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**ADOLESCENT DATING RELATIONSHIPS:
IMPLICATIONS FOR UNDERSTANDING ADULT INTIMATE UNIONS**

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INTRODUCTION

In contemporary American culture, increased interest in romantic relationships has been considered a defining feature of adolescence (Waller 1937; Sullivan 1953). Indeed, by age 18 over 80 percent of American adolescents have some dating experience (Carver, Joyner, and Udry 2003). Even relatively young adolescents report having boyfriends and girlfriends, and youth who are not romantically involved, nevertheless express a strong interest in dating (Giordano, Longmore, and Manning 2001). In recent years, developmental psychologists in particular have focused much attention on the ways dating contributes to adolescent development (e.g., Collins 2003). Given the broad cultural and societal interest in adolescent dating, and increased research interest in romantic relationships during this period (e.g., Brown, Feiring, and Furman 1999), it is surprising that little academic research has considered the implications of adolescent dating for understanding the character of adult development associated with life course experiences. In terms of relationships, young men and women do not emerge from adolescence as ‘blank slates.’ As Laursen and Jensen-Campbell (1999:70) aptly state: “Mature patterns of romantic social interaction do not germinate or blossom during adulthood, but rather emerge gradually with experience and maturation acquired during adolescence.”

In this chapter we introduce an integrated framework which links socialization perspectives (social learning and symbolic interaction), developmental psychology (attachment theories), and human development with life course approaches to better understand how dating and romantic experiences among youth --- between, approximately, ages 12-18 --- shape adult union formation. Our own approach to the study of adolescent relationships (Giordano et al. 2001) recognizes there are limits to the idea that conduct within youthful relationships, and indeed, the meaning of these relationships, is transported wholesale into adult relationship

experiences. However, it is equally erroneous to conclude that individuals navigate each new phase of the life course and the relationships that define them unaffected by previous relationships and experiences. This chapter draws on a range of theoretical traditions to argue that what occurs within the contexts of adolescent dating and romantic relationships provides an important backdrop for later adult intimate unions.

Because age at first marriage is at an historical highpoint in the United States (25.5 for women and 27.5 for men), there is increased time during late adolescence and early adulthood for a wide variety of relationship experiences. Consequently, adolescent relationships may increasingly gain importance as launching points for the wide variety of adults' premarital relationships. Efforts to understand the changing family patterns in the United States should recognize the value of relationship experiences in adolescence. Prior studies of union formation primarily incorporate the adolescent period as a reflection of parent influence (e.g., marital transitions like divorce or single motherhood, socioeconomic status). However, an emphasis on adolescent relationships is an important addition to our understanding of transitions to adulthood, because the form of relationship is similar; teenage dating relationships, like adult unions, are intimate dyadic liaisons. As the age at marriage increases and there is more life course space for different types of adult intimate unions, adolescent dating experiences may be an important foundation for future adult relationships. Only a handful of studies have examined how adolescent romance and dating influences later adult relationship formation and maintenance. As Roisman and colleagues (2004:124) state "Despite some provocative theoretical speculation (Collins 2003; Furman 2002), to our knowledge no published study has shown adolescent romantic experiences to be a key building block on which future adult relationships rest."

IMPLICATIONS OF ADOLESCENT DATING: WHY ARE THERE SO FEW STUDIES?

There are several reasons why adolescent dating has not been extensively studied (Brown et al. 1999; Collins 2003) and, more importantly for this chapter, why it has not been considered in research on adult union formation. One reason for the oversight is that until recently most researchers have regarded adolescent relationships as fleeting and brief. Relative to adult marriages, these relationships are short in duration. Yet not all dating relationships are, in fact, fleeting. Although there is wide variation in the duration of dating experiences, Carver et al. (2003) report that one-third of 15-16 year olds and over half of 17-18 year olds were in relationships that lasted at least 11 months.

A second and related reason that researchers ignore adolescent dating experiences is that teen dating relationships are sometimes viewed as a series of shallow relationships of little consequence (Merten 1996). Yet these relationships loom large in the minds and lives of teenagers themselves (Brown 1999; Eder 1993; Giordano, Longmore, and Manning 2006). As we describe in more detail below, even though these relationships may be relatively short in duration, our view is that they can nevertheless have profound direct and indirect influences on later union formation processes.

Another explanation for the empirical neglect of adolescent relationships is that they are difficult to measure. As the structure of families has shifted, so have the rules surrounding adolescent dating (Modell 1989), and some argue that dating is a fading remnant of the 1950s. The large social changes that redefine adult intimate relationships also have influenced how teenagers 'do' romance. However, researchers have documented that teens do refer to dating and while the contours may have changed, teenagers still have boyfriends and girlfriends. Furthermore, the definitions of dating relationships change across the adolescent period (Brown 1999), causing the measurement of dating to vary widely. For example, Raley (2006) illustrates

the significance of measurement issues by comparing the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (Add Health) respondents, which asks whether respondents “date or had gone out with someone of the opposite sex in an unsupervised social outing,” to the National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health respondents, which asks whether respondents were involved in a “special romantic relationship.” She finds that the terms “dating” and “romantic relationships” are not equivalent; teens who have romantic relationships do not always date and not all daters report having romantic relationships (Raley 2006). These terms do not appear interchangeable and have different meanings to adolescents that differ by age, gender, race, and social class.

