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**THE INFLUENCE OF ADOLESCENTS' EXPECTATIONS ON UNION  
FORMATION DURING YOUNG ADULTHOOD**

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## ABSTRACT

Despite the increasing acceptance and growth of cohabitation, previous research has shown that compared to marriage, American youth have rather ambivalent expectations for cohabitation. Yet the role of adolescents' union formation expectations in subsequent behavior during young adulthood has received little scholarly attention. Drawing on data from the Toledo Adolescent Relationships Study (TARS), we examined how adolescents' cohabitation and marital expectations were associated with the likelihood of cohabiting and of marrying by age 25. Additionally, we assessed how such expectations influenced the timing of cohabitation and of marriage. Consistent with the theory of planned behavior, we found that adolescents' expectations to cohabit predicted cohabitation during young adulthood, net of key correlates. However, we showed that this was not the case for marriage. Our results contribute to the broader understanding of the association between union formation expectations and behavior and further, provide insight into the shifting family landscape in the U.S.

Key words: cohabitation, marriage, union formation, youth/young adulthood

Patterns of union formation in the U.S. have changed dramatically over the past few decades. Not only has the median age at first marriage reached its highest point in U.S. history, providing evidence for a delay in marriage (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014), but there has also been a dramatic increase in cohabitation (Bumpass & Lu, 2000; Manning et al., 2014). The result of such trends today is that young adults are more likely to cohabit than to marry (Lamidi & Manning, 2016). Despite the increase in supportive attitudes toward and widespread prevalence of cohabitation (Anderson, 2016a; Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2001), American youth report greater expectations to marry than to cohabit (Crissey, 2005; Manning, Longmore, Giordano, 2007; Manning, Smock, Dorius, & Cooksey, 2014). Although a focus on union formation expectations is important, insight on how adolescents' cohabitation and marital expectations influence young adult union formation behavior is equally significant for assessing future trends in union formation.

Using data from the Toledo Adolescent Relationships Study (TARS), we examined the association between adolescents' union formation expectations and subsequent behavior in young adulthood. We addressed two research questions: (1) do adolescents' expectations to cohabit and to marry influence the likelihood of entering a cohabiting and a marital union by age 25; and (2) are adolescents' cohabitation and marital expectations associated with the timing of cohabitation and of marriage? By including indicators of adolescents' academic, romantic, and risk behaviors, as well as sociodemographic characteristics, our results demonstrated the extent to which adolescents' cohabitation and marital expectations have an independent effect on union formation behavior during young adulthood. Thus, our research makes several contributions to our broader knowledge of union formation expectations and behavior and further, speaks to

current discourse regarding the retreat from marriage and the view that cohabitation has replaced marriage as the 'new normal.'

## BACKGROUND

### *Adolescents' Union Formation Expectations*

Adolescents' expectations to marry have been well documented within scholarly research. Despite concerns about the retreat from marriage (Cherlin, 2004, 2010; Lee, 2015), family scholars (Anderson, 2016b; Crissey, 2005; Manning et al., 2007; Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2001) have demonstrated that adolescents' marital expectations continue to remain high, a trend that does not appear to be declining in the near future (Manning et al., 2007). For instance, using datasets spanning the 1970s to the 1990s, Thornton and Young-DeMarco (2001) found that the majority (78%) of adolescents expected to marry in the future and further demonstrated that both older and younger birth cohorts viewed marriage as an important social institution. Examining a more recent cohort of adolescents from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (Add Health) (n=12,973), Crissey (2005) reported that the majority of youth expected that they would be married by age 25, but noted that such marital expectations varied both within and between gender and racial/ethnic groups. Similarly, using data from TARS (n=1,293), Manning and colleagues (2007) demonstrated that the majority (76%) of adolescents in grades 7 to 12 expected to marry in the future, while less than one-tenth (5.2%) had no expectations for marriage. Finally, Anderson (2016b) showed that in 2014, the proportion of high school seniors from Monitoring the Future who do not expect to marry is low (5%) whereas the proportion of high school seniors who expect to marry is high (79%), noting that such trends have persisted for 40 years. Taken together, previous research (Anderson, 2016b; Crissey, 2005; Manning et al., 2007; Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2001) has provided

evidence suggesting that marriage remains a significant social institution and adult status marker in the U.S.

