

Chapter Eight

“Talking” and *Tapaila* (“Seeing Someone”)

Cultural Terms and Ways of Communicating in the Development of Romantic Relationships in the United States and Finland

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Amber,¹ a 28-year-old female from the United States, recounting her current romantic “situation,” explained:

We’ve been friends now for four years, but this whole time he’s been pursuing me. And recently I kind of gave him an inch, you know, like we’ve been kind of talking now, so like the label that’s been put on that was friends, and then friend zone, for a couple years . . . and now like there’s potential and so it’s like a positive situation.

When asked why she calls it a “situation,” Amber further explained:

Because I wouldn’t say that we are dating. I wouldn’t say that . . . I would say that he’s my friend and now we’re talking I guess.

What does it mean that Amber has given “him an inch,” so now they are not just “friends,” or in the “friend zone,”² nor “dating,” but are friends that are “talking”?

In Finland, a participant in a *Vauva* online discussion forum,³ responding to a question on the difference between *tapailu* and *seurustelu*, noted:

Well, I have *tapailut* more men in my lifetime than what I've eventually *seurustellut* with. Even with my current husband we *tapailtiin* for some time before we started to call it *seurustelu*.

Tapailu is lighter than *seurustelu*. It is precisely that, that you don't know yet, whether you want to commit with the other one. *Tapailu* is about getting to know the other and figuring out the chemistry. If two people are on the same page regarding *tapailu*, you wouldn't think it bothers anybody if you want to call it that (August 17, 2017).⁴

Although the Finnish writer clearly distinguishes between *tapailu* and *seurustelu* in her response, the differences between the two terms and relationship stages being up for discussion in an online forum and her last claim suggest that there is ambiguity and tension between them in Finland. Similarly, in Amber's example above, there is ambiguity and tension between the emerging term and relationship stage of "talking" and "dating" in the United States.

These examples suggest not only that ways of identifying and developing romantic relationships are in transition today, but also that they are culturally situated processes. We are interested in the communicative process of romantic relationship development across cultures, with attention to both the cultural terms participants use to identify ways of communicating, relating, and feeling in them, as well as those very ways (Carbaugh, 2005).

Research and theorizing about interpersonal communication has long focused on communication and relationships in the United States and only marginally addressed the influence of culture (Scollo & Carbaugh, 2013; Fitch, 1998; Poutiainen, 2009; Gudykunst, Ting-Toomey, & Nishida, 1996; Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988). Romantic relationship research has also been critiqued for being largely focused on the Western context and ignoring cultural differences regarding love (Baxter & Akkoo, 2008; Goodwin, 1999; Dion & Dion, 1996; Jankowiak, 1995).

Despite this, research on romantic relating in different cultures has been on the rise, with the ethnography of communication (EC), the research program within which this study is situated,⁵ offering some notable contributions. Early on in EC, Basso (1970) studied silence among the Western Apache and found that *zééde* ("sweethearts") who are in the beginning stages of *liigoláá* ("courting") spent time together in a variety of settings yet were often silent and talked little until after several months when they felt more comfortable. Later, Katriel and Philipsen (1981) examined the importance of "communication" and Carbaugh (1988) "self" as cultural categories in the domain of interpersonal communication in the United States. Fitch Muñoz has perhaps most extensively studied interpersonal communication and relationships in the EC program, examining multiple forms of interpersonal communication in Columbia including directives, leave-taking, personal address,

politeness, and narratives, also introducing the concept of "interpersonal ideology" (2009, 2006, 1998, 1994, 1991a, 1991b).

Poutiainen (2009, 2005) examined romantic relationship development in Finland and found at the time that some relationships began with a period of *kattelu*, meaning to observe or watch someone that one has romantic interest in for a period of time, before a committed relationship (*seurustelu*) ensues.⁶ There is also a burgeoning area of research on culture, weddings, and marriage, with Sandel's (2015, 2011) work on cross-border marriage in Taiwan, Leeds-Hurwitz's (2002) study of intercultural weddings in the United States,⁷ and Baxter and Akkoo's (2008) study of East Indian arranged marriages.

Although "dates" and "dating" have also been most extensively studied in the United States (e.g., Mongeau & Wiedmaier, 2012; Mongeau, Jacobsen, & Donnerstein, 2007; Roses, 2006), dating and romantic relationships in different cultures have intrigued scholars doing qualitative research in different disciplines in recent years. Some noteworthy examples include Jyrkiäinen's (2016) study of Egyptian females' negotiation of identity profiles on Facebook as part of their dating practices and Farrer, Tsuchiya, and Bagrowicz's (2008) study of *tsukiau* dating relationships in Japan. There is also a nascent area of research on online dating applications and sites in different countries including China (Liu, 2016; Pan & Lieber, 2008), Iran (Golzard & Miguel, 2016; Shakoori & Shafiei, 2014), and the Netherlands (Sumter, Vandenberg, & Ligtenberg, 2017; Ward, 2017).

While research on romantic relationship development in different cultures is growing, we aim to illustrate what a cultural discourse analysis approach, a research method and theory in EC, can offer to studies of interpersonal communication in the development of romantic relationships in different cultures today (Carbaugh, 2007, 2005).

METHOD

We take relationships to be constructed via communication and, following Fitch (1998), "that personal relationships are, like speaking more generally, culturally situated processes" (p. 14). As such, relationships are not only constructed through communication, culture is at the root of that very communication and re-created in the process. Likewise, relationships are both cultural and communicative processes.

We are particularly interested in the role of communication in the development of romantic relationships in different cultures. We are drawn to Knapp's long-standing model of interaction stages in relationships (Knapp, 1978; Knapp, Vangelisti, & Caughlin, 2014) in this endeavor due to its popularity, focus on communication in the development of relationships, yet

its common presentation in introductory communication texts and research without attention to culture. The model is a descriptive model of communication patterns in the development of relationships such as romantic relationships and friendships that is organized into five progressive stages each of “coming together” and “coming apart.” Our focus is on the stages of “coming together,” which include (1) “initiating” (greeting); (2) “experimenting” (small talk); (3) “intensifying” (self-disclosure, expressions of commitment, personal idioms); (4) “integrating” (“two become one” in communication and relationship); and (5) “bonding” (public institutionalization of the relationship such as marriage) (Knapp, Vangelisti, & Caughlin, 2014).⁸ Following our own and others’ research, we argue that this may be a cultural model of communication in relationship development that is not applicable to all cultures (Poutiainen, 2009, 2005; Scollo & Poutiainen, 2006; Basso, 1970).

To begin exploration of this with preliminary cultural cases, we interviewed adults ages 22 to 38 about their experiences in developing romantic relationships from first meeting to establishment of a serious relationship, including ways of communicating involved in them, in the United States⁹ and Finland.¹⁰ We also took field notes on naturally occurring talk and interaction about the development of romantic relationships in our everyday lives in the United States, for Scollo, and Finland, for Poutiainen. Lastly, we searched for and examined online articles, discussion forums, and videos about recurrent, prominent terms in our initial data, such as “talking” in the United States and *tapailu* in Finland, to round out our data and analysis.