An additional reason for lack of attention to adolescent dating on adult union formation is the necessity of longitudinal data collections. Typical national studies do not ask adults extensive retrospective questions about their adolescent dating experiences. To best measure how adolescent dating influences adult union formation, longitudinal data collections are required that follow respondents from adolescence into early adulthood. Few longitudinal data collections contain extensive details about adolescent and adult intimate relationships, although Add Health is an important exception.

A final explanation for the limited research on adolescent dating is related to disciplinary boundaries. Developmental psychologists tend to emphasize how early childhood experiences influence adolescent dating, but typically have not addressed how adolescent experiences carry over into adulthood. Their work seems to end at the point of adulthood, although to be sure some scholarship emphasizes emerging adulthood as a new life stage (e.g., Arnett 2004). In contrast, sociologists’ and demographers’ analyses of adult union formation tend not to focus on how adolescent experiences shape union decision-making or behavior. Rather, the focus of sociologists usually is on the implications of sociodemographic factors, such as gender, age,

race/ethnicity, family structure, and family socioeconomic status. While building on the sociological perspective that emphasizes structural variables, much can be gained by incorporating ideas from related fields including developmental psychological, symbolic interaction, and social learning theories. Life course theories are often an overarching approach used to frame the transition to adulthood, as this perspective acknowledges links between youth and adulthood (Shanahan 2000). To best understand how adolescent dating relationships influence adult intimate unions, it is important to draw on multiple theories rather than a single research tradition. It is useful to distinguish direct and indirect ways in which adolescent dating experiences affect adult union formation, a distinction we develop in more detail below.

DIRECT PATHWAYS FROM ADOLESCENT DATING RELATIONSHIPS TO ADULT RELATIONSHIPS

Although the number of empirical studies is quite limited, conceptually, there are at least four reasons why adolescent dating should matter for adult unions. First, based on the general logic underlying attachment theories, it is reasonable to expect that early *attachment experiences* influence later ones. Second, as dating relationships involve extensive interaction and communication, such liaisons potentially involve the development of *relationship skills* that can be employed or adjusted within the context of subsequent relationships. Third, adolescents not only develop a roster of skills that are useful in the conduct of their later relationships, but potentially develop more *generalized expectations about adult relationships*, based at least in part on the character of these earlier experiences. Finally, these attitudes and experiences gradually gain coherence as influences on the individual's views of self; the young adult's *emerging identity* then acts as a kind of cognitive filter for decision-making, as life choices and relationship decisions unfold as part of the adult transition.

Attachment and Carry over Effects from Prior Relationships

The attachment perspective highlights prior relational experiences as influences on current romantic experiences. This work, however, focuses most on the key role of attachment processes in early childhood, including support and interactions with parents and peers (Hazan and Shaver 1987). Hartup (1986:2) states that childhood and adolescent relationships “serve as important templates or models that can be used in the construction of future relationships... [thus] consequences of earlier relationships can frequently be detected in later ones.” While research has demonstrated support for the notion that within the realm of peer and romantic relationships, secure early attachment is related to later success, most studies of attachment processes have considered adolescent romantic relationships as an end-point of research, rather than constituting a set of experiences that uniquely influence and structure subsequent life course trajectories.

Furman and Wehner (1994) propose a developmental theory of adolescent romantic relationships, arguing that prior relationship experiences and the accumulation of interactions are the basis for the development of “romantic views.” Romantic views are conscious and unconscious styles and working models that are integrated into and shape the life course of relationships. This perspective builds on attachment theory as originally applied to parent-child relationships, as well as Erikson’s (1968) psychosocial and Sullivan’s (1953) relational approach that also emphasize the influence of prior relationship experiences. Furman and Wehner (1994) propose three ‘views’ of romantic relationships: secure, dismissing, and preoccupied. Teens draw on early experiences and their interpretations of them to form their emotional and cognitive views towards relationships (Collins 2003; Furman and Simon 1999). Downey et al. (1999) take a slightly different approach and refer to working models or relational schema. Their work

focuses on acceptance and rejection in relationships. Rejection sensitivity, developed through experiences in prior relationships, is part of a cognitive-affective processing system that determines the initiation and progress of relationships.

The essence of each of these approaches is that every individual possesses beliefs and expectations based on earlier attachment experiences, which in turn influence interactions with dating partners. Relationships are not perfectly replayed in the future, but prior experiences have the potential to influence adult union formation and the quality of such unions as individuals adapt and modify their behavior.

