AN EXAMINATION OF THE INFLUENCE OF ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS ON PROSOCIAL AND ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOR DURING THE PERIOD OF EMERGING ADULTHOOD: A MIXED-METHODS APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

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There is growing sociological interest in romantic relationships during the period of adolescence. However, most prior research focuses on the adolescent time period and very little on emerging adulthood, a distinct period where adolescent social networks gradually shift as adulthood approaches. Previous studies on adulthood emphasize the role of marriage and employment as processes in general and as an influence on behaviors such as criminal activity, but not much is known about the dynamic processes that affect romantic partner influence during emerging adulthood. Contributing heavily to the wealth of research relating peers to delinquency, Haynie et al. (2005) find that peers and romantic partners are associated with adolescent delinquency and arguably romantic partners become more salient as adolescents mature into adulthood.

With age and maturity, romantic partners may become more important as a source of reference, support and influence- but most of the research on romantic partner influences on antisocial and prosocial behavior focuses on adult marriage effects. The current study relies on a mixed methods approach to explore the extent to which and mechanisms through which romantic partners influence individuals in prosocial and antisocial directions. The study examines direct and indirect influences through an assessment of the ways in which young adults describe romantic partners’ influence on attitudes, future goals and behavior.

The study utilizes quantitative data to note developmental trends from adolescence into emerging adulthood along with in-depth interviews with 92 youths ages 17 to 23, including an oversample of high risk respondents from the Toledo Adolescent Research Study (TARS). The
use of these retrospective life history narratives also reveals developmental trends, as respondents highlight ways in which they have changed as they have matured into adulthood. Finally, the study explores variability within the qualitative sample, with the goal of developing dating profiles including distinctive patterns of dating/romantic partner effects throughout respondents’ dating histories.

Quantitative results indicate that older respondents spend less time with their friends than younger respondents, suggesting that friends become less of a source of reference and support as adolescents mature into emerging adulthood. Additionally, older currently-dating respondents report seeing less of their friends than their younger counterparts, indicating that social dynamics shift as adolescents move into emerging adulthood. Older currently-dating respondents also report being more influenced by their partner relative to younger respondents. Females are less likely to be influenced by their romantic partner, but females and males are equally likely to spend less time with friends while dating. The significance of cohabitation status as a complicating factor is also explored. In conclusion, quantitative results indicate that the romantic partner is beginning to supersede the influence of friends during emerging adulthood.

Qualitative results show that respondents can be positively and/or negatively affected by their romantic partners. Four domains of partner influence mentioned most often across respondents’ life history narratives include: delinquency/antisocial behavior, educational goals, financial/career concerns and pregnancy. Specific mechanisms of partner influence are discussed within each domain. Lastly, respondents were given the opportunity to reference past romantic relationships and note progression throughout previous relationships. Most respondents perceive the current-self as more positive/prosocial than in the past. In addition, life history narratives show that not being in a romantic relationship can actually be a learning
experience. In fact, educational goals are mentioned most often as a reason for limiting dating involvement. The study emphasizes the merit of emerging adulthood as a distinct period in the life course and informs the design of future research.
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INTRODUCTION

A defining facet of the adolescent period is the increased interest in the opposite gender (Sullivan 1953), however only recently have researchers began to study romantic relationships and sexual behaviors during this period (Brown, Feiring and Furman 1999; Giordano 2003). Using data from 7th through 12th graders from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), Haynie et al. (2005) provide evidence that the romantic partner and adolescent delinquency are associated with one another, even when the peer effect is controlled.

As mentioned, previous research on adulthood emphasizes the role of marriage as a significant part of the desistance process, a dynamic known as the “good marriage effect.” However, research has neglected the role of the romantic partner during emerging adulthood, a distinct period where adolescent social networks gradually shift and developmental changes occur as adulthood approaches. This area of research is potentially important because it forges a link between desistance processes during adolescence and into the period of adulthood.

Because some juvenile delinquency scholars have talked about developmental change and specific movement away from crime, I highlight some of those processes and attempt to apply the concepts of change to a broader sample of youth. Most delinquency research focuses on parents and peers and only recently have romantic partners been subject to research scrutiny (i.e., Haynie 2003; Rebellon and Manasse 2004; Haynie et al. 2005; Wong 2005). Much prior sociological research indicates an association between an individual’s delinquency involvement and delinquent peers (Agnew 1991; Akers 1998; Haynie 2002; Sutherland 1947; Warr 2002). An association between parental criminality and children’s delinquency has also been observed (Farrington 1995; Glueck and Glueck 1950). Still others spotlight the influence of parental social control (Demuth and Brown 2004; Hirschi 1969; Nye 1958). Previous studies have also
focused on older adults, highlighting the role of marriage in the desistance process (Farrington and West 1995; Horney, Osgood and Marshall 1995; Laub, Nagin and Sampson 1998; Sampson and Laub 1993). Yet, in general, researchers have not fully explored the gradual desistance that occurs throughout emerging adulthood and the role and impact of the romantic partner during this time.

First, I use quantitative data from the third wave of the Toledo Adolescent Research Study (TARS) to address whether older emerging adults report spending less time with friends when in a romantic relationship. Also, I address how levels of partner influence are associated with age, gender and cohabitation status. Second, I add to the current research regarding romantic relationships by focusing on the perspectives of 92 youth who participated in in-depth interviews in connection with TARS. These qualitative data are rich in context, perspective and reflection. The current investigation builds on the work of Haynie et al. (2005) and emphasizes the role of the romantic partner on attitudes, behaviors and future goals, as understood by respondents themselves. I examine direct as well as indirect influences on antisocial behavior. Additionally, I use data from TARS to examine social network shifts including the association between the level of partner influence and age, gender and cohabitation status. I focus on four domains of partner influence during emerging adulthood that may help researchers more fully understand the results of quantitative studies: delinquency/antisocial behavior, education, financial/career options and pregnancy. I highlight the mechanisms associated with romantic partner influence, including effects on attitudes, future goals as well as prosocial and, to a lesser extent, antisocial behavior.

Third, TARS respondents discuss the ways in which they have changed throughout different dating experiences. Thus, the qualitative data allow me to describe changes that occur
during the period of emerging adulthood in contrast to processes that are more difficult to
document using traditional quantitative approaches. Specifically, respondents reveal the levels,
types and changes in romantic partner influence as they have matured and as they change
partners. Therefore, I identify multiple dating pathways prevalent throughout emerging
adulthood. I explore the variability of pathways within the sample, with the goal of developing
profiles of distinctive patterns of dating/romantic partner effects. I use the term “dating profiles”
to address this portion of the study. Overall, this study is important because it bridges the gap
between adolescent dating and adult marriage effects and will inform the design of more focused
analyses exploring network influences.
CHAPTER I: BACKGROUND

Contributions from Delinquency and Desistance Research

The association between age and crime is well documented (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990). Prior research indicates an age-crime curve, which shows that most crime peaks during the mid to late teens, a time when peer and romantic partner dynamics shift. Sampson and Laub (1993) have suggested that marital attachment and employment play a major role in the desistance process. However, Warr (1998) finds that it is not necessarily the “good marriage effect” that influences desistance from crime, but rather the fact that individuals gradually spend less time with peers, and specifically delinquent peers, once they marry. These findings reflect that desistance processes are complex. A limitation of the Sampson and Laub study is that the sample consists mostly of white male offenders who came of age during the 1950s, when the markers of adulthood were more straightforward and predictable. In general, there is limited research regarding more gradual desistance processes that occur in connection with the transition to adulthood.

The strong emphasis on the good marriage effect within the criminological literature has a counterpart in family research on ways in which marriage and cohabitation may be linked to variability in a range of different health outcomes (Waite and Gallagher 2000). Although these studies have not typically focused on antisocial behavior, recently Duncan, Wilkerson and England (2006) found that marriage reduces binge drinking and marijuana use. Results also indicate that cohabitation is associated with a reduction in women’s, but not men’s, binge drinking. The authors theorize that risky behaviors can be reduced by the marriage norm of “cleaning up one’s act” and the monitoring impact of a co-resident partner, but do not study these processes directly. In addition, both the criminological and demography/family literatures
have overlooked the impact of romantic partner influence prior to the experience of marriage or cohabitation. Thus research is needed on the increased influence of romantic partners as individuals begin to mature into adulthood, on the specific dynamics that underlie this influence, and on the social psychological and developmental processes that are associated with variations in receptivity to influence attempts.

Much research focuses on the association between delinquent peers and delinquency involvement, and an even larger body of research centers on parental factors related to delinquency. Most recently, Haynie et al. (2005) find concordance between romantic partner and antisocial behavior. The effects of the romantic partner were greater for female respondents where the focus was minor deviance, but a similar statistically significant effect of the romantic partner behavior was found for male and female respondents where the referent was serious delinquency involvement. These findings suggest the need for more research on the specific mechanisms through which the romantic partner may have an effect and conditions under which this occurs. Furthermore, late adolescent developmental changes are important to take into account as well as variability within the sample.

Giordano, Cernkovich and Rudolph (2002) outline four types of cognitive transformations that are associated with sustained desistance: openness to change, exposure to “hooks” for change, envisioning a conventional “replacement self,” and change in desirability of the deviant lifestyle. These mechanisms of change are a basis for desistance and can be relatively important features of romantic relationship formation, stability and change over time. These cognitive transformations should be studied in conjunction with romantic partner influence and change over time, especially as adulthood approaches.
Emerging Adulthood

The transition between adolescence and early adulthood is a unique period in an individual’s life and is referred to by researchers as “emerging adulthood” (Arnett 1998, 2000; Hagan and Foster 2003; Schwartz, Côté and Arnett 2005). Roughly consisting of ages 18 to 25, emerging adulthood is a life stage typically present in industrial societies where adolescence is prolonged, thus forming a mixture of adolescent and adult commitments and responsibilities (Arnett 2000; Erikson 1968). Additionally, it is both a demographically and subjectively distinct period. As noted by Arnett (2000) and Goldscheider and Goldscheider (1994), emerging adults typically have diverse and unstable residential status. Some live independently from parents (about 40%) and may cohabit. About one-third live in college dormitories. Emerging adulthood includes a diversity of educational and occupational trajectories where some enter higher education (over 60%) and others seek employment. About one-third of the population between 25 and 29 years old completed four years of college (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1997).

Subjective processes are also important as many emerging adults do not feel like adolescents or adults (Arnett 2000). In fact, Arnett (2000) finds that, when asked: “Do you feel that you have reached adulthood?” approximately sixty-percent of emerging adults respond both “yes and no.” Further complicating the matter, there are diverse views among scholars of what exactly marks adulthood. What researchers do agree on are the identity exploration and experimental aspects of emerging adulthood (see Arnett 1998; Arnett 2000; Erikson 1950; Rindfuss 1991; Valde 1996). Questions that emerging adults may ask themselves are: “who am I” and “where do I want to go” along with “who do I want to go there with?” Since not much is known about non-daters and how they emerge from adolescence into adulthood, this study will examine the non-dating role among emerging adults.
Specifically, emerging adulthood is a time of heightened identity exploration in terms of romance, employment and worldviews (Arnett 2000). There are many characteristics of identity and dating that differ between adolescence and emerging adulthood. Previous studies show that, on average, adolescents begin dating some time between 12 and 14 years old and typically forge recreational relationships. Furthermore, they last only a few weeks or months (Feiring 1996). During emerging adulthood, however, these relationships last longer and are typically more physically and emotionally intimate (Collins 2003). The developmental changes associated with dating have nevertheless not been fully investigated.

