a committed relationship from the outset, these individuals confirmed that they were all committed to their partners on a personal level. They were not, however, interested in the structural commitments that ambivalent partners were struggling to reconcile as part of their definition of commitment. As Eli

stated regarding his feelings of commitment toward his partner, Denise, “I wouldn’t want to iterate, put it down on paper. I don’t want, I hate to feel trapped, but emotionally, yeah, I feel that way.”

Both ambivalent and championing LAT partners talked about fit in terms of marriage, however, their explanations for a lack of fit appeared to vary more by gender than by preference to LAT. Women internalized the lack of fit, whereas men externalized it. In other words, men blamed the institution of marriage (e.g., marriage is not a good fit for them), and women blamed themselves (they are not fit for marriage). This was particularly poignant for Miriam, who shared that the reason for never marrying her LAT partner of 25 years, Floyd, was because she “didn’t deserve it.” Miriam’s previous marriage ended when her husband committed suicide — something she blamed herself for due to her inability or unwillingness to stifle her discontent. Miriam told a story of disillusionment due to the traditional gender roles that accompanied her marriage. She responded by getting a job outside the home as a nurse at the local hospital, and she quickly preferred being at work to her time at home. When her husband committed suicide, Miriam was at work; she attributed her preference for her work role over her spousal role as the reason her husband died, thus convincing herself that she is undeserving of marriage.

Modeling the Process of Developing a Preference for LAT

In sum, developing a preference toward LAT is a gendered process involving seven contributing factors, including: personal and relational goals, age, health, partner factors, relationship history, historical time, and relationship beliefs (see Figure 1). Relationship beliefs represent the core concept because the data demonstrate that

reconciling one's relationship beliefs — particularly those beliefs surrounding commitment and expectations — is key to understanding the process of how older adults decide to LAT. The other six factors flow into this core concept, two of which have a bidirectional influence with relationship beliefs. That is, participants' relationship beliefs evolve based on their goals and partners' beliefs; however, changing relationship beliefs can also impose changes on their goals and their partners' beliefs.

Relational and personal goals are pictorially represented in the model as one contributing factor to denote a level of symbiosis. They are presented in the model within a single block (entitled, "goals: personal and relational") because the pursuit of both types of goals symbiotically explains the motivation participants had to LAT. As well, personal goals and relational goals are sometimes difficult to distinguish. For example, maintaining autonomy/independence — a personal goal — could also be described as a relational goal because maintaining autonomy/independence not only has individual-level benefits, but couple-level benefits as well. Several participants made this point by stating how they felt their overall happiness and the longevity of their relationships should be credited to the fact that living-apart-together affords them the ability to simultaneously and satisfactorily achieve a relational goal of intimate companionship, without having to sacrifice personal goals of autonomy/independence. As one participant eloquently stated, "We have the best of both worlds. We have our freedom but we have each other."

Of final note is the outcome variable depicted in this model of the LAT decision-making process — LAT preference. LAT preference is represented as a bidirectional arrow suggesting a fluid continuum of experience, as opposed to a deliberate outcome that is implied with 'deciding' to LAT. Rather than a binary categorization of 'deciding'

and ‘not deciding’ participants had varied responses regarding their decision to — or preference toward — LAT. Nine individuals experienced an ambivalent preference toward their relationship status. The remaining were more resolute about their preference toward LAT, with five individuals resistant to LAT — firmly desiring marriage or cohabitation — and 11 fully championing LAT as a lifestyle.

Relationship Maintenance Strategies

The reason participants in this study were asked about their relationship maintenance strategies was to recognize strategies unique from those that have already been identified and discussed in the broad literature on relationship maintenance. The five participants who opposed their living-apart arrangement did not describe maintenance strategies unique from those that have been previously identified by relationship maintenance scholars. Therefore, the relationship maintenance strategies discussed here only apply to the 20 ambivalent or championing LAT partners identified in this study.

When participants were asked what they do to keep their relationships going (i.e., avoid dissolution), or what they do to stay satisfied in their relationships, ambivalent and championing LAT partners described two broad strategies: 1) maintaining separateness, and, 2) redefining commitment. These strategies are derivative of two of the seven contributing factors explaining the preference for LAT (Figure 1), namely, personal/relational goals and reconciling relationship beliefs. Maintaining separateness is indicative of the personal/relational goals that partially explain participants’ motivations to LAT as opposed to marry or cohabit. The second strategy — redefining commitment — is indicative of the core concept in the LAT decision-making process model,

reconciling relationship beliefs. These relationship maintenance strategies are the means whereby LAT partners are able to achieve their goals and reconcile their beliefs about relationships.

Maintaining separateness. Maintaining separateness involves maintaining one's previously established — and therefore separate — homes, relationships, hobbies, and finances. “Defining some life for myself,” as one participant described it, is a vital means for maintaining the LAT relationship. Maintaining separateness supports LAT partners' overall goals of: 1) maintaining autonomy/independence, and, 2) building a romantic relationship focused on intimacy and companionship/friendship. In most cases, participants attributed keeping the majority of the routine or mundane aspects of their lives separate and apart from their relationship as key to allowing them the ability to focus on keeping their LAT relationship “fun” and “light,” positioning intimacy at the forefront. Here, Phyllis astutely illustrates this notion, making it clear that she perceives maintaining separateness as an advantage and strategy for building intimacy:

The intimacy factor, as I mentioned, is very easy when you're only seeing the person that you care about deeply three, really only two days out of the week, two nights and two days. It's easy because it's all fresh and new and you're excited to see them and you want to be with them, and whatever you're doing together is fun, even if it's just driving around [running errands]. And so it's easy. It seems so easy to me, and he's really good about sharing concerns with me. Again, I'm thinking I'm his touchstone. I think he, he likes to share issues that he's having with me, and I've gotten better about doing that with him, and so there's that intimacy about our lives and what's going on in our lives.

Ben shared this sentiment, yet more simply:

It's lovely, you know — to be a little crude — to have that connection, but not underfoot, is freeing.

Autonomous decision-making. As mentioned earlier in this chapter when describing ambivalent LAT partners, maintaining separate living quarters was not always viewed as ideal, yet the benefits it afforded were hard to ignore; particularly when it came to avoiding difficult or “heavy” decisions with partners. Lisa expressed this when she described how living at a distance from her partner made time together something to “relish” so that there was “no time to discuss anything that’s heavy. . . the heaviest thing for us is how to get back to see each other again.” Lisa was thankful that she did not have to make heavy decisions with her partner about children, finances, homes, or how she spends her free time – topics she and other LAT partners felt provide fodder for fueling conflict that often befalls married or cohabiting partners.