Relationship Skill Building

Adolescence is an exploratory stage where important skills and experience are obtained while dating. These accumulated experiences may help teens to navigate later life relationships. Beginning and ending romantic relationships during adolescence is socially constructed as developmentally appropriate. Thus, dating performs an important social learning function in teaching youth how to enter, manage, and end relationships with their romantic partners. In fact, an analysis of undergraduates that indicates two-fifths report that enhancing their “expertise in relationships” is a perceived benefit of a romantic relationship (Sedikides, Oliver, and Campbell 1994).

To date, while there is not a large body of empirical evidence, some theoretical attention supports the notion that adolescent dating teaches teens how to do romance; that is, how to be the expert in their own relationships. Laursen and Jensen-Campbell (1999:64) convey this idea of relationship skill building: “Brief romantic encounters provide adolescents with opportunities to practice exchange rules and refine personal resources prior to initiating relationships that entail commitment and reproduction.” Adolescent competence in the relationship domain may lead to

more intense dating or more positive experiences in adulthood because teens work through their relationships, which is still subject to change and re-direction as youth encounter new romantic and dating experiences. For example, breaking up allows teens to learn how to end romantic relationships and to know that they can emotionally survive the experience. Giordano et al. (2006) interviewed a young man who let a relationship drag on even after he wished to break up. Eventually, he started dating someone else before he had ended the prior relationship (“I just couldn’t do it.”). As the young man observed the way this made his first girlfriend feel, he began to recognize that, “If I’m feeling a certain way I should just tell them and not just sit there and wait and wait and not tell her.” Dating relationships thus provide numerous opportunities to learn about positive relationship dynamics, such as intimate self-disclosure and caring, as well as difficulties that romantic partners frequently encounter—differences of perspective, break-ups, conflict, and jealousy.

While the researchers have suggested that adolescents move through different stages in the salience of dimensions of romantic involvement, overlap is likely. Thus, Shulman and Kipnis (2001) and others suggest that later in the sequence of these stages, social support becomes more important, but it is likely that even early romantic interactions contain some socially supportive interactions. These experiences and exposures to particular types of partners can serve as guides for future partner choices and eventually for the emergence of more mature relationship behaviors. This is compatible with the attachment approach, but highlights to a greater extent the role of the adolescent romantic context itself as a site for learning and additional socialization.

A particularly underdeveloped line of investigation and conceptualization is the notion that particular dating experiences can *redirect* future actions within the romantic realm. Since

moving in the direction of particular types of partners involves the element of choice, the individual's agency/cognitive capacities to redraw romantic "goals" based on prior experiences is especially relevant (e.g., the young woman who dates a series of "bad boys," but ultimately recognizes that it is preferable to develop ties with a more prosocial partner). These adjustments/changes are more of a challenge to study and observe than the dynamics of "continuity," (i.e., the notion of "styles" of attachment), but nevertheless are important to understand and document.

Union Formation Attitudes and Expectations

Family change occurs in tandem with social shifts in norms. Thus, adolescents' expectations for family behavior reflect the existing normative climate and provide us with a sense of what future changes can be expected for the institution of the family. At the individual-level, an important predictor of behavior is the expectation to perform that behavior (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975).

This suggests that teens' attitudes toward adult intimate unions will be an important predictor of their union formation and maintenance, and may be indicative of future family change. For example, despite a high national divorce rate, the overwhelming majority of high school seniors expect to marry in the future and continue to value marriage (Thornton and Young-DeMarco 2001) and these expectations have remained high over time (Popenoe 2005). The acceptability of cohabitation has increased dramatically and over three-fifths of high school seniors think of it as a good way to ensure compatibility (Thornton and Young-DeMarco 2001). Even though the majority of teenagers expect to marry in the future, just over half who expect to marry also expect to marry and cohabit (Manning, Longmore, and Giordano 2007).

Although the above studies provide a portrait of contemporary trends in adolescents' views of marriage and cohabitation, these views reflect broader social norms as well as family

and peer influences. As teens move toward adulthood, their expectations may be most significantly influenced by the character of their dating experiences. Even though a majority of adolescents do not go on to marry their dating partners from this period in their lives, adolescents often express positive future orientations toward their boyfriends and girlfriends and many young people report the desire to marry them (Crissey 2005; Manning et al. 2007). Manning et al. (2007) report that teens who never dated had lower expectations to marry and to cohabit than their counterparts with dating experience. Teenagers in relationships may be more relationship-oriented and more likely to envision themselves in adult relationships. However, it is important to consider the *type* of relationship rather than simply its existence. For example, teens in more serious (committed) relationships have higher odds of expecting to marry by age 25 than do teens who are not dating (Crissey 2005). At the same time, these sentiments toward marriage and cohabitation may be another way of expressing emotional intimacy and commitment during ongoing relationships. It appears that dating and the degree of perceived commitment in the dating relationship influence teens' expectations to marry and cohabit, and adolescents' feelings about marriage (and cohabitation) may influence subsequent decisions about the timing, quality and type of their first coresidential unions.