Arnett (1998, 2000) is among the first to argue that emerging adulthood should be a distinctive developmental and academic concept. In particular, he notes that changes in occupational interests and worldviews are characteristic of emerging adulthood. For example, most high school students are employed part-time in low-skilled jobs simply to pay for leisure activities and personal items. As adulthood approaches these employment characteristics begin to shift. Emerging adults focus more so on skilled jobs that may lead into careers and adult roles. Arnett additionally notes that emerging adults experiment with educational choices to help form career paths. These phenomena underscore the importance of taking into consideration the variability of employment pathways in the period of emerging adulthood.

Furthermore, Arnett (2000) suggests that adolescents enter emerging adulthood with worldviews learned throughout childhood. The collegiate years in particular may bring rise to diversity and other worldviews unobserved throughout youth. Arnett notes that these years are heterogeneous in nature and can additionally be characterized by forming and fine-tuning independent beliefs and values. In general, the identity exploration aspect of emerging adulthood tolerates the experiences of achievement and failure.
Arnett’s (1998, 2000) conclusions imply that future research should focus on the developmental aspects of emerging adulthood as a period uniquely different from adolescence and adulthood. However, little is known about the role and influence of romantic partners as an influence and outcome of these developmental shifts. The freedom of choice and identity exploration characteristic of emerging adulthood is consistent with the agentic component noted in previous studies of desistance (see Maruna 2001). Based on this prior work, I hypothesize that respondents’ personal desistance efforts would be magnified when a partner’s behavior is in stark contrast to the respondents’, thus supporting positive changes. However, various “profiles” of emerging adult dating influences are probable and should be studied further. In short, changes based on romantic partners’ attitudes and behaviors are far from inevitable, and individuals play a key role in selecting the type of partners who may go on to exert a positive or negative influence. The significance of agentic qualities that a respondent may bring to a relationship needs further analysis, as agency influences prosocial and antisocial behaviors and goals. The observed variability within the subset of emerging adults suggests the need for identifying distinctive pathways regarding dating effects on prosocial and antisocial behavior.

Côté’s (2000) renowned phrase “arrested adulthood” suggests that social markers that previously indicated entry into adulthood have diminished. These diminishing markers such as marriage and parenthood have forced youths to negotiate entry into a form of “psychological adulthood.” Côté suggests that the loss of role structure, traditional meaning and parental guidance has prolonged adolescence and has kept traditional forms of adulthood unreachable. He further suggests that youth are encouraged by media and previously non-traditional consumption ideologies to seek individualization, thus remaining self-involved and quite immature.
Converging the main points of Arnett (1998, 2000) and Côté (2000), it is reasonable to suggest that previous demographic markers of adulthood (marriage, employment, independent living, parenthood, school completion) are no longer the clear markers that existed in prior eras. In fact, age at first marriage has risen dramatically since the 1960’s (Furstenberg 2000). Research shows that emerging adults view adulthood as marked by individualistic qualities of character. Accepting responsibility for oneself and making independent decisions are consistently described as the top criteria for adulthood status found in many studies (see Arnett 1997, 1998, 2000; Greene et al. 1992). Financial independence typically ranks near the top as well.

Summarizing, compared to other eras, the transition into adulthood is elongated and emerging adulthood seems to be a fitting term. Marriage is occurring later in the life course and is no longer a distinct marker for adulthood. Therefore, researchers must look to other facets of desistance processes that may be at play beyond marriage and employment. The role of dating during emerging adulthood should be considered as part of this process that, contemporaneously and later on, may influence desistance patterns.

**Romantic Relationships**

The above literature highlights in a general way that emerging adulthood deserves additional attention as a distinct period within the life course. However, beyond noting that contemporary marriages occur later and are not inevitable, more needs to be known about the nature and influence of romantic relationships during this period. These intimate relationships are potentially implicated in the complex developmental changes, behaviors and attitudes that characterize the emerging adulthood phase, suggesting the need to examine romantic relationships in more detail.
Studies in adulthood focus on the benefits of romantic relationships, whereas studies in adolescence have concentrated on their costs (see Joyner and Udry 2000 for a brief review). Researchers have also focused heavily on gender relations during early adolescence (e.g. Adler and Adler 1998, Eder et al. 1995). Additional work focuses on the changing individual needs throughout different periods of adolescence. Connolly and Goldberg (1999) summarize romantic relationship phases typical throughout this time period. Initially, young adolescents go through an infatuation phase in which they are physically and passionately attracted. During the affiliation phase, they begin to value companionship. Emotional intimacy gradually begins to form. Finally, the commitment phase is a time when adolescents begin to value the long-term significance on the relationship. Not all adolescents may reach this final phase, which means that there is variability within the emerging adult dating population.

The infatuation stage typically consists of short-term, superficial relationships, but by the time adolescents experience the intimacy stage, romantic relationship begins to be deeper and more stable (Brown 1999). It should be noted that the intimacy stage may occur during emerging adulthood as well (see Feiring 1996), further adding to the variability of dating profiles. Additionally, this emphasizes the point that many romantic relationships may become more salient as adulthood approaches (see Haynie et al. 2005 and Johnson and Leslie 1982). However, we know little about the developmental changes tied to romantic relationships during emerging adulthood and the influence of romantic partners on behaviors, goals and well-being. My research explores how partner choices deriving from agentic processes may influence changes in behaviors, the way individuals relate to romantic partners and how this in turn influences behaviors.
There is limited research regarding the changing salience and dynamics of romantic relationships throughout emerging adulthood, but qualitative studies can help bridge this gap. One methodological strategy for building knowledge about romantic relationships is to compare the qualities of romantic relationships to that of the well-known aspects of peer relations. These parallel qualities include evidence of social support, intimate self disclosure, sociability, and opportunities for communication (see Furman and Simon 1998). Like peer relationships, romantic relationships can be a source for individual growth and general social development (Mead 1934).

On the other hand, there are a number of ways in which romantic relationships differ from peer relations. For one, adolescents have previously been socialized in same-gender friendship groups, so they may bring diverse perspectives to the romantic relationship (Eder, Evans and Parker 1995). As Youniss and Smollar (1985) point out, friendship groups are quite egalitarian in nature and are characterized by cooperative co-construction. There is much evidence that adolescent romantic relationship dissolution is attributed to one partner being more invested or committed to the relationship than the other. In other words, it takes two to form the relationship but only one to end it. Giordano, Manning and Longmore (2002) find partners use various power dynamics in attempt to influence each other, suggesting that cooperative co-construction may be more common in friendships than romantic relationships. These findings are in contrast to neo-Sullivanian ideas that romantic relationships are egalitarian in nature and characterized by reciprocal altruism and cooperation (Buhrmester and Furman 1986; Furman 1998; Furman and Simon 1998). Further suggesting that qualities of peers and romantic partners differ is that feelings of love, heartache, sexual desires and jealousy are unique to romance as opposed to same-gender friendships.
As summarized by Furman and Shaffer (2003), romantic relationships play an important role in various aspects of adolescent development: identity, family and peer relationships, sexuality, scholastic achievement and career planning. It is suggested that positive romantic experiences affect one’s sense of self in a positive way and adverse experiences may negatively affect one’s confidence in the ability to have a strong romantic relationship (Connolly and Konarski 1994). Additionally, one’s global self-esteem and other aspects of well-being may be affected by positive or negative romantic experiences (Furman et al. 2003; Harter 1988). Using two waves of Add Health, Joyner and Udry (2000) find that adolescents, especially female adolescents, who are involved in a romantic relationship between waves have greater depression than those who did not have a romantic relationship. Typically, females have a higher level of depression and Joyner et al. adds to our understanding of the emerging gender difference in depression among adolescents: females are more vulnerable to romantic relationships. Thus, one important process of influence is the affect that partners have on well-being.

Another line of research hints at partner influences on prosocial and antisocial behaviors. Research finds that there is significant similarity between respondents’ grades and romantic partners’ grades (especially for male students) indicating the possibility of selecting similar partners (Giordano, Phelps, Manning and Longmore 2008). However, the results may indicate influence processes at play because wave one partner grades contributed to the variance of wave two respondent grades. These findings suggest the need for or a more complete understanding of romantic careers in the transition between adolescence and adulthood, especially concerning the increasing importance of romantic partners and diminishing importance of peers during this phase of the life course.
Summarizing, as pointed out by Furman and Shaffer (2003), we need to understand the contexts in which romantic relationships occur in order to fully understand the impact of romantic relationships. We know more about adolescent romantic relationships than we know about their dynamics during the transition into young adulthood. A qualitative approach should help us understand the possible pathways that adolescents may follow during this transition. Additionally, qualitative research is needed to help us understand the complexities of these social relationships as they emerge through the uniquely complicated phase of emerging adulthood. Life course theory has been supported by many (Crosnoe 2000; Elder 1998), but this transition period between adolescence and adulthood has been defined and discussed in general terms rather than as specific influences on development and prosocial and antisocial behavior patterns.
CHAPTER II: CURRENT STUDY

Previous research suggests that romantic partners may become more important as a source of reference, support and influence as individuals mature into adulthood (Haynie 2005). Not much is known about these processes during emerging adulthood since most research focuses on romantic partner influences on antisocial and prosocial behavior as part of adult marriage effects. Additionally, social and psychosocial processes such as cognitive shifts and agentic actions should be studied in conjunction with romantic partner influence throughout emerging adulthood, to help understand the mechanisms involved in social network influence during this period. Variability in the ways in which dating influences individual development and conduct rather than a single developmental trajectory is more consistent with the variable-routes to adulthood that have been observed in the contemporary context.

The first section of the current study relies on Wave III TARS quantitative data to track developmental changes from early adolescence into emerging adulthood, specifically ages 15 to 21. I explore the association between age of respondents and the amount of time spent with friends, hypothesizing that older adolescents report spending less time with friends than do their younger counterparts. I report effects of gender and cohabitation status as well. I explore these associations among emerging adults who report current-dating status. Additionally, I hypothesize that age, gender and cohabitation status are positively related to higher levels of reported partner influence.

I utilize Wave III TARS qualitative data of 92 youth for the second and third sections of the study. For the second section, I explore the extent to which and mechanisms through which romantic partners influence individuals in prosocial or antisocial directions during emerging adulthood within four domains: delinquency/antisocial behavior, education, financial/career
goals and pregnancy. I examine the direct and indirect influences on attitudes and future goals like educational attainment, social behavior, employment, and general personal growth.

Lastly, I explore variability within the sample and construct “profiles” of distinctive dating patterns. I focus on three main groupings of respondents: non-dating youths, those with previous experience who are not currently involved, and different conceptions of romantic partner effects throughout emerging adulthood. Because most quantitative studies have focused on current or most recent dating partners, researchers have generally neglected the role of the “non-dating” experience as a factor associated with youth development. Thus, it is important to focus on ways in which not dating, or breaking up with particular partners can be an important phase within this period of the life course.