Although rates of cohabitation have increased dramatically over the past few decades (Bumpass & Lu, 2000; Manning et al., 2014) and has become the most common relationship experience in young adulthood (Lamidi & Manning, 2016), compared to marital expectations, adolescents' expectations to cohabit are less well understood. Manning and colleagues (2007) found that adolescents have more ambivalent expectations about cohabitation than marriage. Specifically, there was some polarity in expectations to cohabit, with one-quarter (23%) of adolescents reporting no expectations to cohabit and, on the other end of the spectrum, 8 percent "definitely" expecting to cohabit at some point in the future. Manning et al. (2007) further showed that about half (50.2%) of adolescents reported expectations to cohabit and to marry, suggesting that many see cohabitation as a precursor to marriage rather than a substitute for marriage. Among young adults in the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY97) (n=1,105), Manning et al. (2014) found similar ambivalence about cohabitation, as 40 percent of single young adults had no expectations to cohabit, compared to 60 percent who expected to cohabit. Thus, although cohabitation has become increasingly more common and accepted as a union type (Anderson, 2016a; Bumpass & Lu, 2000; Manning et al., 2014; Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2001), it appears that expectations to cohabit are less definite among adolescents and young adults.

### *Expectations and Behavior*

In its simplest form, Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior, an extension of the theory of reasoned action (see Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980), suggests that the most salient predictor of individuals' behavior is their intention to perform the behavior. Integral to this theoretical

framework is that behavioral intentions or expectations are influenced by individuals' attitudes, subjective norms (how others, such as peers, perceive the behavior), and perceived behavioral control. Regarding union formation, positive expectations to cohabit and to marry are formed in conjunction with the developmental significance of intimate relationships during young adulthood (Arnett, 2000; Conger, Cui, Bryant, & Elder, 2000). Thus, we expected that adolescents' positive union formation expectations would be associated with (a) higher odds of cohabiting and of marrying by age 25, and (b) earlier timing of cohabitation and of marriage.

Indeed, a well-documented finding within empirical family research is that expectations are strongly associated with behavior, particularly as it pertains to fertility (Barber, 2001; Miller, Rodgers, & Pasta, 2010; Morgan & Rackin, 2010). Yet, within the context of union formation, the role of union formation expectations in subsequent behavior is less well-understood. Regarding marriage, some researchers have examined the association between union formation expectations and behavior, but results have been inconclusive. For instance, some scholars (e.g., Gibson-Davis et al., 2005; Lichter et al., 2004) have demonstrated that expectations to marry are not associated with transitions into marital unions. However, these studies primarily focused on low-income, unmarried parents who face many barriers to marriage. Conversely, focusing on marital expectations among cohabitators, other researchers (e.g., Brown, 2000; Guzzo, 2009; McGinnis, 2003; Waller & McLanahan, 2005) have found associations between expectations to marry and entry into marital unions. Thus, the role of marital expectations in subsequent behavior largely appears to be contingent on the demographic characteristics and union status of the individuals examined.

With regard to cohabitation, virtually no studies, with the exception of Manning et al. (2014), have examined the association between cohabitation expectations and transitions into

cohabiting unions. Manning and colleagues (2014) showed that young adults' expectations to cohabit were associated with transitions into cohabiting unions during young adulthood, but noted that the majority of young adults did not meet their expectations two years later. Certainly, the latter finding may be a consequence of examining the association between cohabitation expectations and subsequent behavior in a short time frame. Moreover, a focus on single young adults represents those who are not in a union and thus, may reflect some selection processes into unions. Nonetheless, Manning and colleagues' (2014) research demonstrated that, although cohabitation expectations are associated with subsequent behavior during young adulthood, the majority of young adults who expect to cohabit do not meet those expectations.

#### *Possible Confounding Factors*

Although this body of work has highlighted the value of union formation expectations, it presents a narrow lens on factors predicting union formation. Adolescent experiences, such as academic, romantic, and risk behaviors, help shape patterns of union formation and trajectories of relationship development and thus, are important to include as control variables. Previous research (Manning et al., 2007) has demonstrated that academic achievement is related to expectations to cohabit and marry, suggesting that better grades in school are associated with more positive marital expectations, but lower expectations to cohabit. Additionally, scholars (Manning et al., 2007; Meier & Allen, 2009; Raley, Crissey, & Muller, 2007; Vasilenko, Lefkowitz, & Welsh, 2014) have shown that adolescent involvement in romantic and sexual relationships play an important role in union formation expectations and subsequent behavior. More specifically, Manning and colleagues (2007) found that involvement in romantic and sexual relationships during adolescence was associated with more positive expectations to cohabit and to marry. Regarding adolescent romantic involvement and union formation,

examining the Add Health data, Raley et al. (2007) demonstrated that individuals who were involved in romantic relationships during adolescence had higher odds of cohabiting and marrying. Also based on the Add Health data, Meier and Allen (2009) reported similar findings, showing that adolescent romantic experiences were associated with transitions into cohabiting unions during young adulthood, but noted that steady involvement in romantic relationships was associated with marriage. With regard to adolescent sexual involvement and union formation, Raley and colleagues (2007) showed that involvement in casual sex relationships during adolescence were associated with higher odds of cohabitation, but not marriage. These findings support Vasilenko et al.'s (2014) argument that involvement in sexual relationships during adolescence provides a setting for romantic expectations, interaction, and behavior. In addition to adolescent academic and romantic behaviors, delinquency has been shown to be associated with adolescent union formation expectations at the bivariate level (Manning et al., 2007), but not at the multivariate level, net of key correlates (Arocho & Kamp Dush, 2016; Manning et al., 2007).