Aside from maintaining separateness with regard to homes, finances, hobbies, and relationships, in particular, maintaining *autonomous decision-making* within those domains was of great importance. Ambivalent and championing LAT partners felt ill at ease about having to make compromises, so keeping the business end (i.e., finances, assets) of their lives mostly separate allowed them the ability to make unilateral decisions about how they handled those aspects of their everyday life. For example, not having a shared home allowed participants the freedom to make their own decisions about how to decorate, remodel, or maintain their respective houses. As well, keeping finances separate and avoiding joint financial purchases allowed them the ability to independently decide how they handled their money. The same was true for how they allocated their time for work, hobbies, and fostering other family relationships or friendships. Several participant quotes provide examples of this need for autonomous decision-making about their lives:

Betsy: It is my home, and it’s very personal. And one of the things
I liked when my husband left was that I didn’t have to

negotiate any more about what I was buying for the house, that if I liked it, I didn't have to go ask him if I could, cause I felt I had to ask him. I wasn't generating any money into the coffers. I remember seeing a painting that I loved, and I came home and I felt like a little girl going to [my husband] to ask permission. I said, "I saw this painting and I just love it and it's \$150, and I would really like to buy it. Can I buy it?" I mean, that was kind of what I said. Anyway. [So now] I don't have to do any kind of negotiating with anyone.

Jacob: I do some stuff that's I guess 'my stuff' and if it's my stuff she's not invited to come along. For example, I might decide that I'll go to a training seminar to learn [a new hobby] and the situation is I can decide. I might see an announcement for a three-day training seminar in Los Angeles to learn how to do this, and I can just say, "All right, that'll fit in my schedule," and then I'm going to LA for three days to, you know, to do this stuff. And I tell her in this, in terms of being an announcement rather than [asking her], "Is it okay if I [go]?" No, I would never consider that. I would say, "I am doing this." So that's the deal, [she] can't help me decide, and she can't [come along].

Mindy: I had done the cohabitation thing and there was just so much compromising, you know, and at this point in my life I wanted, I'm from a large family, and it seemed like I was catering to everybody else. I just wanted my life to be about me. I was feeling self-centered. I didn't want to make those kinds of compromises.

Jill: We both have our own children, and I had everything (finances; assets) set up to go to my children if anything happened to me. And I think he does, too. So we didn't want to get that all entwined to where maybe the kids would have a problem if something happened to one of us . . . Ben and I just didn't want to deal with that. We both had our own incomes. You know, we didn't really need each other's money, and also I think to be in charge of your own financial situation made us both feel comfortable. I didn't want anything to do with his finances and he didn't want anything to do with mine.

Freedom to ignore negative traits. In general, maintaining separateness, particularly in terms of living arrangements, also affords ambivalent and championing LAT partners the luxury of being able to ignore their partners' perceived negative traits or bad habits. Jacob, a championing LAT partner, described these negative traits as warts.

I think, you know, living apart the majority of the time, you know if there are warts you don't see them really. If there are small problems that, you know, would then become larger problems. If you spend 95% of your time apart, then you're not sort of focused on [irritating habits].

An LAT couple, Miles and Betsy, expressed a sense of gratitude that their LAT relationships conveniently allowed them the ability to ignore irritations that they believe arise when sharing an abundance of space and/or time with a partner. For example, Miles sympathized about his married friends' situations as he explained how his LAT relationship relieved him from having to experience the same fate:

My friends that have been married so long, you know, they complain about their wives so much (laughs), you know, and since I know their wives, I know their wives' habits. And yeah, what [my friends are] complaining about is legit. But, I don't have to do that kind of thing. I don't have to complain about Betsy because we don't live together. . . getting married is like sharpening the edge of the knife.

In turn, Betsy spoke about several of her partner's habits that she envisions becoming points of possible contention if they were ever to share a home together:

I have to tell you, as I think about going to Miles's house there are times I'm in there rearranging the living room. In my head I'm rearranging it and realizing how he lives in his house. I don't watch television. He watches a lot of television and he has this big TV set in the living room. I have never had a TV set in my living room, never, cause I think if you're gonna watch television it has to be deliberate, you don't just have it in an easy place where you go and it stays on. You need to go there and pay attention to it. . . So the television set's here (Betsy gestures with her hands), he sits on the stool over here (Betsy gestures), sometimes the radio is on. He'll have the TV on mute so he can watch that, the radio might be on, and then sometimes he might be playing music, (laughs) and then he has a book! (laughs) Well, he's, you know, he doesn't sit still. He doesn't

know how to sit still very well, and I just think about, you know, would this drive me crazy? I mean, I can leave this alone. I don't have to, you know, and I have, when I go to his house what I think is 'this is how he lives.' I respect it, you know, cause I'm not, I don't live here, and I don't have all this stuff turned on. . . [If we lived together] I don't know how it would be, and I don't know if I could ignore it and just accept it.

Like Betsy, others conjectured about how their expectations might differ if they were married or cohabiting. For ambivalent and championing LAT partners, keeping expectations and feelings of obligations at bay were perceived as relationship maintenance strategies, as Teddy describes here:

Once you go from being in a relationship such as the one we have now into a live-in relationship then the amount of expectation that's placed on each individual by the other and by self to do something for her or for him goes way, way up, and I don't like that. If I want to, if I want to go with her [to an event] to support her, 'okay.' But I don't want to respond to an expectation.

Although Teddy and other championing LAT partners were resolute about their desire to avoid expectations or behaving out of obligation rather than desire, those who were perhaps more actively working to reconcile their relationship beliefs struggled with the idea of being in a committed relationship that did not include expectations or obligations. Hence, redefining commitment by revising one's expectations and minimizing feelings of obligation were crucial maintenance strategies for LAT partners, and were particularly salient for ambivalent partners at the time of their interviews.

Redefining commitment: revising expectations. Revising expectations engendered certain cognitive strategies such as changing how one conceptualizes a (happily) committed relationship. For the championing and ambivalent LAT partners, their subjective evaluations of their relationship satisfaction evolved (is evolving) with an understanding that their own personal fulfillment and happiness is not (should not be)

dependent on their LAT partner/relationship. One participant, Phyllis, described this revision of expectations as involving an “aspect of settling.”

I think there is a settling aspect to it. Because Henry mentioned this weekend, ‘I hate it when you go’ and I said, ‘I know but we have obligations.’ So there is that aspect of settling because I know he’d like to spend more time with me, and I’d like to spend more time with him, but on a day to day basis being there at his house, I’m not sure I’d want that.

Phyllis went on to describe how working to revise her expectations surrounding her current LAT partner/relationship was a result of her negative experience in her prior marriage and subsequent divorce. Learning from her divorce experience, Phyllis shared how she (along with her recently divorced best friend) is revising her expectations about romantic partners/relationships by taking personal responsibility in making sure she is “take[n] care of.”

My best friend and I are learning to take care of ourselves now. We for years took care of somebody else, and they didn’t reciprocate. So we’re trying to take care of ourselves, and that’s the mature way to deal with things. It’s certainly an evolving system... there are so many issues involved in it...relationships at this stage of your life are incredibly complex and I’m not even conscious of everything that’s going on...as to a totally typical first marriage, [an LAT relationship] is so far removed from that. It’s a different animal altogether.

