ADOLESCENT UNION BELIEFS AND EXPECTATIONS:
A FOCUS ON PARTICIPANTS IN RELATIONSHIP EDUCATION PROGRAMS

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ABSTRACT

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Recently, the federal government has attempted to support marriage by providing financial and political resources for relationship initiatives, particularly those that target poor and disadvantaged populations. This comes in response to a shift in marriage behavior during the last half of the 20th century in the United States wherein age at first marriage, nonmarital childbearing, cohabitation, and divorce rates increased (Cherlin 2004; United States Census Bureau 2009). There are few relationship education programs that target adolescents. Adolescent romantic relationships unfold during a unique stage in the life course, one that is characterized by keen interest in relationships, but with little preparation for navigating this new type of intimate contact. The goal of this dissertation is to evaluate the relationship beliefs and expectations of adolescents in an effort to advance knowledge of the factors that influence transitions to healthy adult relationships and marriages. The life course perspective serves as the conceptual framework for ensuing analyses by highlighting the occurrence of romantic relationships during a pivotal period of growth, and highlighting the ramifications of these relationships and transitions to more binding adult relationships. This dissertation utilizes three data sets: 1) existing data from the relationship education program No Jerks (including pre-/post-class assessments, a brief marriage attitudes survey, and demographic data) that highlight and advance knowledge of the views and experiences of disadvantaged adolescents; 2) new data from a pilot relationship education program Relationship Smarts including pre-/post-class assessments, demographic data, and in-depth interviews; and 3) wave one findings from the Toledo Adolescent Relationship Study with a particular emphasis on addressing factors that account for socioeconomic differences in relationship beliefs.
For Vivian and Genevieve
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INTRODUCTION

The federal government has attempted to support marriage and healthy relationships by providing financial and political support for relationship initiatives, particularly those that target disadvantaged populations (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families 2003, 2005; Stanley, Pearson, & Kline 2005). This comes in response to a shift in marriage behavior during the last half of the 20th century in the United States (Cherlin 2004). During this time, the age at first marriage reached its highest point, (United States Census Bureau 2009) and divorce rates increased steadily before peaking in the 1980s (United States Census Bureau 2009).

Political concern about the impact of delayed marriage, increases in divorce rates, increases in cohabitation, and increases in nonmarital childbearing gave rise to marriage and relationship programs and policies (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families 2003). The movement to support marriage began in 1996 with the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) detailing the goal of ending government dependency among poor parents, reducing nonmarital childbearing, and encouraging two-parent families (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families 2003). Renewed in 2006, this initiative has allocated millions of dollars toward programs that promote healthy marriages and relationships, especially in low-income communities. The Healthy Marriage Initiative (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families 2005) outlines a number of goals, one of which involves enacting relationship education programs in high schools with an aim toward increasing the percentage of youths who have the skills and knowledge to initiate and sustain healthy relationships that eventuate in healthy marriages. To
this end, government-, state- and community-level programs and policies were enacted to meet
the needs of individuals, couples, and families seeking the skills and knowledge to achieve
healthy relationships. This dissertation will examine two community based marriage programs
supported by both state and federal dollars.

Regardless of the tenuous nature of modern marriage, and the increased age at first
marriage, most Americans expect to and will marry someday (Amato, Booth, Johnson, & Rogers
2007; Nock 2005; Thornton, Axinn, & Xie 2007). At the same time, cohabitation has become
more common, and has garnered acceptance, especially among young adults in the United States,
as a pathway to marriage (Kennedy & Bumpass 2008). Among economically disadvantaged, the
recipients of many federal social programs, the rates of union dissolution and cohabitation are
highest (Lichter & Qian 2008) and odds of marriage are lowest (Edin & Kefalas 2005; Lichter,
McLaughlin, & Ribar 2002). Transitions to marriage from cohabiting unions are particularly
unlikely for poor women (Lichter, Qian, & Mellott 2006). A target of marriage initiatives,
unwed low-income mothers aspire to marriage yet they tend to believe that the short-term risks
associated with marriage exceed any potential long-term benefits (Edin 2000). Even though low-
income mothers desire to get married (Lichter, Batson, & Brown 2004) they face a number of
barriers preventing them from achieving their relationship goals (Smock, Manning, & Porter

The association between socioeconomic status and relationship formation and stability
most likely begins prior to adulthood. The effects of socioeconomic status appear to be far-
reaching and are likely to originate before having children or getting married. Disadvantage
takes root in childhood and has long-lasting effects on adolescent and subsequent adult
relationships (Axinn & Thornton 2000). Thus, the primary goal of this dissertation is to step
back in the life course and assess how parental disadvantage influences adolescent’s beliefs and expectations about their own romantic relationship trajectories.

Numerous researchers have highlighted the influence of parental resources on adolescents’ subsequent educational, occupational, and romantic goals (e.g., Amato 1996; Manning & Lamb 2003; Brown 2006; Manning & Brown 2006; Cavanagh, Crissey, & Raley 2008). The current work extends this research by focusing more specifically on how parents’ educational attainment and family structure influence adolescents’ beliefs about romantic relationships. During adolescence, the majority of youth experience a shift away from family in lieu of increased frequency of interaction with friends and romantic partners (Bouchey & Furman 2003). Yet family still plays an important role in adolescents’ development and the timing and nature of the multiple transitions that occur during this time in the life course. Consistent with the social learning perspective, the family is one of the most important and proximate influences in the formation of relationship attitudes and behaviors. Familial influence on individuals’ relationship behaviors and quality emerges in part from direct experiences in the family and on viewing and emulating romantic couples, or role models, in their own families, particularly parents. Parental resources are pivotal because they predict the quality of dating relationships, timing of sex, and nonmarital childbearing.

The parental relationship is typically the first and most salient model of romantic involvement that children experience and from which they draw conclusions about the nature of romantic relationships (Bouchey & Furman 2003). Their impression of the parental relationship may guide adolescents’ own beliefs and behaviors with romantic partners. For example, when mothers prefer early marriage and larger families their children tend to enter marriage and parenthood earlier than their peers (Barber 2000). This same intergenerational transmission of
beliefs and behavior may also apply to divorce (Amato & Cheadle 2005) and single motherhood (e.g., Lichter et al. 2004; McLanahan & Sandefur 1994). Amato and Booth (1991) find that children who are raised in stable married families experience lower rates of marital separation and divorce as adults compared to children raised in divorced households. Children from divorced homes are more accepting of divorce and more pessimistic about their chances for achieving marriage (Amato & Booth 1991). This link may be due, in part, to socioeconomic disadvantage, but may also stem from children’s personal observations and experiences of troubled family relationships in single mother households, which can influence later adult relationships. A consistent empirical finding is that individuals raised in non-two parent biological families express weaker support for marriage, and hold more non-normative attitudes about marriage (Manning, Longmore, & Giordano 2007a; Crissey 2005; Axinn & Thornton 1996; Amato 1996). Crissey (2005) finds that individuals raised in non-biological two-parent families express weaker support for marriage, and hold more non-traditional attitudes about marriage that may include cohabiting. Further, Manning et al. (2007a) find that adolescents living with a cohabiting parent have lower marital expectations than adolescents who live with two biological married parents. Adolescents who are raised in a cohabiting household may be more likely to acquire positive beliefs about non-traditional relationships. Varying parental norms and values about marriage and cohabitation likely contribute to differences in adult union decisions (Thornton et al. 2007) and influence adolescent romantic behaviors. Additionally, many studies have examined the link between family structure and adolescents’ sexual behavior (e.g., Cavanagh et al. 2008; Musick 2002, Miller, Benson, & Galbraith 2001; Trent & Crowder 1997; Hogan & Kitagawa 1985; Newcomer & Udry 1987; Thornton & Camburn 1987; Albrecht & Teachman 2003; Miller, Norton, Curtis, Hill, Schvaneveldt, & Young 1997). Generally,
research indicates that living in any type of married household reduces the risk of sexual
initiation and the odds of reporting sexual intimacy (Moore & Chase-Lansdale 2001).
Adolescents in single parent and stepparent families are more likely to engage in sexual
intercourse earlier than those in married two-parent biological families (Hogan & Kitagawa
1985). Upchurch, Aneshensel, Sucoff, and Levy-Storms (1999) find that teens living in single-
parent or stepparent families have higher risks for sexual activity. Similarly, Cavanagh et al.
(2008) find that those in single and stepparent families were significantly more likely to have sex
and form romantic relationships. Family background and sexual activity is also tied to early
pregnancy and childbearing (e.g., Musick 2002; Miller et al. 2001; Trent & Crowder 1997).
Further, adolescents who are raised in two-parent biological families are less likely to intend to
have a birth compared to teens from other family types (Trent & Crowder 1997). While this may
be true, a number of qualitative studies reveal the disconnect between parenting and marriage in
low-income populations (Edin, Kefalas, & Reed 2004; Ellwood & Jencks 2004; Edin 2000) and
suggest the importance of examining how parental resources operate in adolescents’ own
relationships. Given the salience of parents’ union status during childhood, adolescents may
model their parents’ union formation behaviors and family transitions in their own romantic
relationships.

Parental education is another factor that may influence the nature, timing, and quality of
adolescents’ relationship behaviors. Greater parental education is associated with adolescents’
increased expectation to marry, and expectation to bear children at later ages (Hogan &
Kitagawa 1985; Trent 1994). Research on the effect of parents’ education suggests that teens
whose mothers have a high school education are also more likely to report having sex compared
to those whose mothers have some college or who have graduated from college (Giordano,
Manning, & Longmore 2005). Adolescents with well-educated parents expect to get married and to have a child at older ages (Hogan 1985), while Trent (1994) finds that higher maternal education is related to fewer expectations for marriage among adolescents aged 14-19. Manning et al. (2007a) find that adolescents whose mothers have less education have significantly lower marriage expectations compared to those with more educated mothers. When race and family structure are included in the multivariate model, mothers’ education is no longer significant (Manning et al. 2007a). Among those who intend to have children, many still consider marriage a traditional first step; yet there remains a significant faction who does not view marriage as necessary for childbearing or as the culmination of a relationship (Sassler & Cunningham 2008). Further, Schoen, Landale, Daniels, & Cheng (2009) find that higher levels of maternal education are associated with a decreased likelihood of cohabitation and marriage. Adolescents whose parents who are in a better financial position to support their educational goals may be better suited to delay marriage to later ages. Previous research also indicates that disadvantaged youth may have lower quality dating relationships compared to their more advantaged peers (Vanoss Marin, Coyle, Gomez, Carvajal, & Kirby 2000; Kaestle & Halpern 2005; London 2005; Eaton, Kann, Kinchen, Ross, Hawkins, Harris, Lowry, McManus, Chyen, Shanklin, Lim, Grunbaum, & Wechsler 2006). Financial stressors and uncertainty among disadvantaged individuals may adversely affect the quality of romantic relationships. For example, Cavanagh et al. (2008) suggest that the lower levels of control and supervision associated with instability in disadvantaged families may contribute to adolescent relationships characterized by verbal or physical conflict. These trends suggest prolonged familial influence, and a potential shift in ideological beliefs concerning traditional life course event sequencing that differs according to
socioeconomic status. Further insight into adolescents’ beliefs may foretell future trends in relationship behavior.

**Conceptual Framework**

The life course perspective provides the framework for ensuing analyses to test hypotheses about how the experience of relationship education classes may influence relationship beliefs, and how these beliefs may differ according to parenting status and parental resources. The life course perspective is well-suited for the study of transitions from adolescence to adulthood because it helps explain how behaviors, beliefs, attitudes, and expectations are developed and may be influenced by changes in one’s life circumstances (e.g., early parenthood). Life course theory posits that one’s life is a sequence of events, social roles, and changes that begin in infancy and continue until death (Caspi et al. 1989). This perspective highlights interactions between individuals and their social environments while facilitating an examination of the interpersonal and compounding consequences of adolescents’ romantic relationships.

Traditional age-linked expectations for the timing of life events suggest that certain behaviors (e.g., childbearing) are generally not compatible with adolescence. This perspective highlights how characteristics and consequences of adolescent relationship experiences influence adult relationship outcomes. The conceptual framework highlights the important links between 1) sequence of life stage transitions, 2) individual characteristics (e.g., beliefs, expectations, and parenthood status), 3) participation in relationship education programs, and 4) outcomes of relationship education participation.

The life course perspective suggests that one’s experience of major life course transitions (e.g., early parenthood) may influence subsequent life events, consequently establishing a new
‘normative’ timeframe for that individual (Bianchi & Casper 2005). Caspi (1987) describes this process as “cumulative continuity”- the idea that behaviors and choices at different developmental stages have consequences that compound to develop and constrain an individual’s options at subsequent life stages. An individual’s position in a particular historical, cultural, and structural context can influence his/her belief in the appropriate age at which certain life transitions (e.g., marriage and childbearing) should occur. It is not surprising, given the cultural shifts that have occurred in the past fifty years, that adolescents today may lack a strong sense of the significance of sequencing major life events. For example, previous generations closely linked sex with the timing of marriage and then parenthood. Today’s teens are more likely to separate the act of sex from expectations to marry and childbearing (Whitehead & Pearson 2006). In the event that an individual experiences premarital childbearing, he/she may experience a shift in the timing of subsequent events such as cohabitation or marriage given their relatively early initiation into more adult roles. The disparate timing of life course events associated with socioeconomic status may be evident as early as adolescence- a finding that supports the need for early intervention (Cavanagh & Huston 2006).

However, individuals maintain a certain level of mastery and control over their own life circumstances regardless of traditional timeframes that may guide others at their same point in life. Many relationship education programs are founded on the assumption that early intervention in the lives of at-risk adolescents may forestall the progression of negative life events by targeting adolescents’ beliefs about romantic relationships. These programs may intervene to further shift the timeframe of future union behaviors for socioeconomically disadvantaged youth in particular. Whitehead and Pearson (2006) argue that, at their core, relationship education programs seek to teach adolescents to do things at the ‘right’ time and in
the ‘right’ order, namely, completion of education, then marriage, and then childbearing. Yet many programs are not adequately suited to address the concerns and barriers to marriage that adolescent parents face. Adolescent parents are a unique group that assumes an alternative life course trajectory upon child birth— an event that undoubtedly influences parents’ beliefs and expectations about marriage. Further, adolescent parents may provide a window into understanding differences in actual adult union behavior.

Existing research on adolescence tends to highlight the importance of early romantic experiences through a framework of social, psychological, and emotional development (Brown et al. 1999). These early experiences are believed to shape adolescents’ beliefs and expectations for subsequent long-term committed relationships (e.g., marriage). The life course perspective suggests that sufficient measurement of union expectations requires consideration of individuals’ personal characteristics, the historical, social, and cultural context in which adolescents exist, as well as the transitions that have already occurred in their lives that may be influencing subsequent life decisions (e.g., parenting status). Yet, as Karney et al. (2007) suggest, the life course perspective has generally been used to describe and examine links between children’s experiences and their adult outcomes with little regard to explaining the direct consequence of adolescents’ beliefs and behaviors in romantic relationships. Given the novelty of romantic relationships during adolescence, and the potential for maladaptive outcomes (e.g., non-marital childbearing) it is particularly important to consider how disruption and discontinuity in this domain may influence subsequent life decisions and experiences. This dynamic period of growth and interpersonal relations suggests the importance of targeting adolescents in healthy relationship programs.
While this time period is generally less constrained by demographic limitations (e.g., marriage markets), economic concerns (e.g., unemployment), and personal responsibilities (e.g., parenthood), this is not always the case (Crissey 2005). Adolescent parents and other socioeconomically disadvantaged youth have already begun a trajectory that puts them at high-risk for poverty, decreased education, single parenthood, marital instability, and divorce—which will undoubtedly influence their beliefs and expectations about marriage. Further, disadvantaged youth are more likely to come from single-parent and unmarried households which may provide a window into understanding differences in actual adult union behavior among this population. Family context theorists emphasize that family values, cultural background, socioeconomic status, family structure, and other characteristics influence adolescents’ beliefs and expectations about marriage (Plotnick 2007; Manning et al. 2007a; Crissey 2005; Collins & Sroufe 1999). Moreover, family theorists have established a link between instability in the household and developmental disruption (Cavanagh & Huston 2006; Wu & Martinson 1993). Researchers suggest that family instability associated with status transitions (e.g., married to single household) and structural transitions (e.g., moving to a new community) contribute to a stressful home life that increases the likelihood that adolescents’ development is upset (Cavanagh et al. 2008).