While it would be ideal to observe all the varied communication involved in the development of romantic relationships, this is likely not possible. Moreover, *how people talk about* relationship development can be an equally important window into how cultural members develop such relationships and make sense of them in their own lives. Toward this end, to analyze our data we conducted a cultural discourse analysis (CuDA) concerning the communicative process of romantic relationship development in the United States and Finland according to members’ perspectives (Carbaugh, 2017, 2005; Scollo, 2011).

CuDA, a theory and method within EC, conceptualizes cultural discourse as “a set of communication practices—acts, events, and styles—which is treated as a historically transmitted expressive system of symbols, symbolic forms, norms, and their meanings” (Carbaugh & Cerulli, 2013, p. 7). Cultural discourses may be topical (e.g., discourses of romantic relating or health), and multiple, intertwined discourses comprise cultures.¹¹ Cultural discourses are systems of associated communication practices and norms that are symbolic in the sense that while our communication may say something explicitly about, for example, communication or relationships, it also implicitly says something about who we are and should be, how we can and should act, relate to others, feel, and live in place (Carbaugh, 2017, 2005). As such,

“communication presumes and creates a rich meta-cultural commentary,” radiating a web of symbolic meanings about being, acting, relating, feeling, and dwelling (Carbaugh, 2017, p. 19).

Using CuDA to unravel this web, there is dual attention on identifying and describing explicit communication practices, or “discursive hubs,” such as cultural terms for types of communication or relationships, while also interpreting the implicit meanings radiating through them or “radiants of meaning” (Carbaugh, 2017). These are “part of an unspoken coherence participants take-for-granted in order to understand their communication,” often formulated into statements of cultural premises, which are combinations of deeply held beliefs and values (Carbaugh, 2017, p. 19). A cultural discourse is likewise typically comprised of multiple “discursive hubs,” associated communication practices, and norms, whose deep meanings are interpreted through cultural premises.

In the spirit of CuDA, our study follows its four modes of analysis—descriptive, interpretive, comparative, and critical—as we describe, interpret, and compare communication practices and cultural discourses of romantic relating in the United States and Finland (Carbaugh, 2017, pp. 17–18). We also include two forms of critical analysis, “natural” and “academic” criticism (Carbaugh, 1989/1990). In the U.S. case, some participants employ “natural criticism” as they critique the emerging term for and relationship stage of “talking,” while in the Finnish case, the data includes criticism of the tone of the relationship stage, *tapailu*. We also engage in “academic criticism” as we use a cross-cultural comparative analysis to critique potential Western bias in Knapp’s model.

For our study, we analyzed our interview transcripts, field notes, and online articles, videos, and discussions for recurrent, prominent cultural terms, associated practices, and norms that feature in the process of romantic relationship development in the United States and Finland today. Inspired by Knapp’s model—since some of these terms identified relationship stages, ways of communicating in those stages, and participants’ recognized stages—we identified stages of romantic relationship development from initial meeting to declaration of a serious relationship in both cases. Lastly, we interpreted the key cultural terms—often identifying stages and ways of communicating, relating, or feeling in them—for cultural premises of being, acting, relating, feeling, and dwelling that radiated through them.

In our analysis, we found differences in the ways the process of romantic relationship development was discoursed¹² in each case. In the U.S. case, the process of developing a romantic relationship was discoursed by participants as primarily one of communication, and secondarily of relating; thus, we have discursive hubs of acting (or communicating) and relating. In the Finnish case, the process of romantic relationship development was discoursed as one of both relating and feeling; thus, we focus our analyses on these discursive

sive hubs. In what follows, we present U.S. and Finnish cultural discourses of romantic relating, each comprised of a system of cultural terms, associated practices and norms, and a constellation of cultural premises radiating through them.

U.S. DISCOURSE OF ROMANTIC RELATING

The process of developing a romantic relationship in the United States was discoursed by our participants as primarily one of communication, and secondarily of relating. In what follows, we delineate three prominent stages in the communicative development of romantic relationships in the United States up to being in a serious “relationship”—Initiating, “Getting to Know Each Other,” and “In a Relationship”—with their associated terms, practices, norms, and cultural premises.

Initiating

Similar to Knapp’s model, “Initiating” is our term¹³ for the first stage of romantic relationship development in the United States, though we broaden it to include a series of communicative means that initiate romantic relationships, including (1) meeting, (2) social media “stalking,” and (3) contacting.

Meeting. Our participants noted a number of settings and scenes where they meet potential romantic interests, including school, work, school clubs, athletic activities, bars, through friends, and mobile dating apps, with Tinder being most popular.¹⁴ While some of our participants were using dating apps and there were varying degrees of comfort with them, most noted that they were especially useful for older people (typically 30 and older) since they have more difficulty meeting people due to being out of school and potentially living in new areas for work. As such, one can meet romantic interests in a variety of physical settings and mediated scenes, suggesting an expanded notion of space and important cultural premises of dwelling and relating: *Space in the United States includes physical place and cyberspace. Both are places to meet potential romantic interests.*

If there is romantic interest, our participants noted the importance of initiating some sort of communication with the person. Here there was a gender norm, that in heterosexual relationships, males should make “the first move,” though several females and males said they would be fine with females doing so. For homosexual and lesbian relationships, participants noted that whoever is more romantically interested should make the first move.

For participants, this “first move” depended on the context or scene. If in a physical setting such as a bar, participants noted that they or the other person would “strike up a conversation,” buy the other person a drink if in such a setting, and eventually exchange mobile phone numbers, Instagram,

Facebook, or Snapchat names, often calling, texting, following, or friending each other right then on their phones. Younger participants preferred to exchange social media handles, while older participants tended to prefer mobile numbers. For those meeting on dating apps, conversation began on private messaging through the app, following the same norms as above for first contact, eventually moving to following on social media or exchanging mobile numbers.

“Stalking.” Most of our participants noted that after meeting someone they were romantically interested in, they immediately started social media “stalking” the person. That is, they would look them up on Facebook, Instagram, and/or Twitter (e.g., “a thorough Facebook stalking”; “I’m that Instagram stalker”) to learn more about them, depending on if their pages are set to public (and therefore open to everyone to see) or private (for only friends/followers). Several participants said they would not friend or follow someone right away, but rather after time if the relationship developed. Participants noted looking for various information while “stalking,” including if they were a real person; if they were in a relationship; last time in a relationship; ratio of female to male “likes” on photos; if they were safe to go out with; what their interests were; their photos; and, for older participants, if they had children.