Like Phyllis, many LAT partners (especially ambivalent women) described being cautious about having too many expectations of — or doing things out of obligation for — their respective LAT partners/relationships. Of the ambivalent and championing LAT partners, all those who had experienced divorce (and three widows) shared stories of past relationships where they had been disappointed when they felt they had fulfilled their obligations as a spouse, but their spouse did not reciprocate in fulfilling his or her obligations. These experiences appeared to greatly impact these participants, leading them to revise their expectations about relationships and obligations. After a messy

divorce and the break-up of a nine-year cohabiting relationship, Betsy (an ambivalent LAT partner) had to learn to shed the engrained expectations she had about doing relationships.

One of the things that I try really hard not to do is to expect something from him, and I think that's part of not being, not being disappointed, you know, when you have expectations that you, cause there have been times when I've had certain expectations and I thought, 'oh, this is gonna be like this'... This is something I've eventually come to because in the beginning of our relationship I had a [mindset] of, 'well, if we're gonna do, 'supposed to's', and I had all these expectations while we were dating, like, "It's the weekend and you haven't said anything about what we're gonna do," you know, this kind of stuff and it was being able to shed the expectations and 'the shoulds.'

Like Phyllis, Betsy also described a need for recognizing personal responsibility in safeguarding her own personal happiness. Quoted earlier in this chapter to describe how participants reconcile their relationship beliefs as they develop a preference for LAT, Betsy described how her current LAT relationship represented her next phase in 'doing' romantic relationships. "[My LAT relationship is a] kind of a relationship of learning that I can be, that I can live alone, that I can be by myself and I'll be o.k., and I can manage." Phyllis and Betsy both summarized how their LAT relationships represent a more "mature," style of partnering in comparison to the committed relationships they had been in previously. Betsy said,

It's almost like this is my first grown up relationship (laughs) if that, that sounds silly but, I was so young when I got married, there were just so many myths that I just thought certain things just happen, that it's just the natural ebb and flow of events and they just happen.

While participants did engage in many shared activities or hobbies, what they felt differed for them compared to married or cohabiting couples was a strong element of choice. LAT partners regularly let their significant others 'off the hook' regarding

obligatory actions. Flexibility and minimal expectations were often cited by ambivalent and championing partners to describe how their relationships ‘worked.’ For example, when Gabby was asked to describe how her relationship with her LAT partner functions, she replied,

It’s flexible, and I don’t make any demands. I don’t really have, I don’t know what to expect. I want to see him as he is, however that is. I want him to be, to just be, like I want to be. I don’t want demands on me, and I won’t make them on him.

Ben also attributed flexibility as a reason his relationship with Jill ‘works’ well. When asked if conversations about marriage or cohabitation had ever arisen between them, Ben stated that neither he nor his partner were interested in marriage or cohabitation. He felt their current LAT arrangement was ideal for the main reason that, in LAT relationships, expectations are flexible and obligations, scarce. For example, travel had once been a mainstay in his and Jill’s relationship. Over time, however, Ben decided he no longer wanted to travel. The following quote demonstrates how Ben attributes his partner’s flexible expectations as a benefit and a reason for why their relationship is “perfect.”

[Our relationship] has all of the benefits and none of the drawbacks. . .It’s just perfect with the flux of we do sometimes travel together, and go to family functions that she has and so forth...Occasionally she goes off and there’s something that she wants to do with her daughter, and if I don’t want to go, I don’t. I told her recently, “You know, I really don’t want to travel anymore, and definitely not in an airplane, definitely not over the ocean. It’s just too cramped, too uncomfortable, and I’m done doing that.” She wanted to go to Italy, and so we talked and she then arranged with her daughter to go with her on a tour to Italy.

It is clear from the above-mentioned quote that Ben felt no obligation to travel with Jill if he did not feel a desire to do so. As well, other participants spoke about refraining from acting out of obligation. However, it bears repeating that most LAT partners were quick to state — with varying levels of resolve — that not acting out of obligation did not

equate to a lack of commitment. In fact, their commitment toward their partner could be perceived as being stronger than the commitment between married or cohabiting couples because everything they did with or for one another was out of desire, rather than a mix of desire and feelings of obligation. Linda's (a championing LAT partner) response to being asked about her commitment level toward her partner, Jack, is indicative of this evolved sense of being fully committed without the inclusion of obligations.

Linda: I feel totally committed to Jack, and I think he totally does to me too. I took awhile, but I feel very committed to him, very, very committed.

Interviewer: What does it mean to be committed?

Linda: To me it means I look forward to being with him, I look so forward to his hugs and kisses and I look forward to our long conversations. I look forward to our long walks and I look forward to laughter, he makes me laugh. I just feel totally committed to him. I really do. He's never more than five minutes out of my mind.

Interviewer: Do you feel any obligations toward Jack?

Linda: In my marriage I felt very obligated to my husband. I felt that was my role. Obligated to Jack? I don't. I would take care of him in a heartbeat. I would. It's not about obligation, it's about wanting to take care of him. It's not an obligation, it's a desire. If you're obligated to do something it would be like you have an assignment. You're obligated to do that and you really can't get out of it. To be obligated to Jack? That's just not a good word.

Although Linda demonstrates an evolved, perhaps unconventional, sense of commitment toward her partner, revising one's definition or one's sense of doing commitment was a struggle for most ambivalent LAT partners. This provides further support to the notion that ambivalent LAT partners are actively working to reconcile their relationship beliefs, whereas championing LAT partners have essentially completed this task resulting in a

stronger, more resolute, preference for LAT. While citing that their relationships were committed overall, ambivalent LAT partners commonly displayed feelings of uncertainty or discomfort over the fact that their sense of commitment lacked the customary markers. Sometimes this marker involved having their definition of commitment reciprocated. For example, Phyllis believes her partner, Henry, conflates commitment with marriage, and because they are not married he is, therefore, not fully committed to her. Conversely, Phyllis herself believes commitment is measured by one's emotions and feelings toward or about a partner, much like Linda described when she explained her feelings of commitment toward Jack. Although Phyllis feels committed toward Henry by her own definition of the construct, she believes Henry is still partly committed to his ex-girlfriend — on an emotional level — whom he cohabited with for five years. As a result of these dissimilarities in their definitions of commitment, Phyllis is careful — often disparate in her comments — when talking about her own sense of commitment because her perception of her partner's lack of commitment affects how she measures it for herself. For example, at one point during her interview Phyllis states that, "Until she (the ex-girlfriend) stops being his focus, I have no intentions of committing to this man." Later on, however, Phyllis states that she is "totally committed" to caregiving for Henry if changes in his health status require it. She explains her contradiction by saying, "I can be cautious and be invested at the same time."

As well, other LAT partners struggled with redefining commitment because of the disquiet they felt about being emotionally committed without the accompanying socially recognized markers to legitimize their commitment. For example, Lisa wanted a wedding band to wear on her left hand when she traveled with her partner. Anita wanted her

partner to be able to financially provide for her, and Gabby wanted to be invited to her partner's family gatherings. Even Betsy — who took great pride in being able to manage her home to her exact preferences — acclaimed how much she enjoyed that her partner left certain personal belongings at her house because she felt it signified his commitment toward her.

