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DEVELOPMENTAL SHIFTS IN THE CHARACTER
OF ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS
FROM ADOLESCENCE TO EARLY ADULTHOOD

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ABSTRACT

As adolescents move into adulthood, the quality/character of their romantic relationships are expected to shift as they mature. Using growth curve models and the longitudinal data from the Toledo Adolescent Relationships Study, we examine developmental changes in the nature of relationships in terms of communication, emotion, influence/power, and utilitarian concerns. We also distinguish young adult daters from those who are cohabiting. In general, relationships formed in young adulthood are characterized by lower levels of communication awkwardness and greater emotional and instrumental rewards. Across the period from adolescence to young adulthood, respondents also report more influence attempts and actual influence on the part of the romantic partner. With regard to gender, there is a generally consistent developmental pattern; however, perceptions of awkwardness decrease more for young female than male respondents, while males continue to perceive a less favorable power balance whether they are currently in dating or cohabiting relationships.

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Marital unions have been the subject of much social research; however, romantic relationships that occur earlier in the life course have not received as much research scrutiny. Consequently, a growing number of studies have now focused attention on dating relationships that take place during the adolescent period (Furman and Shaffer 2003; Giordano, Longmore, and Manning 2006). Studies of family processes and peer influence have a much longer history within the field of adolescent development, likely connecting to the belief that dating relationships during this time are transitory and somewhat shallow, thus lessening their potential impact (see e.g., Merten 1996). In contrast to this portrait, an emerging research base documents that adolescents themselves often consider these relationships to be an important part of their lives. More focused investigations have suggested that romantic partners are a potential influence on such outcomes as drug/alcohol use, academic achievement, delinquency involvement, and sexual decision-making (Cleveland 2003; Giordano et al. 2008; Haynie et al. 2005).

In the contemporary context, adolescent dating relationships do not segue neatly and inevitably into adult marital unions. Increases in the average age at marriage and the more variable order of key events creates for many an extended period of non-marital heterosexual involvement that takes place during the phase of life increasingly referred to as “emerging adulthood” (Arnett 2000; Setterstein and Mayer 1997). Cohabitation has received attention, as it is increasingly common (in 2002, 58% of 25-29 year old women ever cohabited), in part, due to the delays in marriage (Kennedy and Bumpass 2008). Yet, cohabitation is not ubiquitous during this time, suggesting the importance of exploring the relationship experiences of young adults who are dating as well as cohabiting. Accordingly, the primary objective of the current study is to compare qualities and dynamics within adolescent and young adult romantic relationships, and within the latter subgroup, to explore the distinction between dating and cohabiting couples.

We rely on the Toledo Adolescent Relationships Study (TARS), a longitudinal study of 1,321 adolescents who were interviewed four times during adolescence and into early adulthood. A key

advantage of this longitudinal approach is that this methodological strategy allows us to observe changes in the relationship qualities/dynamics as individuals have matured rather than relying on a cross-sectional comparison of two samples characterized by different age ranges. Another advantage of these data is the measurement emphasis on relationship qualities and dynamics, which allows us to build a developmental perspective on romantic relationships. A particularly important goal of this investigation is to determine whether gendered responses observed in prior analyses (notably boys' lower scores on perceived power in their relationships (Giordano et al. 2006)) shift as respondents complete the transition into young adulthood. We focus on domains included in prior research on adolescent relationships (communication, emotion, and power/influence dynamics) and include attention to more utilitarian concerns, recognizing that these may become more salient as priorities in this next stage of life change/expand.

BACKGROUND

Developmental and life course approaches stress that each phase of life brings with it new challenges, constraints, and opportunities. The symbolic interactionist perspective that serves as a theoretical underpinning of this investigation extends this basic insight by highlighting that subjectively experienced phenomena are similarly 'situated' within a particular social framework/context (Mead 1934). Maccoby (1990) argued that in the case of *adolescent* romantic relationships, "both sexes face a relatively unfamiliar situation to which they must adapt" (Maccoby 1990:517). Nevertheless, this author concluded that the transition was accomplished more easily for males who often simply transport their dominant interaction style into this new form of social relationship. Another line of work argues that because girls have more experience than boys with intimate dyadic communications by virtue of their own earlier friendship experiences, boys must make what amounts to a bigger developmental leap as they begin to develop this more intimate way of relating to another. Giordano et al. (2006) find that adolescent boys scored significantly higher than their female counterparts on a scale indexing perceived *awkwardness in communication* with a focal romantic partner.

Movement into romantic relationships involves more than developing a level of comfort while communicating with the opposite gender. It also requires a full complement of relationship skills.

Young people must become familiar with the process of making initial overtures, learn how to communicate their needs to partners, manage conflict, and successfully terminate unwanted relationships. Here, too, young women might feel more competent and confident in these relationship navigational skills, as they have experienced generally related social dynamics in prior relationships (e.g., friendship troubles and their repair). While prior research has shown that boys frequently score higher on scales measuring general self-esteem and self-efficacy (Gecas and Longmore 2003), teenage male respondents compared with their female counterparts, on average, perceived lower *confidence navigating adolescent romantic relationships* (Giordano et al. 2006).

Much of our theorizing about these communication processes centered on the ‘newness’ of involvement in the dating world, particularly for adolescent boys. However, as young people mature and gain more experience within this social arena, perhaps young men in particular are more likely to become the confident actors that Maccoby described. Accordingly, we explore whether age is associated with reduced feelings of communication awkwardness and greater feelings of confidence navigating romantic relationships, considering also whether the gender gap in these communication dynamics and feelings of confidence dissipate as respondents mature into adulthood.

Communication processes comprise a core aspect of close relationships; however, researchers have suggested that feelings of heightened emotionality, especially the experience of passionate love, encompass relationship dynamics that are arguably unique to the romantic context (Giordano, Longmore, and Manning 2001). In this regard, prior studies of adolescent romantic involvement have also theorized about strong gender differences. Some scholars have emphasized that while girls are likely to become highly invested in their romantic entanglements (Eder, Evans, and Parker 1995), boys are socialized within their peer worlds to avoid or deny softer emotions and are teased and ridiculed by peers if they reveal signs of emotionality (Fine 1987). In turn, this literature suggests that boys learn to devalue relationships that might engender positive emotions and to objectify and denigrate the young women who are their partners in romantic interactions. Overall, much previous research provides support for the idea of an emotional closing off process, as boys are observed making crude comments in the school

lunchroom (Eder et al. 1995), describing their romantic relationships as tedious (Wight 1994) or constructing relationships as a game perpetrated on young women for the purpose of sexual conquest (Anderson 1989).