Identity Development

Above, we considered ways in which dating experiences potentially influence attachment processes, hone relationship skills, and shape more generalized expectations about adult union formation. However, it is also useful to consider that these relationship experiences influence the development of identities that themselves represent a crystallization of these emotions, skills and attitudes. In turn, self and identity processes serve as a lens for decision-making as the adolescent moves into the future and confronts the challenges of adulthood. A symbolic

interactionist approach to identity recognizes that the meanings of relationships and self-views emerge through social interaction, and this process is crucial to the formation of malleable but increasingly stable self-views (Mead 1934). A symbolic interactionist view is an important supplement because it argues that the romantic relationship domain is unique from parent or peer relationships. The relatively private and emotionally based adolescent romantic relationships provide a context in which new meanings are constructed. Over time, these conceptions of self affect short and long term goals, partner choices, and conduct within relationships. Similarly, those same relationships and partner choices influence the development of identity as well as other components of the self-concept. Thus, relationship experiences and associated identity development during adolescence may influence later union formation experiences (e.g., as an individual develops the view of self as/as not the 'marrying kind'). For example, recent research (e.g., Manning et al. 2007) demonstrates that as early as the adolescent period, youth have already begun forming their expectations on whether they are likely to be the sort of person who will cohabit without expectations to marry, follow a contemporary union formation path (cohabit and later marry), or pursue a more traditional path to later marriage.

A particularly important component of the adolescent's developing self-concept incorporates conceptions of gender, as well as expectations of what the opposite sex should be like. Scholars, especially from the tradition of psychology, emphasize how adolescent views of gender influence adult self-conceptions (e.g., Erickson 1968; Collins and Sroufe 1999; Connolly and Goldberg 1999; Feiring 1999; Larson, Clore, and Wood 1999; Zimmer-Gembeck, Siebenbruner, and Collins 2001). Thus, adolescent dating is one way that teens explore and develop their gender identities through involvement with --- and as --- romantic partners (Furman and Simon 1999). Some literature suggests that these romantic identities and ideals, established in part from

earlier relationships, are associated with later relationship quality and variations in levels of commitment (e.g., Sprecher and Metts 1999). Moreover, dating typically marks teens' movement toward sexual transitions including first sexual experiences, and for some youth, continued sexual activity, pregnancy, and pregnancy resolution (e.g., Thornton 1990). As a result, issues of sexual identity and attraction are typically explored in the context of dating relationships (Diamond, Savin-Williams, and Dube 1999).

Empirical Studies Examining Adolescent Dating and Adult Union Formation

Although there are only a few empirical examinations of the influence of adolescent dating and adult union formation, these studies have drawn attention to a) whether or not youths are dating; b) qualities or characteristics of dating relationships; and c) longer term relationship styles which develop gradually over time.

Dating. Analyses using the Add Health have documented that 11th and 12th graders who have romantic partners are more likely to transition into cohabitation or marriage by early adulthood (Raley, Crissey, and Muller 2007). These findings are confirmed by Meier and Allen (2007) who rely on a broader adolescent age spectrum and find that adolescent dating appears to increase the number of young adult romantic and sexual relationships, and be associated with higher odds of cohabitation in early adulthood. Thus, there seems to be a logical association and progression from adolescent dating to cohabitation or marriage. This early union formation need not be conceptualized in uniformly positive ways, however. For example, marriage at an early age is associated with higher divorce rates (Teachman 2002). Given that almost all teens date during adolescence, further empirical work focuses on the specific character of adolescent dating experiences that are associated with the timing of union formation experiences.

Relationship Qualities. Simply gauging whether or not youths have begun dating is a first step, as romantic involvement becomes ubiquitous as a social phenomenon during this period (Carver et al. 2003). Research has attempted to determine whether qualities of adolescents' relationships influence their later union formation. For example, are there some earlier dating characteristics that lead toward higher quality relationships and transition into cohabitation and marriage? The quality of early romantic relationships at age 17 is highly predictive of relationship quality at age 21 (Seiffge-Krenke and Guttenburg 2003). Although this longitudinal study is based on a small sample of 103 youth, it is important in terms of the array of relationship qualities examined, including happiness, friendship, trust, fear of closeness, acceptance, emotional extremes, jealousy, obsessive preoccupation, sexual attraction, desire for a union, desire for reciprocation, and love at first sight. Moreover, simply dating or not does not influence romantic love at age 21, but social support from the partner at age 15 and 17 is positively associated with experiencing romantic love at age 21. Thus, the quality of earlier relationships influences the quality at older ages.