Relationship education programs that target adolescents can intercede at a critical juncture in the formation of romantic relationships that may have significant consequences for marriage and childbearing behavior. These programs can offer emotional and behavioral alternatives that are associated with more positive life outcomes. Participation in relationship education programs is expected to influence subsequent adult relationships to the extent that: 1) adolescents indicate an increase in positive beliefs about marriage, 2), adolescents acquire a
greater appreciation for the importance of healthy relationship behaviors, and 3) adolescents report an increase in expectations to marry. Evaluation of adolescent-focused relationship programs can provide improvements to curricula in an effort to best meet the needs of youth while also advancing social science research on adolescent relationships, barriers to marriage among adolescent parents, and adolescent union beliefs and expectations.

Current Investigation

Addressing adolescents’ relationship beliefs may provide insight into new family transitions and the future importance of marriage as a desired union status. The life course perspective provides the framework for ensuing analyses to test hypotheses about how parental resources influence relationship beliefs.

This dissertation addresses three principal research questions:

**Question 1**: What are the beliefs concerning dating, sex and parenthood, cohabitation, and marriage among adolescents in relationship education programs and a more general sample of youth?

**Question 2**: How does participation in relationship education programs influence adolescents’ relationship beliefs?

**Question 3**: How do relationship beliefs differ by parenthood status and parental resources? Do demographic indicators explain the relationship between parental resources and relationship beliefs?

This study extends beyond previous literature by providing unique insight into youth who have participated in two different relationship education programs. This dissertation utilizes three data sets: 1) existing data from the relationship education program No Jerks (including pre-/post-class assessments, a brief marriage attitudes survey, and demographic data) that highlight and advance knowledge of the views and experiences of disadvantaged adolescents; 2) new data from a pilot relationship education program Relationship Smarts including pre-/post-class
assessments, demographic data, and in-depth interviews; and 3) wave one findings from the Toledo Adolescent Relationship Study (TARS) with a particular emphasis on addressing factors that account for socioeconomic differences in relationship beliefs. Qualitative results from participants in the Relationship Smarts program allow adolescents’ voices to emerge to explain, in their own words, the challenges they face in meeting their relationship goals. Further, this research provides a comparison point with a larger and more generalizable sample of youth from the TARS. Prior studies have not focused on the sources of socioeconomic differentials in marriage and cohabitation expectations. This work includes key demographic indicators (e.g., race, parenthood status, gender) that may account for socioeconomic differences in relationship beliefs.

Given the aims of relationship education programs and policies targeted at adults it is important to understand adolescents’ beliefs about marriage. If, as some researchers suggest, disadvantaged youth do not differ from more advantaged youth in their desire for and expectation of marriage, it is pivotal to address why marriage rates remain significantly lower among disadvantaged populations. Socioeconomically disadvantaged youth may have already accumulated a substantial number of risk factors associated with an increased likelihood of marital disruption. As such, these youth are in a unique position to forecast future marriage patterns as well as the stability of marriage as a social institution. The findings from this dissertation will help understanding of how the next generation will be moving into a new world of adult decision-making that was and is not part of the life course landscape of their parents.
CHAPTER 1: NO JERKS

INTRODUCTION

Little research has examined how relationship education programs influence adolescents’ union beliefs and expectations, and even less research has addressed the unique experiences of adolescent parents (Ooms 1998; Lerman 2002). This work expands on existing work (e.g., Gassanov, Nicholson, & Koch-Turner 2007) by analyzing how adolescents experience relationship education programs, and whether the relationship beliefs and expectations of adolescent parents in these programs may differ from their non-parenting counterparts. I analyze the No Jerks relationship education program- a program that is tailored to single individuals seeking a healthy, committed romantic relationship. The No Jerks curriculum emphasizes building a strong foundation of knowledge and respect in a romantic relationship before establishing physical intimacy- behavior that could result in an unwanted and/or non-marital birth. However, some adolescent participants have already engaged in pre-marital sex and are now parents. It is important to consider how the No Jerks curricula differentially influences teen parents- a group that has an added incentive to marry yet also a potential deterrent to marriage. The experience of these adolescent parents in No Jerks may provide additional insight to program facilitators as they seek to reorient the focus of relationship education classes to best meet the needs and challenges of all program participants.

BACKGROUND

Adolescent Parents

Adolescent parenthood is a compounding hardship that disproportionately affects the socioeconomically disadvantaged, and may account for differences in union beliefs and expectations among youth. The majority of federally-funded marriage initiatives are targeted at
disadvantaged young single parents, in part, because it is assumed that this population fails to recognize and appreciate the benefits of healthy marriages, and may be at risk for early relationships of poor quality (Karney & Bradbury 2005); yet this may not be an entirely accurate assessment (Edin & Kefalas 2005). For this reason, it is particularly important to understand how unwed adolescent parents may differ from non-parents in their beliefs and expectations concerning marriage and romantic relationships more generally.

An increase in nonmarital childbearing is a trend that is differentially predominant among disadvantaged populations. Adolescent childbearing was identified by the United States Congress as a considerable social issue associated with long-term receipt of public assistance, interruption of education, and increased risk of economic hardship (Lugaila 2001). Adolescent parents who experience non-marital childbearing are at greater risk for poverty, diminished educational and employment opportunities (Bianchi 1999), early marriage (Bennett, Bloom, & Miller 1995), relationship instability (Lichter & Graefe 2001), and divorce (Lichter, Graefe, & Brown 2003). Lichter et al. (2003) find that almost 30% of mothers with a nonmarital birth currently live in poverty compared to those in marital relationships (8%) and childless women (5%).

The United States is currently experiencing an historic low in the overall teenage pregnancy rate. In 2002, there were 76.4 pregnancies per 1,000 females as compared to 84.8 per 1,000 females in 2000, and 116.8 pregnancies per 1,000 females in 1990 (National Survey of Family Growth 2002). From 1977 to 1987 the birthrate among adolescent women ages 15-19 declined from about 52.8 per 1,000 women to 51.1 (Darroch & Singh 1998). In 1991 the estimated adolescent pregnancy rate peaked at 116.5 per 1,000 among women ages 15-19 before dropping 15% in 1996 to 98.7 per 1,000 (Ventura & Bachrach 2000). The cost of teenage
childbearing in the United States remains significant with an estimated $9.1 billion in public funding expended on teenage childbearing in 2004 including public assistance, health care, child welfare, and other expenses (Hoffman 2006). Statistics for 2001 indicate that among the 621,000 teenage mothers, more than half (57%) were receiving some form of public assistance or welfare services. Of importance for the current study, adolescent parenthood has been shown to differentially influence subsequent union formation (Karney & Bradbury 2005). Yet it remains unclear how parenthood status may influence adolescents’ beliefs about romantic relationships and partners.

Adolescent Parents’ Marriage Beliefs and Expectations

A number of qualitative studies reveal the disconnect between parenting and marriage in low-income populations (Edin 2000; Edin et al. 2004; Ellwood & Jencks 2004). Less than one-third of adolescent pregnancies in the United States occur within or result in marriage (Darroch & Singh 1998). While the majority of adolescent parents are romantically involved at the time of their child’s birth, and maintain an optimistic outlook for marriage, many face significant social and structural barriers to achieving their goal. Adolescent parents may experience a greater pressure to legitimate their childbearing behavior through marriage. The implication of this pressure may be relationships that are hurried, fragile, and lacking a sufficient and solid foundation of familiarity. Poor dyadic interactions among adolescent parents and their partners may also contribute to the low quality and fragility of these relationships. Adolescent childbearing is not only less likely to eventuate in marriage but those who do achieve marriage are likely to be at greater risk of marital instability and dissolution (Lichter & Graefe 2001; Furstenberg, Brooks-Gunn, & Morgan 1987). Further, more structural barriers (e.g., decreased education and financial hardship) may compound the vulnerability of these relationships.
Current research offers a limited assessment of the romantic relationships and marriage expectations of unmarried mothers (Edin 2000; Lichter et al. 2003) and adolescent mothers more specifically. Adolescents who have non-marital births tend to have unique beliefs and characteristics that increase their risk for early childbearing including low self-esteem, poor academic performance, low educational aspirations, and perceptions of lower educational, occupational, and financial opportunities (Coley & Chase-Lansdale 1998). Adolescent data from the Monitoring the Future survey suggest that many teens are ill-informed about the implications of premarital childbearing and how this will affect their subsequent marriage potential (Flanigan, Huffman, & Smith 2005). They report that almost half of unwed teen mothers felt “good” or “certain” about their marriage prospects to the child’s biological father at the time of their child’s birth. However, within a year of their child’s birth less than 8% of these teen mothers had married the baby’s father (Flanigan et al. 2005). Using data from a sample of youth ages 15-21 from the 1997 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, Gassanov et al. (2007) find that pregnant and parenting youth have a greater expectation to marry than those without children. However, teen parents are actually less likely to go on to marry compared to non-parents. Teen mothers are 40% less likely to marry than non-mothers and 51% less likely to marry when they do not marry the biological father of their child within six months of the birth (Lichter & Graefe 2001). Teen mothers who do go on to marry are more likely to see their marriages end in divorce, with only 30% still in their first marriage by age 40 (Whitehead & Pearson 2006). Given the differentially poor outlook for adolescent parents, it is particularly important to understand how their marriage beliefs may be influencing expectations to marry and actual marriage behavior; yet the majority of existing research simply focuses on expectations to marry. The current work
seeks to address the dearth of research concerning differences in marriage beliefs by parenthood status among youth.

Relationship Education Programs

Relationship education programs arose in response to the notion that low-income populations, in particular, were experiencing a separation of marriage and parenthood. Political concern about the impact of delayed marriage, increases in divorce rates, and increases in cohabitation gave rise to marriage and relationship programs and policies. This movement began in 1996 with the passage of the *Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act* (PRWORA) detailing the goal of ending government dependency among poor parents, reducing nonmarital childbearing, and encouraging two-parent families (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families 2003). Renewed in 2006, this initiative has allocated millions of dollars toward programs that promote healthy marriages and relationships, especially in low-income communities. The Healthy Marriage Initiative (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families 2005) outlines goals aimed at increasing the number of married households, increasing the number of ‘healthy’ marriages, increasing public awareness about the value of marriage and the skills necessary for achieving positive relationships through relationship skills programs, encouraging research on healthy marriages and relationship education programs, enacting relationship education programs in high schools with an aim toward increasing the percentage of youth who have the skills and knowledge to initiate and sustain healthy relationships that eventuate in healthy marriages. To this end, government-, state- and community-level programs and policies were enacted to meet the needs of individuals, couples, and families seeking the skills and knowledge to achieve healthy relationship.
Community-level relationship education programs have received less attention than more large-scale federally-funded programs, although these grassroots efforts to strengthen relationship have taken hold across the United States. These community-level programs differ from larger-scale relationship education initiatives in that many of the participants voluntarily choose to participate at the behest of friends, family, and other respected community individuals. A combination of support from state agencies, family resource centers, mental and physical health centers, religious organizations, and community-based organizations has resulted in the proliferation of numerous relationship education programs, some of which are specifically tailored for an adolescent audience. State- and community-wide adolescent relationship education initiatives exist in various formats and teach a variety of curricula (e.g., Love U2, No Jerks, Within My Reach), however all share a core goal of increasing healthy marriages, lessening divorce rates, strengthening existing marriages, and teaching youth about healthy relationships (Appendix A).

Programs tailored for adolescents encourage seek to forestall premarital sex and childbearing while emphasizing the acquisition of communication skills adapted to healthy marriages. Research by Martin et al. (2003) indicate that over half of adolescents feel they are unprepared for marriage, yet close to 70% feel that they have the skills necessary to make a good marriage. This suggests that adolescents may be overestimating their abilities while lacking a complete understanding of what it takes to make a marriage work. Marriage promotion programs are structured on the premise that non-marital childbearing and cohabitation are highly correlated with economic disadvantage. Further, research suggests that marriages among adolescents are particularly at risk for economic instability and divorce compared to marriages later in life (Booth & Edwards 1985). For this reason, adolescent relationship education
programs help youth develop the skills necessary to forge healthy relationships while emphasizing the importance of establishing a strong basis for marriage in later adulthood.

Program Evaluations

Given the limited number of adolescent relationship education program assessments, some researchers suggest evaluating the effectiveness of a program based on how well it aligns with existing social science research on adolescent well-being and romantic relationships (Karney, Beckett, Collins, & Shaw 2007). Research demonstrates that interventions in adolescence can positively influence precursors to healthy adolescent romantic relationships (Johnson, Pentz, Weber, Dwyer, Baer, & MacKinnon 1990), timing of sexual initiation (Philliber, Williams, Herrling, & West 2002), and self-esteem, as well as long-term implications of adolescent relationships including educational attainment (Myers & Schirm 1999). These classes help adolescents develop self-awareness and future-oriented thinking patterns as they relate to goals for romantic relationships. Although these programs address some precursors to healthy relationships and marriages, no program entirely aligns curricula with current theoretical social science research concerning adolescent development and relationships.

Ideally, evaluative research on adolescent relationship programs should rely on nationally based surveys of adolescent health, development, and outcomes (e.g., National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, National Survey of Family Growth) for uniformity and comparative purposes. However, this is not possible given the predominant gap between program curricula and evaluation, and social science research. Regardless, it is important to provide evaluation of these programs given the significant influence of adolescent relationships on subsequent marriage behavior and family formation patterns. Adolescence is a pivotal timeframe for establishing healthy relationship beliefs and behaviors that can transfer to more binding adult relationships.
Most relationship education programs focus on adults and their marriage behavior; however, many of these adults have already had children and are on life course trajectories that make it challenging to move into stable marriages.

Further, a growing body of literature suggests that efforts to promote and support healthy relationships among adults may be unsuccessful, in part, because many of the risk factors that place participants at a high risk for non-marital childbearing and divorce may already be present (Kirby 2001). It is imperative that program curricula are sufficiently suited to address the needs of adolescents as they begin and end relationships that may have lifelong ramifications. Given the great number of changes that occur during adolescence (e.g., education decisions, first relationships, and the shifting role of parents and friends), it is perhaps most important that adolescents receive proper guidance in managing important life stage transitions to ensure their future emotional, physical, and economic well-being.

CURRENT INVESTIGATION

The current work provides a unique opportunity to assess the union beliefs of a sample of youth who recently completed a relationship education program. While research on adolescents’ union beliefs is relatively scarce, there is an even greater need for research that highlights the unique qualities and concerns of adolescent parents. Given the differentially poor outlook for adolescent parents, it is particularly important to assess methods of intervention, like relationship education programs, that may steer parents on a more productive and healthy life course trajectory. The current work will evaluate adolescents’ participation in the No Jerks relationship education program with a particular emphasis on differences in union beliefs by parenthood status. Although the No Jerks class is not tailored to adolescent parents, I expect that parents will experience a greater shift toward more positive relationship beliefs compared to non-parents.
in part because adolescent parents who voluntarily seek relationship education may have a greater investment in pursuing healthy, long-term committed relationships compared to non-parenting youth. Additionally, these youth may be more invested in finding a partner for their existing child in an effort to assume a more traditional family type, and therefore may exhibit a greater expectation to marry.

This research addresses two key research questions. First, what are the attitudes of adolescents toward marriage and relationships and is there variation among parents and non-parents? Second, how does the No Jerks program influence marriage beliefs and expectations of participants and is there variation among parents and non-parents?

DATA AND METHODS

The data for these analyses come from participants in the No Jerks program, a community-based relationship education program targeted toward single individuals seeking a healthy, committed relationship (See Appendix B for program details). This program was introduced to participants through flyers in local stores, schools, and churches, from word-of-mouth recommendations from pastors to congregations, and from community leaders seeking to better relationship quality among constituents. Participants voluntarily participated in the No Jerks program and were counted by program staff as successfully completing the program class if they attended 3 of 4 classes. The sample is overwhelmingly disadvantaged with about one-fifth (17%) of the study city population below the poverty line (United States Census Bureau 2009) and about 30% unemployed.

The No Jerks class participants complete a Relationship Attachment Survey before and after the four-week course to capture shifts in their beliefs about partner dynamics. In addition, participants complete a separate Marriage Attitudes Survey prior to the class. Demographic
information is collected from each participant that includes age, race, educational attainment, employment status, receipt of public assistance, household size, number of children in the household, and parenting status.

