

# Ending Relationships During Emerging Adulthood: Connections to School, Work, and Personal Growth

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# Background

- Breakups are often regarded as negative events
- May be adaptive in emerging adulthood (Norona et al., 2016)
- Coordinating relationships with education and work (Shulman & Connolly, 2013)



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# Research Questions

1. What roles does school or work play in breakup decisions during emerging adulthood?
2. What role does personal development play in breakups during emerging adulthood?



# Relationship Histories Study

- Mixed method data from 35 adults
- In-depth interviews capturing full romantic histories
- Quantitative measures for each reported partner
  - Emotional and sexual intimacy
  - Commitment
  - Consolidation
  - Overall quality



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# Sample N = 35

- 24-40 years old ( $M = 31.5$ )
- 20 women
- 26 heterosexual, 9 LGB
- 26 White, 4 Asian-American, 3 Black/AA, 2 Latino
- 24 bachelor's degree or more
- Single (9), Casually dating (3), Exclusively dating (8), Engaged (1), Married (14)



# Data Analysis

- Applied Thematic Analysis (Guest et al., 2013)
- Bounding the analysis
  - Evaluate relationships more than one year that ended 20-29 (n = 22)
- Open coding
- Creating a code book
- Identifying variation within and between codes



# Results

- Career or education conflicts
- Incompatible family formation goals
- Increased personal insight or maturity



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# Career or Education Conflicts (7)

‘I’m glad that I took a break from school but ultimately I think I want to finish my PhD. What are we doing?’ And Mike had just gotten settled into a job that he really liked doing, and he just started. And he was like, ‘I don’t feel like I can quit and move to Chicago again.’ And at that point, I was just like, ‘I don’t want to go long-distance again.’ So we ended the relationship.



Female, Age 26 at breakup



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# Incompatible Family Formation Goals (9)

At the time, you know, I wanted to travel around and get married and have kids, but then I kind of realized that I wasn't ready to get married and have kids. I wanted to travel around and still explore, and I wasn't ready to settle into, like, a job for the rest of my life, kind of thing. He was, he was very much, like if it feels like the right time, it's the right time.



Female, Age 23 at breakup



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# Increased Personal Insight/Maturity (5)

Looking back on it, a lot of stuff that I just wasn't ready to do yet like grow up. I still wanted to hang out with all the college friends and act like I was still a college student and go to the bars and have fun. But at the time I wasn't ready to make those changes.



Male, Age 26 at breakup



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# Interplay Between Themes

- Individual maturity was tied to both career development and knowledge of what they wanted
- The examples are not distinct because our development in one domain has consequences for other domains



# Example

And then I guess that must have changed when I was 23 because I became a preschool teacher, and I didn't want to be hungover anymore going to work. And before we used to work together. And she just didn't have any drive. Like, her drive was to go out.



Female, Age 23 at breakup



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# Discussion

- Important to note the interplay of romantic relationships with career and individual development
- Delaying marriage may make space for some of these other developments to occur
- Implications for career and relationship counseling integration





Thank you!



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