In sum, commitment and its linked properties (e.g., obligations and expectations) proved to be a thorny issue for LAT partners to reconcile. Yet redefining commitment along with maintaining varied aspects of separateness in daily life appeared to be important components of relationship maintenance for LAT partners.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This study focuses on the process of cultivating committed, living-apart-together relationships among older adults. The findings from this study suggest that older adults in LAT partnerships engage in a trial and error process as they navigate how to define and label their partners/relationships. The terms ‘partner’ and ‘friend’ were deemed the most age appropriate labels to use when referring to one another. Defining the relationship involved an inductive process of defining what the relationship was not — it was not dating, and it was not marriage/cohabitation. In general, the majority of participants believed LAT was an end-stage relationship rather than a precursor to marriage or cohabitation.

Regarding the decision-making process of choosing to LAT, several factors coalesce to influence an older adult’s preference to LAT. Rather than conscious, deliberate choice-making, the data from this study suggest that a preference for LAT evolves based on seven contributing factors: personal and relational goals, age, health, partner factors, prior relationship history, historical time, and reconciling relationship beliefs. Further, the process of developing a preference for LAT was a gendered experience. Men and women were almost equally likely to experience (un)certainty about their LAT relationship, however, the explanations they provided were indicative of traditional gender norms regarding relationship expectations and roles. Men spoke more often about the instrumental benefits that LAT partnerships lack, whereas women discussed the intimacy benefits that LAT partnerships can lack compared to married or cohabiting partnerships. As well, only women expressed any concern about the need to

maintain reciprocity in their relationship with their LAT partner. These findings support those of Carr's (2004) and other scholars (e.g., Davidson, 2001) who found that remarriage is uncommon for older adults — particularly widows — because they wish to eschew the domestic demands of traditional marriage. As an alternative to (re)marriage, relationship researchers argue that cohabitation will continue to rise among the older adult population (Brown, Bulanda, & Lee, 2005; King & Scott, 2005), however, the data here suggest that older adults may view cohabitation almost equally to marriage in terms of the costs and benefits. Therefore, older adults wishing to re-partner may become increasingly interested in LAT as this approach to “doing” relationships becomes more recognized and normative in society. Indeed, a growing trend in a preference for solo living has been noted among the young and old alike (Klinenberg, 2012).

Although all of the older adults in this study identified themselves as part of a committed partnership (a criterion for inclusion in the study), a slight majority (n = 14) were either opposed or ambivalent about LAT, whereas the remaining 11 participants fully championed the LAT arrangement. The core concept identified in this study — reconciling relationship beliefs — was key to explaining participants' preference for LAT. Specifically, reconciling beliefs about commitment and relationship expectations were the central mechanisms of the core concept and also represented the major strategies LAT partners employed to maintain their relationships.

Based on the three classifications identified in the LAT preference model (opposing, ambivalent, and championing) the experience of reconciling beliefs is a fluid one whereby opposing participants experience little to no reconciliation — preferring marriage or cohabitation — to championing participants who have reconciled their

beliefs and confidently prefer an LAT relationship. Ambivalent participants were those LAT partners who were actively working through reconciliation as they considered their LAT relationships in the context of their historical understanding of romantic relationships and modern approaches to enacting such relationships. Based on the findings, whether or not opposing or ambivalent partners become LAT champions depends on the content, interaction, and relative level of influence of the seven contributing factors included in the model. As well, the findings from this study suggest that a championing partner's preference for LAT may diminish based on changes occurring in one or more of the seven contributing factors. Indeed, all championing partners stated they would consider cohabitation should certain changes in their own — or their partners' — health require cohabitation to provide/receive appropriate care.

Salience of the Marriage Institution

Throughout the interviews, it became abundantly clear that the salience of marriage in U.S. society was influential to the process of reconciling relationship beliefs about commitment and expectations. Participants spoke about commitment and expectations as central to the definition of marriage regardless of whether or not they agreed with this notion. Disentangling feelings about being 'totally committed' to one's partner while also wanting to avoid marriage was a challenge for participants. These findings, however, are not surprising in light of current marital trends. As marriage scholars often indicate, the meaning of marriage and the ways in which marriage partnerships are currently enacted have evolved to include much greater expectations for intimacy and support from spouses than in the past (Coontz, 2006; Gerstel & Sarkisian, 2006). At the same time, we expect less from others in terms of these qualities, an

imbalance that can cause marriages to buckle. That most LAT partners in this study had experienced marriage — sometimes multiple times — and were either unequivocally resistant toward marriage or ambivalent about it, supports current suppositions regarding the salience of marriage in American society (Cherlin, 2009). Yet, their current preferences for LAT support further claims (e.g., Coontz; Haag, 2013) that the institution of marriage needs to change to survive and continue meeting the needs of modern couples, regardless of age. The stories told by the LAT partners in this study demonstrate that opposition to marriage does not equate to lacking desire for a deeply intimate, committed partnership. The individuals in this study are seeking the same level of intimacy, trust, and companionship that marriage affords without the grand expectations and obligations that are often tied to marriage. What most study participants have done is form a living-apart-together relationship as a way of ‘doing’ romance; ‘doing’ commitment; and ‘doing’ intimacy that avoids the disappointments that can follow when too many grand expectations are planted within a single partnership.

The Nondeliberative and Nondefinitive Decision to LAT

As indicated by the LAT preference model, making decisions about the ways to enact and maintain a romantic relationship in later life involves an incremental process shaped by several factors. This process of deciding to LAT (or developing a preference for LAT) among older adults generally evokes passive rather than deliberate decision-making. The ambiguity surrounding the LAT partners’ experiences of labeling and defining their partners/relationships — as well as the ‘ambivalent preference’ many study participants communicated — is indicative of a non-deliberative process of forming LAT unions. These findings are consistent with the research on cohabiting unions

demonstrating that cohabiters are more apt to slide into cohabitation rather than make a deliberate decision to live together (Manning & Smock, 2005; Sassler, 2004). The non-deliberative decision to cohabit is attributed to event-driven phenomena (e.g., needing a place to live) rather than relationship-driven (e.g., greater self-disclosure). Although sliding into cohabitation versus deciding is associated with greater risk of unhappiness and subsequent relationship dissolution (Stanley, Rhoades, & Markman, 2006), what cohabiters acquire when they slide into cohabitation are greater *structural* commitments (e.g., a shared home). Conversely, the sliding that the older LAT partners in this study described involved an incremental process of acquiring greater *personal* commitment (Sassler) and subsequently a stronger preference for LAT. Moreover, greater personal (or relationship-driven) commitment is associated with higher reported relationship happiness and stability (Surra, 1987; Surra & Gray, 2000; Surra & Hughes, 1997). Taken together, because sliding into LAT appears to be relationship-driven and because relationship-driven commitment processes are associated with positive relationship outcomes, sliding into LAT may not pose the same level of risk as sliding into cohabitation. Stated differently, sliding vs. deciding to LAT may be a matter of splitting hairs, with no meaningful differences occurring between the two approaches in terms of relationship outcomes.