The *No Jerks* adolescent sample is comprised of youth who are all under the age of 20 at the time of class participation. The analytic sample is limited to N=72 participants. Although there are pre-class Relationship Attachment Survey data for N=103 adolescents, post-class survey data are only available for N=73 of these participants. Further, one participant was removed from the sample for missing greater than 75% of data on the Marriage Attitudes Survey. This reduced the sample to N=72 respondents who have a complete pre- and post-class Relationship Attachment Surveys, a Marriage Attitudes Survey, and demographic information. Mean substitution was applied on the pre-test for one respondent who is missing 70% of response data, and on the Marriage Attitude Survey for four respondents. Among these four respondents, two are missing 10% of response data, one respondent is missing 30% of response data, and one respondent is missing 40% of response data. Of these N=72 participants ten are parents. The analytic sample is selective from those who do not have post-class Relationship Attachment Survey data on a number of items.

* Compared to those who did not complete a post-class survey, this sample is significantly older (t=-2.40, \(\rho=.014\)), has significantly more education (t=-2.65, \(\rho=.0111\)), reports less employment (t=2.08, \(\rho=.04\)), has significantly greater incomes (t=-3.69, \(\rho=.0004\)), receives significantly more public assistance (t=-3.00, \(\rho=.004\)), and lives with significantly more children in the household (t=-2.53, \(\rho=.014\)). This sample also reports one significant difference on the pre-test Relationship Attachment Survey. Those who have a post-test report significantly less agreement with statement that “sex results in bonding” (t=2.86, \(\rho=.005\)) compared to those without a post-class survey.

*No Jerks* Program Curriculum

The *No Jerks* relationship program is targeted toward singles who would like to avoid dating a ‘jerk’ or a ‘jerkette’—someone who resists change, does not acknowledge problem areas in his/her life, who resists emotional intimacy, is disrespectful, and who has poor relationship...
and communication skills. This program teaches singles to recognize a ‘jerk/jerkette’ and guides them through five steps to establish meaningful relationships with potential partners. Although this program is not targeted toward adolescents, per se, adolescents are encouraged to participate and may accompany their parents to the classes. An emphasis on establishing healthy relationships and avoiding poor partner choices makes No Jerks ideal for young adults who are beginning to establish more meaningful, long-term relationships.

Underlying the No Jerks curriculum are five themes that provide the foundation for course material: Know, Trust, Rely, Commit, and Touch. Participants are taught to structure their romantic relationships so as to delay physical intimacy (or “Touch”) until they “Know” a partner, “Trust” their partner, can “Rely” on their partner, and can “Commit” to the relationship. To visually reiterate these themes, participants are given a Relationship Attachment Model scale (RAM scale) to gauge the level of each component in their relationship. The RAM scale allows participants to rank- by moving a sliding component up or down- the “Know”, “Trust”, “Rely”, “Commit”, and “Touch” aspects of their relationship so they can visually represent the appropriateness of incorporating each progressive aspect with their partners. The gradual implementation of each element is believed to foster a strong foundation between partners that may contribute to the health and longevity of relationships.

The first step on the RAM scale establishes participants’ knowledge of a potential romantic partner. To “Know” and understanding a partner’s relationship history, family background, and employment, incarceration, and drug abuse history is pivotal before progressing on the RAM scale. The second step involves participants learning to “Trust” a potential romantic partner. Participants are taught to establish trust with a new partner by ensuring that he or she follows through on promises and commitments, and establishes themselves as reliable.
The third step on the RAM scale involves learning to “Rely” on a partner. Once partners agree to mutually trust one another, it is important that they learn to rely on each other when in need. The fourth step gauges participants’ level of commitment to a partner and a relationship. Once partners learn about one another’s background, establish trust, and can rely on each other they must decide whether to “Commit” to the relationship. The last step on the RAM scale involves implementing “Touch,” or physical intimacy with one’s partner. This step should come after all other aspects of the relationship have been established to the satisfaction of both partners. Ideally, all other facets of the RAM scale should be at their highest positions before a relationship is physically consummated.

Relationship Attachment Survey

The Relationship Attachment Survey asks adolescents to reflect on their beliefs concerning partner dynamics prior to and upon completion of the four week course. These surveys allow program facilitators to gauge the extent to which participants have retained the course curriculum over time. The Relationship Attachment Survey includes statements that relate to the quality of romantic relationships. The survey asks respondents to rank their level of agreement with ten statements (α=.82). I have separated these items into two groups based on participants’ desired “requirement of partners” (α=.74) and their own “personal responsibility” in relationships (α=.67). Ensuing findings are not presented in scaled format; rather, responses are grouped together according to these conceptual categories. This distinction highlights a key component of the No Jerks program—teaching participants to take responsibility for their relationship decisions—that is visually reinforced with the RAM scale. This distinction is also important when comparing the experiences of parents and non-parents as the presence of children is likely to influence what is required of a partner (e.g., Edin et al. 2004) and also what
participants are willing and capable of offering to another person. The first group of statements addresses participants’ desired “requirements of romantic partners”: “It’s important that my partner be willing to change and improve,” “How open-minded my partner is to seeing another point of view will affect our relationship,” “The relationship my partner had with their parent(s) affects our relationship,” “How my partner reacts when my feeling are hurt says a lot about them,” and “How well my partner listens says a lot about them.” The second group of statements addresses participants’ beliefs about their own “personal responsibility”: “Talking and spending time together helps me understand my partner,” “I should get to know my partner’s history in relationships,” “I should feel comfortable sharing dreams and goals with my partner,” “I should be able to rely on my partner to help or support me,” and “Sex results in bonding.” Possible responses range on a five-point scale from (1) Strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Not Sure, (4) Agree, to (5) Strongly Agree.

Marriage Attitudes Survey

Ideally, facilitators establish a baseline survey of participants’ relationship attitudes prior to the start of a program in order to tailor curriculum to participants’ unique needs and concerns. Hence, the No Jerks participants are asked to complete a Marriage Attitudes Survey prior to beginning the four-week course. The survey asks participants to rank their level of agreement with ten statements. I have combined these statements into three groups based on “positive relationship beliefs” (α=.60), “negative relationship beliefs” (α=.46), and “personal fears about relationships and partners” (α=.66). Given low alphas, ensuing findings are not presented in scaled format; rather, responses are grouped together according to these conceptual categories. This distinction is particularly important when comparing parents and non-parents because the presence of children may influence participants’ personal beliefs and plans concerning marriage.
and partner selection more generally, versus their beliefs about what is or is not appropriate for the general population. The first group of statements addresses participants’ “positive beliefs” concerning relationships: “People should marry”, “I expect to get married to someone during my lifetime,” and “It is better for children if their parents are married”. The second group of statements addresses participants’ “negative relationship beliefs”: “Most marriages are unhappy,” and “Most marriages are not equal partnerships,” and “When people don’t get along, I believe they should divorce”. The third group of statements addresses participants’ “personal fears concerning romantic partners and relationships”: “I am scared of marriage,” “I have doubts about marriage”, “Men cannot be trusted to be faithful”, and “Women cannot be trusted to be faithful”. Possible responses range on a four-point scale from (1) Strongly Disagree to (4) Strongly Agree.

Analyses

No Jerks survey data are used to examine the influence of a relationship education program on adolescents’ beliefs and expectations concerning romantic relationships by analyzing the association between participants’ pre- and post-class answers to the Relationship Attachment Survey and Marriage Attitudes Survey. First, I provide an assessment of mean results for the total sample (N=72) on the demographic survey, Marriage Attitudes Survey, and pre-class Relationship Attachment Survey. Further, I examine whether significant differences exist between non-parents (n=62) and parents (n=10). Second, I provide t-test statistics to determine significant change on the Relationship Attachment Survey from pre- and post-class for the total sample. Third, employing t-tests I examine whether differences in pre- and post-class Relationship Attachment Survey responses exist for parents and non-parents. Lastly, using t-
tests I examine whether parents experienced a significantly different magnitude of change from pre- to post-class compared to non-parents.

RESULTS

Program Participants

Table 1.1 presents demographic characteristics for the total sample and according to parenthood status. The No Jerks target population is a low-income population in a moderately sized Midwestern city of 187,000, with a county-wide population of approximately 575,000.

The average age of sample respondents is 17 years old (range: 15 to 19 years old). Almost half (49%) are 18 years old, one-quarter (26%) are 17 years old, 10% are 16 years old, 8% are 19 years old, and 7% are 15 years old. Most (74%) are female and only one-quarter (26%) are

**Table 1.1. Percentages & Means (SD) for Demographic Variables According to Parenting Status**

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<th>Total Sample</th>
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<td><strong>Number of People in Household</strong></td>
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N 72 10 62

*ρ≤.05, **ρ≤.01, ***ρ≤.001
male. In terms of race and ethnicity, the majority of respondents are minorities with 71% African American, 8% Hispanic/Latino(a), 11% White, and 10% listed as “Other” (i.e. biracial or tri-racial). With regard to educational experience, 81% have some high school experience (grades 9-12), 8% have less than high school experience (grades K-8), 4% are high school graduates, and 1% have some college or trade school experience. Education data are missing for 6% of the sample. In this sample, about one-half (53%) are not working, 38% work part-time, and 7% work full-time. Employment data are missing for 3% of the sample. Participants are generally drawn from a relatively disadvantaged population. About two-fifths (43%) of participants report annual household earnings of $15,000 or less. Forty-four percent of this sample currently lives in households that receive public assistance in the form of Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), FIP, food stamps, cash assistance, unemployment insurance, worker’s compensation, Medicaid, subsidized childcare, and subsidized housing. Adolescent parents are significantly ($p \leq 0.01$) more likely to report receiving some form of public assistance compared to non-parents. The majority (75%) of participants live with at least 1-5 people ($M=4$) and about one-quarter live with more than six people (25%). The majority (69%) of participants live with two or fewer children in the home while about one-third (31%) live with 3 or more children ($M=2$).

Adolescent Marriage Beliefs

Results pertaining to “positive beliefs about marriage” suggest that adolescents believe people should marry, and agree that they personally expect to marry in the future (Figure 1.1). Eight-three percent of teens generally support marriage and the majority (86%) expects to personally marry. Adolescents also support marriage in situations where children are involved with 74% of respondents agreeing that it is better for children to have married parents. Answers
to the second group of statements concerning “negative marriage beliefs” reinforce adolescents’ generally positive outlook on marriage. Sixty-eight percent of teens disagree with the statement that most marriages are unhappy. Although half of the sample is uncertain of the equality of most marriage partnerships, teens generally do not believe that people should get divorced when they do not get along (79%). Lastly, responses to the third group of statements addressing “personal fears about marriage” indicate that, although the majority (64%) of teens are not scared to get married, more than half (58%) do have some doubts concerning marriage. This finding suggests that participants may have some uncertainty concerning the viability and sustainability of marriage even though they personally expect to marry and think that people should generally marry. Participants’ belief that men and women are generally trustworthy and faithful suggests that gender distrust is unlikely to be the source of their doubts concerning marriage. However, a

Figure 1.1. Marriage Attitudes Survey Means
considerable one-third (30%) and one-fifth (19%) of teens still believe men and women (respectively) cannot be trusted to be faithful.

Figure 1.2 provides responses to the Relationship Attachment Survey taken prior to the class. These findings reveal a more detailed assessment of adolescents’ desired relationship dynamic with romantic partners. Concerning beliefs about “requirements for romantic partners”, 81% of teens agree that it’s important for their partner to be willing to change and improve for the sake of the relationship, and the majority (88%) agree that a partner’s open-mindedness affects relationship quality. Adolescents generally agree (43%) that familial relationships influence subsequent romantic relationships, but at least one-third (29%) are unsure about

Figure 1.2. Pre-Class Relationship Attachment Survey Means

parents’ influence. The majority of adolescents (82%) also agree that partners should be
emotionally supportive when they express hurt feelings and the vast majority (90%) agrees that being a good listener is a desirable partner trait.

Concerning beliefs about their own “responsibilities in a relationship”, teens generally agree (88%) that talking and spending time together helps them get to know and better understand a partner. Likewise, the majority (86%) of teens agree that getting to know a partner’s history in relationships is also beneficial. Adolescents also want to feel comfortable sharing dreams and goals with a partner (88%) and would appreciate being able to rely on a romantic partner for help or support (82%). Lastly, relatively equal numbers of teens agree (40%) and disagree (42%) that having sex is a way to bond with a partner.

**Relationship Attachment Change**

Pre- and post-class Relationship Attachment Survey results are presented in Figure 1.3, and mean responses are presented in Appendix C. There is only one significant change concerning “requirements of romantic partners”. Teens experience a significant increase (t= -2.32, p=.0234) in their agreement concerning the importance of partners’ willingness to change and improve themselves for the benefit of a relationship. There was also a significant change concerning adolescents’ beliefs about their own “responsibilities in relationships”. Adolescents experienced a significant increase (t= -2.18, p=.0329) in agreement concerning the benefit of talking and spending time together with partners. There were no other notable changes in beliefs concerning “partner requirements” or “personal responsibility” over the course of the program.

**Adolescent Parenthood Status**

Comparisons by parenting status (Figure 1.4) indicate that, regardless of presence of children, adolescents tend to share similar views of marriage. There is only one significant difference (t=2.28, p=.0256) between parents and non-parents concerning the belief that it is
better for children if their parents are married. Adolescent parents express less agreement with this item than non-parents ($M=2.4$ vs. $M=3.03$).

Although not statistically significant, there are still notable differences (greater than 10%) in marriage attitudes that may emerge as significant with larger samples. For example, teen parents express greater agreement with the belief that divorce is an option for people who do not get along compared to non-parents ($M=2.50$ vs. $M=1.91$). Further, teen parents indicate less fear about marriage ($M=1.90$ vs. $M=2.21$) and have slightly less doubts about marriage ($M=2.30$ vs. $M=2.56$) compared to non-parents. Teen parents do, however, indicate greater distrust of men compared to non-parents ($M=2.30$ vs. $M=2.06$).
Responses to the Relationship Attachment Survey taken prior to the *No Jerks* class reveal significantly lower scores among adolescent parents on two relationship items (Figure 1.5).

*Figure 1.4. Marriage Attitudes Survey Means According to Parenting Status*

Non-parents agree significantly more than teen parents (*t* = 2.04, *p* = .0454) that talking and spending time together with a partner is beneficial. Non-parents also agree significantly more than teen parents (*t* = 2.02, *p* = .0473) that a partner’s reaction to hurt feelings reveals a lot about them. These findings suggest that teen parents may be less inclined to focus on partner qualities that are less practical and superfluous to the relationship. Teen parents may be less likely to consider communication and emotional support of paramount importance if they are more focused on the everyday responsibilities associated with caring for young children.
Additional findings, though non-significant, reveal notable differences (greater than 10%) between adolescents according to parenting status. Teen parents agree more than non-parents that a partner’s relationship with his/her parent(s) affects their own romantic relationship ($M=3.60$ vs. $M=3.15$). Non-parents agree more than teen parents that they should be able to comfortably share hopes and dreams with a partner ($M=4.34$ vs. $M=3.80$). Again, these results suggest that adolescent parents may be better suited to appreciate the importance of more consequential factors (i.e. a partner’s family background) in relationship success as opposed to less essential qualities like being a good listener.
As Figure 1.6 indicates, there is only one significant change (t= -2.11, p=.0509) on the post-test according to parenting status- teen parents agree significantly more than non-parents that the relationship partners have with their parents affects subsequent romantic relationships ($M=4.00$ vs. $M=3.37$).

Over the course of the program, the magnitude of change experienced by teen parents and non-parents on each survey item was not significantly different (Figure 1.7) even though both parents and non-parents experienced change from pre- to post-class assessment (see Appendix D for group means). Although non-significant, there are still a number of notable (greater than 10%) differences in the magnitude of change experienced by teen parents and non-parents. The magnitude of change over the course of the program is an artifact of the initial difference in beliefs according to parenting status. In other words, parents and non-parents differed on the initial pre-test scores and subsequent post-test scores and did not merely differ on post-test scores. Teen parents began the No Jerks program with more negative marriage beliefs. For statements concerning desirable “partner requirements”, teen parents experienced a greater magnitude ($\delta=.60$) of change in their belief concerning the importance of partners’ willingness to change and improve compared to non-parents ($\delta=.20$), and a greater magnitude ($\delta=.40$) of change concerning the influence of parental relationships on subsequent romantic relationships compared to non-parents ($\delta=.22$). These findings, while non-significant, reflect initial discrepancies in beliefs according to parenting status.