Our analyses also included the following sociodemographic correlates that have important implications for adolescents' union formation expectations and subsequent behavior during young adulthood: age, gender, race/ethnicity, education, religiosity, and family structure while growing up. Older age is associated with more positive marital expectations (Arocho & Kamp Dush, 2016) and lower odds of union formation (Guzzo, 2006). Compared to men, women have higher expectations to marry, but lower expectations to cohabit (Manning et al., 2007). Additionally, women, compared with men, are less likely to cohabit or to marry (Guzzo, 2006). Blacks, compared with Whites, report lower expectations for cohabitation and marriage (Crissey, 2005; Manning et al., 2007; Manning et al., 2012) and are less likely to marry than cohabit (Guzzo, 2006). Greater education is associated with marital expectations (Arocho & Kamp



Dush, 2016), but is not associated with cohabitation expectations (Manning et al., 2012). Education is associated with lower odds of cohabitation, but higher odds of marriage (Guzzo, 2006). Religiosity is associated positively with marital expectations and negatively associated with cohabitation expectations (Manning et al., 2007). Moreover, religiosity is associated with lower odds of cohabitation (Manning et al., 2014) and higher odds of marriage (Guzzo, 2006). Finally, family structure is associated with marital, but not cohabitation expectations, such that individuals who grew up in a two biological parent household have more positive expectations to marry than individuals who grew up in a step-parent or single parent family (Manning et al., 2007). Additionally, having ever lived in a single mother or cohabiting family is associated with early cohabitation whereas ever living in a step-family is associated with early marriage during young adulthood (Ryan, Franzetta, Schelar, & Manlove, 2009).

#### CURRENT INVESTIGATION

The focus on union formation expectations within scholarly research has provided valuable insight into future trends in cohabitation and marriage. However, with the exclusion of the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG), the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY), and TARS, few data sources have included expectations to cohabit as well as to marry. Thus, while rates of cohabitation have outpaced marriage rates among young adults (Lamidi & Manning, 2016), few scholars have considered cohabitation expectations. Moreover, previous research (for an exception, see Manning et al., 2007) has yet to consider adolescents' union formation expectations. The analysis of adolescents' union formation expectations is important because it allows scholars to prospectively examine the influence of such expectations on transitions into cohabiting and marital unions. Additionally, examining union formation expectations offers a distinct perspective on adolescents' relationship horizons, which is

particularly important in a climate where cohabitation has replaced marriage as the 'new normal.'

Capitalizing on limitations of other datasets, we used data from TARS, the only longitudinal dataset that allows us to analyze the role of adolescents' cohabitation and marital expectations on their union formation choices during young adulthood. First, we examined whether adolescent cohabitation and marital expectations influenced the odds of cohabiting and/or marrying by age 25. We hypothesized that positive union formation expectations would be associated with greater odds of forming a particular union. Second, we examined whether cohabitation and marital expectations influenced the timing of cohabitation and marriage, specifically age at first cohabitation and marriage. We anticipated that positive union formation expectations would be associated with earlier entry into cohabiting and/or marital unions.

## METHODS

### *Data and Sample*

The data were from the first, third, fourth, and fifth interviews of TARS. TARS is a longitudinal study based on a stratified random sample of adolescents who were registered for the 7<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> grades in Lucas County, Ohio during the fall of 2000. Currently, data has been collected over a ten-year span, consisting of five interviews, with the first interview collected in 2001 and the fifth interview in 2012. The initial sample, developed by the National Opinion Research Center, was drawn from student rosters from 62 schools across seven different school districts and included over-samples of Black and Hispanic adolescents. The student rosters were made accessible through Ohio's Freedom of Information Act. Although the sampling frame of the TARS data was based on school enrollment, school attendance was not required for inclusion in the sample. Compared with descriptive data from the 2011 American

Community Survey, at the fifth interview, the TARS sample was similar sociodemographically to young adults living in the U.S. in terms of gender, race, educational attainment, employment status, and union status.