In contrast to the emphases within much of the existing adolescence literature, recent quantitative and qualitative findings support the idea that boys often develop positive emotional feelings toward partners and accorded significance and positive meanings to their romantic relationships (Korobov and Thorne 2006; Tolman et al. 2004; Way and Chu 2004). The notion that new attitudes and feelings can emerge from these new romantic experiences is consistent with Thorne's (1993:133) key observation that “incidents of crossing (gender boundaries) may chip away at traditional ideologies and hold out new possibilities.” To the degree that boys engage in a distinctive form of intimate self-disclosure lacking within their peer discourse, and receive both positive identity and social support from a caring female partner, we argued that boys in some respects may be seen as more dependent on these relationships than girls who have a range of other opportunities for intimate talk and social support. Generally consistent with this hypothesis, there were no gender differences in reports of feelings of passionate love within adolescent romantic relationships (Giordano et al. 2006).

We expect that as respondents mature, relationships will become even more intimate and provide even greater emotional rewards than those that characterize the adolescent period. It is possible that as young men gain feelings of confidence and additional relationship experience, including sexual experience, they may be more likely as young adults to engage in dating experiences that are not characterized by strong emotions (i.e., the idea of ‘scoring’ as a competitive game, the notion of ‘getting over’). We explore the relationship between age and feelings of passionate love directly and whether the data reveal gender and age interactions in reports of the nature of these feelings. Some research on college samples suggests that highly gendered patterns may not be observed in the young adulthood. For example, Hatfield and Sprecher (1986), who developed a 30-item passionate love scale, did not find strong gender differences in reports of love as reported within a sample of male and female college

students. Similarly, using a national sample, Brown and Bulanda (2008) find similar levels of relationship satisfaction and love among dating young men and women.

A third key dimension of relationships is the nature of influence and power. The social influence literature emphasizes that the more highly valued the relationship, the more individuals are willing to accede to influence attempts in order to maintain or enhance their standing with valued others (Blau 1964). Given that traditional gender socialization emphasizes the centrality of relationships in girls' lives, it is conventional to argue that structurally based gender inequalities tend to be reproduced at the couple level, and that on average, the male partner acquires more power and control in the relationship (Komter 1989). While these ideas originally were applied to adult marital relations, the notion of gendered inequalities of power is also a recurrent theme within the adolescence literature. Further, if young women's identities are dependent upon their relationships with romantic partners, it follows that these others would be a significant source of reference and influence. In contrast, to the degree that adolescent males' concerns lie outside the romantic context itself (i.e., where heterosexual success is merely a form of competition and basis for camaraderie with one's male peers), we may expect the romantic partner's influence to be (and to be viewed as) rather minimal (see Collins 2004:238). This is likely to be the case whether the focus is on change in relationship attitudes/behaviors, influence on other aspects of the adolescent's life, or effects on the young person's emerging identity. A contrasting hypothesis is that adolescent girls, due to their greater familiarity with issues of intimacy and skill in communication, would be expected to make influence attempts, while boys (highly interested/engaged in this new relationship form) would often be receptive to them. The symbolic interactionist framework also suggests a more situated, constantly negotiated view of power dynamics, in contrast to a straightforward male privilege argument (see e.g., Sprey 1999). Consistent with the latter perspective, a recent study found that boys scored higher on perceptions of influence attempts as well as actual influence on the part of their romantic partners (Giordano et al. 2006). An examination of power dynamics was in accord with these findings; boys scored lower than their female counterparts on a scale indexing the perceived power balance within the relationship (Giordano et al. 2006). During adolescence, social forces that are generally understood as

fostering gender inequalities are still very much at a distance; thus, the reproduction process itself may be markedly less than complete. This suggests the importance of assessing the nature and extent of developmental changes in respondents' reports about their romantic partner's *influence attempts*, *actual influence (as perceived by the respondent)*, and perceptions of the *power balance* within the relationship (defined as getting one's way, given some level of disagreement). We expect that as individuals spend increased time with their romantic partners, and peer relationships begin to recede somewhat in importance, in general, the romantic partner will increase as a source of reference, support, and influence. A key question, however, is whether the non-traditional gender pattern observed in connection with adolescent romantic relationships continues to be characteristic of the young adult romantic context. It is again useful to observe these gender patterns with respect to power and influence alongside findings that relate to dynamics of communication and emotion within these romantic relationships.

McCall and Simmons (1966) noted that while it is typical to evaluate the intrinsic benefits of close relationships and dynamics that center on issues of intimacy, social bonds may provide more extrinsic or utilitarian benefits. Thus, in addition to being an important partner in communication, object of affection, or source of reference and influence, the dating partner may also provide tangible benefits. Marriage has often been described in light of these extrinsic elements, particularly as their provision connects to gender inequalities (where men gain power from their historically greater ability to bring such extrinsic benefits to the relationship). In the current analysis, we focus on non-marital dating partners, and ascertain whether there is a developmental shift in the provision of extrinsic rewards and how gender influences observed developmental progressions.

Dating and Cohabiting in Young Adulthood

There has been a continued rise in the age at marriage; in 2007, the median age for marriage among men was 27.5 and women was 25.6 (U.S. Census Bureau 2008). While young adults are not holding out for marriage, they are still forming unions and having relationships - outside the confines of marriage (Raley 2000). Cohabitation has become increasingly common. In 2002, nearly three-fifths of women aged 25-29 had ever cohabited, and cohabitation has become the typical pathway into marriage (62% of

first marriages are preceded by cohabitation) (Kennedy and Bumpass 2008). To help understand the nature and meaning of cohabiting relationships, research is often framed around the question of whether cohabiting unions are similar to single or more akin to marriage (Casper and Sayer 2000; Rindfuss and VandenHeuvel 1990). Empirical studies have explicitly compared cohabitation to marriage relationships. They find that couples in cohabiting unions have lower relationship quality, less homophily, lower fertility levels, and less gender equity than those in marriages (e.g., Blackwell and Lichter 2000; Brines and Joyner 1999; Brown 2004; Hohmann-Marriott 2006; Loomis and Landale 1994; Qian 1998). Yet little recent work has contrasted the relationship qualities and dynamics of cohabiting and dating young adults. One recent study reports that cohabiting and dating men and women share similar levels of relationship satisfaction (Brown and Bulanda 2008). While there are gender distinctions in levels of love, cohabiting and dating young adult men report similar levels of love, and cohabiting women report significantly higher levels of love than dating women (Brown and Bulanda 2008). An examination of how the relationship qualities of dating and cohabiting relationships are similar and different will speak to the issue of where cohabitation fits in the American courtship system. We recognize that while cohabiting and dating relationships are non-marital unions, the qualities and dynamics within them may be different than within the context of young adult daters who have not yet entered the co-residential (cohabitation) phase of their relationship. Thus, in the analyses below, we include attention to this distinction as we explore basic developmental and gender trends observed in relationship characteristics (relating to issues of communication, emotion, influence, and partner utility) in the transition from adolescence to young adulthood.