The magnitude of parents’ reported change in beliefs concerning how a partner reacts to hurt feelings ($\delta=.40$) is also greater than that of non-parents ($\delta=-.13$). Lastly, non-parents reported a greater magnitude of change in beliefs about partners’ listening skills ($\delta=-.05$).
compared to teen parents ($\delta=0$). For statements concerning “personal responsibilities” in relationships, teen parents experienced a greater magnitude of change in their responses to all items over the course of four weeks compared to non-parents. Parents experienced a greater shift ($\delta=.80$) in their beliefs about the importance of talking and spending time with a partner compared to non-parents ($\delta=.16$). Compared to teen parents, non-parents experienced negative shifts in magnitude of change on items pertaining to the importance of getting to know a partner’s history ($\delta=-.15$ vs. $\delta=.40$), and comfort sharing dreams and goals with a partner ($\delta=-.11$ vs. $\delta=.30$). Both parents and non-parents experienced negative shifts in magnitude of change
Figure 1.7. Relationship Attachment Magnitude of Change According to Parenting Status

![Bar chart showing relationship attachment magnitude of change according to parenting status.]

Concerning the importance of relying on a partner ($\delta=-.10$ vs. $\delta=-.15$). Lastly, teen parents experienced a greater magnitude of change concerning the belief that sex results in bonding ($\delta=.30$) compared to non-parents ($\delta=.11$).

**DISCUSSION**

The majority of youth experience their first romantic relationship in adolescence making this time period pivotal for ensuring that adolescents forge meaningful, healthy relationships as they transition to adulthood. Whether government policies concerning relationship education programs are effective and appropriately targeted will depend, at least in part, on an understanding of whether adolescents, and teen parents more specifically, are receptive to
marriage (i.e., they intend or want to marry), and ultimately whether they act on their receptivity (i.e., they actually marry). This paper argues that marriage expectations do not fully capture the breadth of adolescents’ subsequent marriage behavior. The current study, while limited in sample scope, seeks to elucidate some of the attitudes and beliefs underlying adolescents’ union expectations and behavior.

Adolescents in the *No Jerks* program generally think that people should marry and actually expect to marry themselves. Their voluntary participation in a relationship education program signals a desire to take positive steps toward achieving a healthy marriage. Although marriage initiative efforts tend to suggest that disadvantaged populations, like adolescent parents, are not invested in marriage, this sample is actively seeking information that will improve their chances of transitioning to healthy, stable marriages in the future.

There are two notable findings from analyses concerning the total sample. First, over the course of the program, adolescents’ agreement that a partner’s willingness to change and improve for the sake of a relationship is important significantly increased ($t = -2.32, \rho = .0234$). The *No Jerks* curriculum is, by name, concerned with the partners of participants and how teens can avoid dating a ‘jerk’ or ‘jerkette’. Adolescents learn to require more of partners and to exercise restraint by following a set of relationship guidelines that emphasize delayed physical gratification in place of improved emotional and communicative development. This significant increase in agreement suggests that teens appreciate the importance of partners’ backgrounds and behaviors and how they influence the relationship quality.

Second, adolescents’ agreement that talking and spending time together helps them to get to know and understand a partner significantly increased ($t = -2.18, \rho = .0329$). This finding also supports the tenants of the *No Jerks* curriculum by highlighting the important role teens must
play in learning about and scrutinizing romantic partners. This program empowers teens to take control of their romantic relationships by focusing on an easy-to-understand plan of action that will lead to increased relationship attachment. By listening and spending time with partners, adolescents learn how well potential partners meet their requirements, and whether they are willing to invest their time and emotional energy to move further on the Relationship Attachment Scale.

Notwithstanding expectations to marry, adolescents maintain certain attitudes and beliefs concerning marriage, and relationships more generally, that may forestall efforts to achieve their union goals. Adolescents’ doubts about marriage suggest that they may have some uncertainty concerning the viability and sustainability of marriage. These findings may reflect the fact that many teens come from socially disadvantaged backgrounds with high levels of parental divorce and household instability. Although adolescents may expect to marry and may express positive feelings about marriage, they are still cognizant of the relationship difficulties others have experienced. Assessments of adolescents’ marriage beliefs should ultimately account for why and how they acquired certain beliefs if relationship education programs are to address the root causes of disadvantage among those less likely to achieve their marriage goals.

This study, while unable to assess the influence of precursors to adolescents’ beliefs (e.g., household stability and parents’ marriage status), examines the influence of adolescents’ own parenthood status on marriage beliefs. The study sample of adolescent parents expresses less fear and doubt concerning marriage compared to non-parents. Regardless of the greater disadvantage associated with unmarried parenthood it does not appear that adolescents’ own behaviors and parenthood status diminish their capacity to foresee marriage as a future possibility.
There are four notable findings from analyses concerning differences between adolescent parents and non-parents. Adolescent parents express significantly less agreement ($t=2.28$, $p=.0256$) that it is better for children if their parents are married compared to non-parents ($M=2.4$ vs. $M=3.03$). Adolescent parents may be less inclined to admit that their children are disadvantaged by having only one parent. It may be easier to suggest that children are better off with two parents if teens are not parents given their emotional distance from the circumstance.

Second, non-parents express significantly greater agreement ($t=2.04$, $p=.0454$) that talking and spending time together helps when getting to know and understand a partner compared to teen parents ($M=4.29$ vs. $M=3.60$). The added stress of parenting during adolescence may decrease the importance of less tangible qualities like being able to have meaningful conversations with partners. Adolescent parents may be more invested in finding partners who can offer practical financial support and child care to meet their more immediate needs compared to non-parents.

Third, non-parents also express significantly greater agreement ($t=2.02$, $p=.0473$) that partners’ reactions to hurt feelings reveal a lot about them compared to teen parents ($M=4.19$ vs. $M=3.60$). Again, this finding suggests that teen parents are less inclined to focus on partner qualities that may be less practical and superfluous to the relationship. Teen parents may be less likely to consider communication and emotional support of paramount importance if they are more focused on the everyday necessities required in parenting young children. Relationship education classes can improve curriculum by addressing the more immediate needs of disadvantaged groups like adolescent parents who are struggling with daily necessities and the more immediate demands of raising children. While emotional connection and communication
are important in a romantic relationship, meeting basic needs and raising children may lessen the importance of these factors.

Lastly, there is one significant difference \((t=-2.11, \rho=.0509)\) on the post-test according to parenting status with teen parents expressing significantly more agreement than non-parents that familial relationships influence subsequent romantic relationship \((M=4.00 \text{ vs. } M=3.37)\).

Adolescence is a period of shifting alliances from parents and family to peers and ultimately romantic partners. As adolescents make these shifts they may be less able to appreciate the importance of family influence on their own romantic relationships. Adolescent parents may be more able to recognize the importance of these intergenerational factors given their own parenting status. Relationship education classes should highlight these connections and encourage adolescents to understand how their backgrounds can influence beliefs and behaviors in romantic relationships especially given the high rates of divorce and single-parenthood among disadvantaged participants.

For relationship education classes to meet the needs of adolescent parents it is imperative to understand the nature of their relationships, how they view marriage, and the obstacles they face in achieving marriage. Future research may benefit from a qualitative assessment of adolescents’ beliefs about the entirety of experiences (e.g., educational attainment, moving away from home, seeking employment, and unmarried childbearing) that may influence their romantic relationships. This kind of approach may provide a more nuanced account of adolescents’ beliefs about their personal trajectory toward marriage. Although no relationship education program to date solely targets adolescent parents, their experiences and the difficulties they face suggest the importance of developing curricula to help them achieve their relationship goals. Findings indicate that adolescent parents begin the \textit{No Jerks} class with more negative
relationship beliefs compared to non-parents. Adolescent parents may be disassociating their parenthood status and romantic relationship potential, yet the two are inexplicably intertwined for better or for worse. It is not enough to presume that the “damage has been done” for adolescent parents. Relationship education programs need to consider the unique beliefs and expectations of adolescent parents and adjust curriculum to accommodate a triadic, rather than dyadic, relationship between parents, their potential partners, and their children. For example, a parent-specific Relationship Attachment Model might include a category that addresses the ideal time to introduce children to a romantic partner. Relationship programs can help address the unique needs of parents by tailoring curriculum to address, not only what participants hope to achieve in the future, but also what their current circumstances are (e.g., parenthood), and what occurred in the past that contributes to their present life-course trajectory. Program evaluations that are able to assess the benefit of such curricula may be more beneficial for understanding the different relationship trajectories facing adolescent parents.
CHAPTER 2: *RELATIONSHIP SMARTS*

**INTRODUCTION**

Recently, the federal government has attempted to support marriage by providing financial and political resources for relationship initiatives, particularly those that target poor and disadvantaged populations (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families 2003, 2005; Stanley et al. 2005). A large body of research examines the link between relationship patterns and socioeconomic disadvantage (Bumpass, Sweet, & Cherlin 1991; Bennett et al. 1995; Brooks-Gunn & Chase-Lansdale 1995; Brown 2000; Lerman 2002; Carlson, McLanahan, & England 2004; Schoen et al. 2009). Further, existing research highlights the significant barriers to marriage among disadvantaged populations (Lichter et al. 2003; Edin et al. 2004; Edin & Kefalas 2005).

While much research has focused on relationship behaviors among disadvantaged adults, relatively less work has considered the implications of disadvantage on adolescents and how relationship programs can intercede at this critical juncture in the life course. Adolescent romantic relationships unfold during a unique stage in the life course, one that is characterized by keen interest in relationships (Giordano, Longmore, & Manning 2001; Giordano 2003), but with little preparation for navigating this new type of intimate contact (Furman & Wehner 1993; Collins & Laursen 1999; Collins & Sroufe 1999). These early romantic relationships provide a framework for interaction with the opposite sex and can influence the trajectory of adult relationships and family transitions. Most relationship education programs focus on adults and their marriage behavior; however, many of these adults have already had children and are on life course trajectories that make it challenging to move into stable marriages. It is for this reason that the quality of adolescents’ early romantic relationships is particularly important, and
programs that seek to improve these relationships are pivotal. There are few relationship education programs that specifically target adolescents. Consequently, little research has examined how programs influence adolescents’ union beliefs and expectations, and even less research has addressed the unique perspectives and experiences of socioeconomically disadvantaged youth (Ooms 1998; Lerman 2002).

This research addresses two key research questions. First, I examine the relationship beliefs among teen program participants and evaluate how parental resources influence these beliefs. I specifically evaluate which background factors may explain socioeconomic differences in relationship beliefs. Second, I address how the *Relationship Smarts* program influences the relationship beliefs of participants. Not all teens are expected to respond in the same manner, and I evaluate distinctions in response to the program according to parental resources.

Using the life course perspective as the guiding theoretical framework, this study builds on prior studies that have examined adolescent views of cohabitation and marriage (e.g., Gassanov et al. 2007; Manning et al. 2007a) in three key ways. First, I examine adolescents’ relationship beliefs and expectations as they pertain to a) dating, b) sex and parenthood, c) cohabitation, and d) marriage using data from the *Relationship Smarts* adolescent relationship education program. I use a multi-method analysis of a unique sample of adolescents who participated in a relationship education program. Second, I examine how participation in the program influences adolescents’ beliefs and expectations in these four substantive areas. Previous research has addressed these themes among adolescents (e.g., Martin, Martin, & Martin 2001; Martin et al. 2003) yet no research to-date examines how relationship beliefs and expectations potentially develop and change over the course of a relationship education program. Third, I consider how participation in this program differs according to parental resources.
(parents’ education and family structure). To-date no research examines this differential experience of adolescents’ participation in a relationship education class from a sociological theoretical perspective. It is important to consider how this curriculum differentially influences disadvantaged youth- a group that has numerous barriers to marriage. This study seeks to understand the relationship beliefs that disadvantaged youth bring to their adult relationships.

BACKGROUND

Parental Resources

For the vast majority of youth, adolescence is a time period characterized by increased frequency of interaction with friends and romantic partners, and a shift away from family (Bouchey & Furman 2003). While this shifting focus highlights the multiple transitions that occur during this time in the life course, it does not adequately convey the significance of underlying ties that link adolescents to their family of origin as they enter adulthood. Parents influence adolescents’ relationship expectations via modeling, socialization and socioeconomic circumstances. Numerous researchers have highlighted the influence of socioeconomic status and family structure on adolescents’ subsequent educational, occupational, and romantic goals (e.g., Amato 1996; Manning & Lamb 2003; Brown 2006; Manning & Brown 2006; Cavanagh et al. 2008). The current work extends this research by focusing more specifically on how parental resources- parents’ educational attainment and family structure- account for adolescents’ beliefs about romantic relationships.

Intergenerational processes associated with socioeconomic status suggest that parental resources likely influence adolescents’ own beliefs and expectations about romantic relationships. The effects of socioeconomic status are likely to originate in childhood and not merely emerge in adulthood (Axinn & Thornton 2000). For example, parents with greater
education are more likely to expect that their children will pursue post-secondary education, and may be better suited to financially support their children’s education and employment goals compared to less educated parents (Smock et al. 2005). These parents are more likely to express greater expectations that their children follow traditional middle-class life course transitions that involve pursuing post-secondary education and delayed childbearing. Additional research supports the notion that greater parental education is associated with adolescents’ increased expectation to marry, and expectation to bear children at later ages (Hogan & Kitagawa 1985; Trent 1994). Manning et al. (2007a) find that adolescents whose mothers have less education have significantly lower marriage expectations compared to those with more educated mothers. However, when race and family structure are included in the multivariate model, mothers’ education is no longer significant (Manning et al. 2007a).

Less educated parents may be unable to provide this same level of economic security as lower educational attainment is almost inherently linked to lower earnings. As a result, romantic relationships and parenting may be a greater priority, and may provide greater social resources, than continued education and marriage. Further, disadvantaged adolescents may be more inclined to support non-traditional union paths, such as cohabitation, when parents are unable to financially support marriage (Manning et al. 2007a). Schoen et al. (2009) find that higher levels of maternal education are associated with less cohabitation and less marriage. These trends suggest residual familial influence, and a potential shift in ideological beliefs concerning traditional life course event sequencing that differs according to socioeconomic status.

Parents’ relationships are typically the first and most salient model of romantic involvement that adolescents experience, and from which they draw conclusions about the nature of romantic relationships (Bouchey & Furman 2003). Intergenerational social modeling suggests
that adolescents may mirror family relationship dynamics in their own romantic relationships (Cavanagh et al. 2008). These experiences may guide adolescents’ own beliefs and behaviors in the romantic realm as they pertain to the appropriateness of marital timing, and union transitions more generally. Further, the nature of these non-traditional relationships may provide adolescents with less parental support and monitoring- allowing adolescents the opportunities to explore romance and develop a particular set of attitudes and beliefs associated with dating (Longmore, Manning, & Giordano 2001). Adolescents from non-traditional households may be more inclined to seek support from romantic partners and may be more deeply enmeshed in romantic relationships (Goldscheider & Goldscheider 1998).

Given socioeconomic differences in union timing and stability, it is not unlikely that there may be also be a difference in adolescents’ romantic beliefs (Lichter et al. 2006). Adolescents who are raised in non-intact families may be more likely to develop non-traditional attitudes about marriage and childbearing (Trent 1994; Crissey 2005). Waller and McLanahan (2005) suggest that “the experience of growing up in a household in which parents were married may … affect partners’ expectations for marriage … Couples who model their relationships on those of their parents may form their expectations about marriage and make decisions about union transitions that are consistent with their parents’ relationships” (p. 55). Further, Amato and Booth (1991) find that children who are raised in stable married families experience lower rates of marital separation and divorce as adults compared to children raised in divorced households. Children from divorced homes are more likely to express pessimism about their chances for achieving stable marriages and are more accepting of divorce (Amato & Booth 1991). Prior research indicates that individuals who are raised in divorced, stepparent, or single-parent families express lower expectations and weaker support for marriage (Axinn & Thornton 1996;
Crissey 2005; Manning et al. 2007a). Varying parental norms and values about marriage and cohabitation likely contribute to differences in adult union decisions (Thornton et al. 2007) and influence adolescent union behaviors.

Taken together, I expect that families shape their teenagers’ views of how to manage the progression of dating relationships, assess the quality of potential dating partners, and establish the acceptability of various relationship trajectories as they pertain to sexual initiation, parenthood, cohabitation, and marriage. I expect that adolescents whose parents have greater education and who reside in two-parent biological families will be more likely to express positive and traditional romantic beliefs and expectations for their relationships compared to adolescents whose parents have less education and who reside in non-two parent biological families. I expect that all adolescents will increase their support for positive relationship beliefs and traditional relationship trajectories (i.e. marriage) over the course of the relationship program with greater change experienced by adolescents with less educated parents and non-two parent biological families.