The “dating-profiles” section is more than just a “snapshot” of the dating experience from the previous section. The retrospective life history narratives I rely upon allow me to spotlight the ways in which respondents note and understand personal changes as they mature into adulthood and the ways in which the role of the romantic partner is highlighted in this “transformation.” The qualitative data will provide another perspective on developmental trends and variability within the sample. A useful feature of the in-depth relationship history narratives elicited from a subset of the respondents is that they provide a window on how individuals themselves understand changes in behavior or influence across different partners, and as they have made the transition to adulthood. I will compare and contrast quantitative and qualitative findings regarding developmental trends.
Data and Methods

This research study uses quantitative and qualitative data from the third wave of the Toledo Adolescent Relationships Study (TARS). TARS data were collected in 2001, 2002 and 2004 with in-depth interviews at wave one \( n=94 \) and wave three \( n=92 \) and a parent questionnaire at wave one. The initial sample was drawn from 7th, 9th, and 11th grade enrollment records of all youths in Lucas County, Ohio in 2000. Through stratified random sampling, a total of 1,316 youths were utilized for the quantitative portion of the study. I will be utilizing the third wave which includes 1,114 youth. Respondents did not have to be enrolled in school to participate in any wave, thus yielding a sample with slightly more high-risk youth than other data samples only including enrolled students. Data from the structured survey at wave three address the developmental aspect of the study. Two subsets of TARS Wave III (total \( n=1,114 \) ) are utilized to track the respondent’s own view of the romantic partner’s influence and time spent with romantic partners and friends by age, gender and cohabitation status. This analysis includes a total of 1,066 respondents from wave three. The analytic sample does not include the twenty-six adolescents who reported a racial category other than white, African American or Hispanic. Additionally, it excludes those who reported being married \( n=15 \) and the one respondent who refused to answer the question. Twenty-two year olds \( n=4 \) are not included in the sample because there are a very low number of respondents at that age. At wave one, parents/guardians completed a separate questionnaire; two of the respondents’ data were missing and dropped. I will use the subset of 1,066 to track the influence of respondents’ age on reports of time spent with friends. Respondents are age 15 to 21 years old; the average age for this subset is just over 18 years. The sample is evenly divided by gender (females= 51.5\%) and the distribution of race/ethnicity is as follows: 701
white (65.7%), 252 African American (23.6%), and 113 Hispanic (10.6%). Most have mothers with an education beyond high school (n=567, 53.2%) followed by those with a high school degree or GED (n= 380, 35.6%). One hundred and nineteen (11.1%) mothers have less than a high school education. Just over fifty percent come from two-parent families (n=553) and about one-fifth (n=243) are single-parent families. Just over eight percent are currently cohabiting (n=89).

The second set of analyses will only utilize those 622 respondents (58.3%) who are currently dating and met criteria (e.g. age, race) as a critical analytic sample. Respondents were asked if they were dating: “Is there someone you are currently dating--that is, a girl/guy you like and who likes you back?” If the respondent responded ‘yes’ (n=533) then they are included in this subset. Married respondents are again not included in this analysis; however, if respondents said they were “living with someone” in a prior question (n=89), then they are also included in this sample. There are slightly more female respondents in the dating sample, otherwise the distribution is marginally different than the first analytic sample (see Appendix: Table 1 and Table 2). This sample is used to address partner influence and time spent with friends (while dating) by age, gender and cohabitation status. I use these results to address maturity levels from adolescence into emerging adulthood and how this is related to the romantic partner as a source of reference and influence.

One-hundred respondents were chosen to participate in in-depth interviews at wave three and are utilized in the second and third sections of the current study. Some were randomly selected (n=15) and others were selected based on their previous high risk sexual behaviors putting them at risk for unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections as observed at wave three (n=15). Though my analysis does not focus only on high risk sexual behaviors,
previous research shows that high risk sexual behaviors are significantly correlated with delinquency involvement, a behavioral outcome of interest in the current study. The remainder of the sample included in the in-depth interviews were selected because they lived in environments that were associated with greater risk (i.e., poverty), even though they had not previously indicated involvement in high risk sexual behaviors. Though not a random sample, this strategy provides a good mix of prosocial youth as well as those with high risk exposure to delinquency and other problem outcomes. A 92-percent response rate yielded fifty-percent male (n=46) and fifty-percent female (n=46) respondents. A majority of respondents are currently dating (n=48) or have dated in the past but are not currently in a relationship (n=34). A small number have never dated (n=10). All but one are involved in strictly heterosexual romantic relationships.

The semi-structured interview questions in the third wave outline various features of adolescent relationships including dating, break-ups, hook-ups, romantic relationship importance and friendships. Interviews took place at the respondents’ home and were approximately one to two hours long. The interviewer was an excellent listener and included humor throughout the interviews, thus further engaging the respondent. Third wave respondents are between the ages of 17 and 23 and speak quite candidly about previous and current dating experiences. Many speak about the link between current goals and romantic partners, a significant aspect of the current study. Their reflections upon prosocial and antisocial behaviors are noteworthy as well. In general, these interviews can be quite helpful in exploring the mechanisms of partner influence, developmental changes and the variability in dating pathways during emerging adulthood. Arnett’s (1998) concept of ‘emerging adulthood’ roughly includes those 18 to 25 years old. Seventeen-year old high school seniors are included in this study because they are
nearing their next birthday and participating in experiences and choices similar to their 18-year-old classmates. Additionally, their reflections on adolescence and life after high school remain distinct and relevant.

**Quantitative Coding and Measures**

Three dependent variables used in the analyses for the developmental aspect of the study: *general-time with friends, influence of dating on time spent with friends, and partner influence*. I utilize quantitative data from the third wave of TARS (n=1066) to note general time spent with friends by age (regardless of dating and cohabitation status). Respondents were asked: “During the past week, how many times did you just hang out with your friends?” Responses were coded 0 for never, 1 for one or two times, 2 for three or four times, and 3 for five or more times. The other two dependent variables, *influence of dating on time spent with friends* and *partner influence*, are constructed from responses from 622 currently-dating adolescents. *Influence of dating on time spent with friends* consists of a binary response in which adolescents and emerging adults are asked: “Since the two of you have been together, have you seen less of your friends?” (yes=36.82%, no=63.18%). Specifically, I address responses by age, gender and cohabitation status, net of race, family structure and mother’s education. Analyzing quantitative influence questions supplement the qualitative research by providing a more traditional approach to actual time spent with friends and partner influence levels.

*Partner-influence* is constructed from five items including a sum of three ‘actual influence’ questions and two questions measuring ‘influence attempts’. Respondents are asked the degree to which: (1) “I change things about myself because I know (partner’s name) likes it” (2) “I sometimes do things because (partner’s name) does them” (3) “I change things about
myself because I don’t want to lose (partner’s name)’s respect’” (4) “(Partner’s name) sometimes wants to control what I do” and (5) “(partner’s name) always tries to change me.” There are five possible responses for each question ranging from strongly disagree (1 point) to strongly agree (5 points). The resulting measure is the sum of all five responses for each adolescent (mean = 10.86). The Chronbach’s alpha for this scale is .84.

Age is coded in years and ranges from 15 to 21. A mentioned earlier, the four twenty two year olds are dropped due to their small number. Gender is coded as a dummy variable where male is the contrast category. Cohabitation Status is coded ‘yes’ and ‘no,’ based on a question where respondents were asked if they were “living with someone.” Race is coded as dummy variables for white, African American and Hispanic where white is the reference category. Mother’s education is based on items from the parent questionnaire at the first wave. The question “How far did you go in school?” was used as long as the parent was indeed the mother of the respondent. If the respondent to the previous question was male, then the question “How far did your spouse or partner go in school?” was used. Dummy variables were constructed for responses where the mother had less than a high school education, high school education, and more than high school education. The reference category is education equal to high school. Family structure is also composed of dummy variables in which, at wave one, respondents reported the type of family they lived in during the previous year. Responses are coded into two-parent, single parent, step-parent, and other family. The reference category is two-parent household.
Quantitative Analytic Strategy

The quantitative portion of the study includes three types of analyses focusing on age, gender, cohabitation status and: (1) the association between general time spent with friends (2) time spent with friends while dating and (3) the level of partner influence. The other variables in each model include socio-demographic indicators as controls: race, family structure, and mother’s education. Ordinary least squares (OLS) regression is typically appropriate for continuous dependent variables and thus will be used for the first and third analyses. Because the second analysis includes a binary dependent variable (1=seeing less, 0=not seeing less of your friends), I use logistic regression (Agresti and Finlay 1997).

Qualitative Coding and Analysis

The 92 in-depth interviews were based on semi-structured questions that elicited information about previous and current romantic relationships. Probing questions regarding impact and importance of these relationships provide researchers with authentic historical narratives unmatched by quantitative measures and are highly significant to this study. One of the specific and relevant interview questions is: “How important is/was the relationship to you?” In response, many focus on influence factors and how they have personally changed because of the dating experience. Additional questions focused on comparison and contrast across partners. The open-ended nature of the interviews allows for general reflection in which respondents are encouraged to speak about their own perspectives without judgment. Short two-page summaries were developed from each interview and specifically utilized direct quotes from the respondent. I use these summaries along with the full transcribed interview to generally analyze each respondent’s reflection on previous and current romantic relationships. I then use an open
coding scheme to develop an understanding of the connections between romantic relationships and life goals and behaviors.

After analyzing interviews with a more global focus, I further examined them for instances where respondents form a link between their romantic relationships and life goals. Specifically I assess the salience of life goals and prosocial behaviors like educational attainment, employment and prosocial attitudes; I look for links to romantic partner’s influences. Specific types of influences are coded including positive, negative and neutral partner influences. Additionally, based on the respondent’s historical narrative, I analyze self-reported delinquency and antisocial behavior levels in connection with their romantic relationships. The narratives are assessed for uniqueness as well as similarity across interviews. I analyze the framework or lens through which respondents view their life goals and behaviors. Analyses also focus on similarities and differences according to gender by comparing male and female respondents’ narratives.