Importantly, much of this “learning” about the other person is quick and *visual*, done by examining photos and posts. This not only helps one decide if there is romantic interest, but also speeds up the process of getting to know the person. As one participant, John, age 23, noted, he “stalked” his current girlfriend:

Just to kind of see what she was into, see what she was doing and seeing her or her interests. . . . I was trying to kind of see what she was, what she liked doing. And turns out she had a lot of pictures of nature and hiking. I saw she ice skates, so I like that too about her. . . . And I just got to know her a little bit better through social media before I even started dating her.¹⁵

Contacting. Lastly, if one party decides after meeting and likely “stalking” the other that they are romantically interested, they may contact the other person. This followed the same norms above for first contact. Depending on the setting or scene where participants first met, as well as what medium of contact was exchanged upon first meeting, this could be a direct message on social media or a dating app, a text message, or, though rare, a phone call.¹⁶

At this point we can ask, what must be presumed for participants to discourse the initiation of romantic relationships in the United States in this way? A set of cultural premises can be formulated that helps unravel this rich complexity: *Being romantically involved with another is, at times, a desirable state. As all people are free and equal, people have a right to choose*

their romantic partners. Potential partners can be met in a variety of places, both physical and online, and through relationships such as friends. Since people are separate, unique individuals, each with their own thoughts, feelings, and experiences, communication must be used to learn about the other person to see if there is romantic interest. This communication may be conducted through a variety of channels such as face-to-face interaction, social media, or mobile texts and calls.¹⁷

If all goes well and there is reciprocal contact after the first meeting, participants move to the next stage of romantic relationship development, “getting to know each other.”

“Getting to Know Each Other”

“Getting to know each other” is a native phrase that captures much of what this stage of developing romantic relationships is about, using various ways of communicating to get to know the other person more deeply to determine if one is romantically interested in them.

There is a system of cultural terms, associated practices, and norms in this stage, some currently emerging and in tension as new ways of communicating and relating take shape and transform over time. Specifically, the cultural term “talking” has emerged in approximately the past five years, which identifies a *relationship stage* (e.g., “we’re talking”). This is in tension in this discursive system with “dating,” an older term, which our older participants tended to prefer for identifying this stage, yet they used, understood, and often critiqued the more recent term “talking.” Most of our younger participants would use the term “talking” to identify this stage of romantic relationships. We have used the broader native phrase “getting to know each other” instead, as it captures the heart of this stage, while encompassing participants who prefer the term “talking,” “dating,” or no term at all.

“Talking” identifies a relationship stage in which participants are trying to get to know each other through various communicative means and can include “meeting up,” “hanging out,” or “dates,” as well as sexual activity. This generally is not exclusive; one can be “talking” to multiple people. As one of our participants, Jordan, age 23, explained:

It’s like you’re not *really* dating yet, but you’re just testing each other I guess. . . . You’re not committed though. . . . You’re kind of like trying to see if it will go there.

“Talking” can last for a few days up to a few months, until participants decide if they want to move to the next, more serious relationship stage, just be “friends,” or end their “talking.” That this stage is identified with the verbal communication term “talking” points to the primary goal of this stage:

using various communicative means to “talk” to get to know the other person to decide if you want to pursue a more serious relationship. We argue, following our participants, that “talking” follows a loosely structured sequence of five communicative activities: (1) “talking”; (2) asking out; (3) going out; (4) more “talking”; and (5) having a “conversation.”

“Talking.” Beginning “talking” often follows “a level of progression” in terms of medium, for example, from directing messaging on a social media site to asking for the other person’s number, to texting. “Talking” at this point can include social media direct messages and posts (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Tinder), texts, and possibly phone calls or “FaceTiming.”

The tone of early “talking” is “casual” and “informal.” Social media and text messages are often funny and flirtatious (e.g., “flirtatious Snapchats back and forth”), while seeking out potential common interests. As Eve, age 28, Lara, age 23, and Mia, age 26, explain after being asked what role texting and social media play in the beginning of romantic relationships:

- | | | |
|----|---------|--|
| 1 | Eve: | I think texting is huge |
| 2 | Lara: | Yeah |
| 3 | Eve: | Which I hate |
| 4 | Lara: | To be able to hold a conversation |
| 5 | Mia: | That’s the whole beginning now |
| 6 | Eve: | Like I don’t, I can’t (.5) I can’t date a bad texter. Like if you can’t like |
| 7 | | make me laugh via text or like play off mine, it’s <i>not</i> gonna work |
| | (. . .) | |
| 8 | Mia: | Give me like a hello, give me a good morning |
| 9 | Eve: | A joke |
| 10 | Lara: | Absolutely, yeah |
| 11 | Eve: | Thought of you when I saw this |
| 12 | Lara: | Exactly |
| 13 | Mia: | No like I want, yeah absolutely, like if I’m gonna like, when I wake up in |
| 14 | | the morning I’m thinking of you, like I wanna make sure that it’s the same |
| 15 | | thing on your side too |
| 16 | Eve: | Send me a funny meme |
| 17 | Lara: | Yeah |
| 18 | Mia: | One hundred percent, yeah, flirt |
| 19 | Lara: | Yes |
| 20 | Mia: | Be a goofball |

Notice here that the developing relationship and romantic feeling are located *in communication*—in texts of different kinds—between interlocutors. Even an important model of personhood—being a good “texter” (and thus poten-

tial romantic partner)—is located in communicative action, that is, the ability to craft good texts.

The goal of “talking” at this point is to get to know the other person to see if there is romantic potential. This may include who the other person is, potential common interests, and career and life goals. According to participants, this can last for a few days to a few weeks.

Asking Out. At this point, if there is interest, one person will ask the other person, or they may mutually decide, to “meet up,” “hang out,” or go out on a “date.” This follows the same gender norms as above. Interestingly, our younger participants treated such events informally, not wanting to call this a “date,” but rather “meeting up” or “hanging out.” A “date” for them is much more formal, involving dressing up and something more serious and planned in advance such as a nice dinner out, and should be built up to over time. For several of our older participants, a “date” was seen as more casual yet necessary to move relationships forward. There was a certain sense of frustration among them that there is a reluctance to call this a “date” or “dating.” For many of our younger participants, however, “dating” is seen as the next, more serious stage of relationships.

Some of our participants suggested that this is “generational.” Many of our older participants grew up with the terms “date” and “dating,” while for our younger participants, “talking” has emerged during their formative years of developing romantic relationships. Thus, we can see how the terms would be in tension for older participants, as new ways of communicating and relating in the development of romantic relationships emerge.

Going Out. At this point, the participants “meet up,” “hang out,” or go out on a “date.” It should be “casual” in nature, one-on-one so that participants can talk, and likewise in a setting that enables talking. Participants noted going out for a drink, coffee, or dinner as good first dates. Several also noted doing a “fun” activity such as hiking, bowling, or mini golf as good first dates, since they enable participants to have fun, while giving them something to talk about during the date. Several participants noted that going to a “movie” should *not* be a first date, since you cannot talk. As Eddie, age 22, noted: “Definitely not the movies. . . . You can’t *speak*. You can’t talk, can’t talk at all.”

The goal of the first “meet-up” or “date” is to talk to get to know the other person to see if there is romantic interest for both parties. This involves learning more about the other person than in the initial “talking” phase over social media and text. Topics may include work, common interests, and life in general. Some of our older participants that wanted to be in a serious relationship preferred to discuss more personal topics and life goals on the first date as they did not want to waste time, whereas younger participants preferred keep first “meet-ups” light.