Adolescent Relationship Beliefs and Expectations

Beliefs about marriage and romantic relationships emerge and are shaped during adolescence making this time period consequential for the nature and quality of romantic relationships during adulthood (Wood, Senn, Desmarais, Park, & Verberg 2002). Thus, an important part of comprehensive marriage education programs is to more thoroughly understand adolescents’ relationship beliefs. Further, insight into adolescents’ beliefs and expectations may foretell future trends in relationship behavior. Given recent family patterns, this generation will be moving into a new world of decision-making that was and is not part of the life course landscape of their parents. The current work highlights the beliefs about dating, sex and
parenthood, cohabitation, and marriage that underlie adolescents’ union expectations and subsequent relationship behavior. Family formation differs sharply for young adults who are from more and less advantaged backgrounds, therefore I expect that relationship beliefs and expectations during adolescence differ for teens with varying parental resources.

**Dating**

Previous research on adolescence characterizes this period as a shift in focus from friends and family to the pool of potential romantic partners (Bouchey & Furman 2003; Dunphy 1963). Romantic relationships during adolescence have emerged as a significant antecedent of mental health (e.g., Joyner & Udry 2000), involvement in risk-taking behaviors and delinquency (e.g., Haynie, Giordano et al. 2005), and subsequent adult unions (Crissey 2005; Raley, Crissey, & Muller 2007). Additionally, prior studies find that serious dating relationships and the initiation of sexual relationships among adolescents are correlated with subsequent entry into cohabitation and marriage (Thornton et al. 2007; Raley et al. 2007). Adolescents with dating experience may be more likely to expect to cohabit and marry because they can envision commitment within the context of romantic relationships. In fact, Crissey (2005) finds that adolescents who are involved in serious dating relationships have a greater likelihood of expecting to marry by age 25 compared to those who have never dated. Manning et al. (2007a) find that adolescents who are currently dating have higher odds of expecting to cohabit and marry compared to those who are not currently dating. Undoubtedly, adolescents who are dating and having sex have begun a sequence of transitions that precede cohabitation and marriage (Manning et al. 2007a). Experience in serious romantic relationships may make the transition to marriage seem more possible, yet the context of these romantic relationships is also important to consider.
Adolescents who experience quality romantic relationships may be able to transition more easily to marriage relationships compared to those adolescents with negative relationship experiences.

Previous research indicates that disadvantaged youth may have lower quality dating relationships compared to their more advantaged peers (Vanoss et al. 2000; Kaestle & Halpern 2005; London 2005; Eaton et al. 2006). Financial stressors and uncertainty among disadvantaged individuals may adversely affect the quality of romantic relationships. For example, Giordano et al. (2005) find that teens whose parents have a high school education scored higher on an index of romantic behavior than youth whose parents have less than 12 years of education and those who reported some college.

To date no studies examine adolescents’ own beliefs about dating and partner interactions that influence the quality of a relationship- factors that may be important in understanding how and when youth transition to more consequential adult relationships. Additional research is warranted to address the different ways adolescents discuss, plan for, and conceptualize their relationship trajectories. The current work moves beyond studies on dating behavior to examine how dating beliefs are shaped by the experience of a relationship education class. I expect that adolescents will acquire greater support for positive dating behaviors and beliefs over the course of the relationship class. I expect that adolescents with fewer parental resources (e.g., low parental education) will experience a greater magnitude of change in their dating beliefs compared to those with greater parental resources. I also expect a greater magnitude of change among those from non-two parent biological families compared to those from two-parent biological families.

*Sex and Parenthood*
It is in the context of romantic dating relationships that many youth begin to have sex and face the risk of non-marital childbearing. Those teens who are more sexually involved also have greater expectation to marry (e.g., Crissey 2005; Manning et al. 2007a) yet may face significant barriers to marriage if their sexual activity results in pregnancy. Those who experience non-marital births during adolescence are less likely to expect to marry, less likely to actually marry, and are more likely to divorce if they do marry (Bennett et al. 1995; Lichter et al. 2004; Lichter & Graefe 2001; Graefe & Lichter 2002; Karney & Bradbury 2005; Ventura, Abma, Mosher, & Henshaw 2006). Adolescent data from the Monitoring the Future survey suggests that many teens are ill-informed about the implications of premarital childbearing and how this may affect their subsequent marriage potential (Flanigan et al. 2005).

Existing studies document a link between socioeconomic background and the timing and conceptualization of sexual engagement. Research on the effect of parents’ education suggests that teens whose mothers have a high school education are more likely to report having sex compared to those whose mothers have some college or who have graduated from college (Giordano et al. 2005). Adolescents with well-educated parents expect to get married and to have a child at older ages (Hogan 1985), while Trent (1994) finds that higher maternal education is related to fewer expectations for marriage among adolescents aged 14-19.

Many studies have examined the link between family structure and adolescents’ sexual behavior (Cavanagh et al. 2008; Musick 2002, Miller et al. 2001; Trent & Crowder 1997; Hogan & Kitagawa 1985; Newcomer & Udry 1987; Thornton & Camburn 1987; Albrecht & Teachman 2003; Miller et al. 1997). Generally, research indicates that living in any type of married household reduces the risk of sexual initiation and the odds of reporting sexual intimacy (Moore & Chase-Lansdale 2001). Adolescents in single parent and stepparent families are more likely to
engage in sexual intercourse earlier than those in married two-parent biological families (Hogan & Kitagawa 1985). Upchurch et al. (1999) find that teens living in single-parent or stepparent families have higher risks for sexual activity. Similarly, Cavanagh et al. (2008) find that those in single and stepparent families were significantly more likely to have sex and form romantic relationships.

Family background and sexual activity is also tied to early pregnancy and childbearing (e.g., Musick 2002; Miller et al. 2001; Trent & Crowder 1997). Further, adolescents who are raised in two-parent biological families are less likely to intend to have a birth compared to teens from other family types (Trent & Crowder 1997). Adolescent parenthood is a compounding hardship that disproportionately affects disadvantaged populations, and may influence union beliefs and expectations among youth (Ellwood & Jencks 2001). Early pregnancy is also an important factor shaping the timing of marriage and cohabitation among youth (Raley et al. 2007). Raley et al. (2007) find that those involved in romantic relationships at the end of high school are more likely to marry and cohabit in early adulthood. They also find that nonromantic involvement in sexual relationships is positively associated with cohabitation and not marriage (Raley et al. 2007). Sexual activity that results in pregnancy may increase the likelihood of legitimizing the birth through marriage. Marriages that occur after conception yet before birth are less common today but pregnancy is still a strong predictor of marriage (Bachu 1999; Raley, Durden, & Wildsmith 2004). While this may be true, a number of qualitative studies reveal the disconnect between parenting and marriage in low-income populations (Edin et al. 2004; Ellwood & Jencks 2004; Edin 2000). Edin et al. (2004) go so far as to suggest that “among America’s least advantaged citizens, non-marital childbearing has become the rule, and marriage just might eventually become the exception” (p. 1008). Yet low-income individuals
who experience a non-marital birth do move into cohabiting relationships and begin to contemplate marriage as pregnancy transforms the meaning of these unions (Edin et al. 2004). The difficulty lies in sustaining these fragile relationships in the face of numerous financial and relational difficulties associated with disadvantage and parenting.

While informative, this research fails to address the underlying beliefs that may account for differences among adolescents of disparate socioeconomic status. Research needs to address the beliefs that adolescents have about sex and parenting in the context of other life course decisions because these beliefs often legitimate behavior. While these studies examine characteristics of the family on adolescents’ sexual activity, they assume certain beliefs that adolescents may have garnered from the family based on their behavior; yet we know that many adolescents engage in behavior that they simultaneously or subsequently view as inappropriate, therefore behavior is not always a good proxy for beliefs. Further, additional research is warranted to account for ways that social disadvantage may act as a frame for non-traditional behavior like pre-marital childbearing (Trent & Crowder 1997). Adolescents may be compensating for their disadvantage by investing in childbearing potential as social capital (Schoen & Tufis 2003). Adolescent who lack a strong familial support system or whose parents are unable to support traditional life course transitions (e.g., secondary education) may be more inclined to seek out means for establishing adult status through less traditional means, namely non-marital childbearing. Given the differentially poor relationship outlook for adolescent parents, it is particularly important to understand how adolescents’ think about sex and parenthood at this stage in the life course.

Of importance for the current work are the underlying beliefs about sex and parenthood—particularly how adolescents conceptualize the timing and acceptability of these behaviors in
their pre-marital relationships- and how these beliefs may be similar or differ according to socioeconomic status. Based on prior research, I expect that adolescents of less educated parents and adolescents from non-two parent biological families will express greater support for non-marital sex and childbearing compared to those whose parents have higher education and who reside in a two-parent biological family.

_Cohabitation_

Cohabitation has become part of the process of marriage and it is becoming increasingly improbable to talk about the two separately (Manning et al. 2007a). Adolescents are expressing increased support for cohabitation as a steppingstone to marriage. Over a twenty-year period from the late 1970s to the late 1990s, Thornton and Young-DeMarco (2001) find that the percent of young women who agree with the statement “it is a good idea to cohabit before marriage to determine compatibility” increased from about one-third to two thirds, while young men increased their agreement from 47% to 67% during the same timeframe. More recent reports reiterate this finding- suggesting that as many as two-thirds of teens think it is okay to live with someone outside of marriage (Whitehead & Pearson 2006). Martin et al. (2003) find that adolescents hold positive attitudes toward cohabitation with half (50.4%) indicating they would prefer to live with someone before marriage and believe that cohabitation will improve their chances for a successful marriage. These findings suggest that marriage beliefs and expectations are intrinsically tied to cohabitation for this generation of adolescents. Recent estimates suggest that almost 70% of young people experience cohabitation prior to marriage (Kennedy & Bumpass 2008). This trend reflects a generational shift in ideological beliefs concerning traditional life course events, and is particularly pronounced among disadvantaged populations (Lichter et al. 2006).
Given the salience of parents’ union status during childhood (Bouchey & Furman 2003), adolescents may model their parents’ union formation behaviors and family transitions in their own romantic relationships. Crissey (2005) finds that individuals raised in non-biological two-parent families express weaker support for marriage, and hold more non-traditional attitudes about marriage that may include cohabiting. Further, Manning et al. (2007a) find that adolescents living with a cohabiting parent have lower marital expectations than adolescents who live with two biological married parents. Adolescents who are raised in a cohabiting household may be more likely to acquire positive beliefs about non-traditional relationship types.

While we know that the percentage of adolescents who expect to cohabit and who judge cohabitation fairly has increased, we know little about the meaning that adolescents ascribe to cohabitation in the life course of romantic relationships. Further, little research has examined how the experience of cohabitation in the household of origin may influence relationship beliefs among adolescents. The current work hypothesizes that adolescents who are raised in non-two-parent biological families and whose parents have fewer social resources to support marriage (i.e. low educational attainment) will express greater support for cohabitation. I expect these same adolescents will experience a greater magnitude of change over the course of the relationship class compared to those with greater parental resources as they are introduced to information concerning the negative implications of cohabitation.

**Marriage**

Expectation to marry is one of the strongest predictors of subsequent marriage behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen 1987; Mauldon et al. 2002) and is related to later union formation (Crissey 2005). Most teenagers expect to marry in the future (Thornton & Young-DeMarco 2001). At least three-quarter of adolescents report that they definitely or probably expect to marry in the
future (Manning et al. 2007a). In a survey of female college students, almost half (49%) strongly agree that marriage is a very important goal for them (Glenn & Marquardt 2001. Most young people do not outwardly reject marriage, rather, the complex nature of early adulthood combined with greater expectations about marriage forestall many from achieving marriage (Kefalas et al. 2005; Lichter et al. 2004). The current work extends beyond existing research by examining the beliefs that may underlie socioeconomic differences in adolescents’ marriage expectations and trajectories.

It is important to understand the underlying attitudes, beliefs, and values of adolescents because these have been shown to influence cohabitation, marriage, and family decisions (Thornton et al. 2007). Marriage beliefs can be conceptualized in a few ways and refer to perspectives on appropriate age at marriage, how long marriages should ideally last, factors that may precipitate separation or divorce, and well-being of married people compared to those in alternative relationships. Positive marriage beliefs may be associated with greater expectations to marry and subsequent marriage behavior. Prior studies find that adolescents’ socioeconomic status is associated with marriage expectations. Teens who are raised in divorced, stepparent, or single-parent families express lower expectations and weaker support for marriage (Crissey 2005; Axinn & Thornton 1996; Amato 1996).

Research supports the notion that greater parental education is associated with adolescents’ increased expectation to marry (Hogan & Kitagawa 1985; Trent 1994). Adolescents whose mothers have less education have significantly lower marriage expectations compared to those with more educated mothers (Manning et al. 2007a). However, the influence of parents’ union status and educational attainment on adolescents’ union expectations may be operating differently for more advantaged youth. For example, McLaughlin, Lichter, and
Johnston (1993) suggest that conflict in the family home and economic instability may prompt young females to leave home but not necessarily with a greater incentive to marry. Further, adolescents whose parents who are in a better financial position to support their educational goals may be better suited to delay marriage to later ages.

Given the aims of relationship education programs and policies targeted at adults it is important to understand adolescents’ beliefs about marriage. If, as some researchers suggests, disadvantaged youth do not differ from more advantaged youth in their desire for and expectation of marriage, it is pivotal to address why marriage rates remain significantly lower among disadvantaged populations. Socioeconomically disadvantaged youth may have already accumulated a substantial number of risk factors associated with an increased likelihood of marital disruption. As such, these youth are in a unique position to forecast future marriage patterns as well as the stability of marriage as a social institution. I do not expect that parental resources will influence adolescents’ support for marriage given previous research that suggests the universality of support for marriage (e.g., Kefalas et al. 2005). I expect that adolescents will increase their support for marriage over the course of the relationship class.

Relationship Education Programs

There remains a sharp divide in marriage patterns according to social class (Ellwood & Jencks 2004) and a growing discontent among political conservatives that the social allure of marriage has faded. Political concern about the impact of delayed marriage, increases in divorce rates, and increases in cohabitation gave rise to marriage and relationship programs and policies (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families 2003). The Healthy Marriage Initiative (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families 2005) outlines a number of goals one of which
involves enacting relationship education programs in high schools with an aim toward increasing the percentage of youth who have the skills and knowledge to initiate and sustain healthy relationships that eventuate in healthy marriages. State- and community-wide adolescent relationship education initiatives exist in various formats and teach a variety of curricula (e.g., Love U2, No Jerks, Within My Reach), however all share a core goal of increasing healthy marriages, lessening divorce rates, strengthening existing marriages, and teaching youth about healthy relationships. Programs tailored for adolescents encourage communication skills, and seek to forestall premarital sex and childbearing among teens while emphasizing the acquisition of communication skills adapted to healthy marriages. Adolescent relationship education programs help youth develop the skills necessary to forge healthy relationships while emphasizing the importance of establishing a strong basis for marriage in later adulthood.

Program Evaluations

Given the limited number of adolescent relationship education program evaluations, some researchers suggest evaluating the effectiveness of a program based on how well it aligns with existing social science research on adolescent well-being and romantic relationships (Karney et al. 2007). Research demonstrates that interventions in adolescence can positively influence precursors to healthy adolescent romantic relationships (Johnson et al. 1990), timing of sexual initiation (Philliber et al. 2002), and self-esteem, as well as long-term implications of adolescent relationships including educational attainment (Myers & Schirm 1999). These classes help adolescents develop self-awareness and future-oriented thinking patterns as they relate to their goals for romantic relationships. Although these programs address some precursors to healthy relationships and marriages, no program entirely aligns curricula with current theoretical social science research concerning adolescent development and relationships. The current work
addresses this deficiency by tailoring the survey instrument to reflect nationally based adolescent surveys of adolescent development and relationships in an effort to encourage uniformity and comparative potential between large-scale survey research and smaller community-based relationship programs.

CURRENT INVESTIGATION

The aims of this chapter are to evaluate adolescent beliefs about relationships as well as how they respond to a relationship education program. Further, this study examines the existence of socioeconomic differences in relationship beliefs and expectations among adolescent participants in a relationship education program using parental resources as a proxy for socioeconomic status. Socioeconomically disadvantaged youth are at risk for a number of factors associated with an increased likelihood of teen pregnancy or marital disruption; therefore it is particularly important that relationship education programs intervene during this critical period of development. If, as some researchers suggest (Manning et al. 2007a), disadvantaged youth do not differ from more advantaged youth in their desire for and expectation of marriage, it is pivotal to address why marriage rates remain significantly lower among this population. Given the differentially poor outlook for this population, it is particularly important to assess methods of intervention, like relationship education programs, that may steer disadvantaged youth on a more productive and healthy life course trajectory.