DATA AND METHODS

Data

The TARS sample ($n = 1,321$) was drawn from the year 2000 enrollment records of all youths registered for the seventh, ninth, and eleventh grades in Lucas County, Ohio. The following waves of TARS data were collected in 2002, 2004, and 2006 with in-depth interviews at waves one, three, and four as well as a parent questionnaire at wave one. The initial sample universe encompassed records elicited

from 62 schools across seven school districts. All schools complied with requests for these data, as this information is legally available under Ohio's Freedom of Information Act. The stratified, random sample, devised by the National Opinion Research Center, includes oversamples of Black and Hispanic adolescents. Unlike school-based studies, school attendance was not a requirement for sample inclusion, and interviews were conducted in the respondent's home using preloaded laptops to administer the interview while maintaining privacy. Based on Census data, the socio-demographic characteristics of Lucas County closely parallel those of the nation in terms of race (13% in Toledo and 12% in the U.S. are Black); education (80% in Toledo and 84% in the U.S. are high school graduates); median income (\$50,046 in Toledo and \$50,287 in the U.S.); and marital status (73.5% in Toledo and 75.9% in the U.S. are married couple families).

We draw on the wave 1 and wave 4 interviews for the descriptive statistics and all four waves for the growth curve analyses. The analytic sample at each wave used in the growth curve analyses is limited to respondents who were dating or cohabiting at the time of that wave's interview (n ranges from 752 to 952 across the four waves, with a total of 3,550 person-period observations). Respondents may be dating or cohabiting with the same or different persons across interview waves. For the descriptive statistics (Tables 1 - 2), the sample is further limited so that "adolescent daters" were all aged 12-17 in the wave 1 interview (n = 855), while the "early adult daters" (n = 672) and "early adult cohabitators" (n = 203) were all aged 18-23 in the wave 4 interview. Respondents were asked if they were dating, phrasing the question: "Is there someone you are currently dating--that is, a girl/guy you like and who likes you back?" If the respondent responded 'yes' then they are coded as dating. The early adult cohabitators reported a cohabiting relationship, either responding affirmatively to the question "Are you currently living with someone?" or reporting that they cohabited with their most recent (but not current) romantic partner. In addition to the relationship qualities described below, which are our dependent variables, we include three additional measures of the relationship context beyond whether the relationship is co-residential versus a dating relationship. We include a dichotomous measure of whether the relationship is ongoing at the time of interview versus being the respondent's most recent (but ended) relationship. We also include a

dichotomous measure of whether the couple has had sexual intercourse. Finally, we include an estimate of relationship duration measured in months. These basic features of the relationship are included as controls in order to gauge whether the character of these relationships vary systematically by age and is not a simple function of, for example, longer average durations among older respondents.

Our measures of relationship quality focus on the domains of communication, emotion, influence and utility. *Communication Awkwardness* is a scale of four items such as “Sometimes I don’t know quite what to say to [PARTNER]” and has alphas across the waves ranging from .71 - .76 (Powers and Hutchinson 1979). *Dating Confidence* is a scale created for TARS that includes three items such as “How confident are you that you could break-up with someone you no longer like?” Across the four waves, this scale has alphas that range from .70 to .74. *Passionate Love* is an abbreviated, 4-item version of Hatfield and Sprecher’s (1986) Passionate Love Scale, including items such as “[PARTNER] always seems to be on my mind” ($\alpha = .84 - .85$). *Emotional Rewards* is measured by two items, “[PARTNER] makes me feel attractive” and “[PARTNER] makes me feel good about myself” ($\alpha = .75 - .85$). *Partner Influence Attempts* is based on two items, “[PARTNER] always tries to change me” and “[PARTNER] tries to control what I do” (Shulman et al. 1997). Alphas for that scale range from .74 to .84 across the waves. *Partner’s Actual Influence* is measured by 3 items such as “I sometimes do things because I don’t want to lose [PARTNER]’s respect” ($\alpha = .70 - .72$). *General Decision-making Power* is measured by a single item from Blood and Wolfe’s (1960) index: “If the two of you disagree about something, who usually gets their way?” This is coded so that higher scores indicate greater decision-making power for the respondent. We measure *Partner’s* and *Respondent’s Instrumental Support* separately, each with three items such as “How often have you done the following for [PARTNER]: paid to see a movie or do some other fun activity?” Alphas range from .80 - .84 for partner’s instrumental support and .80 - .83 for respondent’s support.

We include sociodemographic indicators related to relationship quality. *Family structure* is measured by asking at wave 1 “During the past 12 months, who were you living with most of the time?” Adolescents who lived with only one biological parent were coded 1. Those who lived with both

biological parents were coded as 2 if his/her parents were married. Adolescents who lived with one biological parent and parent's spouse or partner were coded as 3 to reflect a stepfamily. Respondents whose biological parents are cohabiting and those who live with one biological parent and his/her cohabiting partner are coded as 4. Respondents who did not fall into one of these categories were coded as 5 "other" (e.g., living with grandparents or other relatives, foster care, etc.). For multivariate analyses, dummy variables were created with "two biological parents" as the contrast category. *Gender* is self-reported. *Age* is calculated from the adolescent's date of birth and the date of the interview.

Race/ethnicity is classified as White, Black, Hispanic, and 'Other' race/ethnicity. White is the contrast category in the multivariate analyses. *Parent's education* is measured from the parent's questionnaire completed primarily by mothers. We ask the question "How far did you go in school?" and give seven response options. These options are collapsed into a four-category variable: responses were coded 1 if the parent had less than a high school education; 2 if the parent had a high school education; 3 if the parent had some education beyond high school, but no four-year college degree; and 4 if the parent had a bachelor's degree or higher. Dummy variables were created for the multivariate analyses with high school as the contrast category.