In conclusion, I focus on two conceptual sections for the qualitative portion of the study: domains of partner influence and dating profiles. First, four main domains of partner influence most prevalent throughout the life history narratives are discussed: delinquency/antisocial behavior, educational goals, financial/career concerns and pregnancy. Within these domains, I focus on specific mechanisms of partner influence which include the salience level of the romantic relationship and shifts from peer social networks to more adult-like roles that are characteristic of emerging adulthood. For example, I take note of changes in deviant behavior or educational objectives in relation to romantic partner influence. Cognitive processes associated with agency and other developmental changes are discerned.
Second, I take note of the variability in the sample by grouping various dating pathways into adulthood and are referred to as “dating profiles.” Three subheadings are used: non-daters, currently non-dating, and current-dating. It is particularly important to focus on young people who do not date, or who recognized the need to break up with specific partners, since these adaptations are often obscured within studies relying on traditional methodological approaches (i.e., current daters). The second section of the study’s qualitative approach to studying romantic partner influence is more than just the “snapshot” like the first section. The study highlights respondents’ reflections regarding personal progression from adolescence into emerging adulthood. Retrospective life history narratives allow me to identify developmental trends as respondents identify reasons for behavior change throughout different dating experiences and partners.
CHAPTER III: RESULTS

Developmental Changes

As predicted, the first model in Table 3 shows that older respondents report seeing less of their friends than younger respondents (b=-.04; p<.05), net of other controls. This suggests that friends become less of a source of reference and support as adolescents mature into emerging adulthood. Recall Warr’s (1998) findings suggesting that delinquent activity diminishes once respondents marry, because they tend to hang out with friends (especially delinquent friends) less often than they did before marriage. However, the results from this study show that, among a sample of unmarried 15 to 21 year olds, older respondents already report seeing less of their friends. This suggests that romantic relationships may have similar desistance potential as marriage. Gender is also related to spending time with friends, reflecting that young females spend significantly less time with their friends (b=-.32; p<.001). On another note, African Americans (b=-.23; p<.05) and Hispanics (b=-.27; p<.05) also report seeing less of their friends when compared to their white counterparts. Family structure (single parent: b=-.05; step parent: b=.02; other: b=-.06) and mother’s level of education (less than HS: b=.03; more than HS: b=-.02) were not significantly related to general time spent with friends. Model 2 in Table 3 incorporates cohabitation status in addition to the statistics for Model 1 and age becomes insignificant (b=-.03; p>.05) suggesting that older emerging adults spend significantly less time with their friends, because those who cohabit are typically older. The model indicates that those who cohabit spend significantly less time with their friends (b=-.31; p<.01) than those who do not cohabit.

As the descriptive statistics show in Table 2, almost 40 percent of the sample report seeing less of their friends while dating. Model 3 in Table 3 shows that older respondents who
are currently dating report having greater odds of seeing less of their friends than their younger counterparts (b=.16; p<.01). These results suggest that social dynamics shift as adolescents move into emerging adulthood. From this model, one might assume that, because emerging adults begin to see less of their friends (because they are dating), they are interacting, socializing, and engaged more so with the romantic partner. The romantic partner may be becoming a pivotal source of support and social reference. In other words, friendship networks may diminish somewhat as romantic relationships start to take a position of greater importance in the life course. There are no significant gender differences in Model 3 indicating that neither males nor females have greater odds of spending less time with their friends due to dating. African Americans (b=-.63; p<.01) have greater odds of not seeing less of their friends while dating. This suggests that, for African Americans, dating status does not necessarily impact amount of time spent with friends. Future research should examine if African Americans actually see more of their friends than their non-dating counterparts.

Model 4 in Table 3 expands the previous model and includes the cohabitation status variable. Findings indicate that those who cohabit have greater odds of seeing less of their friends that those who do not cohabit (b=.62; p<.05). This strengthens my findings from Model 2; cohabitation is associated with seeing less of your friends. Age (b=.13; p<.05) and African American (b=-.60; p<.01) continue to be significant in Model 4. Because age continues to be significant, though somewhat less-significant than Model 3, suggests that cohabitation status accounts for some of the significance of age on spending less time with friends while dating.

In fact, Model 5 of Table 3 clarifies our understanding of the romantic partner’s role during emerging adulthood. Age (b=.22; p<.05) and gender (b=-2.10; p<.001) are both strongly associated with partner-influence, net of all controls. This is unique because there is no
significant gender differences in Model 3 or 4; females and males are equally likely to spend less time with friends while dating (b=-.07; p>.05) even when controlling for cohabitation (b=-.08; p>.05). Older respondents do report being more influenced by their partner relative to younger respondents. This, coupled with Models 3 and 4 results, indicates that the romantic partner is beginning to supersede friend influence during emerging adulthood. Again, as respondents mature into adulthood, social dynamics shift and the romantic partner becomes a stronger influence.

Cohabitation is a key factor in understanding the level of partner influence as respondents age, however. The significance of age in Model 5 (b=.22; p<.05) is diminished in Model 6 (b=.14; p=.094) once controlling for cohabitation. This suggests that older respondents are more likely to cohabit than their younger counterparts. More importantly, the results indicate that those who cohabit (b=1.39; p<.001) are more significantly influenced by their partner than their non-cohabitating, current-dating counterparts. Qualitative results help shed more light onto how the romantic partner influences these young adult respondents across this period of the life course.

Domains of Partner Influence

Results show that respondents can be positively or negatively affected by their romantic partner. In addition, the actual mechanisms of change are important for researchers to analyze because these mechanisms can inform the design of more focused analyses exploring network influences using traditional quantitative approaches. Analysis of the relationship history narratives show that there are four domains of change mentioned most often in the 92 interviews: delinquency/antisocial behavior, education, financial/career concerns and pregnancy.
Delinquency/Antisocial Behavior

Emerging adulthood is a time where some begin to refrain from delinquent activity and seek out more positive, prosocial partners. Respondents are more likely to view their current-self as more prosocial than their “past-self.” Because respondents are becoming emerging adults, this finding may be a direct reflection of the age-crime curve mentioned previously (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990). However, the finding may also suggest that respondents simply perceive current relationships as a positive influence and overlook current negative influences. The prosocial influence of romantic partners on the domain of delinquency and antisocial behavior is mentioned more frequently by male than female respondents. Twenty-two-year-old Billy recalls:

Um, well I got a DUI, I got possession of marijuana, um, drug paraphernalia, and I got caught with an OxyContin… [but] I’m trying to direct that whole [thing] into a positive atmosphere. I uh, um, I, the girl that I was with at the time, she was bad news and all this other stuff…. she was just egging me on for everything that was going on so I decided [to break it off]. [0072]

He further continues and says:

…but since then I kind of changed all of my friends. I changed my girlfriend. My [new] girlfriend now maybe wants to drink once on the weekend, maybe at that. Um, she’s a good girl.

This quote demonstrates that romantic partners are not a uniformly positive influence, since this first girlfriend was “egging” him on in a negative way. The quote also demonstrates the importance of his own cognitive shifts in discarding the prior girlfriend, getting a new girlfriend who would be more likely to be a positive influence and discarding all his old friends.

Other respondents describe how romantic partners have helped them become more prosocial. Sean and Gina, both 22 years old, have been dating for over five years and have been
living together for three. Sean specifically says that his girlfriend gave him an “extra little push that I didn’t have” to go to college and notes that Gina:

…helped me become…a better man… a better person inside and out. And I don’t know where I would, what I would be doing. I don’t know if I would be, you know, be doing stupid little stuff like a lot of my friends are still doing…running the streets, still living with your mom at home. You know? Borrowing three bucks from everybody just so you can go buy a 40 ounce. You know? Just, just a lot of stuff that you see nowadays. You know? I don’t know what I would be doing…I know I definitely wouldn’t be going to college {LAUGH}. So, it’s very important to me. She’s helped me get my life on track a little… Not saying that it was off. But just, yeah, skip that…because that sounds like I was on the wrong path. She just cleaned the windows on the train a little. You know what I’m saying? So, she just let me see a better… [0602]

Sean thinks that he would be running the streets, drinking, and not in college if it was not for Gina. In fact, he says that she “made me grow up a little quicker.” It is obvious that emerging adults notice positive changes in their mindset throughout dating experiences. Additionally, the positive influence regarding attending college is indirectly affecting Sean’s delinquent activities. This shows that the partner can play an influential role in helping minimize delinquency by stressing prosocial goals like educational attainment.

Twenty-year-old Raymond has been dating Ashanti, 21, for a total of five years with a one year break in the middle. Two years ago, Raymond got in trouble with the law and recalls Ashanti’s role in helping him through that tough time:

She was kind of telling me the right way to go- like stuff I do and don’t need to do as far as hanging out around the streets. Like staying out all night and hanging out…hanging with the wrong crowd too long. Something was bound to happen. Every little thing [she did] made it stronger, so it just got better over time. [1048]

Sean and Raymond express specific mechanisms of partner influence. Sean suggests that Gina has made him “grow up quicker” and essentially suggests that he needs a partner to keep him off the streets and on track with traditional adult-like behaviors. Raymond addresses particular ways in which his girlfriend has helped him progress throughout his relationship. She highlights the
importance of minimizing his time with the “wrong crowd” and avoid staying out too late. These are more ‘everyday’ ways in which the romantic partner influences the other’s behavior. Recall Warr’s (1998) study finding marriage is only a desister because, once married, people spend less time with friends (especially delinquent friends). In this case, Raymond’s girlfriend is influencing his time with delinquent friends. Quotes from Sean and Raymond illustrate the fact that respondents acknowledge their need for a partner with a positive influence and note positive life changes as the dating experience progresses.

Prior to his current romantic relationship, Doug was in trouble with the law for possession of marijuana, attempting to sell and drug paraphernalia. The 20-year-old speaks candidly about his girlfriend of three years:

She keeps me in line. Before I got with her I was just like all out and about and then partying. Not thinking about nothing. Now I think of the future. I think about myself and just to do things the right way. She really keeps me [in line], not keeps me but lets me know when I’m out of line. So now I got to go and check myself and stuff… [She did] not just [help me] figure it out but make me see that, you know, ‘cause I knew I had choices and stuff, but now I’m just like… I want to do it more, because I got somebody in my life now. Someone waiting for me to do stuff. [1288]

Similar to Doug, many respondents express feelings of partnership paired with future goals. The above quote additionally demonstrates that respondents express the need for prosocial influence. Doug’s romantic partner gives him a reason to change. Compared to the previous quote from Raymond, Doug speaks about the mechanisms of partner influence in a more broad and long-term way. The fact that Doug has “somebody in [his] life now” who is “waiting for [him] to do stuff” expresses the feeling of companionship and a reason to change in a more positive direction.

Attributing prosocial behaviors to that of partner influence can occur even though the influencing partner is significantly younger than the delinquent. Brian, 23, has been dating
Britney for two years, and he is five years her senior. Despite this age difference, Brian says “she keeps me out of trouble” and “I don’t get in fights like I did before” [0707]. Brian acknowledges the fact that he has matured throughout the time he has been dating Britney even though she is much younger.

Though rare, female respondents do suggest that they have ceased delinquent activity since dating their current partner. Eighteen-year-old Shelly is currently going through an unplanned pregnancy, because she was not taking birth control pills on a regular basis. She says that, through the support of her boyfriend, she has not participated in gang activity, fighting, drinking or getting high since they began their relationship. Currently she has high hopes of finishing school and becoming a nurse. She says that Brad “hated” when she got into fights and made her realize the detrimental effects of smoking:

Like he would tell me like you don’t need to do that. You don’t need to smoke or whatever. He would… tell me, you know, ‘just look at everybody else and how they are. You don’t want to be like that. You don’t need to smoke and you’re going to get old and you know your face is going to start getting wrinkly. You don’t need to look old…’ He was basically trying to help me out. [0954]

This quote expresses the ways in which partners can “lecture” respondents about delinquent activity and help cease that behavior.