Most relationship education programs focus on adults and their marriage behavior; however, many of these adults have already had children and are on life course trajectories that make it challenging to move into stable marriages. Further, a growing body of literature suggests that efforts to promote and support healthy relationships among adults may be unsuccessful, in part, because many of the risk factors that place participants at a high risk for non-marital
childbearing and divorce may already be present (Kirby 2001). It is imperative that program curricula are sufficiently suited to address the needs of adolescents as they begin and end relationships that may have lifelong ramifications. Given the great number of changes that occur during adolescence (e.g., education decisions, first relationships, and the shifting role of parents and friends), it is perhaps most important that adolescents receive proper guidance in managing important life stage transitions to ensure their future emotional, physical, and economic well-being. Further, while it is valuable to assess relationship expectations among youth, results may be misleading given the social desirability of marriage and the apparent disconnect between expectations to marry and actual marriage behavior among disadvantaged groups. It is necessary to address the underlying beliefs about relationships and romantic partners that may influence adolescents’ expectations to marry and ability to transition into healthy marriages. For this reason, it is particularly important to understand how disadvantaged youth may differ from their more advantaged counterparts in their beliefs and expectations concerning marriage and romantic relationships more generally. Further, it remains unclear how union beliefs may be influenced by participation in programs that encourage healthy relationships, and emphasize skill-based learning to help youth transition to committed marriages in adulthood. The current work examines how differences in adolescents’ parental resources influence their experience in a relationship education class.

This research addresses two key research questions. First, I examine the relationship beliefs and expectations among teen program participants and evaluate how parental resources influence beliefs. I specifically evaluate which background factors may explain socioeconomic differences in relationship beliefs. I expect that socioeconomically disadvantaged youth will indicate a more negative and non-traditional orientation to romantic relationships prior to
participation in the program. The indicators included in this study are gender, race/ethnicity, age, dating experience, current relationship status, grades received in school, and parenthood status. Prior studies have not included such a wide array of demographic indicators which tap into several domains of relationships and provide a more comprehensive understanding of exogenous factors that may influence adolescent relationship beliefs and behaviors.

Second, I address how the *Relationship Smarts* program influences the relationship beliefs and expectations of participants. Not all teens are expected to respond in the same manner, and I evaluate distinctions in response to the program according to socioeconomic status. I expect that disadvantaged youth will experience a greater shift toward more positive relationship beliefs and expectations compared to more advantaged youth in part because they will have started the program with more negative beliefs, and also because disadvantaged youth may have a greater desire to overcome barriers to pursuing healthy, long-term committed relationships.

**DATA AND METHODS**

Sample participants were administered the *Relationship Smarts* program as part of their middle- and high-school curriculum in the public school system during the fall semester of 2008 (see Appendix E for program details). Participants at all grade levels (9-12) took the *Relationship Smarts* program as part of their health or physical education class. Participation was required as part of the general curriculum and it was expected that adolescents would complete the entire number of offered sessions. Both classes were conducted by the same teacher and met on a weekly basis for 70 minutes over the course of eight weeks. These schools are generally disadvantaged with 89% and 80% of students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunches (vs. 37% for state), and the vast majority (91% and 78%) identifying as a racial minority.
Further, about one-fifth (17%) of the study city population are below the poverty line (United States Census Bureau 2009) and about 30% are unemployed.

The *Relationship Smarts* class participants complete a survey before and after the eight-week course to capture shifts in their relationship beliefs and expectations. Additional demographic information is collected including age, race, parents’ educational attainment, family structure, participants’ academic performance, dating history, relationship status, cohabitation history, and parenting status. There are pre-class survey data for 207 adolescents, and most (97%) also have post-class survey data ($N=201$). The sample is further limited to $N=199$ respondents because two participants are missing information on their parents’ education. Mean substitution was applied on the pre-test for 61 respondents who responded to at least 70% of questions. Of these 199 participants, 40% ($N=79$) have parents with low educational resources. Face-to-face interviews were also conducted with twenty students who voluntarily chose to be interviewed shortly after completing the program (described further below).

*Relationship Smarts* Curriculum

The *Relationship Smarts* program is targeted at adolescent participants and offers more than existing adolescent relationship education programs which emphasize abstinence and avoidance of premarital sex, (e.g., *Why Am I Tempted?*, *Plain Talk*, *Teen Outreach Program*). *Relationship Smarts* focuses on helping adolescents establish healthy relationships characterized

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† The analytic sample ($N=199$) is selective from those who do not have post-class survey data, six respondents ($N=6$), on two items. Compared to those who did not complete a post-class survey this sample reports two significant differences on the pre-class survey: those who have a post-class survey report significantly less agreement with statement “teens should wait to have sex until they are out of high school” ($t=3.15$, $p=.02$) compared to those without a post-class survey. Additionally, those who have a post-class survey data report significantly greater agreement with the statement “it would be okay for me to have children if I was living with my [boyfriend/girlfriend]” ($t=3.14$, $p=.04$). I do not anticipate that these findings adversely influence the selectivity of my sample given the small number of participants who failed to complete a post-class survey.
by mutual respect and open communication. This program helps adolescents establish a “north star” or positive vision of a healthy relationship that will help guide their behavior with potential romantic partners (Pearson 2007). This positive relationship model gives adolescents the opportunity to compare their relationships to an ideal. This program is pro-abstinence, although not for religious, ideological, and political reasons, yet it extends beyond issues concerning sex to explore the emotional and social well-being of adolescents in romantic relationships (Pearson 2007). This program sends the message to teens that developing positive relationships, waiting until marriage to have sex and children, and fully committing to another person is the ideal relationship model (Pearson 2007). In a culture that encourages casual sex, cohabitation without commitment, and accepts premarital childbearing without commitment between parents, the Relationship Smarts program gives adolescents another model to aspire toward.

The Relationship Smarts program is based on 8 lessons that help adolescents build healthy relationship knowledge and skills. Lessons include information on self-awareness, establishing a future-oriented relationship mindset, and determining a more realistic concept of romantic love (Pearson 2007). Topics include the difference between infatuation and love, building blocks for healthy relationships, open-communication, cohabitation, mate selection, and consequences of premarital childbearing (Pearson 2007). Lessons are conveyed through role-playing, small group work, visual worksheets and guides, lectures, and multi-media accompaniment (e.g., video and music). Teens are apprised of the benefits of continued education, establishing financial security prior to marriage, and considering the consequences of early and unwanted pregnancy from the perspective of the child (Pearson 2007).

Parental Resources
The current work examines differences in adolescents’ relationship beliefs and expectations according to parental resources. The highest level of education is treated as one measure of parental resources (Crissey 2005). Participants report the highest level of education achieved by their mother and their father. Possible answers include 1) Less than High School, 2) High School Graduate, 3) Some College/Trade School, and 4) College Graduate. When data are missing for one of the parents, the other parent’s education level is used as the measure of couple’s resources. Further, I collapse these four categories into two levels of Social Resources with Less than High School and High School Graduate representing “Low Attainment” and Some College/Trade School and College Graduate representing participants with “High Attainment”. This distinction was made after t-test results failed to indicate significant differences between the lowest two levels of education and between the highest two levels of education. Forty percent (N= 79) of participants have parents with Low Attainment and 60% (N=120) have parents with High Attainment.

Another parental resource is family structure. Participants are asked to report their family composition and they are coded into the five categories 1) Two Married Biological Parents, 2) Single parent, 3) Stepparent, 4) Cohabiting Stepparent, and 5) Other. The ‘Other’ category includes single parent and another adult relative, and relative but not a parent. These categories were further collapsed into two groups: 1) Two Parent Biological Family and 2) Non-Two Parent Biological Families. This distinction was made after t-test and regression analyses failed to indicate any significant change between groups. This non-significance is likely due to the small number of cases in each category. There are N= 132 (66%) adolescents represented in the Non-Two Parent Biological Family category and N= 67 (34%) adolescents in the Two-Parent Biological Family category.
Demographic Indicators

The *Relationship Smarts* target population is a low-income population in a moderately sized Midwestern city of 187,000, with a county-wide population of approximately 575,000. Tables 2.1 and 2.2 (respectively) present the distribution of socioeconomic characteristics among the complete sample of adolescent participants (\(N=199\)) according to parents education and family structure. Demographic indicators examined include age, gender, race/ethnicity, dating experience, current relationship status, grades received in school, and parenthood status. Age ranges from 13 to 19 and is coded as a continuous variable. The average age of sample respondents is 16 years old. In this sample, most (77%) are female and only one-fifth (23%) are male. There is a significantly larger proportion of male participants with highly educated parents \((t=2.52, \rho=.0124)\) compared to less educated parents. Participants’ race and ethnicity are divided into four categories: *African American*, *White*, *Hispanic/Latino(a)*, and *Other* (i.e. Asian, Native American, biracial or tri-racial). There are not sufficient cases to provide more refined measures of race/ethnicity. The majority of respondents are minorities with 49% *African American*, 20% *White*, 16% *Hispanic/Latino(a)* and 15% listed as *Other*. There is a significantly greater proportion of African American youth \((t=-3.40, \rho=.0008)\) and youth who self-describe as a racial ‘Other’ \((t=-3.27, \rho=.0013)\) whose parents have high levels of education. Conversely, there are a significantly greater proportion of White adolescents with less educated parents \((t=7.89, \rho\leq.0001)\). There are a greater proportion of African American teens who live in non-two parent biological families \((t=4.04, \rho\leq.0001)\), and greater percentages of White \((t=-3.67, \rho=.0003)\) and Hispanic \((t=-3.00, \rho=.003)\) adolescents living in two-parent biological families. Grades received in school are established with the question “What type of grades do you mostly make in your academic classes?” Thirty-two percent of participants report receiving *Mostly A’s*
Table 2.1. Percentages and Means (SD) for Demographic Variables According to Parents’ Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mediating Variables</th>
<th>Total Sample</th>
<th>Low Attainment</th>
<th>High Attainment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%, M (SD)</td>
<td>%, M (SD)</td>
<td>%, M (SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age (range is 13-19)</strong></td>
<td>15.62 (1.21)</td>
<td>15.68 (1.15)</td>
<td>15.58 (1.26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race/Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American***</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White†</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other***</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grades Received in School</strong></td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>3.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly A’s</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly A’s and B’s</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly B’s</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly B’s and C’s</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly C’s</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly C’s or less</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dating Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Currently Dating)</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Currently Dating</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never Dated</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parenthood Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Parent</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family Structure</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-Parent Biological</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Two Parent Biological</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td>199</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*ρ≤.05, **ρ≤.01, ***ρ≤.001, †ρ≤.0001
### Table 2.2. Percentages and Means (SD) for Demographic Variables According to Family Structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Sample</th>
<th>Married Two-Parent Biological</th>
<th>Non-Two Parent Married</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%, M (SD)</td>
<td>%, M (SD)</td>
<td>%, M (SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (range is 13-19)</td>
<td>15.62 (1.21)</td>
<td>15.71 (1.07)</td>
<td>15.57 (1.28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American†</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White**</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic**</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades Received in School</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>3.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly A’s</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly A’s and B’s</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly B’s</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly B’s and C’s</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly C’s</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly C’s or less</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dating Status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Currently Dating)</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Currently Dating</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never Dated</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenthood Status*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Parent</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents’ Educational Attainment**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Attainment</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Attainment</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p ≤ .05, **p ≤ .01, ***p ≤ .001, †p ≤ .0001
or B’s in school. Another one-third (28%) report Mostly B’s and C’s. Eleven percent report receiving Mostly A’s, 10% receive Mostly B’s, and the remaining 20% receive Mostly C’s or less.

Dating status is established with the questions “Are you currently dating (going out with) someone?” and “Have you ever had a dating relationship (going out) that lasted a month or more?” About one-third of participants are not currently dating (35%) and about two-fifths (45%) are currently dating. One-fifth (20%) of teens have never dated. Parenting status is established with the questions “Have you ever been pregnant?”, “Are you or your partner currently expecting a baby” and “Do you have children of your own?” Participants who responded affirmatively to one or more of the above questions are coded as Parents while all others are listed as Non-Parents. Only 4% of participants are parents. While parenting is not common in this sample, there are a greater proportion of teen parents from families with less educated parents (t= 2.10, p=.04). Interestingly, there are a significantly larger proportion of teen parents living in two-parent biological families (t= -3.36, p=.0009). Lastly, the majority of participants do not live in two-parent biological families. Surprisingly, there are a significantly greater proportion of participants living in non-two parent biological families who report having highly educated parents (t=2.85, p=.0050).

Relationship Beliefs

Prior and subsequent to participation in the Relationship Smarts program adolescents were asked to complete a 23-item relationship questionnaire to establish their beliefs about dating, sex and parenthood, cohabitation, and marriage. Further, participants are asked to consider their future plans and goals as they pertain to education and relationships (see Appendix F for survey). This questionnaire was developed in collaboration with the research coordinators overseeing the pilot study. The Relationship Smarts program provided a unique opportunity for
me to participate in a marriage program evaluation process from the initial development of a
demographic questionnaire and Relationship Beliefs pre-/post-class assessments, to the
qualitative interview process. At each step in the development process I was granted the
opportunity to collaborate with program coordinators to address my unique research questions
with this study sample while providing key evaluation work to further their programmatic goals.
Their concern for the length of the survey combined with my interest in content and
thoroughness resulted in a 23-item questionnaire that reflects the basis of the Relationship
Smarts program as well as existing national survey data on adolescents. Survey questions were
chosen that succinctly address key programmatic goals. In addition, an effort was made to
provide a comparison point with existing research on adolescent relationships. Given the limited
nature of the pilot study it is important to evaluate how this small sample compares to larger
national samples of adolescents. There is a dearth of relationship education programs that are
created in collaboration with social science researchers familiar with existing literature on
relationship and marriage patterns and expectations. This joint research effort highlights the
potential opportunities that exist for research applications at the community and federal level.

The Relationship Beliefs pre- and post-class surveys ask adolescents to reflect on their
beliefs concerning dating, sex and parenthood, cohabitation, and marriage. These surveys allow
program facilitators to gauge the extent to which participants have retained the course curriculum
over time. I have separated the survey into five groups based on participants’ “dating ideals and
attitudes” (α=.32), “partner preferences” (α=.38), “sex and parenthood beliefs” (α=.50),
“cohabitation beliefs” (α=.50), and “marriage beliefs” (α=.35). Given low alphas, ensuing
findings are not presented in scaled format; rather, responses are grouped together according to
these conceptual categories. This distinction highlights key components of the Relationship
Smarts program—teaching participants to take a long-term perspective on their romantic relationship decisions.

To assess dating beliefs, participants are asked to report their level of agreement with two sets of statements. The first set of statements address adolescents’ “dating ideals and attitudes”: 1) My previous dating relationships influence what I look for in a partner, 2) I am too young to be tied down to one person, 3) I would not date someone who my parent[s] dislike, 4) It is important to get to know my partner’s family before fully committing to him/her, and 5) Completing my education is more important than being in a romantic relationship. Responses range on a four-point scale from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree.

The second set of statements address “partner preferences”: 1) It is important that my partner share my values, 2) I should be able to trust my partner before fully committing to him/her, 3) I would end the relationship if my partner tried to change me into someone I am not, 4) I would stay in the relationship if my partner hit me, as long as he/she loves me, and 5) I would stay in the relationship if my partner cheated on me, as long as he/she loves me. Responses range on a four-point scale from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree.

To assess “sex and parenthood beliefs”, participants are asked to assess their level of agreement with the following four items: 1) Teens should wait to have sex until they are out of high school, 2) A person should only have sex if they are married, and 3) It would be okay for me to have children if I was living with my partner. Responses range from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. Participants are also asked to gauge the extent to which parenthood would forestall their future goals. Responses range on a five-point scale from Not affect me from reaching my future goals to Delay me from reaching my goals for the future.
“Cohabitation beliefs” are captured by the following three statements: 1) It is usually a good idea for a couple to live together before getting married in order to find out whether they really get along, and 2) People who live together without being married are less committed to one another than people who are married. Responses range from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. Respondents are also asked how likely is it that they will ever/ever again live with a partner before marriage. Possible answers range on a four-point scale from Very Likely to Very Unlikely.

“Marriage beliefs” are assessed from participants’ level of agreement with four statements: 1) How important is it for you to be married one day? (Four-point scale from Very Important to Not Important at all), 2) Married people are generally happier than unmarried people, 3) I see so few good or happy marriages that I question whether I should get married, 4) Marriage is for life and divorce is not an option for me, and 5) I want to wait until I finish my education before getting married. Possible responses range on a four-point scale from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree (unless otherwise stated).