Analytic Strategy

We first present descriptive statistics for the sample, with a focus on the subsets of adolescent daters (wave 1) and young adult daters and cohabitators (wave 4). To assess change over time, we use a multilevel, linear mixed effects model. This technique includes procedures to handle the correlations between the data (and errors) that make traditional regression techniques less than ideal for longitudinal data. Our data are multilevel in the sense that some variables are measured at the relationship level (e.g., whether the couple has had sex in the relationship), while others are measured at the individual level (e.g., gender, parent's education). The data are relationships nested within individuals; the hierarchy of the data can also be considered from the standpoint that variables related to the relationship are "time varying," while respondent characteristics in our models remain stable across relationships. The technique we use is a "mixed effects" model in the sense that some variables have random effects and others have fixed:

random effects are ones where the relationship between the variable of interest and the dependent variable contains enough random variation that it is best modeled by an individual random coefficient for each respondent (with the mean of these coefficients reported in our tables; these means are identical to what the fixed effect coefficient would be). In the models presented below, the intercept is always random and age is random in the majority of cases, while the remaining relationship-level variables are each random for about one-quarter of the dependent variables. Variance components are not shown, but are available from the authors. Each relationship quality is modeled separately, and Tables 2 - 5 show two models for each quality. At each wave, we use single year of age as our measure of time, with each respondent contributing up to four relationships (one at each wave) for analysis. Age is modeled linearly for ease of interpretation. The first model is a basic model that includes age (time), gender, and an age by gender interaction if such an interaction is significant. The second model shown is a full model, including all covariates and any statistically significant interactions between the covariates and age.

RESULTS

Descriptive Analyses

Table 1 provides descriptive statistics for all variables used in the multivariate analyses for teens at wave 1 and young adults at wave 4 (cohabiting and dating). We examine the following qualities of romantic relationships: (1) *communication processes* as indexed by communication awkwardness and dating confidence; (2) *emotionality* as measured in terms of passionate love and emotional rewards of the romantic relationship; (3) *influence* as indexed by the degree to which the romantic partner attempts to influence the respondent, the extent to which the partner actually does influence the respondent, and who, in general, has more decision making power in the relationship; and (4) *instrumental support* as indexed by perceptions of instrumental support provided by the romantic partner as well as the respondent's report of providing instrumental report to the romantic partner.

We find that the qualities of communication, emotional aspects of the relationship, influence, and instrumental support all appear to change as respondents age and as the nature of the union becomes more embedded as reflected in cohabiting versus dating. For example, communication awkwardness is highest

among teens (mean = 9.9), relative to young adult daters (mean = 9.2), with the lowest scores of communication awkwardness being reported by young adults who are cohabiting (mean = 8.6). Similarly, dating confidence is also lowest among teen daters (mean = 10.4) and highest among cohabitators relative to adult daters (mean = 12.5 and 11.8, respectively). Emotional qualities of romantic relationships also appear to increase as a consequence of age and intensity of the romantic relationship, with passionate love scores being lowest for teen daters (mean = 14) and highest for young adult cohabitators (mean = 16.3). Similarly, the romantic partner's attempts to influence the partner (mean = 3.8, 4.2, and 4.3 for teen daters, young adult daters, and young adult cohabitators, respectively) as well as actually influencing the partner also seem to increase (mean = 6.4, 7.4, and 7.7 for teen daters, young adult daters, and young adult cohabitators, respectively). The most striking increases, however, are associated with receiving and providing instrumental support (partner's provision of instrumental support = 7.0, 8.6, and 10.2, for teen daters, young adult daters, and cohabitators, respectively). Respondents who are cohabiting provide greater levels of instrumental support to their partners (mean = 10.6), relative to young adult daters (mean = 8.2) and teen daters (mean = 6.8).

Aspects of the relationship context also appear to indicate that relationships become more serious as adolescents transition to young adulthood. For example, the average duration of young adult dating relationships (10.5 months) appears to be more than twice as long as the average duration of teen dating relationships (4.8 months), with early adult cohabitators having the longest relationships among the three groups (15.8 months). Likewise, 58.0% of teen dating relationships are current at the time of wave 1 interview compared to 62.5% of dating relationships reported by young adults at wave 4 and 88.7% of early adult cohabiting relationships. Sexual activity within the relationship is relatively uncommon among teen daters (23.0%), while most of the early adult daters (72.9%) and virtually all of the early adult cohabitators (94.1%) have had sex in their most recent relationship.

The teen daters at wave 1 are, on average, 15.2 years old. Looking at early adults at wave 4, the daters (20.1) appear to be just slightly younger than the cohabitators (20.8). The racial/ethnic composition of teen and young adult daters appears roughly the same with about two-thirds of those groups being non-

Hispanic White; however, it appears that Hispanics are overrepresented among the early adult cohabitators (16.8%, versus 8.2% of young adult daters). There do not seem to be many differences in family structure between teen and early adult daters; however, early adult cohabitators appear to be more likely to have been raised by single parents or in stepfamilies. Parental education also seems similar among the two groups of the daters, with early adult cohabitators being less likely to have a custodial parent with a college degree or higher education.

Multivariate Analyses

Tables 2 - 5 show the results of growth curve analyses of relationship qualities in the arenas of communication, emotionality, power, and instrumentality. (Graphs depicting these findings are presented as figures.) Table 2 shows growth curve results for two communication-related relationship qualities e.g., communication awkwardness and dating confidence. Model 1 for communication awkwardness indicates that there is a significant interaction between age and gender, such that communication awkwardness decreases more with age among female than male respondents. This association remains in the full model and is illustrated in Figure 1. Communication awkwardness decreases as relationship duration increases, particularly among younger respondents. Those in current relationships, and those who have had sex with their partners, both report less communication awkwardness. Interactions of age and race/ethnicity indicate, holding other characteristics constant, Hispanic and non-Hispanic Black teens report greater communication awkwardness than non-Hispanic Whites at older ages, although Hispanics, in particular, experience less communication awkwardness than non-Hispanic Whites in early adolescence.