Rather than relationship quality, studies using the Add Health rely on behavioral measures of romantic activities. Raley et al. (2007) measure involvement by averaging across relationships whether or not respondents engaged in nine different romantic behaviors, such as if they met the parents, said they were a couple, exchanged presents, thought of themselves as couple, said they loved their partner or saw less of their friends. Teens who expressed love in their relationships were more likely to have entered a marriage in early adulthood and none of the romantic activities were associated with the odds of cohabiting in early adulthood. They conclude "Overall, romantic activities provide little additional information net of our indicators of romantic involvement" (Raley et al. 2007:16). Also using the Add Health, Meier and Allen

(2007) pursue a slightly different strategy and distinguish among elements of the romantic behaviors in the most recent relationship by measuring emotional intimacy (exchanged gifts, said they loved one another, thought of themselves as a couple, and told others they were a couple) and interaction with partner (went out alone, spent less time with friends). Neither emotional intimacy or interaction were related to either the relationship status at the third interview, number of relationships, or whether respondents ever married or cohabited by their early to mid 20's (Meier and Allen 2007). One preliminary conclusion that can be drawn is that there does not seem to be specific, definitive, qualities that lead to longer-term relationships. Yet these studies focus on behavioral indicators that may be critical to capture more refined measures of relationships experiences that are emotion-based (feelings of jealousy, love, conflict, relationship alternatives).

Another characteristic of the relationship is whether or not the couple was sexually active. Raley et al. (2007) consider whether sexual behavior in dating relationships influences adult transitions. They report that teens who had sexual romantic relationships more often transitioned to unions in early adulthood than teens who had a non-sexual romantic relationship. Thus, sex is an important element of dating relationships that influence later union formation. Meier and Allen (2007) report that teens who had any sexual activity in adolescence had greater numbers of relationships in early adulthood, as well as higher odds of having cohabited or married. An avenue for future work is to consider in more detail how the timing and meaning of sexual activity in adolescence influences adult intimate unions.

Relationship Styles. Another strategy is to classify dating experience according to relationship styles or patterns. This strategy is also consistent with a developmental approach. As teens engage in relationships that vary in duration and quality, they may adopt relationship

styles that carry over into adulthood. For example, teenagers may consistently engage in highly conflicted relationships, unhealthy abusive relationships, or a series of short-term sexually based relationships. To date, few researchers have specifically empirically addressed this topic.

In terms of conceptualization, research has examined how individuals move toward progressively more stable relationships or regress to more numerous and fleeting relationships (McCabe 1984). Meier and Allen's (2007) Add Health study includes the number and duration of relationships and measures relationship progression or regression as movement along a continuum toward stable and steady relationships (more than three months in duration). They find that teens in stable relationships at wave 1 and 2 of the Add Health were more likely to have ever been married six years later. The effect of being in stable and steady relationships at waves 1 and 2 of the Add Health was initially related to whether teens had cohabited, but this was explained by the level of sexual involvement with their partners. This is not surprising because two-thirds (65 percent) of the respondents in stable relationships had sexual intercourse. Similarly, in a smaller study, adolescents who were continually involved with one partner or a sequence report increased romantic relationship quality over time (Seiffge-Krenke and Gutenberg 2003). Taken together, these findings support the notion of a sequence of romantic development from early adolescence to early adulthood.

Although the above studies have a behavioral emphasis, Shulman and Kipnis (2001) focused on how an adult's perception of their teenage romantic relationships influenced their current romantic life. A total of 40 Israeli romantic couples were interviewed about their romantic experiences when they were 15-16, and findings show clear differences in the experiences of adult and adolescent romantic experiences. Moreover, there is a gender difference with a males reporting a closer link between the quality of adolescent and adult

relationships than do females (Shulman and Kipnis 2001). More research attention to developing a more complete portrait of the progression of relationships is warranted.

In sum, the research described above suggests that dating experiences during adolescence may influence the likelihood, character and conduct within adult unions. This is intuitive, because while the more heavily studied family and peer relationships have been shown to be critically important, the inherently dyadic and uniquely intimate nature of dating most closely aligns with the basic parameters of adult unions. Nevertheless, these findings suggest that these experiences need not be replicated to influence adult union formation. For example, a relationship with a romantic partner that is characterized by little intimate self-disclosure may serve as a catalyst for involvement in a different type of adult relationship. It is more straightforward to pursue elements of association or continuity across time and relationships, but these elements of discontinuity in relationships warrant greater empirical scrutiny as well.

INDIRECT PATHWAYS FROM ADOLESCENT RELATIONSHIPS TO ADULT UNION FORMATION

It has been useful to consider some of the direct mechanisms linking adolescent dating experiences and the character of adult unions. Yet there are a number of more indirect ways in which these experiences may affect the adolescent-to-adult transition and the nature of adult relationships. Specifically, adolescent dating involvement that hinders or encourages emotional well-being, early criminal activity, educational performance and goals, and early parenthood will have implications for adult intimate relationships. We note that this may not be a straightforward relationship and there are likely reciprocal effects resulting from selection processes. We expect that adolescent dating relationship experiences may influence the likelihood of forming

traditional marital unions, the character and stability of relationships, and the nature of partner choices.