At times, partners have a positive effect through their influence on the respondents’ choice of companions rather than lecturing about negative consequences as Shelly’s partner above. Seventeen-year-old Anne recently moved in with her 22-year-old boyfriend. They have been dating for almost one year, and she suggests that:

He wants like the best for me. He wants me to go to college. Um he’s like- some of the friends that I have like weren’t really like the good crowd [because we would smoke marijuana and drink], so he was like you know, ‘you know you shouldn’t really be hanging out with them. They’re not good for you.’ So I think he had a good affect on me. [1124]
Anne’s boyfriend helped her realize that she was hanging out with the wrong crowd. Her partner realizes that her companions not only affect her level of delinquency but also have a broad, indirect effect on her education since he “wants the best” for her, including attending college. This quote brings us to another domain in which partners can also have a heavy influence: education and financial/careers.

**Education and Financial/Career**

Many respondents indicate that the partner helps with career goals and objectives. Indeed this is more common than the direct assault on drinking and other antisocial behaviors. Twenty-two-year-olds Cameron and Julie have been together for over three years. Marriage pressures from family have made the couple decide not to live together any longer. Despite this recent change, the two remain romantically involved and claim that living together was just “too much too soon.” When asked about how their relationship has affected him, Cameron says: “She kept me straight. I mean I have a really good, steady job” [1314]. Many emerging adults attribute their own successes to the presence of their romantic partner. This quote expresses the idea that having a steady job is a positive aspect of his life and somehow attributes that to the partner.

There are many other positive responses toward partner-motivation regarding careers and education. Aaron, 20, and Lisa, 18, have been dating for seven months and recently moved in together. When asked what he has learned from the relationship, he replies:

I guess so far as sticking [to] my priorities and taking care of stuff I need to take care of. I guess just handle my business as far as whether it be bills or anything else. Well, she tries to motivate me to go and do this and take classes, whether it be work, she motivates me to go to work here and there, whether it be anything that I need to take care of. She tries to make sure that I stay on top of it even though I fade away some times. [1315]
Aaron acknowledges the fact that he can “fade away” at times and expresses the need for his partner to help “motivate” and “stick to priorities” like bill paying, classes and work.

Twenty-two-year-old Rebecca has been dating 24-year-old Joshua for over a year and a half. She suggests that she has become more responsible because she dates Joshua:

Oh gosh! He [helps me out] - especially with me getting into New York [fashion school] and stuff. He is very career driven. Very responsible. And I’ve seen just through dating him, how much more responsible I’ve become. Like 100% almost more. [0400]

This quote represents multiple ways in which partners can be a source of influence. Joshua models positive behaviors like being career driven and responsible. Rebecca says that, because of Joshua, she does not skip classes or “get drunk anymore.” Joshua has helped her with her resume and even talks to her about the social aspects of professional people. These mechanisms of influence are quite specific.

Another way in which the narratives highlight partner influence are some respondents’ claims that they are currently helping their partner realize life goals and emphasize prosocial attitudes. Seventeen-year-old Ebony has been living in a high risk environment for her entire life. Most of her family members are crack addicts with little or no education or legitimate employment. Despite her surroundings, Ebony places a strong emphasis on education and future goals. In fact, she refuses to be a “statistic” and does not want to be “stuck in neutral.” She says:

Everybody can straighten up, but don’t mess up and just stay there. Just stuck on staying there in neutral. Why? For what? You’re not gonna get no where. I’m like- I can’t be with you if you’re in neutral, and I’m in drive all the way. I’m pressing the gas and I’m accelerating as far as I can go…I know if he [boyfriend Reggie] messed up- it’s like skating on thin ice with me, because I have a life, and you’re not gonna mess it up…So I sit down and talk to him one night and I say ‘you need not to become a statistic.’ …’cause he’s done [sic] got in trouble with Juvey [sic] [in the past]. He didn’t have to just go get in trouble, change schools and not do nothing with your life. You need to- I told him like- ‘okay you need to get a state identification. So, you can at least be ID’d here, other than your social security number, because that’s what we all are anyways. Get a picture ID other
than your school ID.’ So he got that and then I said ‘go to school. Go to school. Get that diploma. No matter what you think, [you] gotta have that diploma.’ I’m telling him that and he’s like ‘okay.’ If you don’t do that, you’ll be a statistic. So when you apply for jobs, it’s like- [the employer would say] ‘Oh no. Not by his record.’ I said, ‘I don’t want you to become that.’ I know I don’t want to become that. [0779]

This quote emphasizes that despite living in a high risk environment and having a troubled past, Reggie is still receiving a positive influence from Ebony. Her lecture style is similar to the lecturing seen in Shelly’s boyfriend Brad in the above section. Recall that Brad lectures Shelly on the detrimental effects of smoking. This illustrates that the romantic partner can be a positive influence despite the negative influences of living in a high risk and criminal environment.

Additionally, positive influences may be more needed in hazardous environments.

More importantly, Ebony suggests that her boyfriend is a reflection on herself indicated by such words as “being on thin ice with me” and “I have a life and you aren’t going to mess it up.” The quote is important because her language has such intensity that we know that she is talking about her boyfriend and not a friend. Ebony wants to help her boyfriend not only for his sake, but because the boyfriend is a reflection of herself. This is yet another example of how specific mechanisms of change can indirectly influence delinquency. For example, Ebony’s suggestions of getting an ID, going to school and applying for jobs can indirectly affect level of delinquency.

As mentioned earlier, though most respondents mention prosocial partner influences on education and finances, there are still a few who are influenced in a non-prosocial way. When asked about how her relationship has affected her, twenty-one-year-old Liz says:

I’m happy. I mean, I’m not typically a happy person, but now I’m like, I’m always happy. I mean, it has affected me. I’ve taken away from schoolwork a little bit to hang out with him, but I mean, at the same time, I am very happy. [0282]
This statement suggests that, for some emerging adults, current happiness is possibly more important than traditional educational endeavors. Though Liz is broadly speaking about “taking away from schoolwork,” her comment is followed by the word “but” suggesting that she acknowledges that the relationship is not entirely positive. Similarly, twenty-year-old Eric reminisces about the beginning of his relationship with Jennifer:

Um, at first we were a little iffy about [the relationship]. It’s hard because she was going to school, had to work a full time job to support herself. I lived with my parents and didn’t have to do nothing. Um, I would probably say that I pushed a little more for [our relationship] than her. Um, as we went on and on, conflicts such as her, like my time with her, versus her time with her friends, you know, became a problem because… you know, I would become jealous. Not like mean jealous but I would feel bad you know, I wanted to be with my girlfriend and she had to split time between work, school, and her friends and me, you know. [0905]

He continues and suggests that Jennifer took time away from college to be with him:

Um, she doesn’t attend college anymore. She actually kind of gave it up for me…I did not ask her for this, but she had to give up something because of time. She can’t give up work and she chose me over her schooling at that particular time. She’s going back there soon as well, but at the time, she decided I’m more important. I don’t know if it’s selfish or not, but I’m very happy that she made that decision.

Now that the two are engaged, Eric and Jennifer plan on going back to school, but in the mean time, they both work at a local pet store. The above quotes show that relationships can be fluid. In other words, priorities may change and romantic partners can influence each other in antisocial directions at some points and prosocial directions at other times, especially as the relationship evolves.

**Pregnancy**

Pregnancy is an obvious way in which a respondent can be influenced by a partner. Among the 92 interviewed respondents, twenty-two report having at least one child or are
currently pregnant. Some are currently with the same partner who conceived the child, while others are no longer dating and have varying degrees of contact with the ex-partner. Studying respondents’ views of the impact of pregnancy on life goals, dating behavior and attitudes is very important since these emerging adults are involved in a traditionally adult-like role-- parenthood.

Eighteen-year-old Shayna [0041] is eight months pregnant and says that her three-year old “…relationship [with Jackson] changed, because at first he didn’t want to work. After I told him [I was pregnant] he jumped up and found a job and that’s basically it. That is really the only thing that changed.” When asked whether or not she and Jackson would still be together if it were not for the baby, she says “I don’t know. I don’t think we would [be together]…because we argued too much even before I got pregnant.” Despite this apprehension, Shayna says that she and Jackson will be getting an apartment together and that the relationship means “everything” to her because of “the baby.” These quotes emphasize the impact that pregnancy has on the relationship status because Shayna thinks they would not be together if she did not get pregnant.

Unplanned pregnancies like Shayna’s are prevalent throughout the TARS data. Jim has a baby on the way and seems nervous about being a father and staying with his girlfriend:

She wants for us to be together and like, she wants… I’m not ready to start a family or nothing. I’m only nineteen and that’s what she’s thinking, you know… well, I mean… she wants us to be like a family, like mom [and] dad… I mean, I guess it’s really up to me [if we’ll stay together] because I know, I know what she wants already. [0650]

Additionally, Jim reflects on previous encounters with police, drugs and the court system:

I mean it’s behind me, because I grew up a lot. But I mean, I have to grow up now though… because of the baby. I’m about to have a baby. I’m trying to get a better job so I can get my own house and just settle down.
Jim acknowledges that he has agency in how the relationship will evolve and proceed. For now, he agrees that he must get a better job and “grow up because of the baby” but has much apprehension about being a part of the “family.”

Twenty-one-year-old Cherise recalls her pregnancy:

Well once I became pregnant with her, it was kind of a rough thing. I guess we both need to grow up here, and he’s a lot older than me [by nine years], and he still didn’t want to grow up, so that’s when I kind of knew that I had to move on. And I knew I didn’t want her in that situation. She needed better than that, so it was time to go. [0160]

Additionally, having the unplanned pregnancy made Cherise “realize” that Kevin was “violent” and “never took care of the bills.” Shayna, Jim and Cherise’s quotes show that emerging adults come to “realize” adulthood upon pregnancy, even though it may be unplanned. Shayna’s boyfriend and Jim both sought jobs and all three recognized the need for “growing up.”

Eighteen-year-old Anne is nervous about being a parent and thinks she is “too young.” However, she claims that the pregnancy “brought us closer” and “we spend more time together” and “I’m closer with his family now. Especially his mom, she didn’t like me because we argued too much. But now, I’m closer with her so it’s kind of nice.” Anne recalls “skipping school” and dropping out during her freshman year to be with her boyfriend. She says “now, I’m pretty much in this situation [pregnant],” and she will be getting her GED. She talks about her boyfriend who used to date many girls at once before her pregnancy:

Like, he needed to grow up and straighten his life out because he’s going to have a kid and get his stuff together. Seeing another girl is just going to make us argue. Why would he do that? [0684]

This quote demonstrates the fact that Anne realized that her boyfriend needed to “grow up,” “straighten his life out” and “get his stuff together” after getting pregnant. Anne’s quote
emphasizes the finding discussed by the previous three respondents: having a baby is a queue to
“grow up” and perform as a parent and adult.