To ensure that respondents have had similar risk periods (or opportunities to cohabit or marry), we limited the analytic sample to respondents who were 15 to 17 years old at the first interview and who were age 25 or older at the fifth interview (n=593). Further, we limited analysis of the timing of cohabitation to respondents who had cohabited by age 25 (n=406). Similarly, we restricted the parallel analysis examining timing of marriage to respondents who had married by age 25 (n=149).

### *Measures*

#### *Dependent Variables*

*Union formation.* We measured union formation with two dichotomous variables that reflected whether the respondents entered a cohabiting and/or marital union by age 25. We based these indicators on responses to questions regarding the start (month and year) of respondents' first cohabiting and/or marital unions asked at the third, fourth, and fifth interviews. Using these questions, we created dichotomous variables that reflected whether the respondents had entered their first cohabiting and/or marital union by age 25 (coded 1), or had not entered a cohabiting and/or marital union by age 25 (coded 0).

#### *Independent Variables*

*Adolescents' union formation expectations.* We measured adolescents' expectations to cohabit and marry using the following two questions from the first interview: "When you think of your future, do you see yourself living within someone without being married"; and "When

you think of your future, do you expect to marry?" Response categories ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*definitely*).

### *Control Variables*

We included the following sociodemographic variables in multivariate models: *age* at the first interview, *gender*, *race/ethnicity* (non-Hispanic White, non-Hispanic Black, Hispanic, and other), *education* (at the interview prior to union formation or at wave 5 for respondents who did not form a union) (less than high school, high school, some college, or college graduate or more), and *family structure* at the first interview (two biological parent, step-parent, single-parent, and other). Additionally, we included an indicator of *religiosity* at the first interview, which was measured with the following question: "How important is religion in your life?" Response categories ranged from 1 (*not at all important*) to 5 (*very important*).

We also controlled for respondents' grades, romantic relationships, and risk behaviors during adolescence. *Grades in school* was measured at the first interview by the following question: "What grades did you get in school this year?" "Would you say," mostly A's"; "mixed A's and B's"; "mostly B's"; "mixed B's and C's"; "mostly C's"; "mixed C's and D's"; "mostly D's"; "mixed D's and F's"; and "mostly F's." We measured *number of dating partners during adolescence* with the following indicator at the first interview (ages 15 to 17): "In the past year, how many girls/guys did you date?" *Adolescent sexual activity* was measured at the first interview (or at the subsequent wave if the respondent was less than 16 years old) by an indicator reflecting whether the respondent had sex by age 16. We measured adolescent risk behavior at the first interview with a summed scale of *juvenile delinquency* based on Elliot and Ageton's (1980) measure. Respondents were asked, "In the past 12 months, how often have you:" "stolen (or tried to steal) things worth \$5 or less"; "carried a hidden weapon other than a plain pocket

knife”; “damaged or destroyed property on purpose”; “stolen (or tried to steal) something worth more than \$50”; “attacked someone with the idea of seriously hurting him/her”; “sold drugs”; “been drunk in a public place”; and “broken into a building or vehicle (or tried to break in) to steal something or just to look around.” Response categories ranged from 1 (*never*) to 9 (*more than once a day*). Scores on the summed scale ranged from 8 to 72 ( $\alpha=.85$ ).

### *Analytic Strategy*

We used logistic regression and ordinary least squares (OLS) regression to estimate models predicting whether respondents cohabited by age 25, married by age 25, and age at first cohabitation and first marriage. We introduced the variables in the same order in each of the multivariate analyses. Model 1 (baseline model) examined the zero-order relationship between adolescents' expectations to cohabit and to marry and union formation behavior during young adulthood. Model 2 added adolescents' academic, romantic, and risk behaviors to the baseline model. Model 3 replaced adolescents' academic, romantic, and risk behaviors with the sociodemographic control variables. Model 4 (full model) added the control variables reflecting both sociodemographic characteristics and academic, romantic, and risk behaviors during adolescence to the full model.

## RESULTS

### *Descriptive Statistics*

In Table 1 we showed the descriptive statistics for the full sample ( $n=593$ ), including means/percentages, standard deviations, and ranges for each of the variables included in the multivariate analyses. Additionally, we included the descriptive statistics for the subsamples of respondents who had ever cohabited by age 25 ( $n=406$ ) and for those who had ever married by age 25 ( $n=149$ ). Regarding the full sample, approximately seventy percent of respondents had

cohabited by age 25 and the average age at first cohabitation was 19.51 years old ( $SD=2.49$ ; range: 13-25). This mirrors national estimates of age at first cohabitation (Manning, Brown, & Payne, 2014). About one-fourth (25.13%) of respondents had married by age 25, with an average age at first marriage being 22.52 years old ( $SD=2.16$ ; range: 17-25). Given that the mean age at first marriage is 25.9 for women and 27.6 for men (Manning et al., 2014), our sample reflects young marriages.