Participants also noted the importance of being “fun” and “interesting” and not “boring” on first “meet-ups” or “dates,” which is gleaned through conversation. Likewise, romantic interest and feeling are located *in conversation*. As John, age 23, noted:

I went on a date with another girl from the college . . . and it just wasn’t there. We went to Outback and we ah, it just wasn’t there. It was slow conversation the whole entire time, no laughs. She was a nice girl but it just wasn’t there, really dull the entire time like I could tell I wasn’t having a good time. And I think you could just see it wasn’t going anywhere, there was no laughing. It was kind of just slow, like really nice girl, but it just wasn’t there.

Notice here that “it”—presumably romantic interest or “chemistry”—is located in “conversation” that is not “slow” or “dull,” but rather in which you have “laughs” and “a good time.” Unfortunately, for John, “it just wasn’t there.” Participants noted in such cases that they would not see the other person again. They may say they could be “friends” or, more likely, not continue “talking” after the first “date” or “meet-up.”

More “Talking.” If both parties are romantically interested in each other after the first “meet-up” or “date,” more “talking” ensues. This includes more “talking” over social media and texts, “FaceTiming,” and phone calls, more “meet-ups,” “hanging out,” or “dates,” as well as sexual activity. The goal here is to get to know the other person more deeply, to see if one wants the relationship to evolve to the next, more serious stage.

A few of our participants noted that there may be “stages” to “talking” and that there is “talking” and “talking talking.” “Talking” is the beginning stage and not exclusive, whereas “talking talking” is a later stage and exclusive. This is where some of the natural critique of “talking” comes in—that it is an amorphous stage where one does not really know where one stands in the relationship. Several of our younger and some of our older participants liked this, as they were interested in more casual relationships, and if interested, wanted to take time to develop a more serious relationship. For many of our participants who were seeking serious relationships, the term and stage of “talking” frustrated them as it seemingly prolonged the development of relationships as well as declaration of their status and exclusivity.¹⁸

Having a “Conversation.” After “talking” or “getting to know the other person” for a period of time, one or both parties may be interested in moving to the next, more serious stage and, if not already, becoming exclusive. At this point, one or both parties may initiate and “have a conversation.” This “conversation” is more serious in tone, where both parties are working out what they would like their relationship to be. If both are interested in deepening their relationship, “talking” or this stage of relationships ends, and they move to the next more serious stage.

“In a Relationship”

According to our participants, there are several terms for couples who reach this more serious, exclusive stage of romantic relationships, including: “dating,” “in a relationship,” “boyfriend girlfriend,” and “they’re” or “we’re together.” Interestingly, for our participants who used the term “talking,” “dating” was seen as the next, more serious stage of romantic relationships, equivalent to “in a relationship,” “boyfriend girlfriend,” or “we’re together.” For participants who preferred “dating” to label the stage of “getting to know each other,” the next stage of romantic relationships was identified as “in a relationship,” “boyfriend girlfriend,” or being “together.”

Analysis

With the communicative process of developing romantic relationships in the United States, including the three primary stages of (1) Initiating, (2) “Getting to Know Each Other,” up to (3) “In a Relationship,” now delineated, we can ask, why are romantic relationships discourses as developing in these ways? What must be presumed for participants to make sense of the process in this way? A set of cultural premises regarding being, acting, relating, and feeling can be formulated that helps unravel this rich complexity: *People are separate, unique individuals, each with their own passions, interests, thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Due to this, if one is interested in another romantically, one must use communication to learn about the person, to connect to them, and to develop romantic feelings. This communication should be fun and interesting in the beginning, as it is an expression of self and develops the relationship and romantic feelings. Time should be taken in this process, since relationships are a serious commitment. People are and should be independent; thus, any relationship impinges on both parties’ freedom. Thus, time and care should be taken in getting to know someone to develop the relationship to see if they are a good match. There are a variety of communication channels today, including the Internet, mobile phones, and face-to-face interaction, that offer more ways and time to get to know another person and develop relationships. This should be taken advantage of so that one can make a good choice.*

FINNISH DISCOURSE OF ROMANTIC RELATING

In contrast to the U.S. case in which the process of developing a romantic relationship focused largely on communication, in Finland the focus was more on relating and feeling. In this cultural discourse of romantic relating, a system of cultural terms for relating, feeling, and communicating, as well as associated practices and norms, came into view as participants made sense of

their romantic lives. The Finnish participants were clear in their responses that the beginning of romantic relating had stages. Throughout the interviews and in other data as well, people analyzed, told stories, and stated beliefs and opinions about these stages. Most of the participants—but not all—expressed hope and longing for meeting potential partners and for long-term relationships.

In what follows, we delineate three current prominent stages in the communicative development of romantic relationships in Finland up to being in a serious relationship—*Tapaaminen* (“Encounter”), *Tutustuminen* (“Getting to Know Someone”), and *Seurustelu* (“Romantic Relationship”). In the following, we discuss in detail the first two stages with their associated terms, practices, norms, and cultural premises.

Tapaaminen (“Encounter”)

The two most prevalent first encounters that were described by participants were meeting face-to-face and meeting on Tinder.¹⁹ Meeting someone for the first time face-to-face was described as coincidental and unpredicted—one could meet new people at unexpected times and in unexpected places. Yet some scenes or ways were described as more typical, such as bars, events, parties, the work environment, and hobbies. First encounters were either followed by interaction via technology (Excerpt 1), or technology was already entwined within the first encounter (Excerpt 2).

Excerpt 1

- 1 Interviewer: *Tai tyypillisesti. Miten perisuhteet tyypillisesti alkaa?*
 2 Or typically. How do relationships typically begin?
 3 Maija: *Mä kertoisin oman tarinan ja sä sanoisit et se on tyypillinen, koska*
 4 *baarissa tavattiin ja hävettää myöntää muille, koska kaikki*
 5 *muutkin aina tapaa baarissa tai siis silleen, niin.*
 6 I would tell my own story and you would say it's typical, because
 7 we met in a bar and I'm ashamed to admit to others because all the
 8 others also always meet in a bar or so.
 9 Interviewer: *Joo, joo. Ja siihenkin liittyy teknologiaa sitten?*
 10 Yes yes. And technology is related to that as well then?
 11 Maija: *Joo, sen jälkeen sit oltiin yhteydessä. Ensin katottiin et kumpi lisää*
 12 *kumman Facebookissa ja sit et kumpi alottaa keskustelun ja*
 13 *tänmästä.*
 14 Yes, after that we were in contact. First we checked out which one
 15 adds which one in Facebook and then which one begins the
 16 conversation and so on.

Excerpt 2

Roosa (age 33): *Että mulla on ainaki monesti sit ku on laitettu Facebook-kaveriks, ni sitten on käyty siinä jo läpi, esims jos baarissa on et ootsä hei Facebookissa. Aa, ni sitte tavallaan niinku käy jo läpi et aa, nää on yhteistä, että mistä sä tän tunnet ja näin, ni sit, sit-siitä saa jo semmosen niinku, alku-keskustelun aikaseks että.*

For me at least many times when you have accepted each other as Facebook friends then you have already there, for example in a bar, [asked] are you on Facebook. Aaa, you kind of go through them, and aaaah, these are common [friends], how do you know this one, and then you kind of get the early conversation going.