The next model shows that dating confidence increases as adolescents age. Females feel more confident about dating, and the lack of a significant interaction of gender and age indicates that this gender gap does not begin to close in early adulthood. In model 2, we see cohabitators and those who have had sex in their most recent relationship feel greater dating confidence. Figure 2 displays the relationship between age and gender based on model 2.

Table 3 shows the results of growth curve analyses for passionate love and emotional rewards, our two measures of emotionality in romantic relationships. Model 1 for passionate love indicates that

females report higher levels of love, and both males and females report more love as they age. The results in model 2 indicate that age is related to increases in passionate love with the interaction coefficient of duration and age suggesting that the effect of age is weaker at longer relationship durations. The gender gap is no longer evident in the full model. Further analyses indicate that the gender gap in love only exists in cohabiting relationships and not adolescent or adult dating relationships (results not shown). Figure 3 illustrates the pattern of findings based on model 2. Being in a current relationship and having had sex in the relationship are both associated with higher scores on the love scale. Longer relationship duration is associated with higher love scores, particularly among younger adolescents. Non-Hispanic Black respondents score lower on the passionate love scale than do non-Hispanic White respondents, while those from single parent and other living situations score lower than those from two-parent married families.

As with passionate love, respondents' ratings of the emotional rewards they receive in their relationships increase with age, with females reporting that they receive more emotional rewards consistently throughout the ages observed in our study (model 1). Results from the full model (model 2) indicate a similar relationship with age and gender. Figure 4 displays the relationships between age, gender, and emotional rewards. We also find that longer relationship duration is associated with greater emotional rewards among younger respondents in the sample, and those who are currently dating and who have had sex in their relationships report receiving greater emotional rewards. There are significant differences in perceptions of emotional rewards by race/ethnicity, with non-Hispanic Blacks reporting that they receive less emotional rewards than do non-Hispanic Whites. There are also significant differences by family structure during childhood, with those from single parent or cohabiting parent families scoring lower on the emotional rewards scale than do those from two-parent married families.

The growth curve analyses related to power and influence are shown in Table 4. In model 1, partner influence attempts increase with age for both male and female respondents, with male respondents experiencing more influence attempts from partners. There is not a significant age and gender interaction term, indicating that the effect of gender is consistent across age. In the full model, the gender gap

persists with females experiencing fewer influence attempts than males. Yet in the full model, there is no longer an age gradient due in large part to the inclusion of sexual intercourse. Figure 5 illustrates the age and gender relationship. Duration is positively associated with partner influence attempts, as is having sex within the relationship. On the other hand, being in a current relationship is associated with fewer partner influence attempts as respondents age. Non-Hispanic Black and “Other” respondents, and to a lesser extent Hispanics, experience lower levels of influence attempts in early adolescence, but such influence attempts increase in frequency more than they do for non-Hispanic Whites. Respondents who grew up in stepfamilies also experience larger increases in partner influence attempts with age than do those from two-parent married families.

The next model shows that as with influence attempts, partner’s actual influence increases with age. Female respondents experience significantly less actual influence from their partners. The lack of a significant gender and age interaction term indicates that this gender gap does not shift during the age period studied. In the full model predicting partner’s actual influence, there remains an age gradient and gender gap (see Figure 6). Relationship duration is positively associated with partner’s influence among older respondents, as partner’s actual influence is also higher among cohabiting relationships and among relationships where sex has occurred. Those in current relationships, on the other hand, report less actual partner influence. Hispanics report less partner influence than non-Hispanic Whites, and those whose custodial parent has less than a high school education report more actual influence from their partners than those whose parents have a high school degree.

The last set of models in Table 4 examines general decision-making power. Model 1 suggests that decision-making power does not systematically change by age. Female respondents score significantly higher, indicating that they perceive greater decision-making power in their relationships. The interaction of gender and age is not statistically significant, indicating that the effect of gender is similar from adolescence to early adulthood. In the full model, the gender gap persists and no age gradient exists (see Figure 7). Duration is negatively associated with decision-making power ($B = -.004$). Hispanics and Non-Hispanic Blacks report greater relationship power than non-Hispanic Whites in early adolescence,

but this difference decreases over time. In addition, those from single parent homes report greater relationship decision-making throughout adolescence and early adulthood than those from two-parent married families.

Table 5 shows the growth curve analyses of variables related to instrumentality within teen and early adult romantic relationships. Model 1 shows that receipt of instrumental support from partner increases with age, but the interaction term indicates that increase is much larger for males (see Figure 8). The gender gap observed in early adolescence, where females receive much more instrumental support from their partners than do males, closes by early adulthood. In the full model, a similar set of age and gender effects are observed. Longer relationship duration, being in a current relationship, and cohabiting are all associated with increased instrumental support from one's partner. Partner support is higher among sexually active couples in early adolescence, but this gap also closes by early adulthood. Partner instrumental support is higher among Hispanics than non-Hispanic Whites in early adolescence. Again, this gap closes by early adulthood. Those from single parent and "other" living situations during childhood report lower levels of partner instrumental support than do those from two-parent married families. Respondents whose parent has less than a high school education report receiving more instrumental support from partners than do those with high school-educated parents, throughout adolescence and early adulthood. Respondents whose parents have some college education also report more partner instrumental support in early adolescence, but this gap closes by early adulthood.

The last two sets of models show that respondent's provision of instrumental support also increases with age. In early adolescence, females provide significantly less support to their partners, but with instrumental support increasing more for females, by early adulthood, females report providing more instrumental to their partners than do males. Model 2 shows that the gender pattern continues to operate with females providing less support than males in early adolescence, but more support than males by early adulthood (see Figure 9). Being in a current relationship, having had sex in the relationship, and cohabiting rather than dating are all associated with higher provision of instrumental support. Longer relationship duration is also associated with higher provision of instrumental support, particularly in early

adolescence. Non-Hispanic Blacks report less instrumental support in early adolescence, but this gap closes by early adulthood. Another take on instrumental support is to consider who over and under benefits. Additional results indicate that males receive more support than they provide with age, and females receive less support than they provide with age. In other words, the female overbenefit in early adolescence diminishes and begins to reverse by early adulthood.