Not only do female emerging adults express the need for their partners to “grow up” once
having a child. Jaylon reflects on his recent fatherhood and where he will be in the future:

I was thinking about [the future], you know what I’m saying, ‘cause them classes
start. They start over, and I’m gonna go over there and check it out. And so I
ain’t, I ain’t made that step yet. You know what I’m saying? But I been thinking
about it. ‘Cause I know my son, my kids is gonna need me to do something with
my life so I can help them. But, I was thinking about that. I was thinking about
going to that, umm, Life Skills school too though. [1144]

Attending school seems to be a huge step for Jaylon, but he acknowledges that education courses
would be a worthwhile endeavor. In fact, Jaylon thinks that his kids “need me to do something
with my life” and that he needs to “help them.” He additionally expresses the need for life-skills
courses. Jaylon, like many others, forges a link between education and parenthood. This link
suggests that parenthood is a distinct form of influence.

Madison, another respondent, speaks about the ways in which the relationship has
positively changed since becoming pregnant:

I would probably say that it got more serious because there’s no more
[negativity]. There’s more talk of positive things. Basically, there’s no thing
doing without the other. Like… you’re not doing this without me. We’re talking
more of a teamwork kind of thing. [1315]

The use of “teamwork” in this quote shows that some romantic partners help each other navigate
through life-changing experiences like pregnancy. In particular, Madison mentions “more talk of
positive things” and experiencing things together. However, in general, most respondents
suggest the need for one partner to “grow up” in order to perform parental duties.


**Dating Profiles**

Although the above quotes and analyses highlight the role of the partner as a source of influence there is much variability within the sample and across the life course in the role of the partner and in the approach to the relationship. This represents essentially ‘snapshot’ of one partner’s influence, but it is also important to explore variability across the sample in the nature and extent of partner influence. In the context of the romantic history narratives, TARS respondents were given the opportunity to reference past romantic relationships and note progression throughout previous relationships. This section acknowledges the fact that there are many dating profiles that can add to previous research on romantic relationships. For clarity, I have organized these profiles under three main types: never dating, current non-dating (but have dated in the past), and current dating. Each type includes various profiles of typical dating behavior.

*Never Dating*  Although most respondents have dated in the past or are currently dating, a small subset has never dated. Of the 92 total respondents, five females and five males indicate that they have never dated. Their ages vary between 17 and 21 years old. Six of the ten non-daters directly relate their non-dating lifestyle to various educational goals. Three mention other factors that have an impact: weight, shyness and extreme independence. One respondent seems uniquely detached from the dating world and cannot give a specific reason for his impassiveness.

Some refuse to date because they believe that dating will interfere with important goals such as high school graduation. When asked about her dating experiences, Asia, a high school senior says:

> I have close friends and no boyfriends. I was mainly trying to stick to my school work. My model is that, that my mom and them taught me was that your
education is priceless. It’s for free. Get all you can get. The boys are always going to be there. They’re not going anywhere. I have friends, but that is too much stress to have a boyfriend. It really is. [0107]

When asked about her friends’ perspective on education and dating, “most of them all are like ‘my education is now, you know everything else can wait. I have to make a future for myself.’”

She recalls a time when she was being pursued by a boy but:

…he wasn’t type of boy to be involved with because I don’t like people who drink. I don’t like people who smoke. I don’t like people who are very aggressive and violent and he kind of fitted in all those categories and I don’t want to get involved with somebody that one day might take my life because somebody is trying to threaten theirs. You know?

This is one of many responses where adolescents associated current dating experiences with their future. Additionally the quote represents the indirect effects of associating with delinquent activity.

Many mention being “busy with school” [1012] and aspirations to finish college before dating. Andrew, another high school senior, fears that dating would be a distraction:

I’d become more pre [occupied] err no. I’d become more interested in pleasing her than keeping my own needs, because I tend to be like that. I tend to think of other people before myself and you know- I would get so caught up in just pleasing her and I might miss out on an important date where I was supposed to turn something into somebody. I’d miss a deadline to turn in my applications or something like that…. I’m just not interested right now. You know, I just want to get through college first, and get my degree and stuff before I settle down. [0328]

Harith, a high school senior, attributes his non-dating lifestyle to his Muslim faith which emphasizes courtship. Based on his faith, Harith was able to begin the process of meeting young women once he reached puberty. Those of the Muslim faith are able to meet women as long as a father and brother are present at the meeting. As the interviewer notes, Harith’s mustache is a sure sign that he is quite physically mature. It is interesting to note that he is personally not interested in beginning the courtship process “…because I want to finish [high] school first”
Despite the prominence of his religious faith, educational goals are still a major factor in Harith’s courtship process.

After being asked why she has never had a boyfriend, a college freshman responds “because I have goals in my life, and I figured that having a boyfriend is probably just going to slow me down” [0167]. Another 21-year-old girl always thought that the typical one-week relationships in middle school and high school were “pointless” and is a reason why she does not date. She mentions that “…like now, yes I’m like- I kind of would like to date, but you know, it’s just like my school is more important right now” [0197]. This apprehension about dating is prevalent throughout some interviews, suggesting that for some who have never dated, these respondents assume dating will interfere with life goals like educational attainment. This assumption is interesting because we see that emerging adults who do date also mention positive life changes as a response.

Four of the ten respondents who have never dated attribute their non-dating lifestyle to other unique factors rather than educational goals. Kayla, a recent high school graduate mentions that:

I’m just like because a lot of boys nowadays, what they can do they for me that I can’t do for myself? So I feel like if I find somebody that can bring to the plate maybe then we’ll date. [1155]

Kayla’s strong independence from dating is unique within the data. She additionally recalls her mother telling her two years ago that she was not old enough to date. She suggests that, because of her personal conviction with God, she refuses to go to Homecoming Dances, Prom or other parties. Her strong religious affiliation prompts her to be heavily involved in her church and has a close group of friends who do the same. Kayla’s quote illustrates how some emerging adults seek out specific types of partners consistent with their parents’ wishes. Additionally, the quote
represents Arnett’s assumption that emerging adults are caught between being adults and adolescents since Kayla is supervised by her mother but still is looking for an adult-like relationship.

One 21-year-old male respondent is a self-proclaimed non-dater, which he attributes to his extreme shyness [0804]. Similarly, a 20-year-old waitress attributes her non-dating lifestyle to self-consciousness about her weight:

That’s the main issue. It’s just I can’t over it. Like I can’t feel comfortable. I can’t be like the flirtatious girl all over these guys because I’m like thinking, you know, ‘what are they thinking of me?’ You know, I think too much. I think that’s my problem. [0141]

A high school senior respondent simply has no idea why he has never dated and unenthusiastically says “things just don’t fall into place” [0114]. Broadly speaking, he seems quite apathetic about the dating world. Additionally, regarding relationships in general, he mentions that couples should break up if they will not be attending the same college because they will be meeting a lot of new people. This particular thought process is not unique to the dataset. In fact, plenty of respondents who have dated in the past indicate college as a distinctive time to meet new people. As will be discussed later, these respondents believe that being involved in a romantic relationship which began in high school will detract from this crucial social experience.

It is interesting to note the salience of goals and education within the unique group of individuals who have never dated. Directly connecting single status with educational goals seems to be an important factor in the non-dating world. However, some may argue that response bias is at play: single status is actually not a “choice” as these respondents claim. Perhaps they use a prosocial value as an excuse for their lack of dating experiences. These particular respondents may be ‘geeks’ or ‘loners’ who seem unattractive as a partner. However, additional qualitative data indicate that educational goals are salient for those who have dated in
the past but are not currently dating. Furthermore, those who are currently involved in a romantic relationship indicate how the relationship is positively coupled with educational and prosocial goals.

*Current Non-Dating* Since researchers generally emphasize the role of relationships in youth development (Youniss and Smollar 1984), this relational focus often neglects the notion that refusing to be in a relationship can actually be a positive learning experience. Thus, recognizing that a given romantic partner is not supportive or a good influence, and taking steps to end the relationship, is a somewhat underappreciated facet of the maturation process. As suggested above, most methodological strategies focus only on a current or most recent relationship, which leaves “current non-daters” responses and learning experiences while not in a relationship less well understood/explored.

The data show that 82 of the 92 respondents have had at least one dating experience. More specifically, 48 are currently dating and 34 have had at least one dating experience in the past but are currently not dating. Therefore, approximately one-third of the respondents have acknowledged dating in the past but at the time of the interview are not dating. This “dating profile” is sociologically interesting because respondents have the opportunity to reflect upon past experiences and think about “ideal” future dating behaviors and partners based on those past experiences. As 19-year-old Anthony claims “It is tough to do an autopsy on past relationships.” In some cases their responses seem to be an “excuse” for not being in a relationship. In most cases, their responses are supported by actual experiences that play a key role in previous break ups; these respondents have detailed experiences heavily influencing their responses and views of these past event. I will focus on these particular responses. Current non-daters most often
reflect upon four main explanations for breaking up or being single: 1.) educational goals and prosocial behaviors 2.) the desire to meet new people 3.) delinquency/crime and 4.) partner anti-social attributes.

**Educational Goals and Other Prosocial Behaviors**

Some respondents broke up with a significant other because of educational goals. A female respondent with a learning disability recently quit dating her boyfriend to catch up with school work in hopes of attending a local community college. “Ahh, it [the relationship] stopped because I don’t want a boyfriend now that I’m studying. I want a clear mind [laughs]” [0240]. When asked why he is not currently dating, 18-year-old Jamal replies “I’m worried about school” [0703]. Ashley, a girl of the same age said she learned responsibility from her last relationship. In fact, her boyfriend wants her to get her unsatisfactory grades up, and until then, they are broken up [0731]. Brandy has dated two boys in the past and suggests that she currently is not dating because she has aspirations to be a nurse and wants “to be into school more than [into] boys” [0158]. This focus on schoolwork is highly apparent among current non-daters; most think that dating will detract from a higher priority- school.

Eighteen-year-old Shawn just recently broke up a four month relationship with his very first girlfriend Mandy. He reflects upon the breakup:

I had a lot with school and with working and stuff and all that. And she went back to school to get her GED and a job too, and her kid, and basically just life got in the way—a lot of it. We’re still friends… but as for relationship wise, we’re pretty much over. [0605]

This response shows that some of the younger emerging adults enmesh other life experiences like careers and children with educational goals, mirroring Arnett’s (1998) description of emerging adulthood. In other words, educational priorities are not the *only* deciding factors for
breaking up for some early emerging adults. This will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

Twenty-two-year-old Laura [0874] says that she is not currently dating because of priorities: her son and work. She even broke up a relationship last year because both she and her partner decided they were both too busy with other priorities. Mike [1222] also does not want to date because of time constraints and “my focus now is with my family” instead of dating. Since the recent passing of his father, he helps take care of 11 brothers and sisters.

Meeting new people

“Meeting new people” is another recurring theme among many emerging adults. Plenty of high school romantic relationships dissolve because of future anticipated social experiences while away at college. Others mention college as a “stepping stone” to get over the emotional toll from a high school breakup. A sophomore at Miami University [0019] broke up with his past two girlfriends specifically to meet other friends. He spoke candidly about his freshman year experiences of drinking, partying and casual sex, including one night stands. Jeremy, 21, recalls breaking up with a high school girlfriend Ashley because the two would be attending college soon. He says:

But you’re at a different school with a lot more people, I mean you might as well break up because, you know, something might happen and you’re going to meet other people, because we were hanging out with different people. So we thought we would be better off if we start off the year broken up and if we wanted to get back together we could but we just wanted to keep our options open for both of us. [0548]

Jeremy is quite fond of Ashley and the two remain friends. He notes that they will not be reconciling their romantic relationship, because each has ambitions to live in separate cities. The two were a close pair during high school, but since then, their priorities have changed. Looking
toward the future and realizing that each have separate goals is a reason for not continuing the relationship.