Emotional Well-Being

The emotional bonds that characterize dating relationships leave adolescents who date open to great emotional pleasure or pain. Dating relationships are reported by teens to be the single greatest source of stress (Larson et al. 1999). Using the Add Health, Joyner and Udry (2000) find that teens who began dating in the year prior to the first interview reported more depressive symptoms than teens who were not dating. Further evidence indicates that the negative aspects of dating, break-up or conflict, have implications for depressive symptoms. A recent break-up increases the likelihood that adolescents experience the initial onset of major depressive disorders (Monroe et al. 1999). Teens who break up with their sexual partners experience elevated depressive symptoms (Meier 2007).

Since adolescence is the period in which depressive symptoms or disorders often make an initial appearance, traumatic or upsetting relationship experiences may be one of the social factors that set in motion long-term patterns of depressive symptomatology. In addition to considering the effect of particular experiences or specific relationships, researchers have also focused on the notion of relationship styles, suggesting that a preoccupied relational style is also associated with higher levels of depressive symptoms (Davila et al. 2004). Studies of adult depression indicate reciprocal relationships between marital quality and mental health, particularly for women (Williams 2003); thus adolescent romantic relationships should be taken into account as they influence well-being, relationship experiences and the way these connect over the life course.

Delinquency

Numerous studies have documented a positive relationship between the delinquency of one's peers/friends and an adolescent's own delinquency involvement (Haynie 2003; Matsueda and Anderson 1998; Warr 2002). Fewer studies have examined whether dating partners influence delinquency; however, researchers have shown that the number of dating relationships is positively related to externalizing behavior problems (Zimmer-Gembeck et al. 2001), and that teens who have multiple casual partners are at increased risk of problem behaviors (Davies and Windle 2000). In a recent analysis using the Add Health data, Haynie et al. (2005) document that dating partner's delinquency is significantly associated with the reports of delinquent involvement provided by the respondent, even after levels of peer delinquency and traditional predictors of delinquency had been taken into account. Haynie (2003) also finds that dating older males is associated with increased involvement in problem behaviors. These findings indicate that dating experiences may influence delinquency involvement, which in turn is associated with adult criminality.

Relatedly, involvement with the legal system as an adult is associated with poor economic prospects, and decreased likelihood and stability of marriage (Farrington 2003; Sampson and Laub 1993). Thus, adolescent romantic partners can potentially be important as a gateway to problem behaviors, but also under some circumstances—even during the adolescent period—could be associated with a more favorable outcome (as might occur when a young man with a history of delinquency involvement develops a strong relationship with a prosocial girlfriend).

Educational Performance and Goals

Recent work using the first two waves of the Add Health indicates that adolescent girls who report having romantic relationships also report declining grades and educational aspirations

(Crissey 2006). However, Crissey (2006) reports that this association between dating and educational performance and goals is not found among boys. Using the Toledo Adolescent Relationships Study data, Giordano et al. (2007) demonstrate that the academic orientation of the romantic partner is a significant predictor of the adolescent's own performance, once the well-documented effects of parents and peers have been taken into account. Thus, there is evidence that an important achievement outcome --- academic performance --- is significantly related to the performance level of the romantic partner. As adolescents may select into relationships with certain types of partners based on their academic achievement, more research is needed that disentangles selection effects from a more active influence process.

The relationship between dating and academic achievement or goals is important for understanding adult intimate unions as educational attainment is positively related to union formation for both adult men and women. Men and women often believe a prerequisite for marriage is being financially stable or economically set (Smock, Manning, and Porter 2005). A good measure of future economic prospects is academic achievement. Also, marriage has more stringent requirements for economic security than cohabitation (e.g., Brines and Joyner 1999; Oppenheimer 2003). Thus, dating experiences may influence educational performance goals, and consequently set a future trajectory for the timing and type of unions formed during early adulthood.

Contraception and Fertility

Teens who are in more-committed relationships are less rigorous in their contraceptive use (e.g., Manlove et al. 2006). This may be particularly true as the relationship progresses and the partners are not viewed as presenting a risk of sexually transmitted infections (Manning et al. 2005). The combination of access to a regular sexual partner and reduced contraceptive puts

teens in dating relationships at greater risk of pregnancy than teens who are having sex outside of dating relationships. In fact, Porter (2005) reports that girls in the Add Health who reported dating at the time of the first interview, were more likely to become teen mothers by the second interview one year later. Several other studies confirm this finding (e.g., Bearman and Brückner 1999; Hanson, Myers, and Ginsberg 1987). Thus, it is possible that adolescent dating may result in teens' increased risk of early parenthood. This has implications for union formation because unmarried parenthood reduces the likelihood of transition to marriage and in some cases also reduces the transition into cohabitation (Bennett, Bloom, and Miller 1995; Goldscheider and Sassler 2006; Stewart, Manning, and Smock 2003).