DISCUSSION

The results of the above analyses reveal significant developmental shifts in the nature of dating relationships from the period of adolescence to young adulthood. Older respondents reported decreased feelings of awkwardness and concomitant increases in perceived confidence navigating various aspects of their dating lives. In addition, findings suggest an overall increase in feelings associated with romantic love and other emotional rewards of these relationships. At the same time, older respondents are more likely than their younger counterparts to describe relationships that include more instrumental rewards and support. Taken together, these findings provide a strong contrast to recent studies decrying the end of romance, and rise of a 'hookup' culture characterized by a succession of sexual liaisons lacking intimacy and investment in these relationships (Bogle 2008).

Our analyses also demonstrated that the generally more intimate portrait of relationships among older respondents is not entirely due to the subset of respondents who have begun cohabiting with their romantic partners. The growth curve models control for cohabitation status, and additional analyses indicate that while the cohabiting couples are closer in some respects (cohabiters score higher on dating confidence, partner influence attempts and instrumental support), cohabiting and dating relationships share similar levels of love and emotional rewards, perceived power and actual influence. The findings that indicate few emotional differences between cohabiting and dating relationships mirror those reported by Brown and Bulanda (2008) using the Add Health.

Of perhaps greatest interest, many of the gender distinctions in the pattern of responses documented in prior analyses of responses of adolescents continue to be observed when we focus on respondents who

are entering the phase of emerging adulthood. Thus, for example, while there is a general upward trend in the direction of greater perceived influence of the romantic partner, male respondents, like their younger counterparts, report higher levels of attempted and actual influence. Moreover, contrary to traditional theorizing, older males, on average continue to report a less favorable power balance within their relationships, relative to the reports female respondents provided. Further, while we hypothesized that the gender gap in perceived communication awkwardness might disappear as male respondents gained additional relationship experience, the gender interaction indicates a sharper age-related decline in perceived awkwardness among female compared with male respondents.

As our study relied on general measures of power and influence, additional research is needed that references specific arenas or domains of decision-making and explores mechanisms through which partners influence one another. It is also important to conduct longitudinal studies that follow young adult respondents into their mid-to-late twenties in order to determine whether the movement to marriage and childbearing influences the range of relationship dimensions assessed here, especially the perceived power balance within the relationship. Data are lacking to fully document the presence of a cohort shift in traditionally gendered power dynamics; yet it would be useful to explore the effects of women's labor force participation on perceived 'dependence' on the romantic partner as well as on the character and balance of power within intimate relationships (see e.g., Risman and Schwartz 2002).

This study is important in highlighting that the transition between adolescence and young adulthood involves relationships of deepening significance and influence, even prior to establishing marital unions; yet the pattern of similarities and differences across gender reveal areas of continuity across this transition. Additional research that is national in scope will ensure that our findings are not specific to one geographic area. Given the increasing ages at first marriage in the U.S., it is important to continue to conduct research that explores the diversity of romantic and sexual experiences of young adults and the ways in which such experiences influence identity development, other social relationships, emotional well-being, and behavioral outcomes, ranging from alcohol use to academic achievement.

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Table 1: Descriptive Statistics, Teen and Young Adult Romantic Relationships

	Means/Percents		
	Teen Dating	Early Adult Dating	Early Adult Cohabiting
RELATIONSHIP QUALITIES			
<i>Communication:</i>			
Communication Awkwardness	10.0	9.2	8.6
Dating Confidence	10.4	11.8	12.4
<i>Emotion:</i>			
Passionate Love	14.0	15.4	16.3
Emotional Rewards	7.6	8.0	8.0
<i>Influence:</i>			
Partner Influence Attempts	3.8	4.1	4.3
Partner's Actual Influence	6.4	7.4	7.7
General Decision-Making Power	2.1	2.0	2.2
<i>Instrumental Support:</i>			
P's Instrumental Support	7.0	8.6	10.2
R's Instrumental Support	6.9	8.2	10.6
<i>Relationship Context:</i>			
Is a Current Relationship	58.0%	62.5%	88.7%
Relationship Duration (est. in months)	4.8	10.5	15.8
Had Sex in Relationship	23.0%	72.9%	94.1%
<i>Sociodemographic Characteristics:</i>			
Age	15.2	20.1	20.8
Gender (Female)	50.3%	48.4%	64.0%
<i>Race Ethnicity:</i>			
Hispanic	7.3%	8.2%	16.8%
Non-Hispanic White	67.2%	64.7%	56.2%
Non-Hispanic Black	22.7%	23.5%	24.1%
Non-Hispanic Other	2.9%	3.6%	3.0%
<i>Family Structure at W1:</i>			
Single Parent	23.4%	22.5%	30.1%
Two Biological, Married Parents	47.6%	54.2%	32.5%
Cohabiting Parents (Bio or Step)	6.5%	5.7%	7.9%
Stepfamily	14.2%	11.3%	22.2%
Other Living Situation	8.3%	6.4%	7.4%
<i>Parent's Education at W1:</i>			
Less than High School	11.2%	9.7%	14.8%
High School	32.7%	31.4%	34.5%
>High School, No 4-Year Degree	32.7%	31.6%	40.4%
4-Year College Degree+	23.5%	27.4%	10.3%
N	855	672	203

Sources: The Teen Dating column includes data from the Toledo Adolescent Relationships Study (TARS), wave 1, age<18; the Young Adult data comes from TARS wave 4, age>17.

Table 2: Growth Curve Models, Change in Communication-Related Relationship Qualities from Adolescence to Early Adulthood

	Communication Awkwardness		Dating Confidence	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
	B	B	B	B
Intercept	10.59 ***	11.74 ***	9.08 ***	8.97 ***
Age	-0.11 ***	-0.10 *	0.27 ***	0.20 ***
Gender (Female)	-0.16	0.19	1.13 ***	1.08 ***
Gender (Female) x Age	-0.14 **	-0.14 **		---
Relationship Duration (est. in months)		-0.12 ***		0.01
Is a Current Relationship		-1.38 ***		-0.01
Had Sex in Relationship		-0.38 **		0.38 ***
Cohabiting (vs. Dating)		0.06		0.45 **
Race Ethnicity:				
Hispanic		-1.22 **		-0.15
Non-Hispanic White (ref.)		---		---
Non-Hispanic Black		-0.44		0.27
Non-Hispanic Other		-1.01		0.61
Family Structure at W1:				
Single Parent		0.09		0.06
Two Biological, Married Parents (ref.)		---		---
Cohabiting Parents (Bio or Step)		0.29		-0.19
Stepfamily		0.21		0.31
Other Living Situation		0.47		0.17
Parent's Education at W1:				
Less than High School		0.09		0.01
High School (ref.)		---		---
>High School, No 4-Year Degree		-0.20		0.17
4-Year College Degree+		-0.05		0.25
<i>Significant Interactions With Age:</i>				
Duration x Age		0.01 **		---
Race Ethnicity:				
Hispanic x Age		0.25 ***		---
Non-Hispanic Black x Age		0.12 *		---
Non-Hispanic Other x Age		0.21		---