Family Form versus Family Function

Debate among LAT scholars has focused on whether or not LAT represents a new family form. Levin (2004) and Roseneil (2006) argue that LAT partners — compared to married or cohabiting partners — have radically different, less conventional views about relationships, including a de-prioritization of partnering and relational commitment.

Conversely, Haskey and Lewis (2006) argue that LAT partners are actually cautious and conservative about relationships, with few attitudinal differences distinguishing them from married or cohabiting partners. The findings in my study suggest that both views are correct, highlighting the variability that lies within the LAT experience. The variance regarding preference for LAT is qualitatively explained when the processes of LAT relationship development and maintenance are examined. In my study, differences in one's preference to LAT are attributed to the relationship beliefs held by LAT partners. By focusing on relationship processes, such as the process of decision-making that I examined in this study, relationship researchers can gain a better understanding of the mechanisms underlying relationship formation, maintenance, (dis)satisfaction, commitment, and dissolution, which in turn help to explain the links between relationships and wellbeing. Unfortunately, policies and programs continue to universally promote marriage, assuming it is superior to other forms of partnering (e.g., cohabitation) in terms of individual satisfaction and psychological wellbeing. This leads to comparative studies pitting marriage against other types of committed, romantic relationships. The results of my study along with conclusions drawn by other scholars (Cowan & Cowan, 2010; Musick & Bumpass, 2012; Weston, Qu, & Hayes, 2012), question the utility of making such comparisons, promoting form over function. By focusing solely on structure, we limit our scope of understanding and subsequently our ability to offer meaningful interventions aimed at improving the health and wellbeing of individuals and families. This study offers additional insight into the depth of experience characterizing LAT relationships. LAT couples cannot be singularly categorized because their motivations for LAT are diverse. Understanding the nuanced ways older adults select and

maintain intimate relationship partners is an important step in gaining a better understanding of the roles new partnerships in late life may play in enhancing quality of life and delaying the inevitable decline in health that personifies almost all human experience.

Theoretical Application

This study was guided by the life course perspective, which was found to be useful in generating new theory on the ways older adults develop a preference for LAT relationships. The contributing factors identified in the LAT preference model reflect the influence of several life course principles, including the importance of historical time, environment, and personal factors. Drawing on the major tenets of the life course perspective, this study's philosophical basis allowed participants to describe their LAT relationship experiences from multiple personal, social, and historical perspectives. Overall, this research process and its findings support the use of life course perspective in grounded theory research and, more specifically, as a way for relationship scientists to better understand the factors associated with relationship development and maintenance as they relate to LAT and other ways of "doing" romantic relationships.

Study Limitations and Future Directions

There are several limitations associated with this research. First, data collection occurred in two Midwestern states yielding a fairly homogenous sample of participants who were highly educated (44% had a graduate or professional degree); 92% of the sample was non-Hispanic White. As a result, the grounded theory model of LAT preference and the LAT maintenance strategies proposed here may not be reflective of older LAT partners who differ in ethnicity or socio-economic status from those in this

study. Although popular belief suggests that LAT is a relationship structure available only to the wealthy — those able to afford the costs associated with maintaining two separate households — this bias may be less true of older adult LAT partners who are more likely to already own their homes (Levin, 2011). Second, most of the LAT partners interviewed in this study were living in close proximity to their respective partners (i.e., less than 10 miles). Furthermore, all participants were able and willing to drive, although a few couples were on the precipice of change regarding driving abilities. Preferences for LAT, as well as relationship maintenance strategies, may be different for LAT partners living more than a 2-hour drive away from their partner, or for those whose options are limited to relying on someone else for transport (Curl, Stowe, Cooney, & Proulx, 2013). Third, although changes in health and willingness to provide care were explored with my participants, only two (a couple) were presently facing these issues and only one additional participant had experienced the end of a previous LAT relationship due to her partner developing dementia and institutionalization. Future research should include a wider range of participants to increase our understanding of sociocultural influences and health changes that limit independence and impact the process of LAT relationship development and maintenance.

Finally, the cross-sectional data collected for this study represent a snapshot of partners' LAT relationships. Although interview questions meant to garner an understanding of relationship shifts and change over time were asked, participants' retrospective accounts of their relationship progression must be interpreted with caution due to subjective reconstruction of the past (Hareven, 1982). Longitudinal research is needed in order to better understand relational processes, outcomes, and change. In

addition to the inclusion of multiple time points of data collection, alternative methods of dyadic interviewing and data analysis could be addressed in future studies to gain a better understanding of LAT dyadic relationship processes (Eisikovits & Koren, 2012; Morgan, Ataie, Carder, & Hoffman, 2013). Focusing on the dyad (or more) as the unit of analysis in qualitative work can be utilized not only to understand the interdependency between the couple but also the influence of other family members on the romantic dyad. Participants in this study were asked to describe how family members and/or close friends influenced their preference for LAT. Their responses indicated that individuals external to the LAT relationship had little to no influence (thus, family or friend relationships was not a contributing factor in the LAT preference model), yet other research indicates that dating after late-life spousal loss threatens parent-child relationships in specific cases, and may strengthen these bonds in others (Carr & Boerner, 2013). The reasons why these differences exist may become clearer if additional research utilizing a qualitative, mixed interview approach is conducted.

The model of LAT preference that was generated from these data provides researchers with several testable hypotheses to explore regarding the varying levels of influence certain factors have in LAT relationship development, maintenance, and dissolution. Further, the findings suggest the need for relationship researchers to consider new ways of conceptualizing and operationalizing commitment, obligation, and expectations. The LAT partners in this study spent considerable time discussing how their definitions and subsequent expression of these relational concepts have evolved over time, which suggests the potential need for revision regarding the existing

theoretical models and survey instruments researchers use to explain and evaluate these concepts.

Finally, but perhaps most importantly, I reiterate Strohm, Seltzer, Cochran and Mays' (2009) call for better measurement of LAT relationships on a national scale. The popular press and changes in societal norms regarding partnering preferences — specifically the rise in cohabitation rates — suggest that LAT relationships will become more popular, however, we lack national data on the occurrence of such relationships. The dearth of such data exists primarily because most demographic surveys are constructed to measure household relationships. Ways to measure LATs to gain accurate accounts of these relationships versus casually dating partners are undetermined. This study, however, lays the groundwork with respect to labels and terms to use in surveys to appropriately measure the occurrence of LAT relationships — at least among older adults.

