Living Apart Together (LAT) Relationships in the U.S.

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INTRODUCTION

• Retreat from marriage and rapid increase in cohabitation
• Despite rise in unmarried population, nonresidential partnerships receive relatively little research attention
• Growing recognition in Europe of Living Apart Together (LAT) relationships

Rationale

• Researchers have used various definitions of LAT relationships—no measurement consensus
• Distinction between LAT and dating relationships can be a challenge
• Prior research may be confounding LAT and dating relationships

Research Goals

• A new measure of LAT relationship status
• Innovative measure explicitly models fluidity of LAT relationships
• Are LATs distinctive from daters on age, relationship duration, home ownership, or plans to marry?

LATS vs Daters

Descriptives: Percentages within Relationship Type
ATTRIBUTE DATER LAT
Married 48.7% 48.6%
Educational attainment
H.S. or less 10.1% 15.6%
Some college 35.3% 38.7%
Bachelors+ 14.6% 25.8%
Race/Ethnicity
White, non-Hispanic 65.1% 63.3%
Black, non-Hispanic 12.5% 18.7%
Hispanic 22.4% 18.0%
Previously Married 21.5% 32.0%
Children in household 31.6% 29.4%
Metro residence 68.8% 81.3%
Household income
Less than $25,000 14.3% 19.5%
$25,000—$39,999 15.4% 17.8%
$40,000—$74,999 33.7% 18.9%
$75,000—$99,999 14.6% 12.0%
$100,000 or more 24.2% 16.2%
Mean (SD)
Relationship duration (years) 19.6(3.9) 4.2(3.9)

Conceptualizing LAT Relationships

Committed, long-term unions
Represent an end point—unlikely to eventuate in cohabitation or marriage
LAT partners maintain separate domiciles to preserve autonomy, not because less committed to each other
LAT relationships are gaining momentum especially among middle-aged and older adults who may have less to gain from cohabitation or marriage

DATA & SAMPLE

• Family & Relationships Survey (FRS), 2013
  - Nationally representative survey of 7,517 adults ages 18-65
  - Designed by NCFMR @ BGSU
  - Collected by GfK—online panel
• Analytic sample includes those who identify as dating or LAT (n=578)

Discussion

• Nearly 40% of daters are in LAT relationships
• LATs and daters are distinct across demographic characteristics and relationship quality
• LAT relationships are the next frontier in individualized partnerships

Next Steps

• Investigate whether LAT relationships are better conceptualized as a continuum to recognize fluidity
• Examine how LATs compare with cohabitators and marrieds, especially among older adults