NEXT STEPS FOR RESEARCH ON ADULT INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

We argue that adults do not enter their intimate relationships as blank slates with no prior intimate relationship experience. As Laursen and Jensen-Campbell (1999) argue, adult relationships are in part the product of adolescent experiences. Typically, young adults have had many years of experience in adolescent dating and romantic spheres that influence their decisions in adulthood. This experience may have both important direct and indirect influences on union formation and quality in adulthood. Yet most researchers interested in early adult intimate union formation and quality ignore relationship experiences prior to adulthood. At the same time researchers focusing on adolescents are primarily concerned with this phase of the life course and do not consider how adolescent relationships influence transitions into adulthood. These boundaries appear to be the artifacts of theoretical and disciplinary divides, as well as data limitations. Increasing knowledge in this area likely requires modifications of theoretical orientations, attention to measurement, collection of new types of data, and new substantive questions.

Additional research on the links between adolescent experiences and adult relationships may lead to modifications of some theoretical approaches often used to understand the latter including attachment, feminist, social exchange, symbolic interaction, life course, bio-social, and family systems perspectives. It seems that adolescent relationships are ignored in part because they do not fit neatly into theoretical paradigms (Brown et al. 1999). For example, mate selection theories are based on an interest in longer term relationships and economically based decisions. Yet, most adolescents do not marry their high school sweethearts and economic factors are arguably not central to their adolescent romances. Similarly, duration in marriage and cohabitation is a signal of commitment. During adolescence, relationships are often relatively short in duration, suggesting that duration may not serve as the most effective proxy for commitment during adolescence. Thus, our understanding of adult relationships cannot simply be extended downward or transported wholesale and applied to adolescent romance (Brown et al. 1999). For these same reasons, theories used to understand adolescent relationships cannot be simply extended upward into adulthood. Moreover, the transition into adulthood involves new roles and identities (e.g., academic, work, social conduct, friendship) that potentially make dating and romantic relationships more complex. Research needs to explore how these roles are interrelated rather than examining them as separate activities.

We also note that broad social change has led to shifts in the terrain of romance. The structures that supported more formal, regulated patterns of love and romance have weakened, making the world of love more uncertain and risky (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995; Bulcroft et al. 2000). This flexibility in adult relationships may mean that personal history and experience may be more important in understanding union formation and maintenance patterns than in the past, making research on these linkages especially critical to pursue.

Parents may have a stronger influence on young adult behavior than previously recognized. The family of origin is recognized for being an important economic base, as well as a socializing influence during childhood. Yet at the same time, family experiences influence the nature of adolescent relationships, which may in turn influence adult intimate relationships. The parent-child attachment style is often linked to the types of relationship styles in adolescence (Shaver and Hazan 1988). In addition, social learning perspectives suggest that adolescents model their parents' family formation behavior and reflect their parents' attitudes about family formation (e.g., Amato 1998; Crissey 2005; Cunningham and Thornton 2004). This social learning is carried forward into adulthood as young adults' family behavior continues to be responsive to their parents' behavior and attitudes (Axinn and Thornton 1996). Little research has drawn linkages between parent relationship styles and adolescent or adult relationships. Finally, as young adults face less direct paths into adulthood and increasingly rely on parents for a place to stay and a source of economic support, parental influence on the lives of their adult children (including their romantic lives) may be heightened.

We have limited most of our discussion to adolescent dating relationships, excluding sexual relationships that occur outside the confines of dating. Analysis of the Add Health indicates that three-fifths of sexually active adolescents have had sex with someone they were not dating (Manning et al. 2005). A more detailed examination indicates that these sexual relationships are typically not one-night stands with someone the teenager has just met. Instead, the bulk of these are sexual experiences with someone the teenager had dated in the past or considers a friend. Furthermore, at times these relationships evolve into dating relationships and can lead to sexual partners feeling closer to one another (Manning et al. 2006). However, extensive sexual experience outside of dating relationships may establish patterns that carryover

into adulthood. For example, having many casual sexual partners or adopting a ‘player’ orientation during adolescence could influence the character of adult intimate unions. Certainly there is a range of sexual adult intimate relationships outside of marriage that varies from casual sexual partners to committed cohabiting partners. The challenge is to establish new conceptualizations of both adult and adolescent intimate relationships. It may be important to utilize qualitative methodologies to ask teenagers and adults about the meanings of their sexual and romantic relationships, and particularly about continuities and changes as they mature into adulthood.

The developmental approach traditionally emphasizes continuity of prior relationship experiences; however, there is recognition of discontinuity. An emphasis on continuity is relatively simpler to understand theoretically and examine empirically. However, the reality of these social processes can be complex because just some elements of relationship experience may be carried over into adulthood. At the same time, there is discontinuity in relationship qualities and style from adolescence into adulthood. This is relatively more difficult to study and conceptualize, but it is important (and consistent with a life course perspective) to do so. Qualitative approaches may provide a useful lens on how adolescents navigate the transition into adulthood. In-depth interviews that allow respondents to describe continuities as well as changes in their romantic and sexual careers should be especially useful.