Regarding adolescents' union formation expectations, nearly thirty percent of respondents either "probably" or "definitely" expected to cohabit in the future whereas, the majority of respondents (68.80%) had more ambiguous cohabitation expectations. Conversely, over seventy-five percent either "probably" or "definitely" expected to get married in the future, suggesting that marriage remains a significant social institution among a contemporary cohort of adolescents. These percentages are comparable to those reported in Manning and colleagues' (2007) research, which used the TARS data ( $n=1,293$ ) to examine predictors of adolescents' union formation expectations.

With regard to indicators of adolescent academic, romantic, and risk behaviors, most respondents reported earning mostly B's in school ( $\mu=3.61$ ;  $\sigma=2.09$ ; range=1-9). Respondents had, on average, 2.61 ( $SD=4.59$ ; range=0-52) dating partners in the year prior to the first interview. Additionally, nearly three-fourths (73.52%) had not had sex prior to age 16. On average, respondents scored low on the delinquency scale ( $\mu=9.37$ ;  $\sigma=4.12$ ; range=8-64).

Respondents were, on average, sixteen years old ( $\mu=15.95$ ;  $\sigma=1.01$ ; range=14-17) at the first interview. Over half (53.76%) of respondents were female and nearly half (46.21%) were male. The majority of respondents identified their race/ethnicity as White (64.42%) followed by Black (20.74%), Hispanic (9.61%), and other (3.71%). At the fifth interview, the majority of

respondents (43.17%) had completed some college and nearly one-third of respondents (32.04%) had earned a college degree or more. Less than a quarter of respondents (24.79%) had completed high school or less by the fifth interview. Regarding the educational attainment of respondents who had cohabited by age 25 ( $n=406$ ), the majority (41.63%) had completed some college and nearly 15 percent had completed college or more. Approximately 45 percent of respondents had earned less than a high school diploma or had completed high school by the time they first reported cohabiting. With regard to marriage ( $n=149$ ), nearly three-fourths (73.15%) of respondents had completed some college or college or more by the interview at which they first reported a marriage. Less than one-tenth (8.72%) of respondents had earned less than a high school diploma by the time they first reported a marriage whereas approximately 20 percent had completed high school. The average level of religiosity among respondents was moderate ( $\mu=3.26$ ;  $\sigma=1.23$ ; range=1-5), suggesting that religion is somewhat important to respondents at the first interview. Over half of respondents (56.83%) had grown up in a two biological parent family followed by single parent (20.91%), stepparent (12.98%), and other family type (9.27%).

### *Multivariate Results*

In Table 2 we included logistic regression results estimating whether respondents cohabited by age 25 ( $n=593$ ). At the bivariate level (model 1), adolescents' expectations to cohabit were significantly associated with cohabitation, demonstrating that respondents with more positive cohabitation expectations have 1.43 higher odds ( $exp. 0.36$ ) of cohabiting by age 25 compared to respondents with less positive (or ambivalent) expectations. Supplementary analyses (not shown) showed that over three-fourths (78.38%) of respondents who "probably" or "definitely" expected to cohabit during adolescence ( $n=185$ ) had cohabited by age 25. With the inclusion of correlates reflecting adolescents' academic, romantic, and risk behaviors and

sociodemographic characteristics in models 2 and 3, respectively, adolescents' cohabitation expectations remained significantly associated with cohabitation.

In the full model (model 4), adolescents' expectations to cohabit positively influenced the odds of entering a cohabiting union, such that adolescents with more positive cohabitation expectations had 1.24 higher odds (*exp.* 0.22) of cohabiting by age 25 compared adolescents with more negative cohabitation expectations. Additionally, respondents who were sexually active prior to age 16 were significantly more likely ( $\beta=0.70$ ;  $OR=2.00$ ) to cohabit by age 25. Women, compared with men, had 1.75 higher odds (*exp.* 0.56) of cohabiting by age 25. Compared to respondents who had completed some college, those who did not have a high school diploma were significantly more likely ( $\beta=1.92$ ;  $OR=6.80$ ) whereas those who completed college were significantly less likely ( $\beta=-1.33$ ;  $OR=0.27$ ) to cohabit by age 25. No significant differences were found between respondents who had completed some college and those who had earned a high school diploma. Finally, respondents who grew up in a step-parent family, compared with a two biological parent family, had 3.31 higher odds (*exp.* 1.20) of cohabiting by age 25. No significant differences were found between single parent and other families and two biological parent families. Taken together, Table 2 provided support for our hypothesis that adolescents' union formation expectations would be associated with subsequent cohabitation.