Lastly, a created variable jointly measures participants’ “expectations to cohabit and marry”. Replies of Strongly Agree and Agree for the statement “how likely is it that you will ever/ever again live with a partner before marriage?” are coded as high expectations to cohabit and replies of Strongly Disagree and Disagree are coded as low expectations to cohabit. Replies of Very Important and Somewhat Important for the statement “how important is it to you to be married one day?” indicate high expectations to marry while replies of Not Very Important and Not at all Important indicate low expectations to marry. Few participants (7%) express low expectations to cohabit and low expectations to marry. The majority (48%) express high expectations to both cohabit and marry while 11% express high expectations to cohabit and low
expectations to marry, and 34% express high expectations to marry and low expectations to cohabit. Given that most adolescents expect to marry, analyses will be limited to adolescents who have high expectations to marry (N=163). Among these adolescents, I compare those who also have low expectations to cohabit (n= 68) to those with further high expectations to cohabit (n=95). This is in line with Manning et al.’s (2007a) conceptualization of expectations to marry directly without cohabitation and expectations to cohabit and marry.

Qualitative Assessment of Relationship Smarts Participants

In addition to survey data, I conducted face-to-face interviews with 20 participants shortly after completion of the program. This qualitative component focuses on questions that could not be asked on the final pre-/post-class survey due to length and content restrictions. Qualitative research narratives allow for a reconstruction of past events and, of relevance here, provide a window on how program lessons influence adolescents’ relationship beliefs and expectations. The open-ended nature of the interviews allows for a free-flowing thought processes in which adolescents can recall and reflect on class lessons as well as their own personal beliefs and expectations concerning dating, cohabitation, childbearing, and marriage. The one-on-one open-ended questioning is ideal for use with this population because it allows adolescents to expound upon their experiences in ways that are not always possible with survey data (e.g., Sassler & Cunningham 2008; Edin et al. 2004; Manning et al. 2004). Qualitative assessments can enhance survey data by highlighting factors that influence meanings, decision-making, and behaviors that survey data seek to uncover (Weiss 1994). For the present purposes, interviews allow adolescents to reveal ways they have internalized the lessons of the Relationship Smarts program in more detailed discussions of the course. Further, interviews contribute to understanding of the challenges that exist in the formation of marriages and
relationships, using adolescents’ own words to describe their views on relationships and marriage expectations.

In-depth Interviews

Adolescents’ participation in the in-depth interview is voluntary, and those under age 18 provide parental consent. Participants are apprised of their rights to refuse interview and to terminate the interview process at any time. Interviews were conducted confidentially at the program site and were tape-recorded. On average, the interviews lasted 30-45 minutes and include 22 pages of single-spaced transcripts. Interviews began with a few questions about family background, relationship experience, and parenting status (see Appendix G for interview guide). Subsequent questions focused on participants’ thoughts about the Relationship Smarts program, including the most important lesson they learned, and whether they have had the chance to use any learned skills in a romantic context. Questions were asked about the unique qualities of adolescent romantic relationships—short duration, heightened emotionality, increased sexual pressure, inexperience with the opposite sex, and difficulty communicating. For example, participants were asked “Did you ever break up with your partner and then get back together?” A few general questions highlighted adolescents’ opinions concerning challenges to having a good relationship, how parents influence adolescents’ dating choices, and standards for dating partners. For example, respondents were asked “Would you date someone who your parents dislike?” Questions concerning premarital sex, pressure to have sex, and adolescents’ beliefs about commitment are also included. All participants are asked about their beliefs concerning advantages and disadvantages to cohabitation and marriage. Participants who are parents are asked to consider how their life circumstances affect dating, partner selection, and marriage expectations. Lastly, all respondents are asked to consider their future goals as they pertain to
relationships, education, employment, and childbearing. Interviews were transcribed shortly after completion. Shorter 1-2 page biographical sketches were developed from adolescents’ interviews. These biographical sketches contain a summary of the respondent’s experiences, including direct quotes from the longer narrative to briefly characterize each case.

Analysis Plan

*Relationship Smarts* survey data are used to examine the influence of a relationship education program on adolescents’ beliefs and preferences concerning romantic relationships by analyzing the association between participants’ pre- and post-class answers to the Relationship Beliefs Survey. First, mean values of responses to the pre-class Relationship Belief Survey are presented for the total sample (*N*=199), and t-test statistics are used to determine significant change from pre- to post-class. In addition, I test for change among respondents who have below average scores on the relationship items. Second, t-tests are employed to examine whether there are initial differences in pre-class survey responses according to parental resources and then evaluate whether youth experience a significantly different magnitude of change from pre- to post-class assessment according to parental resources. Lastly, ordinary least squares regression models are used to estimate how sociodemographic factors mediate the effects of parental resources on relationship beliefs. Coefficients indicate how a unit change in the independent variables is associated with a unit change in the dependent variable. Logistic regression is used to estimate adolescents’ joint cohabitation and marriage expectations. Models indicate how each independent variable is associated with the odds of having high expectations to cohabit and marry versus having only high expectations to marry. Findings are supplemented with qualitative interviews with *N*=20 participants from the total sample.

RESULTS
Adolescent Relationship Beliefs

*Dating Beliefs: Ideals and Attitudes*

Tables 2.3 and 2.4 (respectively) present relationship beliefs for the total sample as well as differences according to parents’ education and family structure. Table 2.3 shows that eighty-four percent of the total sample of participants agree or strongly agree that previous dating relationships influence subsequent partner choices ($M=3.19$), and 54% disagree or strongly disagree that they are too young to be tied down in a relationship ($M=2.39$). The mean values for these items do not differ according to parents’ education or family structure. Katie, 14-years-old, explains the importance of picking a good partner to date, “well it depends like what you look for in a guy…Because most girls like dudes with saggy pants and all that other stuff, and still expect him to do something with his life. Like 5 out of 10 it’s not always gonna be that. So it’s like you gotta really look for what you’re looking for in a guy.” Even at a relatively young age, Katie recognizes that choosing a romantic partner entails more than just superficial qualities.

Table 2.3 shows that 42% of participants would not date someone their parents dislike ($M=2.36$). Participants with less educated parents express significantly greater disagreement ($t=-1.99, \rho=.05$) with this statement than those with more educated parents. This suggests that those teens with highly educated parents are slightly less willing to make decisions that are incompatible with their parent’s views. Jill, 17-years-old with highly educated parents who have some college and trade school experience, explains how she would reconcile wanting to be with a partner her parents disapproved of,

[My parents would] prefer to meet them…They want to know who I’m dating. They want to know where I’m going, what I’m doing … But I don’t want to just not date someone just because they don’t think it’s the perfect person for me. I don’t know if they’re perfect standards and … I would try and work out the differences … If I really loved him and had strong feelings for him, then I don’t want to disrespect my parents, but I would want to stay with him.
Table 2.3. Percentages and Means for Pre-Class Relationship Beliefs According to Parents’ Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Sample (M, %)</th>
<th>Low Attainment (M, %)</th>
<th>High Attainment (M, %)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dating Beliefs: Ideals and Attitudes</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous dating relationships influence partner choice.</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>3.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Want to wait until I finish education before marriage.</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>3.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Joint Marriage and Cohabitation Expectations</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Cohabit/High Marriage</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Cohabit/High Marriage</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*ps<0.05, **ps<0.01, ***ps<0.001
While teens may be conflicted about incorporating their parents’ opinions about dating partners into their relationship decisions, the majority (76%) agree or strongly agree that it is important to get to know a partner’s family before fully committing to a relationship ($M=3.08$). Abigail, mentioned above, elaborates on the importance of getting to know a partner’s family, “um like your background - I think it’s important to know a person’s family history. Since because like people say I’ve lived a sheltered life with my two parents and you know, I’m an only child. So I think it’s important to know … the family aspects and like your goals.” Other respondents, like Abigail, expressed the importance of getting to know, not only their partner, but the immediate influences (e.g., family) in his/her life. There is not a significant difference in beliefs about getting to know a partner’s family according to parents’ education or family structure.

Lastly, Table 2.3 also shows strong consensus (92% overall agree or strongly agree) among teens whose parents have both high ($M=3.59$) and low ($M=3.39$) educational attainment that completing education is more important than being in a romantic relationship. Participants with highly educated parents express significantly greater agreement with this statement than those teens with less educated parents ($t=-2.09$, $p=.04$).

According to Table 2.4, adolescents from non-two parent biological families also agree more strongly that education takes precedence over romantic relationships ($t=1.94$, $p=.05$). Thus, dating and education are at greater odds among those with highly educated parents and among those in two-parent biological families. Seventeen-year-old Abigail, daughter of married biological parents with some college or trade school experience, thinks that being in a relationship in the next three to five years will “depend on like where … what type of goals and stuff that I see maturing and moving forward with life.” For Abigail and others, romantic
Table 2.4. Percentages and Means for Pre-Class Relationship Beliefs According to Family Structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Sample (M, %)</th>
<th>Two-Parent Biological (M, %)</th>
<th>Non-Two Parent Biological (M, %)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dating Beliefs: Ideals and Attitudes</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous dating relationships influence partner choice.</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>3.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too young to be tied down.</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>2.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would not date someone parents dislike.</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>2.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important to get to know partner’s family.</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>3.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completing education more important than relationship.*</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dating Beliefs: Partner Preferences</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important that partner share values.</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>3.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Should be able to trust partner.</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>3.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would end relationship if partner tried to change me.</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>3.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would stay in relationship if partner hit me.</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>1.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would stay in relationship if partner cheated on me.</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>1.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex and Parenthood Beliefs</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teens should wait to have sex until after high school.</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>2.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Should only have sex if married.</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>2.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How being parent would affect future goals.</strong></td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td><strong>2.26</strong></td>
<td>1.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not affect me from reaching future goals.</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help me reach future goals.</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prevent me from reaching future goals.</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delay me from reaching future goals.</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Okay to have children if living with partner.</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>2.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cohabitation Beliefs</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usually a good idea to live together before marriage.</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>2.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People who live together before marriage are less committed.</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>2.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How likely is it you will cohabit?</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>2.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marriage Beliefs</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How important is it to be married someday?</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>3.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married people generally happier.</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>2.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See so few good marriages that I question whether to marry.</td>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>2.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage is for life and divorce not an option.</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>2.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Want to wait until I finish education before marriage.</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>3.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td>199</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>132</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Joint Marriage and Cohabitation Expectations</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Low Cohabit/High Marriage</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Cohabit/High Marriage</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td>163</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*ps.05, **ps.01, ***ps.001
relationships and marriage decisions do not occur in a vacuum; rather, they must be evaluated in the context of education and career goals.

Table 2.5 presents the zero-order and multivariate models using parents’ education and family structure to predict dating beliefs. At the bivariate level the indicators of parental resources (parental education and family structure) are not related to beliefs about the influence of previous relationships on partner choices and being too young to be tied down to one partner. As indicated in Table 2.3, there is a significant relationship between parents’ education and choosing to date someone who parents dislike (t=1.50, ρ=.05). The effect of parental education on decision-making about partners is mediated by the parenthood status variable and the dating status variable (results not shown). This mediation effect is due, in part, to the greater percentage of youth with highly educated parents who are not parents or who are not currently dating (Table 2.1). Family structure is not associated with choosing dating partners based on parents’ approval.

The next model in Table 2.5 shows that there is not a significant relationship between parents’ education and the perceived importance of getting to know a partner’s family before committing. However, in the multivariate model parental education is positively associated with the importance of knowing partner’s family. This suppression appears to be largely due to the inclusion of race and ethnicity in the model (results not shown). The effect of parents’ education on beliefs about getting to know a partner’s family may operate differently for African Americans in this sample compared to Whites given significant racial differences in parents’ education according to race.
Lastly, as indicated in Table 2.3, teens whose parents have more education place a greater value on education in relation to romantic relationships (t=2.13, p=.03) and teens from two-biological parent families place less value on the completion of education versus engaging in romantic relationships (t= -1.94, p=.05). The effect of parents’ education in the multivariate model is no longer statistically significant after the addition of the race and ethnicity covariates or family structure (results not shown). This mediation is due in part to racial differences in
parental education. Similarly, the effect of family structure is explained by the inclusion of race and ethnicity, dating status or parental education in the model (results not shown). This mediation is due in part to racial differences in family structure and to greater dating among respondents living in non-two parent families (Table 2.2). Furthermore, the effect of parental education and family structure mediate one another in models predicting beliefs about achieving education goals in relation to dating (results not shown), largely because family structure and parental education are significantly related to one another (see Table 2.1, 2.2).

**Dating Beliefs: Partner Preferences**

Answers to the second group of statements concerning “dating partner preferences” reinforce participants’ generally healthy outlook on romantic relationships (Table 2.3, 2.4). Eighty-seven percent of this sample agrees or strongly agrees that it is important for a partner to share similar values ($M=3.27$), 94% agrees or strongly agrees that they should be able to trust their partner ($M=3.65$), and 88% agrees or strongly agrees that they would end a relationship if their partners tried to change them into someone else ($M=3.49$) (Table 2.3). Fifteen-year-old Melissa echoes the sentiments of many participants when it comes to partner preferences, “I’m looking for how much they- how much they respect me … How much they respect my family. If they care what I think. If they care what I- well what I say … You gotta see if they’re sweet, if they’re smart, if they’re dedicated to their work, if they want a future.” Participants express fairly strong disagreement concerning whether they would stay in a relationship if a partner hit them ($M=1.28$) or cheated on them ($M=1.35$). Only 8% and 9% of participants, respectively, agree that they would stay in a relationship if they were being hit or cheated on. There are no significant differences in dating partner preferences according to parental resources (parents’ education or family structure) suggesting these are universal beliefs about romantic partners.
Table 2.6 presents the zero-order and multivariate models using parents’ education and family structure to predict dating partner preferences. The indicators of parental resources (parental education and family structure) are not related to beliefs about the importance of shared values and trust in a partner (Table 2.6). As indicated in Table 2.3, there is not a significant relationship between parents’ education or family structure and ending a relationship due to attempts by partners to change respondents. However, in the multivariate model parental education is positively associated with ending a relationship due to partners’ attempts to change. This suppression appears to be largely due to the inclusion of family structure, parenthood status, or the race and ethnicity covariates in the model (results not shown). This suppression may occur because of the significantly different distribution of family structure, parenting status, and adolescents’ race/ethnicity according to parents’ educational attainment (Table 2.1). The indicators of parental resources (parental education and family structure) are not related to beliefs about staying in a relationship if partners hit or cheat.

Sex and Parenthood Beliefs

As indicated in Tables 2.3 and 2.4 this sample of teens believes (68%) they should wait to have sex until after high school ($M=2.96$) though they agree less strongly (62%) that people should only have sex if they are married ($M=2.73$). There is variation in response with 11% strongly disagreeing to wait until after graduation to start having sex and 17% strongly disagreeing they should wait to marry before having sex. Fourteen-year-old Wendy explains her decision to wait to have sex, “I’m waiting until I’m as of age because I don’t know when I might get married. It could be a long time from now … I think whenever I graduate high school …

Table 2.6. Summary of Regression Analysis for Variables Mediating Dating Partner Preferences and Parents’ Resources
Parents' Education
(Low Attainment)
High Attainment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
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<th>2</th>
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<th>2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Should be able to trust partner.</td>
<td>-0.41</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>-1.40</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>-1.17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would end relationship if partner tried to change me.</td>
<td>2.28**</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would stay in relationship if partner hit me.</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>-1.69</td>
<td>-1.37</td>
<td>-1.58</td>
<td>-0.62</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would stay in relationship if partner cheated.</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>-1.40</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>-1.17</td>
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</table>

Family Structure
(Non-Two Parent Bio.)
Two-Parent Bio.