Conclusions

Until very recently, intimate partnerships and dating in late life have been ignored in both the academic community and in larger society, yet, a call for greater attention to the study of late life romance dates back several decades. In 1973, Robert Kastenbaum criticized the APA Task Force on Aging for ignoring this topic, stating that a comprehensive gerontology would cease to exist unless we embraced the notion that romantic love and sexual intimacy in later life is an important, if not vital, aspect of healthy aging. As norms about romantic partnering and the aging experience continue to evolve, exploring the ways in which older adults “do” romantic relationships and identifying the mechanisms underlying how romantic relationships are enacted and negotiated in late life are

important contributions to our greater understanding of the ways in which relationships impact wellbeing across the lifespan.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- AARP (2011). Chronic conditions among older Americans. *AARP.com*. Retrieved from http://assets.aarp.org/rgcenter/health/beyond_50_hcr_conditions.pdf.
- ABC News (2006, May 31). The new American family: Living apart together. *ABCnews*. Retrieved from <http://abcnews.go.com/GMA/AmericanFamily/story?id=2023499&page=1>
- Augustin, S. (2013, September 16). Kudos for living apart together. *Psychology Today*. Retrieved from <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/people-places-and-things/201309/kudos-living-apart-together>
- Barlow, A., & Probert, R. (2004). Regulating marriage and cohabitation: Changing family values and policies in Europe and North America – an introductory critique. *Law & Policy*, 26, 1-11.
- Baxter, L. A. (1994). A dialogic approach to relationship maintenance. In D. J. Canary & L. Stafford (Eds.), *Communication and relational maintenance* (pp. 233–254). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- Booth, A., & Johnson, D. R. (1994). Declining health and marital quality. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 56, 218-223.
- Brown, S. L., Bulanda, J. R., & Lee, G. R. (2012). Transitions into and out of cohabitation in later life. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 74, 774 – 793.
- Brown, S. L., Lee, G. R., & Bulanda, J. R. (2006). Cohabitation among older adults: A national portrait. *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B*, 61, S71-S79.
- Bulanda, J. R. (2011). Gender, marital power, and marital quality in later life. *Journal of Women and Aging*, 23, 3-22.
- Canary, D. J., & Dainton, M. (2006). Maintaining relationships. In A. L. Vangelisti & D. Perlman (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of personal relationships*. (pp. 727-743). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Canary, D. J. & Stafford, L. (1992). Relational maintenance strategies and equity in marriage, *Communication Monographs*, 59, 243–67.
- Canary, D. J., & Stafford, L. (2001). Equity in maintaining personal relationships. In J. H. Harvey & A. Wenzel (Eds.), *Close romantic relationships: Maintenance and enhancement* (pp. 133-150). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

- Canary, D. J., Stafford, L., Hause, K. S., & Wallace, L. A. (1993). An inductive analysis of relational maintenance strategies: Comparisons among lovers, relatives, friends, and others. *Communication Research Reports, 10*, 5-14.
- Carr, D. (2004). The desire to date and remarry among older widows and widowers. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 68*, 1051-1068.
- Carr, D., & Boerner, K. (2013). Dating after late-life spousal loss: Does it compromise relationships with adult children? *Journal of Aging Studies*. Advance online publication. doi: 10.1016/j.jaging.2012.12.009
- Carr, D., & Springer, K. W. (2010). Advances in families and health research in the 21st century. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 72*, 743-761.
- Cherlin, A. (1978). Remarriage as an incomplete institution. *American Journal of Sociology, 84*, 634-650.
- Cherlin, A. (2009). *The marriage-go-round: The state of marriage and the family in America today*. New York, NY: Random House.
- Connidis, I., 2001. *Family ties and aging*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Connidis, I., 2010. *Family ties and aging* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Cooney, T. M., & Dunne, K. (2001). Intimate relationships in later life: Current realities, future prospects. *Journal of Family Issues, 22*, 838-858.
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Coontz, S. (2006, November 30). How to stay married. *The Times of London*. Retrieved from www.stephaniecoontz.com/articles/article34.htm
- Cowan, P. A., & Cowan, C. P. (2010). Beyond family structure: Family process studies help to reframe debates about what's good for children. In B. J. Risman (Ed.), *Families as they really are*. (pp. 252-271). New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Curl, A. L., Stowe, J. D., Cooney, T. M., & Proulx, C. M. (2013). Giving up the keys: How driving cessation affects engagement in later life. *The Gerontologist*. Advance online publication.
- Davidson, K. (2001). Late life widowhood, selfishness and new partnership choices: A gendered perspective. *Ageing and Society, 21*, 297-317.

- Dedoose Version 4.5, Web application for managing, analyzing, and presenting qualitative and mixed method research data (2013). Los Angeles, CA: SocioCultural Research Consultants, LLC (www.dedoose.com)
- De Jong Gierveld, J. (2002). The dilemma of repartnering: Considerations of older men and women entering new intimate relationships in later life. *Ageing International*, 27, 61-78.
- De Jong Gierveld, J. (2004). Remarriage, unmarried cohabitation, living apart together: Partner relationships following bereavement or divorce. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 66, 236-243.
- De Jong Gierveld, J., & Peeters, A. (2003). The interweaving of repartnered older adults' lives with their children and siblings. *Ageing & Society*, 23, 187-205.
- Duncan, S., & Phillips, M. (2010). People who live apart together (LATs) – how different are they? *The Sociological Review*, 58, 112-134.
- Eisikovits, Z., & Koren, C. (2012). Approaches to and outcomes of dyadic interview analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 20, 1642-1655.
- Elder, G. H. (1994). Time, human agency, and social change: Perspectives on the life course. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 57, 4-15.
- Fitzpatrick, T. R., & Vinick, B. (2003). The impact of husbands' retirement on wives' marital quality. *Journal of Family Social Work*, 7, 83-100.
- Gerstel, N. R., & Sarkisian, N. (2006). Marriage: The good, the bad, and the greedy. *Contexts*, 5, 16-21.
- Haag, P. (2013). *Marriage confidential: The post-romantic age of workhorse wives, royal children, undersexed spouses, and rebel couples who are rewriting the rules*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Haas, S. M., & Stafford, L. (1998). An initial examination of maintenance behaviors in gay and lesbian relationships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 15, 846-855.
- Haskey, J., & Lewis, J. (2006). Living-apart-together in Britain: Context and meaning. *International Journal of Law in Context*, 2, 37-48.
- Hutchinson, E. D. (2010). A life course perspective. In E. D. Hutchinson (Ed.), *Dimensions of human behavior: The changing life course*. (4th ed.) (pp. 1-38). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Jamison, T. B. & Ganong, L. (2011). "We're not living together:" Stayover relationships among college-educated emerging adults. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 28, 536-557.
- Joel, S. (2013, October 31). Dating decisions. *Psychology Today*. Retrieved from <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/dating-decisions/201310/living-apart-together>
- Johnson, D. R. (1985). The impact of illness on late-life marriages. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 47, 165-172.
- Karlsson, S. G., & Borell, K. (2002). Intimacy and autonomy, gender and ageing: Living apart together. *Ageing International*, 27, 11-26.
- Karlsson, S. G., & Borell, K. (2005). A home of their own. Women's boundary work in LAT-relationship. *Journal of Aging Studies*, 19, 73-84.
- Kastenbaum, R. (1973). Loving, dying and other gerontologic addenda. In C. Eisdorfer & M. P. Lawton (Eds.), *The psychology of adult development and aging*. (pp. 699-705). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Kaufman, G., & Taniguchi, H. (2006). Gender and marital happiness in later life. *Journal of Family Issues*, 27, 735-757.
- Kiecolt-Glaser, J. K., Newton, T. L., (2001). Marriage and health: His and hers. *Psychological Bulletin*, 127, 472-503.
- Kiernan, K. (2004). Redrawing the boundaries of marriage. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 66, 980-987.
- King, V., & Scott, M. E. (2005). A comparison of cohabiting relationships among older and younger adults. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 67, 271-285.
- Klinenberg, E. (2012). *Going solo: The extraordinary rise and surprising appeal of living alone*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Koren, C., & Eisikovits, Z. (2011). Life beyond the planned script: Accounts of secrecy of older persons living in second couplehood in old age in a society in transition. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 28, 44-63.
- Krishnan, M. (2013, September 17). Living apart, together. *Macleans*. Retrieved from <http://www2.macleans.ca/2013/09/17/living-apart-together/>
- LaRossa, R. (2005). Grounded theory methods and qualitative family research. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 67, 837-857.