In Table 3 we showed a parallel analysis for marriage ( $n=593$ ). At the bivariate level (model 1), adolescents' marital expectations were not significantly associated with marriage by age 25. This finding persisted at the multivariate level with the inclusion of indicators of adolescent academic, romantic, and risk behaviors and sociodemographic characteristics. Supplementary analyses (not shown) demonstrated that a quarter of respondents (25.47%) who "probably" or "definitely" expected to marry during adolescence ( $n=475$ ) had married by age 25.



Thus, regarding marriage, the results in Table 3 did not provide support for our hypothesis. With regard to the control variables, women, compared with men, had 1.82 higher odds (*exp.* 0.60) of marrying by age 25. The other control variables were not associated with marriage by age 25 in the full model.

Table 4 included the OLS regression of timing of cohabitation on adolescent cohabitation expectations and the control variables ( $n=406$ ) as well as the OLS regression of timing of marriage on adolescent marital expectations and the control variables ( $n=149$ ). At the bivariate level (model 1), adolescent expectations to cohabit were significantly associated with earlier age at first cohabitation ( $b=-0.36$ ). With the inclusion of control variables, this finding persisted, demonstrating that adolescents with more positive cohabitation expectations cohabit at younger ages ( $b=-0.29$ ) than those with more negative (or ambivalent) expectations. Regarding adolescent behaviors, respondents who were sexually active by age 16 cohabited at significantly younger ages ( $b=-0.53$ ) than respondents who were not. Older age was associated with later entry into cohabiting unions ( $b=0.24$ ). Women entered cohabiting unions at significantly younger ages ( $b=-0.73$ ) than men. Finally, respondents who had completed less than high school and who had earned a high school diploma by the time they cohabited, entered cohabiting unions at younger ages ( $b=-2.34$  and  $b=-0.90$ , respectively) than those who had completed some college. Moreover, compared to those who completed some college, respondents who completed college or more by the time they cohabited, entered cohabiting unions at significantly older ages ( $b=2.27$ ). In sum, explaining 42 percent of the variance in timing of cohabiting union, Table 4 provided support for our hypothesis.

Regarding the parallel analysis for marriage ( $n=149$ ), adolescent marital expectations were not associated with timing of first marriage at the bivariate level. This finding persisted

across all models, net of adolescent academic, romantic, and risk behaviors and sociodemographic characteristics. Regarding the control variables, women married at significantly younger ages ( $b=-0.70$ ) than men did. Additionally, compared to respondents who had completed some college, those who earned less than a high school diploma by their first marriage and those who had completed high school entered marital unions at younger ages ( $b=-2.98$  and  $b=-1.25$ , respectively). Respondents who had completed college or more married at significantly older ages ( $b=0.91$ ) than respondents who had completed some college. In total, Table 4 explained 34 percent of the variation in age at first marriage and did not provide support for our hypothesis.

## DISCUSSION

Adolescents' expectations to cohabit were associated with greater odds of entering a cohabiting union by age 25 and earlier entry into a cohabiting union. These findings persisted with the inclusion of adolescents' academic, romantic, and risk behaviors, and sociodemographic characteristics. Thus, these findings are consistent with Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior, as it appears that adolescents' cohabitation expectations provide an independent basis for understanding the formation of cohabiting unions in young adulthood. In contrast to marriage, cohabitation occurs at a relatively young age (an average age of 21.8 years and 23.5 years for women and men, respectively) (Manning et al., 2014), and thus, may explain, in part, why adolescent's expectations are associated with transitions into cohabiting unions, but not marital unions. Unlike marriage, despite the increase in supportive attitudes toward and prevalence of cohabitation, transitions into cohabiting unions may not be as aspirational for adolescents (as evidenced by adolescents' ambivalent cohabitation expectations in the descriptive analysis). Thus, adolescents' cohabitation expectations may matter for subsequent

behavior, as positive expectations, coupled with the increasing familiarity and acceptance of cohabitation, may translate into more receptivity to cohabit.

In contrast, adolescent marital expectations were not associated with odds of marrying by age 25 and were not associated with the age at entry into marriage. These findings were observed at the bivariate and multivariate levels. Thus, findings from the parallel analyses of marriage do not provide support for Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior. One possible explanation for the null marriage findings is the symbolic significance of marriage in the U.S. According to Cherlin (2004, 2010), marriage is a symbolically significant social institution, such that the majority of Americans, regardless of socioeconomic status, aspire to marry. As such, it is possible that positive expectations for marriage during adolescence have become universal and thus, are not predictive of future marital behavior. Indeed, the universality of positive marital expectations among adolescents is portrayed in our descriptive analysis, as the majority (80.10%) of respondents reported strong expectations to marry. Our analyses capture young marriages and thus, it is unlikely adolescent marital expectations have a strong effect at older ages.