The first face-to-face encounters vary. Length of time does not define the actual act or account of *tapaaminen* face-to-face. It could be a short encounter, as described by Sini, age 33. She had had a short but meaningful first meeting, a 15-minute conversation in a daytime outdoor event that was followed by a “friend request” on Facebook, an exchange of messages the day after, and an agreement to meet sometime in the future in the city where the other party lived. Further, first encounters may or may not include sexual activity or romantic feelings. Some of the first *tapaaminen* were described with expressions such as *meillä synkkasi* (“we hit it off”), *hän oli kiinnostava* (“he was interesting”), *hän teki itseään tykö* (“he put himself forward”), and *me juteltiin koko ilta* (“we talked the whole night”). These expressions suggest that the speaker has met an interesting person, that they have possibly experienced mutual interest toward each other, and expressed that by having an extended conversation and moment of enjoying each other’s company.

The first face-to-face encounter—or the first few—in interviewees’ descriptions included an exchange of contact information. Friending on Facebook or using Facebook Messenger were the primary channels for first contact. If phone numbers were exchanged, typically messaging then moved from Facebook Messenger into the WhatsApp service.²⁰

The participants discussed who initiated friending on Facebook, time between the first encounter and first message, and the amount and content of first messages as points for making interpretations of the other person, possible romantic interest, and compatibility. However, when discussing the amount and kinds of messages, there was not a strong consensus or shared norms for messaging. What participants seemed to agree on was that Facebook is a source of potentially meaningful information. In Excerpt 2 above, Roosa described how during the first face-to-face encounter parties would bring up their Facebook pages on their phones, friend each other, and examine each other’s contact list. To have common friends on Facebook is not rare in Finland or Helsinki. Participants mentioned, for example, that sometimes

it is refreshing to meet someone who does not have shared friends on Facebook. On the other hand, participants also suggested that if the other party shared several friends, he or she could not be that dangerous or strange.

Tutustuminen (“Getting to Know Someone”)

Although we have separated the first stage of *kohtaaminen* (“encounter”) from the stage of *tutustuminen* (literally translated as “getting to know someone”), the transition from one stage to another is not always clear. The very first *kohtaaminen* could already contain deep and long conversations, high self-disclosure, sexual activity, and romantic feelings—all of which certainly lead into getting to know someone. Martta, age 33, described the beginning of her current relationship as:

Meil ei kyl ikinä oikeen ollu treffejä ku me tavattiin silloin yöll, yöll Mustas Häräs ja sit vietettiin se yö yhdessä. Ja sit seuraavan viikonloppun, no me, oli se tavallan treffit ku me oltiin sovittu tapaaminen, mut siis mun luo. Me käytiin vaan kävelee ja sit Jussi tuli heti mun luo yöks ja sit me ollaan siit lähtien aina oltu toistemme luon yöll. Et ei me olla ikin oikee käyty missää kahvil tai mitään.

We never really had any *treffit* when we met that night at the *Musta Härkä* [a restaurant] and then spent the night together. And then the next weekend, well, it was kind of *treffit* as we had agreed to meet but at my place. We just went for a walk and then Jussi came over right away for the night and then we’ve then on been at each other’s place the nights. So we have not really ever gone out for coffee or anything.

Although Martta’s relationship began swiftly and without *treffit* (“dates”), participants in her group interview stated that typically, at the stage of *tutustuminen*, there would be face-to-face meetings (*deitti* or *treffit* in Finnish, translated as “a date” or *hengailu*, “hanging out”).²¹ As Maria, age 32, explained, “There needs to be *treffit* , so that the thing starts developing to some direction,” and then laughed. *Treffit* could follow, for example, after meeting someone for the first time at a party or bar. An invitation to meet up would be presented, and the parties would agree on a time, place, and activity for the meeting. During the first few meetings (or *treffit*) an evaluation of the connection takes place, as noted here in Roosa’s, age 33, words: “*Jaksaaks rueta tapailee tai kohtaako intressit tai onko kemiaa?*” (“Do I feel like starting *tapailee* or do our interests meet or do we have chemistry?”). If two people end up having multiple meetings and occasions of getting together, even lasting for months, these meetings or activity could be called *tapailu* (ongoing meeting-up).²² *Tapailu* is also part of the *tutustuminen* stage. In the following, we describe in detail the ways in which participants talked about two significant cultural terms in this stage, *Tinder-treffit* and *tapailu*.

Tinder-Treffit (“Tinder Dates”). Some participants had single *Tinder-treffit* occasionally, while some described phases in their lives during which they could have five or six *Tinder-treffit* in one week with different individuals. Participants also knew of others who had had multiple *Tinder-treffit* in one day. An invitation to a *Tinder-treffit* would follow a shorter or longer period of exchanging messages on Tinder. Participants had different opinions on whether the male or female should present an invitation and whether the invitation should always be accepted or not. A typical *Tinder-treffit* was going for a drink or coffee. The emphasis here is on “typically”—a drink or a coffee were discussed as safe and easy activities, but also as predictable or unimaginative suggestions.²³ Participants also expressed frustration regarding unimaginative opening lines for chats on Tinder, and on patterns of communication during *Tinder-treffit*, such as questions and topics for conversation.

On the stage of getting to know someone, for example during *Tinder-treffit*, the parties interact when they meet up. In addition to getting to know one another, parties explore, evaluate, and reflect on the potential for their own and the other’s romantic interest. However, participants described not only the content of the conversations, but also the gaze and physical appearance as meaningful sources of information. To the interviewer’s question on how do you know, in addition to self-disclosure, whether there is romantic interest, Leena (33), Saimi (32), and Martta (33), replied:

- 1 Leena: *Jotain vaan puuttuu.*
 2 Something is just missing
 3 Saimi: *Niin*
 4 Right
 5 Leena: *Et ei oo, ei oo kemiaa*
 6 There is no, there is no chemistry
 7 Martta: *Nii, se kemia*
 8 Right, the chemistry
 9 Leena: *Eikä se ihminen kiehdo jotenki välttämättä.*
 10 Nor does the person fascinate somehow necessarily
 11 Saimi: *Niin, et tietenki se voi, ihan niinku siis, ihan tosi karua, että näki*
 12 *jostain ihmisistä että kun olit sopinut treffit niinkun Tinderissä tai*
 13 *Tinderissä oot jutellut jonkun aikaan ja vaikutti hyvältä ja näin. Ja*
 14 *sitten ku se käveli sua koh, niinkun kohti ni se olemus ja kaikki*
 15 *kerto ja niinkun itelle tuli saman tien semmonen [olo, tunne] et ei.*
 16 *Sit vaan silleen et fuck, et no okei istutaan tässä ja juodaan nää*
 17 *kahvit tai kaljat.*
 18 Well, of course it can be, very harsh, that you saw in someone,
 19 when you had agreed on *treffit* on Tinder, or on Tinder you have
 20 talked for a while and he appeared good. And then when he walked

- 21 towards you, the appearance and everything told you and you got
 22 that [feeling] right away that no. Then you just go oh fuck, okay,
 23 let’s sit here and drink these coffees or beers.