For many early emerging adults, college is not only a time to pursue educational goals, but to break free from high school ties and meet new people. This anticipation is a recurring theme among high school graduates and early college students. Nineteen-year-old Brian needed “space” from his ex-girlfriend and felt that the only way to meet new friends from other high schools was to break up with her. Nick broke up a two-year serious relationship because his girlfriend was cheating. Regarding the breakup, he says “She can just go live her life, and I’m gonna go live mine. I’m gonna be starting college and just moving on. So, I can, I’ll find someone new.” This quote illustrates that some look positively towards the future and not refuse to let negative past experiences dampen future dating efforts.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, some respondents cherish their own independence more than a relationship. In fact, a 22-year-old suggests she broke up with her boyfriend of three years because “I’m just too young and I rather have a good career and experience with traveling and stuff than being tied down to someone.” She felt pressure from him to be more serious than she wanted to be. Many others want to enjoy being single and not be “tied down.” Christine is a junior at University of Toledo studying Mayan social thought and linguistics. Regarding Blake, she says she is “trying to decide if I actually like him as like a boyfriend.” Later, she continues and says:

I need to have somebody that’s kind of like at my level. You know what I mean? Like where we’re kind of at the same stage in life with going to school and everything. Blah, blah, blah. [But] he’s [Blake] like working at a factory so I kind of feel like ‘duh!’ You know what I mean?

Despite the fact that Christine would rather be looking for a man with more education and a more prestigious career, she enjoys having him as a “friend with benefits.” Additionally, she
says: “I mean, I’m only like 21 years old. I don’t feel like doing quote unquote marriage right now. I like to go out and have fun and not be tied down with somebody.” Another respondent says “I mean, I can have friends and, you know, have fun with friends and do stuff with other people not needing to be like tied down [in a relationship]” [0772]. This suggests that some emerging adults are simply not the prosocial seeking adults that researchers hypothesize occurs throughout the end of emerging adulthood. This “player” profile, though rare, is indeed found among some respondents. Continual “hanging out” and party behaviors suggests that they are indeed sexually high risk emerging adults.

**Delinquency**

After an analysis of all interviews, more female respondents break off ties with delinquent males than the other way around. Jenna and Shayna, five years apart, dissolved relationships based on their partner’s delinquent activities. These two respondents acknowledge that they personally needed to break free from their significant other. Twenty-two-year-old Jenna broke up an engagement a couple of months ago because of her fiancée’s behavior. On top of being kicked out of Army training, he became physically abusive and emotionally manipulative within the first seven months of their two year relationship. She is thankful for her friends from a campus organization who “lifted [her] up on a good step” [0341] and made her realize that she needed to leave the relationship. One year after breaking up, 17-year-old Shayna says they broke up “because he’s not right. Like- he likes to drink [underage]. So [when] he drinks, he act a fool! He’ll… come by every holiday drunk! Easter, Christmas, Thanksgiving, drunk!” [0810]. A detailed analysis of these interviews indicates that females often dissolve relationships based on the delinquent behavior of their partner.
Delinquent males tend to seek out prosocial partners; but, most often, females are ending the relationship. Though four years separate the two, Steven and Jerry’s delinquency led to relationship dissolutions. Interestingly enough, both seek to continue the relationship with their prosocial partner. Seventeen-year-old Steven talks about his ex-girlfriend Chantell:

She was encouraging me to stay out of trouble, go to school…uh…every time I was in school, making sure I stayed in school. If I didn’t stay in school, you know, she’d get mad. All that. Texting me while I’m in class to make sure I’m in class. Texting me on the phone, you know. Making sure I’m in class. All that. Making…that was back when I was smoking weed…didn’t want me to smoke weed. None of that. She was, she was very…you know, she was good. [0759]

Steven just recently finished a 10 month jail sentence and just lost a short-lived job at Big Boy. Currently, he is crushed because Chantell did not make any contact with him during his sentence and Chantell claims she is pregnant with his baby. Steven claims that their relationship was “everything” to him and no other girl compares to Chantell. This may suggest that some emerging adults like Chantell “give up” on attempting to influence a delinquent partner in a prosocial way. Twenty-one-year-old Jim [1243] was recently dumped by his girlfriend because of a jail sentence for selling marijuana. Despite the fact that she refused to stand by him through the situation, Jim still wants her to have his baby. He claims she has her head on her shoulders and likes her because she is career woman who attends a local college. Thus seeking out prosocial partners is a recurrent theme, but partners may also recognize the negative effect on them and thus fail to maintain the relationship with a more troubled partner.

**Antisocial Attributes**

Twenty year old Julie dated 19-year-old Tommy for a year and half, but since his recent move to Florida for Navy training, the two are not together. Julie looks back on their relationship and mentions that:
…it’s gotten to the point where I don’t like the way he spends his money. I don’t like his drinking habits or his smoking habits or anything like that and it’s just gotten to the point where nothing’s progressing anymore, and I can’t- I’m not big on that. [0040]

This is a clear example of how one partner’s non-prosocial behaviors contribute heavily to the end of the relationship. Twenty-year old Sheila has a 7-month-old baby but does not talk to the father anymore. She thought he would be more responsible with fatherhood and is convinced that she “attracts morons”, “cheaters”, and “gold diggers” [0104]. Sheila’s negative attitude towards men seems to have been learned through so many negative experiences with antisocial partners.

Meghann, 22 years old, is currently not dating anyone but has a long dating history. In the past, she has dated men over ten years her senior and has had many “friends with benefits.” She is currently working at a Party Store and attending college to become a paralegal. When asked about what she wants in a boyfriend, she says

They have to have a future. They have to have a job like some sort of future. Like, Jack [ex-boyfriend] works at the cigarette store and he has no ambition to get the hell out of there. And that’s something that I could never stand. So yeah some sort of future like a steady job or going to college for a steady job. Um yeah, not working at a cigarette store for the rest of your life. [0468]

This shows that despite having a “player” identity, there are still some prosocial and life goal seeking aspects that players process. Respondents like Meghann prove that emerging adulthood may be a time of conflicting prosocial and antisocial behaviors/attitudes.

Similarly, 20-year-old James was caught cheating on his ex-girlfriend Stacy almost ten times, obviously making him a sexually high risk youth. When asked about his cheating, James claims that:

Stacy always had like money problems. And the fact that she had a job but it was like she got a car and she always getting tickets or like she couldn’t afford insurance. It was like she had like a problem. And I was so young I felt like
‘damn why do I always have to deal with her problems?’ You know what I’m saying? Always have to cope with her problems. And then I would meet this other girl and she’s working and going to school and like me and she’s got everything going for her so I’m like I rather spend my time with her because it’s just less stress.

James is currently “talking” to various girls and mentions one in particular:

We’re dating, but we’re not together. Put it this way: I see her everyday, but we’re not together. We’re not boyfriend-girlfriend. The only reason that is because I work a lot and I go to school and I got a lot of things going on, so I don’t even have time. [0477]

These quotes represent conflicting prosocial and antisocial attitudes occurring throughout emerging adulthood. James cheated on Stacy apparently because their relationship was stressed by her delinquent driving record and financial problems. Being attracted to his new “semi-girlfriend” seems to be a positive step in the right direction as adulthood approaches.

The role of the ex-partner can be concurrently positive and negative, proving the complexity of romantic relationships. Sara reflects on a one-month relationship she had last year that fizzled out once summer began. She depicts her ex-boyfriend as very strange, a person who liked Black Magic and talked about “blowing kids up” [0629], both of which are reasons she no longer talks to him. It is interesting to note, however, that she herself used to burn her wrists with an eraser but has not done so since this boyfriend said he would break up with her if she continued. This shows that antisocial partners are not always influencing in an antisocial way.

There is more evidence that there are some positives aspects from relationships which ended because of an antisocial partner. Some miss “love” and “romance” from previous relationships with antisocial partners and at the same time express concern over future prospects. Twenty-year-old Lani is still lamenting over a three-year relationship with Samuel that ended over four years ago. She misses their strong friendship and romance but knows that he was bad for her. They have been through many ups and downs including sleeping in a car because their
families did not want them to be together. Lani says that Samuel never got a job and stayed at her grandmother’s house for free and eventually became physically abusive. These negative aspects of the relationship eventually lead to their breakup. She claims that “I’ve never grown to love nobody else like I’ve loved him. He was my very first major boyfriend, my very first everything” [0848]. Additionally, she is afraid to be hurt again. “I have not had a nice, level headed guy with common sense that has a job approach me ever, I don’t think. I’m starting to wonder if there’s any out there.” This depressive attitude toward future prospects is rare but still noteworthy.

Current Dating It is important to analyze current dating experiences from the perspective of the relationships history narratives, because these data indicate that respondents draw on, learn from, and in effect “fold” earlier relationships into their current choices and conduct. Respondents show they gain appreciation for their romantic partner and often times compare and contrast their current experiences to prior sets of experiences. More often than not, respondents are more likely to reflect upon the self as more positive now than in the past.

Twenty-one-year-old Sammy says that two specific relationships were “stepping stones” in his life. Sammy mentions that he thought he would be a “gigolo forever” and was proud to say that he dated between four to seven girls at one time and cheated multiple times. Until his ex-girlfriend Trish cheated on him, Sammy did not realize how much his actions could have hurt others.

I just started to wake up and see, like [I] did that [cheated on] to so many people. How could [I] be mad? I mean, I was like, oh man. So, when [Trish] did me like that I prayed, and it was just like magic how [Michelle] just appeared. It wasn’t like the next day or something, but everything that I prayed for, for what I wanted in a girl…it’s in her. She was sent to me. So that’s why I can’t [cheat and have one night stand and party anymore], I just don’t…it was easy for me to give up
everything else [cheating and partying]. It was easy. Don’t get me wrong. I still miss it. I mean, it’s still, I still go out from time to time and go out to the clubs and stuff. And now I get to the point where girls flirt with me a lot, and to me that’s enough. Like, that’s fine with me. You know? I don’t have to date you. I don’t have to have sex with you. I don’t have to be with you. If you want to go to the club, if you want to dance, if you want to flirt, and you know just be all in love with me, that’s cool with me. But, just know that once I leave this club, you are nothing; you are just somebody who I was able to deal with here and, you know, talk and have a couple drinks, have a good time. But, nobody can take [Michelle’s] place. Nobody. I don’t even think that if something was to happen to her, I would never marry. But that’s how serious I am about her. [0345]

His previous girlfriends have taught him to manage money and to “have fun.” His current girlfriend, Michelle, is three years his junior and pregnant with his baby. Sammy prides Michelle on being independent. He mentions that his previous girlfriends were lazy and could never hold a job more than two weeks. This quote shows the level of maturity and growth from adolescent dating to dating in emerging adulthood.