Although we have covered new terrain regarding expectations and behavior, our study has some limitations. First, although the TARS sample shared similar sociodemographic characteristics to national averages, it is not nationally representative. Thus, results from our research are not generalizable to the entire U.S. population of young adults. Data permitting, future research should seek to replicate our study using nationally representative data. Second, our analysis focused on early marriage experiences (i.e., by age 25). Given the increasing age at first marriage (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014), an analysis of marriage by age 30 may be more appropriate. Currently, TARS is in the field collecting data for the sixth interview. As such, we intend to pursue this analysis in the future. Third, due to sample restrictions and by focusing on

union formation by age 25, our analytic samples, particularly for marriage, are small. It is possible that null findings could be the result of small sample sizes and lack of statistical power.

Limitations aside, our study extended prior research in several important ways. In addition to marital expectations, we considered cohabitation expectations. With the exclusion of Manning et al. (2007) and Manning et al. (2014), few scholars have considered cohabitation expectations. Although trends in cohabitation are well documented, a focus solely on cohabitation behavior is limited, as it does not highlight individuals' preferred relationship patterns. Moreover, virtually no studies have considered the role of union formation expectations during adolescence in young adult union formation behavior. The examination of union formation expectations during adolescence allows scholars to consider the influence of such expectations longitudinally. Capitalizing on this limitation, our research showed that adolescent cohabitation, not marital, expectations are associated with subsequent behavior and thus, provided key insight into the shifting family landscape in the U.S.

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**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics, by Cohabited and Married by Age 25

	Full Sample ( <i>n</i> =593)	Cohabited by 25 ( <i>n</i> =406)	Married by 25 ( <i>n</i> =149)
<i>Dependent Variables</i>			
Cohabited by 25			
Yes	68.47%	-	77.18%
No	31.53%	-	22.82%
Age at First Cohabitation	-	19.91 (2.49)	-
Married by 25			
Yes	25.13%	28.33%	-
No	74.87%	71.67%	-
Age at First Marriage	-	-	22.52 (2.16)
<i>Independent Variables</i>			
Cohabitation Expectations			
Not at all	21.92%	18.47%	19.46%
A little	19.56%	15.52%	18.79%
Somewhat	27.32%	30.30%	26.85%
Probably	23.10%	26.11%	27.52%
Definitely	8.09%	9.61%	7.38%
Marital Expectations			
Not at all	3.88%	4.93%	2.68%
A little	6.41%	6.90%	5.37%
Somewhat	9.61%	10.84%	10.74%
Probably	36.42%	35.47%	34.23%
Definitely	43.68%	41.87%	46.98%
<i>Adolescent Behaviors</i>			
Grades in School (1-9)			
	3.61 (2.09)	3.93 (2.13)	3.48 (2.28)
Number of Dating Partners (0-52)			
	2.61 (4.59)	2.99 (5.38)	2.90 (4.38)
Adolescent Sexual Activity			
Had sex prior to age 16	26.48%	33.00%	25.50%
Did not have sex prior to age 16	73.52%	67.00%	74.50%
Delinquency (8-64)			
	9.37 (4.12)	9.53 (4.63)	9.36 (5.32)
<i>Sociodemographic Characteristics</i>			
Age (14-17)			
	15.95 (1.01)	15.91 (1.00)	16.10 (0.95)
Gender			
Male	46.21%	43.10%	35.57%
Female	53.79%	56.90%	64.43%

Source: Toledo Adolescent Relationships Study

Note: Standard deviations are indicated under mean values and ranges are listed beside continuous variables; <sup>a</sup> Indicates variables was measured at the first interview

**Table 1 continued.** Descriptive Statistics, by Cohabited and Married by Age 25

	<b>Full Sample (n=593)</b>	<b>Cohabited by 25 (n=406)</b>	<b>Married by 25 (n=149)</b>
Race			
White	64.42%	59.85%	73.83%
Black	20.74%	23.40%	14.09%
Hispanic	9.61%	11.08%	10.07%
Other	3.71%	4.19%	2.01%
Education			
Less than high school	7.25%	23.40%	8.72%
High school	17.54%	20.44%	18.12%
Some college	43.17%	41.63%	37.58%
College or more	32.04%	14.53%	35.57%
Religiosity (1-5)	3.26 (1.23)	3.19 (1.23)	3.38 (1.29)
Family Structure			
Two biological parent	56.83%	48.03%	65.77%
Step-parent	12.98%	16.50%	10.07%
Single parent	20.91%	24.38%	14.77%
Other	9.27%	11.08%	9.40%

Source: Toledo Adolescent Relationships Study

Note: Standard deviations are indicated under mean values and ranges are listed beside continuous variables; <sup>a</sup> Indicates variables was measured at the first interview; <sup>b</sup> Education for the full sample reflects the respondents' educational attainment at the fifth interview.