In a similar manner, in another interview, Liila, age 31, responds as follows to the interviewer’s clarifying questions: “What was the word you used, did you talk about chemistry?” and “How do you know that the other one is interested in you?” Note at the end of her turn, how all the participants agree with her:

- 1 Liila: *Et se, se toinen, kat-, se katse, että [kyllä mä sen tiedän et onks se*
 2 *toinen kiinnostunu vai ei*
 3 The other one, the the gaze, I do know whether the other is
 4 interested in or not
 5 Sini: *[Kyllä, kyllä. // Ja kaikki eleet siis sellaset*
 6 *Yes, yes. And all the gestures those*
 (...)
 7 Liila: *Se on paljon niinku sellasta . . . no vet-vetovoima*
 8 *It’s a lot that kind of . . . well gravity*
 (...)
 9 Liila: *Mut tässä jos, ihan niinku mieltii ni, ihan et mitä siellä silmissä*
 10 *näkyy, se semmonen tietynlainen pilke // sellanen // ni se kertoo*
 11 *But here if you think about it what do you see in the eyes, it’s the*
 12 *certain kind of twinkle, that, so that tells you*
 13 Sini, Roosa: *Mm, mm*

From these utterances, we see that chemistry or fascination—or lack of them—is something that can be observed without engaging in verbal interaction. This does not mean, however, that on *Tinder-treffit*, there would be no talk, or that silence would be important, not to mention preferred. Our aim here is simply to underline that it is not only verbal communication that is observed, interpreted, and evaluated by participants. Occasionally, as in the excerpts earlier, it is also difficult to verbalize what is the source or channel from which the interpretations are drawn.

Tapailu. The phase of *tapailu*, in practice, consists of a number of meetings (meet-ups, dates, rendezvous) that could be regular, but go on without an agreement of a set time period or set requirements, for example, for the frequency of the meetings. *Tapailu* most likely would include sex, and it could go on only for sex. For example, Liila, age 31, described her current relationship as *tapailu*: she is single, but meets with a particular man five or six times a week. They are attracted to each other, enjoy each other’s compa-

ny, and the sex is “great”; however, they are not in a committed romantic relationship (*seurustelu*), and she would not want to have one with him.

Earlier Roosa stated that the first few *treffit* are a point to evaluate whether to start *tapailu* . During *tapailu* the partners get to know each other, and they evaluate, further, the level of romantic interest and the need and possibility for a monogamous relationship (*Et onks tässä jotain?* , “Is there something going on here?”). *Tapailu* either develops into *seurustelu* (romantic partnership) or eventually ends.

Participants were keen on analytically evaluating the expectations, beliefs, and values surrounding *tapailu* . Participants also discussed changes, and some of the participants stated as natural criticism that in current times, *tapailu* is preferred over “serious” relationships. Commitment (to one person) was considered to be rare, and there was an expectation to enjoy Tinder and *tapailu* lightly and playfully. Tinder, in particular, creates the impression that there are multiple possible people to meet, and thus committing to someone becomes more demanding. In other words, *tapailu* is not necessarily assumed as a monogamous stage. At least monogamy is not agreed upon once in this stage (although *tapailu* could move into monogamy without an explicit agreement). As Sini, age 33, explains:

Mun mielestä // esmes parisuhde on jo sit tosi vakava jo nykyaikana et jos joku sanoo et ne on parisuhteessa niinku me nyt sanotaan ni se on jo melkeen niinku avoliitto . . . sitte // niinku tapailusuuhde, se voi kestää x määrän aikoja riippuen niist henkilöist mitä ne halua mut parisuhde on jo sellane et sit niinku esittäydytään vanhemmille // ja sit ku jos ollaan tän ikäsi [kolmekymppisiä] ni sit siinä on niinku jo se optio niinku tosi vahvana siihen että // pitäis ehkä niinku mennä naimisiin ja sitte niinku tehdä niitä asioita et, tietysti on erilaisia pariskuntia et joku ei halua ees lapsia tai näin mutta //

In my opinion for example *parisuhde* [romantic relationship] is already really serious nowadays. If someone says that they are in *parisuhde* , like we are now saying, then it is already almost like *avoliitto* ²⁴ . . . that *tapailusuuhde* (*tapailu* relationship), it can last x amount of time depending on the people what they want, but *parisuhde* is already that, that in it you introduce yourself to the parents and when you are at this age [around 30s] there is that option, very strong, that maybe we should get married and do those things, of course there are different kinds of couples, not all even want to have children, but like this.

Participants also discussed romantic relationships as a bonus. Some participants suggested that instead of looking at committed romantic relationships as the aim, those relationships are seen as a bonus in the process of getting to know new people, and in the process of *tapaileminen* . In the end, participants’ experiences and discussion were full of contradictions. In addition to describing lightness, playfulness, and staying noncommitted, the participants

described heartaches, tears, disappointments, fears for expressing romantic interest, and difficulties in experiencing rejection.

Participants recognized *keskustelu* (“the conversation”) as the turning point, which moves *tapailu* into a committed relationship. In the conversation, the couple defines the relationship. They could, for example, acknowledge their mutual feelings (or lack of them) and agree on monogamy. Some of the participants describe *keskustelu* as scary or risky. Roosa, age 33, suggested that both parties might be afraid of initiating *keskustelu* , being worried about getting rejected, and thus *tapailu* could go on for a long time.

Seurustelu (“Romantic Relationship”)

If *keskustelu* is successful and both parties want to move forward to the next, more serious stage of romantic relationships, they move into *seurustelu* (“romantic relationship”). Synonyms for *seurustelu* from participants included *tyttöystävä* , *poikaystävä* (“girlfriend, boyfriend”); *naisystävä* , *miesystävä* (“womanfriend, manfriend”; equivalent for “girlfriend, boyfriend,” but used in relationships of older partners, in middle age and up); and *varattu* (“to be taken”). Other expressions used were *olla yhdessä* (“to be together”), *olla jonkun kanssa* (“to be with someone”), or to be (*pari*) *suhteessa* , which is the expression used also on Facebook, “in a relationship.”