Twenty-two-year-old Alexis says a previous two year relationship ended because her boyfriend Dave was not motivated in school and “addicted to porn.” Additionally, he was “not supportive about my job” and “pessimistic” [0505]. Dave, four years her senior, did not have the motivation and educational goals that she wanted in a partner. Despite dating her current boyfriend for only three months, Alexis says that the relationship is serious because they “both have the same life long goals.” In her near future she sees “marriage and family… I hope I see myself with William [current boyfriend] still and happy. Three to five years we might be living in Florida [and] getting my PhD.” She describes her boyfriend as “goal oriented, motivated and optimistic.” In fact he is receiving his master’s degree in a few months. These quotes show that emerging adults connect their partner’s prosocial attributes with positive lifelong goals.

Nineteen-year-old Matthew says that the romantic relationship he has with Jillian has made him grow up and become much more responsible and less lazy. He has been saving money
for an engagement ring and for classes at a community college, but the pair recently had a baby together. Matthew reflects on fatherhood at such a young age and says that at first he was “mad” about the unplanned pregnancy because he was so “young and…had just started school.” It is interesting to note that when asked about his future with Jillian he says:

My partying days are about over anyways. I ain’t getting fucked up. I ain’t gonna get fucked up to the point where I can’t even speak around anybody. I just kinda stay in my own little world or whatever. So it’s not even fun. Like, you used to go to the parties to get drunk and be around people. And now it’s not as fun. So I don’t even bother. [0730]

Matthew suggests that he thinks this is a good time to “grow up” quickly. He reassures himself that he can be more mature and can leave the partying behavior behind. In fact, the quote suggests that he knows that having a child assumes more responsibility and links to prosocial behavior. Having a child during emerging adulthood complicates dating and other behaviors.

Twenty-one-year-old Jessica recalls the breakup of a previous relationship:

I broke up with him. I just wanted to. Like I just wanted to pull things together and I didn’t want to do it with him around. I just felt like I was pulling him down into a hole. Like I was having trouble with school and stuff. [1023]

This struggle between schoolwork and romance was enough to end the relationship. She recounts later in the interview that the relationship:

…kind of just like pulled me down into a hole. I don’t really think it did any good for me, because he was like a lazy slacker and didn’t really do anything to encourage me in school or anything like that.

In other words, Jessica says the relationship was pulling both of them into a “hole” and she felt the need to break it off. Jessica’s current boyfriend encourages her to do homework and helps her overcome procrastination. Unlike her previous boyfriend, he is supportive of her work at the local drycleaner and motivates her to go when she wants to skip: “If I say I don’t want to go to work or whatever he would be like ‘you have to.’” This suggests the need for some respondents to seek out prosocial partners for motivation and support. Some seek out partners who have
“something going for them” and someone who won’t “pull me down into a hole.” As an example, 17-year-old Carmen remembers choosing between two concurrent boyfriends.

Okay. Mark [current boyfriend], he had a job. He had his own place to live in. He had a car. He’s still got, he’s still got all this stuff. And Shorty [ex boyfriend], he was the person that I help him or I give him money. He didn’t have no money. He didn’t have a job. [1068]

Twenty-year-old Eric has been engaged to Jennifer for almost one year. The two were together for seven months before becoming engaged. Eric speaks candidly about the types of influence they have had upon each other throughout the past two years.

Well at first there were a lot of problems. She would want to go places and I wouldn’t, I prefer of watching a movie and staying in. She used to prefer going out, but we kind of both adjusted. I am a lot more social because of her. She’s helped me in so many ways with that. I can go do things that I never could before. I used to be very uncomfortable about myself. I wouldn’t go swimming because I wouldn’t take my shirt off. I’ll go get the mail without a shirt on! I do a lot of things. It seems very simple in every day life, but for me…it help me so much. And her, in turn, she’s calmed down, she used to be very much the partier, you know alcohol and that. And we still drink, but we don’t go…we don’t get drunk. We just have a few beers. We hang out, and we have reached a very happy median. [0905]

This quote emphasizes the idea that the two have learned to complement each other. In fact, Eric mentions being very intimidated and unable to “open up” emotionally and sexually with girls in his past. He reveals the fact that he only spoke to girls on the internet and ended up with one night stands. The above quote demonstrates that partners can influence each other to find a “happy median” during emerging adulthood and the idea that boys too can be a prosocial influence. In the words of Eric: “we help each other, because I mellow her out, and she spices me up!”
CHAPTER IV: DISCUSSION

This study adds to a budding field of sociology regarding peer relationships and romantic partners (Warr 2002; Haynie et al. 2005). As indicated by Arnett (2000, 2001), developmental changes occurring during late adolescence and emerging adulthood include the onset and escalation of romantic behaviors. This particular study gives researchers more insight into the mechanisms of partner influence by utilizing interviews, rich in context and reflection from adolescents and emerging adults.

The first part of the study is quantitative in nature and shows that older respondents report seeing less of their friends than younger respondents. Among the currently dating, older respondents are more likely to report seeing less of their friends since dating. Additionally, older respondents report being more influenced by their romantic partner than younger respondents. These results show that social dynamics begin to shift during emerging adulthood, and the romantic partner begins to be a stronger influence throughout this time. Older respondents begin to minimize time with friends and increase time with romantic partners. Cohabitation status accounts for much of partner influence and less time spent with friends. Results regarding gender are interesting because females, despite reporting similar tendencies to spend less time with friends while dating, actually report lower levels of partner influence, compared to males. Future studies should use longitudinal data as opposed to the cross-sectional data used in this study to fully explore selection versus socialization arguments. Data should include a broader age range, from early adolescence into the late-twenties, a time when the progression from emerging adulthood to young adulthood intensifies (Arnett 2000).

The second section of the analysis relies on qualitative data to explore domains of partner influence. These responses provide us with a “snapshot” of the respondents own view of partner
influence and romantic relationship importance. Four domains of change were mentioned most often across interviews: delinquency/antisocial behavior, educational goals, financial/career concerns, and pregnancy. Analyses indicate that there are universal and domain specific mechanisms of partner influence. Prosocial partners have made male respondents in particular “grow up quicker” and minimize contact with the “wrong crowd.” Many delinquent males suggest the need for a partner to help him “stay off the streets” and “keep me out of trouble.” Many responses indicate that the partner helps with career goals and educational opportunities and is actually more common than the direct assault on drinking and other delinquent activity. Some engage in helping their partner realize life goals through multidimensional avenues including modeling and lecturing. Unplanned pregnancies are times when most partners “realize” specific negative qualities in their partner that have been overlooked in the past.

Finally, the last section of the study looks at more than just the “snapshot” from the second section and relies on the romantic history narrative where respondents reflect on the progression throughout relationships as well as the variability between responses. More often than not, respondents are likely to reflect upon a current partner’s prosocial impact, while describing earlier relationships as relatively more negative in their impact. This finding may reflect the age-crime curve (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990) since respondents range between 17 and 23 years old-- ages as which desistance occurs. The life history narratives also offer researchers a perspective or “lens” to account for actual shifts in social dynamics.

Previous studies neglect the idea that not being in a relationship can actually be a learning experience. Future studies should embrace non-daters as part of researching romantic partner influence and the non-dating role in the life course. Educational agendas are the main reason some refuse to date or are reasons for currently not dating. There are some who suggest that they
do not want to be “tied down” anymore and that they would rather “hang out” and have “friends with benefits” indicating a “player” profile. Analyses indicate that females often dissolve relationships based on the delinquent behavior of their partner. This is consistent with the quantitative findings that show that being female is negatively associated with partner influence, that is, females are less likely to give in to partner influence (see Giordano, Longmore and Manning 2006). This suggests that females may be less willing to change themselves in a romantic relationship than males. Additionally, analyses indicate that antisocial partners are not entirely antisocial; partners do express prosocial influence from antisocial partners. There are also indications that the romantic partner is seen as a direct reflection of the self.

Future research should embrace qualitative research methods to help inform the design of traditional quantitative measures. Using longitudinal data, researchers can measure relationship dynamics (i.e., partner maturity, delinquency level, educational goals, financial concerns), both before and after pregnancy. This can help us understand actual respondent perceptions of the relationship at various intervals. Additionally, future research can focus on relationship duration paired with level of partner influence. Specific measures can include ways in which partners influence the respondent and vice-versa: refraining from delinquency, minimizing time with the ‘wrong crowd,’ realizing life goals, supporting educational agendas, providing motivation to attend school/job and supporting/changing maturity.

Future surveys should include ways in which couples perceive their own influence on each other. Doing so, researchers will capture more than just a perception of the relationship, as they are able to compare and contrast findings between partners and highlight specific gender differences. Additionally, interviewing couples separately and together may provide further understanding of relationship dynamics and actual influence attempts. The life history narratives
used for this study highlight the role of the romantic partner. Future life history interviews should account for friend influences paired with romantic partner influences. Furthermore, future research should investigate qualities of parent relationships in connection with romantic partners, especially because previous research finds that, for girls who have conflicts with their parents, the dating-depression link is strengthened (Joyner and Udry 2000). Similar to Arnett (2000), this study maintains that emerging adulthood merits scholarly attention as a specific period in the life course. The respondents’ subjective perception, level and type of influence is a key ingredient to further understanding changing social dynamics during this time.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Total Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean/%</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>Gender</td>
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<tr>
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<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>48.5%</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
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<td>—</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Controls</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mother’s Education</strong></td>
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<td>—</td>
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<tr>
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<td>—</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
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*Note: Mean/% = mean or percentage; SD = standard deviation; N = number

*Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.*
Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Currently Dating Respondents

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<td>Less time spent</td>
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<td>African American</td>
<td>24.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Step-parent</td>
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*Note:* Mean/% = mean or percentage; SD = standard deviation; N = number; $\alpha$ = Chronbach’s alpha

*Note:* Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding
Table 3. Effects of Age, Gender and Cohabitation on General Time Spent with Friends, Less Time Spent with Friends While Dating, and Romantic Partner Influence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>Less Friend-Time While Dating</th>
<th>Romantic Partner Influence</th>
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<td></td>
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<td>Model 3</td>
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<td>2.77***</td>
<td>-3.39 ***</td>
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<td>-.03</td>
<td>.16**</td>
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<tr>
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<td>-.31***</td>
<td>-.07</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Male)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>- .31**</td>
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<tr>
<td>(No)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(White)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>-.23**</td>
<td>-.24**</td>
<td>-.63**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
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<td>-.26**</td>
<td>-.30</td>
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<td>Mother’s Education</td>
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<td>.03**</td>
<td>-.09</td>
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<tr>
<td>(HS graduate)</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>(Two parent)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>622ª</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi Square</td>
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<td>6.05***</td>
<td>20.11*</td>
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<tr>
<td>R²</td>
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</table>

Notes: Contrast categories for blocks of dummy variables are indicated by “( )”; OLS Models 1&2, 5&6; Logistic Regression Models 3 & 4; *Analyses include only dating respondents (n=622); *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001.