Source: Toledo Adolescent Relationships Study, Waves 1-4.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 3: Growth Curve Models, Change in Emotionality-Related Relationship Qualities from Adolescence to Early Adulthood

	Passionate Love		Emotional Rewards	
	Model 1 B	Model 2 B	Model 1 B	Model 2 B
Intercept	12.99 ***	12.29 ***	7.17 ***	6.83 ***
Age	0.30 ***	0.15 ***	0.06 ***	0.06 ***
Gender (Female)	0.46 ***	0.08	0.61 ***	0.52 ***
Relationship Duration (est. in months)		0.16 ***		0.05 ***
Is a Current Relationship		1.44 ***		0.44 ***
Had Sex in Relationship		0.75 ***		0.19 **
Cohabiting (vs. Dating)		0.15		-0.11
Race Ethnicity:				
Hispanic		-0.15		-0.10
Non-Hispanic White (ref.)		- - -		- - -
Non-Hispanic Black		-0.47 **		-0.28 ***
Non-Hispanic Other		-0.26		-0.09
Family Structure at W1:				
Single Parent		-0.39 *		-0.19 *
Two Biological, Married Parents (ref.)		- - -		- - -
Cohabiting Parents (Bio or Step)		-0.45		-0.32 *
Stepfamily		-0.33		-0.12
Other Living Situation		-0.55 *		-0.19
Parent's Education at W1:				
Less than High School		-0.08		0.15
High School (ref.)		- - -		- - -
>High School, No 4-Year Degree		0.09		0.12
4-Year College Degree+		0.12		0.17
<i>Significant Interactions With Age:</i>				
Duration x Age		-0.01 ***		-0.01 ***

Source: Toledo Adolescent Relationships Study, Waves 1-4.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 4: Growth Curve Models, Change in Influence-Related Relationship Qualities from Adolescence to Early Adulthood

	Partner Influence Attempts		Partner's Actual Influence		General Decision-Making Power	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
	B	B	B	B	B	B
Intercept	3.84 ***	4.01 ***	6.37 ***	6.80 ***	1.92 ***	1.82 ***
Age	0.07 ***	0.00	0.19 ***	0.06 *	-0.01	0.00
Gender (Female)	-0.54 ***	-0.55 ***	-1.13 ***	-1.17 ***	0.38 ***	0.38 ***
Relationship Duration (est. in months)		0.03 ***		0.01		0.00 *
Is a Current Relationship		-0.09		-0.27 **		0.03
Had Sex in Relationship		0.37 ***		0.20 *		0.04
Cohabiting (vs. Dating)		0.19		0.48 **		0.05
Race Ethnicity:						
Hispanic		-0.33		-0.40 *		0.27 **
Non-Hispanic White (ref.)		---		---		---
Non-Hispanic Black		-0.39 *		-0.11		0.17 *
Non-Hispanic Other		-0.86 *		-0.33		0.10
Family Structure at W1:						
Single Parent		0.23		-0.23		0.08 *
Two Biological, Married Parents (ref.)		---		---		---
Cohabiting Parents (Bio or Step)		-0.06		0.16		0.05
Stepfamily		-0.35		-0.04		0.00
Other Living Situation		0.43		-0.07		0.03
Parent's Education at W1:						
Less than High School		0.16		0.40 *		0.04
High School (ref.)		---		---		---
>High School, No 4-Year Degree		-0.08		0.16		0.03
4-Year College Degree+		-0.09		0.17		0.01
<i>Significant Interactions With Age:</i>						
Duration x Age		---		0.01 *		---
Current Relationship X Age		-0.07 **		---		---
Race Ethnicity:						
Hispanic x Age		0.09 *		---		-0.04 **
Non-Hispanic Black x Age		0.12 ***		---		-0.02
Non-Hispanic Other x Age		0.14 *		---		0.01
Family Structure at W1:						
Single Parent x Age		-0.01		---		---
Cohabiting Parents (Bio or Step) x Age		0.01		---		---
Stepfamily x Age		0.08 *		---		---
Other Living Situation x Age		-0.05		---		---

Source: Toledo Adolescent Relationships Study, Waves 1-4.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 5: Growth Curve Models, Change in Instrumentality-Related Relationship Qualities from Adolescence to Early Adulthood

	Partner's Instrumental Support		Respondent's Instrumental Support	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
	B	B	B	B
Intercept	3.79 ***	2.66 ***	7.54 ***	7.28 ***
Age	0.59 ***	0.48 ***	0.10 **	-0.14 ***
Gender	4.08 ***	3.78 ***	-3.63 ***	-3.67 ***
Gender (Female) x Age	-0.42 ***	-0.43 ***	0.57 ***	0.51 ***
Relationship Duration (est. in months)		0.13 ***		0.18 ***
Is a Current Relationship		0.67 ***		0.69 ***
Had Sex in Relationship		1.89 ***		0.82 ***
Cohabiting (vs. Dating)		0.49 **		0.63 ***
Race Ethnicity:				
Hispanic		1.01 *		-0.36
Non-Hispanic White (ref.)		---		---
Non-Hispanic Black		0.38		-0.94 **
Non-Hispanic Other		-0.43		-0.24
Family Structure at W1:				
Single Parent		-0.52 ***		-0.19
Two Biological, Married Parents (ref.)		---		---
Cohabiting Parents (Bio or Step)		-0.01		0.14
Stepfamily		-0.18		-0.14
Other Living Situation		-0.53 *		-0.05
Parent's Education at W1:				
Less than High School		0.97 *		-0.01
High School (ref.)		---		---
>High School, No 4-Year Degree		1.04 ***		-0.10
4-Year College Degree+		0.42		-0.11
<i>Significant Interactions With Age:</i>				
Duration x Age		---		-0.01 **
Had Sex in This Relationship x Age		-0.17 ***		---
Race Ethnicity:				
Hispanic x Age		-0.14 *		0.09
Non-Hispanic Black x Age		-0.01		0.14 **
Non-Hispanic Other x Age		0.11		0.00