- Lavee, Y., & Katz, R. (2003). The family in Israel: Between tradition and modernity. *Marriage and Family Review, 35*, 193-217.
- Lee, R. M. (1993). *Doing research on sensitive topics*. London: Sage.
- Levin, I. (2011). Living apart together: A new family form. In S. J. Ferguson (Ed.), *Shifting the center: Understanding contemporary families* (4th ed.). (pp. 248-261). New York: McGraw Hill.
- Levin, I. (2004). Living apart together: A new family form. *Current Sociology, 52*, 223-240.
- Levy, E. J. (2013, September 19). On living apart together. *The Rumpus*. Retrieved from <http://therumpus.net/2013/09/on-living-apart-together/>
- Lindsay, J. M. (2000). An ambiguous commitment: Moving into a cohabitating relationship. *Journal of Family Studies, 6*, 120-134.
- Manning, W. D., & Brown, S. L. (2011). The demography of unions among older Americans, 1980-present: A family change approach. In R. Settersten, Jr., & J. Angel (Eds.), *Handbook of sociology of aging* (pp.193-210). New York: Springer.
- Manning, W. D., & Smock, P. J. (2005). Measuring and modeling cohabitation: New perspectives from qualitative data. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 67*, 989-1002.
- Milan, A., & Peters, A. (2003). Couples living apart. *Canadian Social Trends*. Publication of Statistics Canada, Catalogue No. 11-008.
- Moggach, D. (2013, April 7). Want to stay in love? Then don't live together. *Mail Online*. Retrieved from <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2305459/Want-stay-love-Then-DONT-live-says-novelist-Deborah-Moggach.html>
- Morgan, D. L., Ataie, J., Carder, P., & Hoffman, K. (2013). Introducing dyadic interviews as a method for collecting qualitative data. *Qualitative Health Research, 23*, 1276-1284.
- Morse, J., & Richards, L. (2002). *Read me first for a user's guide to qualitative methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Musick, K. & Bumpass, L. (2012). Reexamining the case for marriage: Union formation and changes in well-being. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 74*, 1-18.
- Piantanida, M., Tananis, C., & Grubs, R. (2004). Generating grounded theory of/for educational practice: The journey of three epistemorphs. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 17*, 325 – 346.

- Proulx, C. M., Helms, H. M., & Buehler, C. (2007). Marital quality and personal well-being: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 69, 576-593.
- Regnier-Loilier, A., Beaujouan, E., & Villeneuve-Gokalp, C. (2009). Neither single, nor in a couple: A study of living apart together in France. *Demographic Research*, 21, 75-108.
- Rosenblum, C. (1993, September 13). Living apart together. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/15/realestate/living-apart-together.html>
- Roseneil, S. (2006). On not living with a partner: Unpicking coupledness and cohabitation. *Sociological Research Online*, 11, 1-17.
- Sahlstein, E. M., & Baxter, L. A. (2001). Improvising commitment in close relationships: A relational dialectics perspective. In J. H. Harvey & A. Wenzel (Eds.), *Close romantic relationships: Maintenance and enhancement* (pp. 115-132). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Sassler, S. (2004). The process of entering into cohabiting unions. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 66, 491-505.
- Shanahan, M. J. (2000). Pathways to adulthood in changing societies: Variability and mechanism in life course perspective. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26, 667-692.
- Social Security Administration (2011). Widows, widowers, and other survivors. Retrieved from <http://ssa.gov/survivorplan/ww&os2.htm>
- Spalter, T. (2010). Social capital and intimate partnership in later life: A gendered perspective on 60+ year-old Israelis. *Social Networks*, 32, 330-338.
- Stafford, L. (2003). Maintaining romantic relationships: Summary and analysis of one research program. In D. J. Canary & M. Dainton (Eds.), *Maintaining relationships through communication: Relational, contextual, and cultural variations* (pp. 51-78). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Stafford, L., & Canary, D. J. (1991). Maintenance strategies and romantic relationship type, gender, and relational characteristics. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 8, 217-242.
- Stanley, S. M., Rhoades, G. K., & Markman, H. J. (2006). Sliding versus deciding: Inertia and the premarital cohabitation effect. *Family Relations*, 55, 499-509.
- Strauss A. L., & Corbin J. (1998). Grounded theory methodology: An overview. In N. Denzin, & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 273 - 285). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Strohm, C. Q., Seltzer, J. A., Cochran, S. D., & Mays, V. M. (2009). "Living apart together" relationships in the United States. *Demographic Research*, 21, 177-214.
- Surra, C. A. (1987). Reasons for changes in commitment: Variations by courtship type. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 4, 17-33.
- Surra, C. A., & Gray, C. R. (2000). A typology of the processes of commitment to marriage: Why do partners commit to problematic relationships? In L. J. Waite (Ed.), *The ties that bind: Perspectives on marriage and cohabitation* (pp. 253-280). New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Surra, C. A., & Hughes, D. K. (1997). Commitment processes: Accounts of the development of premarital relationships. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 59, 5-21.
- Umberson, D. J., Williams, K., Powers, D. P., Lui, H., Needham, B. (2006). You make me sick: Marital quality and health over the life course. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 47, 1-16.
- Weishaus, S. W., & Field, D. (1988). A half century of marriage: Continuity or change? *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 3, 763-774.
- Weston, R., Qu, L., & Hayes, A. (2012). From form to function: Contemporary choices, changes, and challenges. In P. Noller & G. C. Karantzas (Eds.), *Wiley-blackwell handbook of couples and family relationships* (1st ed.). (pp. 11-24). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Yorgason, J. B., Booth, A., & Johnson, D. (2008). Health, disability, and marital quality. *Research on Aging*, 30, 623-648.