The shift from adolescence to adulthood involves new types of relationships. The affiliative and often sexual processes are central to adolescent romantic relationships, while attachment and caregiving are believed to gain prominence in adult romantic relationships (Furman and Simon 1999). Connelly and Goldberg (1999) describe stages of romantic unions that move from infatuation, to affiliative, to intimate, to committed. Brown (1999) delineates

phases of relationships that encompass initiation, status, affection, and bonding. Laursen and Jensen-Campbell (1999) argue that as teens become older, their relationships include commitment and interdependence, and more closely mirror adult relationships. Furman and Wehner (1997) report increases in support from romantic relationships as youth age, and some replacement of support from partners relative to support from friends and parents. Although these researchers thus clearly recognize that relationships change in character over time (and with increasing age), little research or theorizing specifically focuses on how early relationships influence subsequent stages, including what could be considered the final stage—adult union formation.

Researchers should not only focus on adolescent dating relationships in their studies of union formation; adult dating relationships certainly warrant more attention. Adolescent dating relationships most likely have the strongest impact on adult dating relationships, which then influence cohabitation and marriage timing and quality. Prior empirical studies move from adolescent relationships to adult coresidential unions (e.g., Raley et al. 2007). Further work needs to explore how adolescent relationships influence the wide array of ways that adults experience romance. Explorations of love in emerging adulthood focus on the following question: “Given the kind of person I am, what kind of person do I wish to have as a partner through life?” (Arnett 2002). In contrast in adolescence, the questions are ‘who would I enjoy being with here and now?’ Research on adult dating relationships has focused on college samples, who are sometimes treated as late teenagers or early adults (Brown et al. 1999). It will be important to broaden our samples beyond college and consider how the full range of adult relationships influences union formation and maintenance.

We argue that the characteristics and qualities of adult married and cohabiting relationships most likely have origins that begin in adolescence and earlier. However, marriage and cohabitation patterns and qualities are obviously influenced by the experiences associated with gender, race-ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Relationship differentials during adulthood emerge in part from earlier experiences with the opposite sex. Thus, if adult relationships connect in direct and indirect ways to adolescent relationships, then some of the same patterns that we observe in adult relationships may begin to develop in adolescent relationships. For example, African American youth report having a somewhat less intense or intimate relationship style—as reflected in lower frequencies of interaction with the romantic partner, and lower odds of intimate self-disclosure (Giordano et al. 2005). We argue that these interpersonal dynamics may be influenced by broader forces, such as a cultural emphasis on socializing within the family of origin and/or greater family responsibilities. These Add Health findings suggest that the racial gap in adult intimate unions may stem in part from racial differentials in intimate unions that appear in adolescence, which are likely influenced by social and historical realities as well as by early attachment experiences. To understand the ways in which race, gender, and socioeconomic status influence marital patterns and relationships, we believe it is important to determine whether these or related patterns originate earlier in the life course.

Attention to timing and sequence of events is consistent with a life course perspective. Theories and research emphasize that adolescent romantic involvement is socially determined as being developmentally appropriate. However, the timing of involvement deserves greater research scrutiny (Neemann, Hubbard, and Masten 1995). There is some evidence that early involvement in adolescent relationships is tied to less competence in later adolescence in terms

of rule/law breaking, employment and academic success, and social competence (Neemann et al. 1995). It appears that early involvement may draw teens' time away from pro-social activities that may in turn influence later adult union formation and the quality of these relationships.

Sexual minority adults may be especially influenced by their adolescent relationships in part because their relationship options are often constrained. Both same sex dating and other-sex dating may be particularly salient to sexual minority youth identity formation processes (Diamond et al. 1999). Sexual minority youth may not have had the same socialization experiences in a dating context that will aid them in their adult relationships. Researchers need to consider how the romantic and sexual experiences of sexual minority youth carry over into adulthood in order to better understand variation in adult same sex relationships, and factors associated with more successful transitions into adulthood.

While we expect that adolescent relationships in terms of experience, style, and quality will influence adult union formation and quality, we cannot claim that adolescent relationships are the only factors to consider in future work. Research should also examine how family and peer relationships influence and operate in tandem with adolescent romantic relationships. This suggests the importance of controlling for family and peer factors in research focusing on adolescent dating effects, and continuing to investigate how parents and friends affect the character of dating experiences. Shifts in the salience of these relationship domains also need to be mapped and better understood. Certainly biological processes play a role as adolescents move through puberty and experience shifts in hormones. New data are available providing opportunities for analyses that incorporate biology. Also, the role of other early adult transitions involving work and education must be considered and are simultaneously related to adult union formation. Further, our discussion has not fully differentiated the timing of union formation,

stability of unions, union choice, and union quality. It is likely that the influence of adolescent relationships will vary according to the outcomes of interest. Challenges remain in how to measure and characterize dating relationships, as well as how to theorize the influence of adolescent relationships.

We provide an overview to help to move our understanding of adult union formation forward. Our view is that multi-method data collection efforts and longitudinal designs will help us to link early adolescent relationships and consequences to later union formation experiences. Greater integration of conceptual frameworks is needed in order to effectively model continuities and discontinuities, as well as direct and indirect mechanisms of adolescent dating influence. This approach is consistent with the basic premises of the Explaining Family Change framework outlined by Seltzer et al. (2005).

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