Source: Toledo Adolescent Relationships Study, Waves 1-4.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Figure 1: Communication Awkwardness

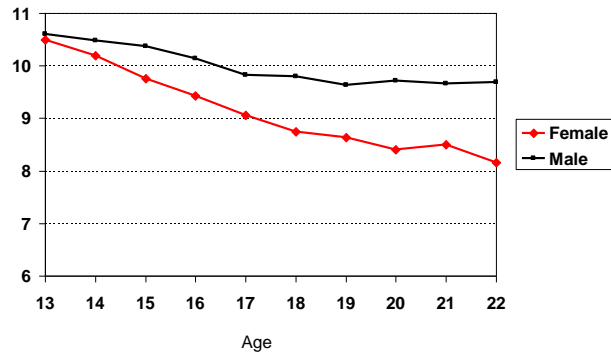


Figure 2: Dating Confidence

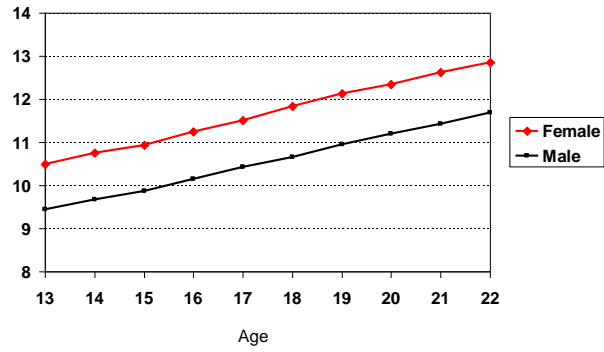


Figure 3: Passionate Love

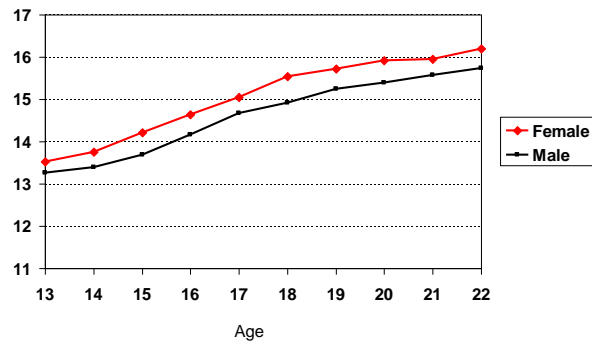


Figure 4: Emotional Rewards

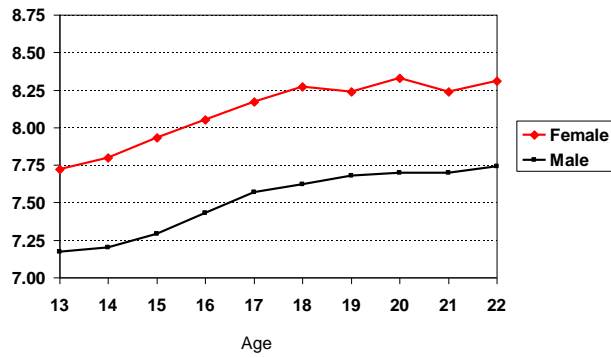


Figure 5: Partner's Influence Attempts

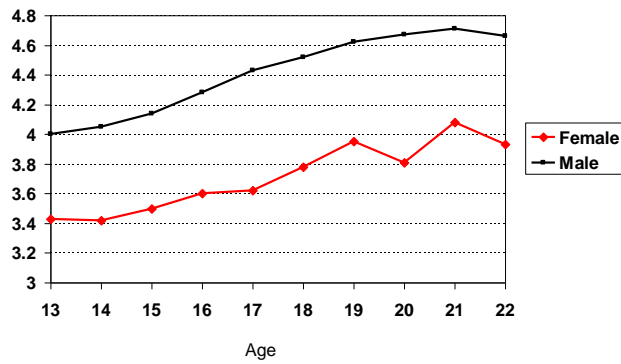


Figure 6: Partner's Actual Influence

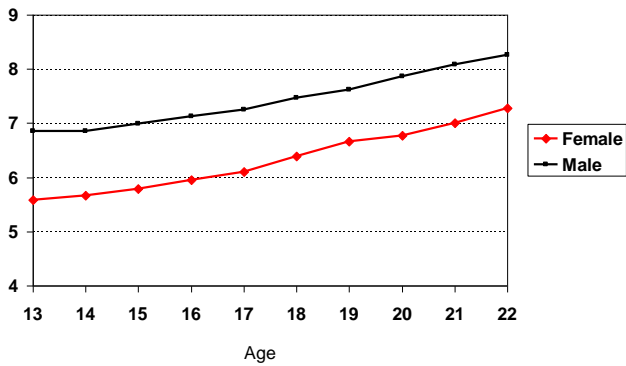


Figure 7: General Decision-Making Power

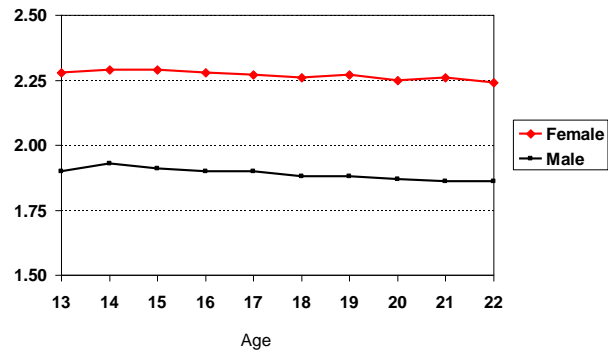


Figure 8: Partner's Instrumental Support

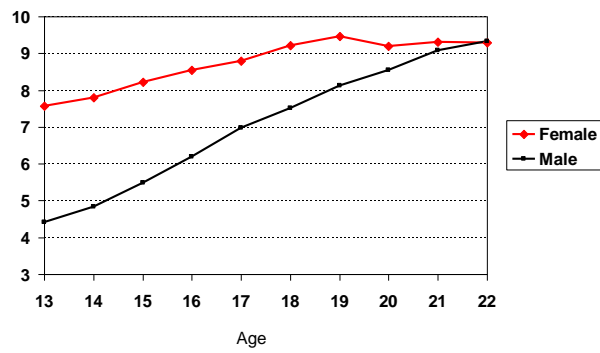


Figure 9: Respondent's Instrumental Support