Analysis

When listening to these men and women in their 20s and 30s living in Helsinki, we can ask, why are romantic relationships discourses as developing in these ways, through the three stages of (1) *Tapaaminen* (“Encounter”), (2) *Tutustuminen* (“Getting to Know Someone”), up to (3) *Seurustelu* (“Romantic Relationship”)? The most prevalent premise is about communication, relating, and feeling happening *luonnollisesti* (“naturally”). This could be considered an ideal, which participants reflected upon regarding their experiences. When something happens *luonnollisesti* , it could be explained as follows: *Participants engaging in romantic relating prefer, emphasize, hope for, trust, and believe in communication, relating, and feeling that is effortless, not forced or artificial, just happening, happening easily, without work or trying, comfortable, happening without noticing, happening on its own pace—be it fast or without rush—and without feeling too anxious about or insecure of the other’s behavior or feelings.* In addition, the following premises are active: *Individuals can have periods of time when they wish for and actively aim to engage in romantic relationships, and periods when they do not wish for or want to engage in one. The feeling of being in love is wonderful but it can be rare. Sometimes it can be difficult to verbally express romantic feelings or the reasons for lack of them. Romantic interest does not*

only lie in the individual feeling the feeling, but it should also be observable or felt between the parties, in the chemistry that is shared by the parties. An individual should listen to his or her feelings, and she or he can and must trust one's own feelings. Potential for romantic relating is observed and evaluated not only in one's feelings, but also in the interaction of the parties. In interaction, nonverbal communication is meaningful—the other's gaze, presence, and appearance affect romantic interest in someone.

DISCUSSION

We have painted, albeit partially, U.S. and Finnish discourses of romantic relationship development, each including a system of cultural terms for relationship stages and types, communicative activities and events, and romantic feeling, as well as associated practices, norms, and their meanings.

While on the surface, the three relationship stages in each case may seem similar, as well as the three initial stages of “coming together” in Knapp's (1978) model, as illustrated below in table 8.1, beneath the surface there are deep cultural differences.

While the first stage for all three is some sort of initial meeting, in Knapp's model the sole focus is on the communication pattern of “greeting,” while Initiating in the U.S. case and *Tapaaminen* (“Encounter”) in the Finnish case include multiple communicative activities and potential romantic feelings, often identified by cultural terms rich with potent meaning. In fact, aspects of the first stage in the U.S. and Finnish cases would likely be part of Knapp's second and third stages, illustrating variance in relationship development culturally and over time, as well as potential bias in Knapp's model.

On the surface, the second stage looks similar for all three, all focusing on getting to know the other person, but deep differences abound. For Knapp, this stage of “Experimenting” focuses on “small talk,” a cultural term for and way of communicating that may not be present in all cultures.²⁵ Indeed, a cultural premise runs through Knapp's model that small talk is the way to get to know people, develop, and maintain relationships.

Table 8.1. Relationship Stages in Knapp's Model, U.S. and Finnish Cases

	STAGE 1	STAGE 2	STAGE 3
Knapp's Model	Initiating	Experimenting	Intensifying
U.S. Case	Initiating	Getting to Know Each Other	In a Relationship
Finnish Case	<i>Tapaaminen</i> (Encounter)	<i>Tutustuminen</i> (Getting to Know Someone)	<i>Seurustelu</i> (Romantic Relationship)

In the U.S. case, the second stage of “Getting to Know Each Other” is discoursed as largely focusing on conversing through multiple channels and meetings to get to know the other person more deeply to see if there is romantic potential. Here we also see a cultural discursive system in motion, as new terms for and ways of communicating and relating emerge and are in tension, with participants having competing preferences and opinions about the new term for and relationship stage of “talking” versus “dating.” Regarding this, there has been a proliferation of mediated technologies such as cell phones, text messaging, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, online dating sites, and apps that enable people to talk to romantic interests in multiple, new ways. As such, “talking” may have emerged as a relationship stage in concert with—or precisely because of—these technologies.²⁶ In a similar manner, in the Finnish case, participants' talk was filled with technology language and loan words such as *swaipata Tinderiä* (“to swipe Tinder”), *Tinder-treffit* (“Tinder-dates”), and *laittaa viestiä* (literally, “to put message”), and there seems to be a recent change in approaching romantic relating more playfully, lightly—more superficially. Thus, new technologies are likely transforming how we communicatively develop romantic relationships today, and concomitantly, those very relationships.

In contrast, in the Finnish case, the second stage, *Tutustuminen* (“Getting to Know Someone”), is discoursed as much more amorphous and largely focused on *relating* and *feeling*. Interestingly, feeling is linked to communication: participants talked about the importance of determining romantic “chemistry,” and on the ways in which it is focused not only on verbal but also on nuanced interpretations of nonverbal communication such as “gaze,” “appearance,” presence, and “gestures.” This is perhaps one of the most significant differences between the two cases, that in the Finnish case, romantic relationships and feelings should ideally develop “naturally” and are interpreted also via subtle nonverbal (and verbal) cues, while in the U.S. case, the developing romantic relationship and feelings are located more explicitly in verbal communication between interlocutors (e.g., texts or talk). This is not to say that Finns do not talk in the beginning stages of romantic relationships. The difference is that when Finnish and U.S. participants *talk about* developing romantic relationships, they focus on different things, suggesting deeper and differing cultural premises grounding the development of romantic relationships.

While there are differences, there were also many commonalities across the cases, which we do not want to diminish. Though we spent the majority of our analysis on the first two stages, we did discuss cultural terms for relationships once both parties had “a conversation” or *keskustelu* and decided to move to a more serious, monogamous relationship (“In a Relationship” or *Seurustelu*). For Knapp, this is the “Intensifying” stage, which is

marked by a number of communication patterns distinctive to and constitutive of this stage.²⁷

While Knapp's model is a long-standing and important one in the field of interpersonal communication, we hope to have illustrated that the model, though useful, may be culturally biased and not applicable to how all cultures develop romantic relationships today. Additionally, we hope to have illustrated how a cultural discourse analysis approach focused on key cultural terms and their meanings can bring a more in-depth and culturally situated view to the study of romantic relationship development and interpersonal communication more broadly. In both the U.S. and Finnish cases, cultural terms for communicating, relating, and feeling were portals into the deep meanings as to how and why participants develop romantic relationships in the way they do. We hope to have provided two such windows into cultural worlds of interpersonal communication and romantic relationships today.

NOTES

1. Names have been changed for all research participants to protect anonymity.
2. The "friend zone" refers to a relationship in which one person is romantically interested in another, but the other is not, so they are placed in a "friend zone," meaning the other person does not think of them in any other "zone" than friends, nor want to be more than friends.
3. *Vauva* online discussion forum (www.vauva.fi/keskustelu) is one of the most active and popular in Finland. It is connected to *Vauva* magazine (in English, "Baby") that publishes on family, children, pregnancy, health, home, and so forth. The discussion forum is not moderated; however, discussants need to register (*Vauva*, October 15, 2017).
4. This excerpt is translated from Finnish into English by the second author, with key Finnish terms included in the English translation, as for all other Finnish interview quotes and transcripts in the chapter. The original Finnish online discussion transcript can be obtained from the authors.
5. The ethnography of communication (EC) research program, originally the "ethnography of speaking," was originated by linguistic anthropologist Dell Hymes in a 1962 article and developed further in a series of articles (e.g., Hymes, 1964, 1967, 1972). Gerry Philipsen brought EC to the communication field with a series of articles on communication practices in Teamsterville, Chicago (e.g., Philipsen, 1975, 1976, 1986). EC is an approach to the study of human communication with its own philosophy, theory, and methodology that aims to study communication in local contexts of use and in cross-cultural perspective. See Philipsen (1990), Carbaugh (1995), and Carbaugh and Hastings (1995) for more on the EC research program and its methodology.
6. Note that in our current research, *kattelu* is no longer talked about as part of the beginning stages of romantic relationship development in Finland.
7. See also Riley (1996) on courtship, marriage, intermarriage, and divorce in the American West.
8. The stages of "coming apart" are (1) "differentiating" (communication focused on differences); (2) "circumscribing" (decreased communication, more superficial); (3) "stagnating" (little communication); (4) "avoiding" (avoidance of communication); and (5) "terminating" (communication that ends the relationship) (Knapp, Vangelisti, & Caughlin, 2014).
9. For the U.S. data, 4 individual interviews and 5 group interviews with 2 to 7 participants each were conducted in the northeastern United States. There were 22 participants ranging in age from 22 to 38, with an average age of 25, including 15 female and 7 male participants. Seventeen identified as White/Caucasian, 2 as Asian/Pacific Islander, 2 as Black or African