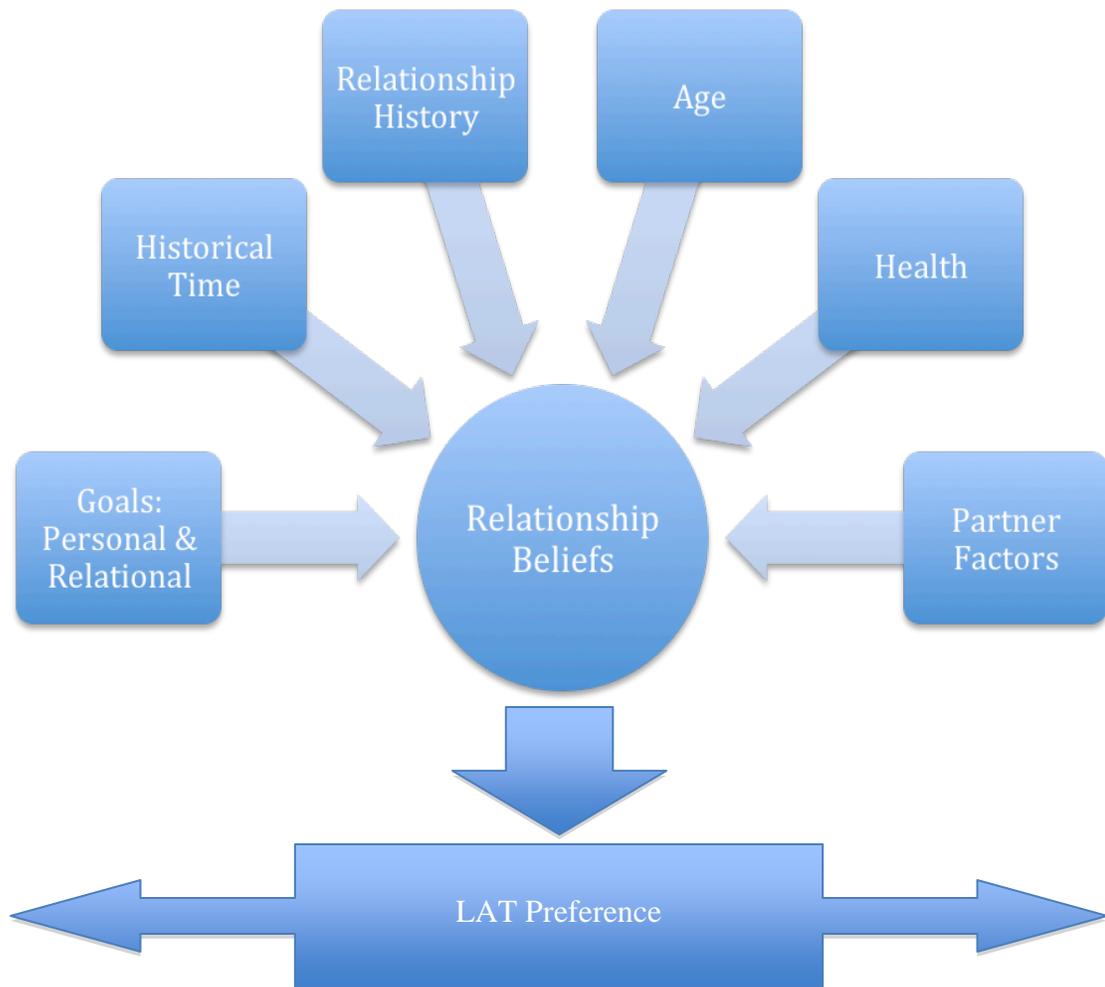
Table 1.

Sample Description

Participant ID	Participant Pseudonym	Age	Race	Education	Yrs. In LAT	Prior LAT?	Prior Marriage?	Prior Cohabitation?	Divorce vs. Widow	2nd Interview	LAT Preference
1	Gabby	62	Black	B.S.	1.5	No	Yes	No	Both	Yes	Ambivalent
2	Jill	70	White	H.S.	9	No	Yes	No	Both	Yes	Championing
3	Ben	77	White	PhD	9	No	Yes	No	Divorce	Yes	Championing
4	Denise	64	White	M.A.	12	No	Yes	No	Divorce	No	Championing
5	Eli	85	White	PhD	12	No	Yes	No	Divorce	No	Championing
6	Phyllis	60	White	B.S.	1	No	Yes	No	Divorce	Yes	Ambivalent
7	Celia	63	White	M.A.	10	No	Yes	No	Divorce	Yes	Championing
8	Mindy	64	White	M.A.	.583	No	Yes	Yes	Divorce	Yes	Championing
9	Teddy	62	White	M.A.	.583	No	Yes	No	Divorce	No	Championing
10	Linda	84	White	H.S.	.75	Yes	Yes	No	Widowed	No	Championing
11	Jack	88	White	M.A.	.75	No	Yes	No	Widowed	No	Ambivalent
12	Sharon	73	White	H.S.	.583	No	Yes	No	Widowed	Yes	Opposing
13	Derrick	73	White	H.S.	.583	No	Yes	No	Widowed	No	Opposing
14	Anita	61	White	M.A.	11	No	Yes	No	Divorce	No	Ambivalent
15	Gary	61	White	B.S.	11	No	No	Yes	N/A	No	Ambivalent
16	Enid	60	Hispanic	PhD	2	No	No	Yes	N/A	No	Opposing
17	Jacob	64	White	PhD	2	No	Yes	No	Divorce	No	Championing
18	Lisa	81	White	B.S.	10	No	Yes	No	Widowed	Yes	Ambivalent
19	Betsy	71	White	B.S.	10	No	Yes	Yes	Divorce	Yes	Ambivalent
20	Miles	62	White	B.S.	10	No	Yes	Yes	Divorce	No	Championing
21	Delilah	77	White	H.S.	4	No	Yes	Yes	Both	No	Opposing
22	Bruce	77	White	M.A.	4	No	Yes	No	Widowed	No	Opposing
23	Gwen	70	White	<H.S.	3	No	Yes	No	Widowed	No	Championing
24	Miriam	78	White	H.S.	27	No	Yes	No	Widowed	No	Ambivalent
25	Floyd	79	White	GED	27	No	Yes	No	Widowed	No	Ambivalent

Figure 1.

LAT Preference



VITA

Jacquelyn Benson is originally from O’Neill, Nebraska. In 2004 she earned a Bachelor of Science with a major in Human Development and Family Studies and a Bachelor of Educational Studies in Human Services from the University of Missouri-Columbia. Upon graduation, Jacquelyn volunteered a year of national service as a senior corps member for the City Year AmeriCorps program in Providence, Rhode Island. She then returned to the University of Missouri to complete her graduate work in Human Development and Family Studies with an emphasis in Gerontology. She earned a Master of Arts degree in 2008 and a PhD in 2013. Jacquelyn is currently working as a Senior Research Associate at Mather LifeWays Institute on Aging in Evanston, Illinois. Her research interests involve studying ways older adults live alone, specifically how the relationships and physical environments of solo-dwelling older adults influence well-being. She is especially interested in studying family caregiving, romantic, and peer relationships in later life. Jacquelyn currently resides in Northbrook, Illinois with her partner, William, and their 4-year-old daughter, Gweneviere.