Education for the subsamples reflect the respondents' educational attainment at the interview in which they first reported a cohabitation or marriage.

**Table 2.** Logistic Regression of Cohabited by 25 on Cohabitation Expectations and Control Variables ( $n=593$ )

	<b>Model 1</b>	<b>Model 2</b>	<b>Model 3</b>	<b>Model 4</b>
<i>Independent Variable</i>				
Cohabitation Expectations	0.36 ***	0.28 ***	0.26 **	0.22 *
<i>Adolescent Behaviors</i>				
Grades in School		0.20 ***		0.00
Number of Dating Partners		0.08		0.07
Adolescent Sexual Activity (Reference=Not sexually active by age 16)				
Sexually active by age 16		0.85 **		0.70 *
Delinquency		-0.03		-0.02
<i>Sociodemographic Characteristics</i>				
Age			-0.02	-0.02
Gender				
Female			0.55 **	0.56 *
Race (Reference=White)				
Black			0.00	-0.07
Hispanic			0.07	0.04
Other			0.23	0.36
Education (Reference=Some college)				
Less than high school			2.03 ***	1.92 ***
High school			0.07	0.04
College or more			-1.38 ***	-1.33 ***
Religiosity			-0.08	-0.09
Family Structure (Reference=Two biological parent)				
Step-parent			1.15 **	1.20 **
Single parent			0.43	0.44
Other			0.29	0.16

Source: Toledo Adolescent Relationships Study

Note: \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

**Table 3.** Logistic Regression of Married by 25 on Marital Expectations and Control Variables ( $n=593$ )

	<b>Model 1</b>	<b>Model 2</b>	<b>Model 3</b>	<b>Model 4</b>
<i>Independent Variable</i>				
Marital Expectations	0.10	0.09	0.01	0.02
<i>Adolescent Behaviors</i>				
Grades in School		-0.04		0.02
Number of Dating Partners		0.02		0.02
Adolescent Sexual Activity (Reference=Not sexually active by age 16)				
Sexually active by age 16		-0.04		0.00
Delinquency		0.00		-0.00
<i>Sociodemographic Characteristics</i>				
Age			0.18	0.18
Gender				
Female			0.57 **	0.60 **
Race (Reference=White)				
Black			-0.58	-0.58
Hispanic			-0.03	-0.04
Other			-0.86	-0.84
Education (Reference=Some college)				
Less than high school			0.48	0.43
High school			0.23	0.20
College or more			0.03	0.09
Religiosity			0.09	0.10
Family Structure (Reference=Two biological parent)				
Step-parent			-0.43	-0.46
Single parent			-0.54	-0.53
Other			-0.04	-0.07

Source: Toledo Adolescent Relationships Study

Note: \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

**Table 4.** OLS Regression of Age at Cohabitation/Marriage on Cohabitation/Marital Expectations and Control Variables

	Age at Cohabitation ( <i>n</i> =406)	Age at Marriage ( <i>n</i> =149)
	Full Model	Full Model
<i>Independent Variable</i>		
Cohabitation/Marital Expectations	-0.29 ***	0.00
<i>Adolescent Behaviors</i>		
Grades in School	0.07	0.07
Number of Dating Partners	-0.02	0.00
Adolescent Sexual Activity (Reference=Not sexually active by age 16)		
Sexually active by age 16	-0.53 *	0.20
Delinquency	0.00	-0.04
<i>Sociodemographic Characteristics</i>		
Age	0.24 *	-0.04
Gender		
Female	-0.73 ***	-0.70 *
Race (Reference=White)		
Black	0.12	-0.51
Hispanic	-0.21	0.13
Other	-0.31	0.42
Education (Reference=Some college)		
Less than high school	-2.34 ***	-2.98 ***
High school	-0.90 **	-1.25 *
College or more	2.27 ***	0.91 *
Religiosity	0.10	-0.09
Family Structure (Reference=Two biological parent)		
Step-parent	0.03	-1.12
Single parent	-0.31	-0.75
Other	-0.34	-0.27
R <sup>2</sup>	0.42	0.34

Source: Toledo Adolescent Relationships Study

Note: \**p*<.05; \*\**p*<.01; \*\*\**p*<.001