American, and 1 as Hispanic or Latino. Fifteen identified themselves as heterosexual, 3 as homosexual, 3 as bisexual, and 1 as other. All had bachelor's degrees except for 4 who were working toward them; 4 were working toward or had master's degrees. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. We are grateful to research assistant Jaclyn Hahn for invaluable help with data collection.

10. For the Finnish data, 1 preliminary group interview and 4 group interviews with 3 to 4 participants each were conducted in Helsinki. There were 14 participants ranging in age from 22 to 33, including 11 female and 3 male participants. All participants were Finnish, Finnish speaking, heterosexual, and currently living in Helsinki. All but two participants had completed or were currently studying toward a graduate degree. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Research assistant Salli Kolehmainen's work on transcription and some analysis was invaluable.

11. Note that, following Carbaugh (2005), we locate culture in communication practice and are making claims about discourse concerning practices prominent in some scenes of social life in the United States and Finland, particularly in the Northeastern United States and Helsinki areas. Our claims are thus about cultural discursive practices, not populations of people. Following Carbaugh (2005), we may call practices in the U.S. case "USAmerican," meaning "practices prominent and potent in some scenes of the United States" (p. xxiv), while practices in the Finland case, experienced while living in Helsinki, we refer to as "Finnish." Several Finnish participants noted that the experiences in, beliefs about, or practices of developing romantic relationships would not be similar outside the capital area of Helsinki.

12. Note the dual meaning of the term "discoursed" here, meaning (1) how the process of romantic relationship development was discussed by participants and (2) the system of cultural practice and meaning that was brought into view during this, or "cultural discourse."

13. "Initiating" is also the first stage in Knapp's interaction stages of relationships model. While that stage is marked by the communication pattern of "greeting," our stage includes first meeting (likely involving "greeting"), social media "stalking," and first contact after meeting (Knapp, 1978; Knapp, Vangelisti, & Caughlin, 2014).

14. A mobile dating application ("app") is accessible via mobile phone or tablet, whereas online dating sites use a desktop site. Many dating sites now also have apps, so these terms are becoming more interchangeable. In the U.S. case, of our participants who used this technology, they only used dating apps, but did give examples of older family and friends that used dating sites. A few noted that they used dating apps because they were free (whereas dating sites often have a fee). The dating apps our participants used included Tinder, Bumble, Coffee Meets Bagel, Grindr, Jack'd, OK Cupid, and Plenty of Fish, with Tinder being most popular.

15. Note that the native term "stalking" denotes that one is almost lurking privately in a public space, anonymously learning more about the person rather quickly without them knowing. Users enable this possibility if they set their social media as open to the public, but it nevertheless carries some negative connotation.

16. Many of our younger participants noted that they were uncomfortable with phone calls early in a relationship and waited to talk on the phone until they had met in person once or a few times. Conversely, a few of our older participants sought to talk to romantic interests right away on the phone as a way to more quickly see if they were romantically interested in the other person.

17. See Carbaugh (1988, 2005) for similar symbols and premises concerning "rights," "choice," the "individual," and "communication" in "USAmerican" culture.

18. Part of this natural critique can be heard in the phrase "just talking," e.g., "we're just talking." The qualifier "just" denotes this as a less serious relationship, which often frustrates those who want to be in a more serious relationship and want the exact nature of the relationship clarified. Conversely, for those who do not want such a relationship, "we're just talking" becomes a way to claim or account for a less serious relationship.

19. According to some estimates, Tinder has about 100,000 Finnish users (www.vaestöliitto.fi). Participants were aware of some other applications as well, but did not use them as frequently or could not remember the names of the applications available. Tinder was by far most recognized, used, and described by participants. This is apparent in media data as well; media

discourse focuses on Tinder. For example, *Tinder-treffit* (a Tinder date) is a widely recognized and used expression in the media.

20. WhatsApp is an Internet-based messaging application through which text-messaging is free. WhatsApp is connected to the parties' phone number, while Facebook Messenger is connected to one's Facebook account. Facebook recently bought WhatsApp.

21. These two terms are loan words. *Deitti* originates from English ("a date") and *treffit* is a loan word from Swedish (*träff*), for which meanings in English are, e.g., a date, a meeting, an appointment, a rendezvous.

22. *Tapailta*, a verb, is derived from *tavata* (to meet). When adding the ending *-illa* or *-ella* to a verb, the meaning changes into action that is ongoing and that is done lightly, or is done only a little, or in passing. In other words, *tapailta* is that kind of meeting that is ongoing, light, and in passing. In addition to *tapailta*, participants used expressions such as *olla jotain* (to have something) or *nähdä toista* (to see one another).

23. Participants listed other, less typical activities as well. These were, e.g., rock climbing, going for a walk, paddleboarding, having dinner at home or a restaurant, and washing windows together.

24. In addition to *avioliitto* (marriage), *avoliitto* (common-law-marriage, cohabitation) is recognized both socially and legally (including taxation, marriage law, social welfare) in Finland. *Avoliitto* is described as two people living indefinitely together without marriage. With some few exceptions, couples live together (they are in *avoliitto*) before marriage. It is also common that a child or children are born to parents who live in *avoliitto*, and who only later marry.

25. The cultural discourse of Finnishness (e.g., Poutiainen, 2015) includes a notion of Finns lacking skills in "small talk" (see also, e.g., Salo-Lee, 1993). These notions emphasize cultural differences in what counts as meaningful communication.

26. We would also suggest that "talking" may mark the ethos of a new generation, i.e., that these technologies are not only changing the way romantic relationships develop, but the very desire for or creation of new types of relationships. As such, new technologies could be changing ways of being, relating, acting, feeling, and dwelling in the world (Carbaugh, 2005).

27. One important note here is that Knapp's model focuses on interaction stages of development across relationship types (e.g., romantic, friendship); therefore, it would be more difficult to focus on terms for relationship types and types of communication specific to certain types of relationships (e.g., romantic, friendship, family). Thus, the model is broader, to encompass interaction in multiple types of relationships.

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