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<th>2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<td>-0.61</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td>0.55</td>
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Gender
(Male)
Female

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Should be able to trust partner.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Would be able to trust partner.</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>-5.34†</td>
<td>-0.92</td>
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Race/Ethnicity
(White)
African American
Hispanic
Other

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>2</th>
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<th>2</th>
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<th>2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Should be able to trust partner.</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>-0.83</td>
<td>-1.02</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>2.38*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Would be able to trust partner.</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>-0.46</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.88</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would be able to trust partner.</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
<td>-0.23</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>1.49</td>
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</table>

Grades

<table>
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<th>2</th>
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<th>2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Should be able to trust partner.</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>-1.44</td>
<td>-0.56</td>
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Dating Status
(Currently Dating)
Not Currently Dating
Never Dated

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>1</th>
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<th>2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Should be able to trust partner.</td>
<td>-0.81</td>
<td>-0.79</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>-1.49</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would be able to trust partner.</td>
<td>-1.02</td>
<td>-1.76</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>-0.36</td>
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</table>

Parenthood Status
(Not a Parent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
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<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Should be able to trust partner.</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>-2.21*</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>-0.82</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| N | 199 |
| R² | 0.08 |
| Adjusted R² | 0.02 |

*p≤.05, **p≤.01, ***p≤.001, †p≤.0001
Half this school’s already had sex…but like half the time that don’t even work. After they have
sex they’re probably going to break up in the next week or so … I mean there’s really no point.”
Wendy’s views reveal that she has learned from the experiences of others that sex does not
guarantee a happy relationship. In terms of parenthood, the majority of participants think that
children would prevent them ($M=2.04$) from meeting future goals. The vast majority (71%)
believe that having a child would delay or prevent them from reaching their future goals. Only
5% of respondents believe having a child would actually help them reach their goals. Table 2.4
also shows a significant difference in adolescents’ belief about the effect of being a parent on
future goals according to family structure ($t=-2.00$, $p=.05$). A greater percentage of adolescents
from non-two parent biological families (34%) report that they think having a child will prevent
them from achieving future goals compared to only 25% of teens from two parent biological
families. This finding may reflect a stronger assumption of perceived familial support from
teens living in two-parent biological families. Adolescents from non-two parent biological
families may not perceive as much familial support if they have a child therefore anticipating
greater difficulty achieving future goals. Ellen, 15-years-old and living in a two-parent
biological household, explains her relief at finding out she was not pregnant after having sex “I
do n’t regret [having sex], because if I- why would I regret it? I shouldn’t have even did it, but I
know it was too soon … Because like I see people got babies while they’re young. I could have
had a baby but good thing- thank God I didn’t.” Ellen realizes that having sex put her at risk for
getting pregnant and admits to feeling relieved that she did not have a child, though she
continues to have sex. Participants generally think it is unacceptable to have children while
cohabiting ($M=2.06$). Approximately three-fifths (62%) of participants strongly reject the
appropriateness of having children in a cohabiting relationship yet close to two-fifths (38%) either strongly agree or agree that it is acceptable.

Table 2.7 presents the zero-order and multivariate models using parents’ education and family structure to predict sex and parenthood beliefs. The indicators of parental resources are not related to beliefs about waiting to have sex until after high school and only having sex if married. Table 2.7 shows that adolescents who live in two-parent biological families more strongly agree that they do not think having a child would prevent them from achieving future goals compared to those from non-two parent biological families ($t=-2.11, \rho=.04$). The effect of family structure in the multivariate model is no longer statistically significant after the addition of parents’ education, parenthood status, or race/ethnicity covariates (results not shown). This mediation occurs in part because family structure and parental education, parenthood status, and race/ethnicity are significantly related to one another (see Table 2.1, 2.2). As indicated in Table 2.3, there is not a significant relationship between parents’ education and having children if living in a cohabiting relationship. However, in the multivariate model parental education is positively associated with this item largely due to the inclusion of gender in the model (results not shown). This suppression may occur because a greater percentage of female participants report having less educated parents compared to boys.

Cohabitation Beliefs

Participants offer support for the idea of cohabiting prior to marriage ($M=2.82$), but there is variation in responses with 28% strongly agreeing and 14% strongly disagreeing (Tables 2.3, 2.4). Teens do not have strong views on whether living together prior to marriage signals less commitment than marriage ($M=2.39$) with 12% strongly agreeing. Fourteen-year-old Katie,
Table 2.7. Summary of Regression Analysis for Variables Mediating Sex and Parenthood Beliefs and Parents’ Resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Teens should wait to have sex until after high school.</th>
<th>Should only have sex if married.</th>
<th>How being a parent would affect future goals.</th>
<th>Okay to have children if living with partner.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zero Order 1</td>
<td>Multivariate 2</td>
<td>Zero Order 1</td>
<td>Multivariate 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents’ Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Low Attainment)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Attainment</td>
<td>-0.57 --</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>-0.36 --</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Structure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Non-Two Parent Bio.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-Parent Bio.</td>
<td>-- 0.66</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>-- 0.98</td>
<td>1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<td>-0.36</td>
<td>-0.39</td>
<td>-1.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Male)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3.10**</td>
<td>2.54**</td>
<td>-0.36</td>
<td>-3.11**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>(White)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>-1.30</td>
<td>-0.88</td>
<td>-1.14</td>
<td>-0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>-0.51</td>
<td>-0.99</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>-0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>-0.64</td>
<td>-0.35</td>
<td>-1.23</td>
<td>-1.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>4.00†</td>
<td>1.15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dating Status</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Currently Dating)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Currently Dating</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>-0.87</td>
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<tr>
<td>Never Dated</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>3.02**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parenthood Status</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Not a Parent)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>-1.44</td>
<td>-1.41</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>1.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>199</td>
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<tr>
<td>(R^2)</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adjusted (R^2)</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

from a non-two parent biological married family, argues “the only difference is there’s a ring on your finger, so you’re really committed … [but] you could still be committed and not be married.” Teens grapple with the pros and cons of cohabiting. Kelly, 14-years-old and from a married household, explains why cohabitation may not be a good choice, “I think you shouldn’t...
live together before you get married … Cuz then like if you’re living together- like the percentage of you guys getting a divorce is really high.” Kelly is making the link between cohabitation and subsequent stability of future marriage. Some beliefs about the downside of cohabiting center on incompatibilities in lifestyle. Abigail, 17-years-old and also from a married household, explains her reluctance to cohabit with her current boyfriend, “I think, and there’s small stuff right now because I think I’m younger, but like just I’ll walk into his room and I’m like I could never live with you … just how he operates sometimes. It’s just like I know our systems would crash.” Abigail anticipates that disparities in their mannerisms and behavior may foretell relationship problems. Other respondents have more positive assessments of cohabitation. Fifteen-year-old Katia, who lives in a non-two parent biological married family, believes that “when you live with somebody before marriage, you know how they react to things … You don’t wanna just get married and then all of a sudden live together because then you’re just going to be learning what this person likes and … dislikes … [cohabitation] could really tell you if you’re going to get married or not.” This sample is also unsure as to whether they will ever/will again cohabit (M=2.52) with 12% expressing strong agreement and 19% strong disagreement (Tables 2.3, 2.4). Tables 2.3 and 2.4 show there are no significant differences in cohabitation beliefs according to parents’ education and family structure which suggests that beliefs may be less a factor of familial characteristics and perhaps more a function of how adolescents view their relationship goals in the context of other future goals (e.g., education).

Table 2.8 presents the zero-order and multivariate models using parents’ education and family structure to predict cohabiting beliefs. The indicators of parental resources are not related to the belief that people who live together before marriage are less committed. As indicated in Table 2.4, there is not a significant relationship between family structure and the belief that it is a
good idea to cohabit. However, in the multivariate model family structure is positively associated with this cohabitation belief. This suppression appears to be largely due to the inclusion of parenthood status in the model (results not shown). At the bivariate level 50% of parents strongly agree that cohabitation is a good idea compared to only one-quarter (27%) of non-parents. The distribution among non-parents mirrors that of the total sample wherein 27% strongly agrees in the benefit of cohabitation. Lastly, the relationship between family structure and the likelihood of cohabiting prior to marriage is not significant at the bivariate level. However, in the multivariate model family structure is positively associated with this item. This suppression appears to be due to the inclusion of parenthood status in the model (results not shown). This suppression may occur because of differential support for cohabitation based on parenthood status and that teen parents more often live in two-parent biological families.

Marriage Beliefs

Tables 2.3 and 2.4 indicate that participants generally agree that it is important to be married someday (\(M=3.21\)) with close to half (44%) of all respondents indicating that marriage is a “very important” goal. Yet they are somewhat undecided as to whether married people are happier than unmarried people (\(M=2.38\)). Fifteen percent of participants strongly disagree that married people are happier than non-married individuals; yet only 8% strongly agree that married people are happier. This may be due, in part, to the fact that more than half (66%) of this sample resides in non-two parent biological families where relationship discord occurs more often. Yet, participants are somewhat unclear as to whether seeing few examples of good marriages makes them question whether to get married (\(M=2.55\)). Similar percentages of participants strongly disagree (16%) and strongly agree (11%) that having few good relationship role models influences their own marriage plans. This uncertainty in response may be due to the
Table 2.8. Summary of Regression Analysis for Variables Mediating Cohabitation Beliefs and Parents’ Resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Usually a good idea for a couple to live together before marriage.</th>
<th>People who live together before marriage are less committed.</th>
<th>How likely is it you will cohabit?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zero Order</td>
<td>Multivariate</td>
<td>Zero Order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents’ Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Low Attainment)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Attainment</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>-0.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Structure</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Non-Two Parent Bio.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-Parent Bio.</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>-1.86</td>
<td>-2.34*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<td>-0.22</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>-3.33***</td>
<td>-0.43</td>
<td>-2.45*</td>
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<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
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<tr>
<td>(White)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>-1.44</td>
<td>-0.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>-1.52</td>
<td>1.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>-2.47**</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades</td>
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<td>-0.77</td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dating Status</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Currently Dating)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Currently Dating</td>
<td>-0.74</td>
<td>-1.29</td>
<td>-1.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never Dated</td>
<td>1.72</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parenthood Status</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Not a Parent)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>-1.50</td>
<td>1.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted $R^2$</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>-0.002</td>
<td>0.06</td>
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</table>

*ps.05, **ps.01, ***ps.001
discrepancy between those who *do* see so few good marriages and therefore question whether to get married, and those who *do* see so few good marriages yet *do not* question whether to get married. Poor question wording may be eliciting unreliable and inconsistent responses.

Participants are also unclear as to whether marriage should be for life without the option of divorce ($M=2.65$) with 26% strongly agreeing. Melissa, 15-years-old explains that she wants “to get married but how I see it is that if I feel that we’re not going- we’re not going okay well then I’d have to say that we’d have to take a break, like separate for a little bit. And then if it really isn’t working then just have to get a divorce because if it’s not working now … [but] I wouldn’t want to put my kids through that.” Even by the age of fifteen respondents like Melissa are grappling with the future ramifications of divorce on themselves and their yet-to-be-born children. Most participants strongly agree that they want to wait until after completing their education to marry ($M=3.47$). Only 2% of participants strongly disagree that they will wait to finish their education before marrying. Fifteen-year-old Ellen claims that before she will marry her current partner, “like we’ve gotta be on top. We both gotta have our stuff, like jobs … And stuff … Our relationships gotta be better … We gotta have more trust in each other … We really gotta be committed if we really want to get married.”

Commitment is not the only consideration for adolescents- educational and occupational goals are also factored into decisions about marriage timing. There are no significant differences in marriage beliefs according to parents’ education (Table 2.3) and family structure (Table 2.4) which indicates that a family’s ability to financially invest in adolescents’ future relationship goals and family structure may not be salient predictors of adolescents’ beliefs about marriage. Ordinary least squares regression was run for marriage beliefs (not shown) but only those models with significant zero-order differences or models with suppression are presented.
Joint Cohabitation and Marriage Expectations

Cohabitation and marriage expectations do not operate separately so views of cohabitation and marriage are combined into a single indicator. Among those with high expectations to marry (N=163), 42% have low expectations to cohabit and 58% have high expectations to cohabit. These findings are in-line with Manning et al. (2007a) who find that three-fifths (57%) of teens who expect to marry also expect to cohabit. There are no significant differences in joint expectations according to parents’ education (Table 2.3) although there are significant differences according to family structure (t= 2.24, p=.03) with adolescents from non-two biological parent families more likely to have high expectations to cohabit and marry. Teens from non-two parent biological families comprise the majority (72%) of those with high expectations to cohabit and marry.

Logistic regression was used to predict adolescents’ expectations to cohabit based on parents’ educational attainment and family structure (Table 2.10). According to Table 2.10, parental resources (e.g., parents’ education and family structure) do not influence likelihood of expecting to cohabit. In the multivariate model, adolescents who live in two-parent biological families have significantly lower odds of cohabiting. Compared to those from non-two parent biological families, teens living with both biological parents have 36% lower odds of expecting to cohabit. These findings are similar to those from Manning et al. (2007a) who find that teens that live with stepparents, single parents, and cohabiting parents have higher odds of cohabiting and marrying rather than following the traditional pathway to marriage.
Table 2.10. Logistic Regression Predicting Expectation to Cohabit and Marry Versus Only Marry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Joint Cohabitation and Marriage Beliefs</th>
<th>Zero Order</th>
<th>Multivariate</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Parents’ Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Low Attainment)</td>
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<td>High Attainment</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Low Attainment)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family Structure</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Non-Two Parent Bio.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Two-Parent Bio.</td>
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<td>0.36*</td>
</tr>
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<td>Hispanic</td>
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<td>-2 Likelihood ratio</td>
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<tr>
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<td>146</td>
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</table>

*p≤.05, **p≤.01, ***p≤.001

Control Variables

The set of covariates examined are strongly associated with a number of the relationship beliefs with the exception of adolescents’ age. The effect of gender varies across models. Girls express significantly greater agreement that it is important to get to know a partner’s family
before committing, that having a partner share values is important, that teens should wait to have
sex until after high school, and that a person should only have sex in the context of marriage.
Boys report significantly greater willingness to stay in a relationship if their partner is hitting
them, think that it would be okay to have children while cohabiting, agree that cohabitation is
beneficial, and are more likely to cohabit prior to marriage. Gender differences are not found for
the remaining items. These findings suggest that relationship education classes may need to be
tailored to gender-specific concerns, and that single-sex classes may be more appropriate for the
course material.

Compared to Whites, Blacks report greater support for completing education rather than
being in a romantic relationship, and staying in a relationship if they were being hit or cheated
on. Blacks agree less about the importance of getting to know a partner’s family and the
importance of waiting to have sex until after high school. Hispanics disagree more than Whites
that they question marriage because they have few examples of good or happy marriages.
Lastly, ‘Other’ race individuals express significantly less agreement that cohabiters are less
committed than married couples, and are more likely to cohabit in the future. Race is unrelated
to the remaining relationship beliefs. These findings suggest that background characteristics are
an important factor that may account for differential class experiences and outcomes.

Teen parents express significantly greater support for getting to know a partner’s family
and feel that being a teen parent would not affect their future goals. Teen parents agree less
about the importance of trusting a partner prior to commitment. The remaining relationship
beliefs do not vary by parenthood status. Relationship education classes need to account for
parenthood status in order to best meet the needs of participants who may be facing a number of
added barriers to achieving healthy relationships.
Those who are not currently dating believe more strongly that they want to postpone marriage until they have completed their education and that married people are generally happier. Those who have never dated agree more that being a teen parent would negatively influence their future goals. These findings suggest that adolescents may filter class information through the context of their own relationship thereby lessening or perhaps magnifying the influence of certain topics.

Lastly, teens with greater academic achievement believe more strongly that it is okay to have children while cohabiting, feel that having children would negatively influence achievement of their future goals, and agree that seeing so few good marriages makes them doubt their own plans to marry. Students who perform well in school may be less inclined to become enmeshed in romantic relationships that curtail education and career goals.

**Relationship Belief Change**

Over the course of the eight-week *Relationship Smarts* program, participants experienced significant change on a number of relationship beliefs. Participants’ pre- and post-class relationship beliefs are presented below in Figures 2.1-2.5. Figure 2.1 shows that for the total sample of participants, there is a significant change in the dating belief “It is important to get to know my partner’s family before fully committing” \( (t=-2.19, \rho=.03) \). Among those who scored below the average on the item pertaining to dating someone whom parents dislike, there was a significant increase in their score after the program \( (t=-2.83, \rho=.006) \). There is no significant change in their other dating ideals and attitudes.
Figure 2.1. Pre-to-Post-Class Mean Dating Ideals and Attitudes

Figure 2.2 indicates there are no significant shifts in teens’ dating partner preferences. However, among those who scored below average on the item pertaining to ending a relationship if a partner attempts to change them, there was a significant increase in agreement over the course of the program (t=−2.17, ρ=.04).

The results in Figure 2.3 show that teens did not significantly change their beliefs about sex and parenthood over the course of the program. Among those with below average scores on the item pertaining to waiting to have sex until after high school, there was a significant increase in agreement over the course of the program (t=−5.33, ρ<.0001). There was also a significant increase in agreement for the item concerning having sex only in the context of marriage for those who started with below average scores (t=−4.05, ρ<.0001).
Figure 2.2. Pre-to-Post-Class Mean Dating Partner Preferences

Figure 2.3. Pre-to-Post-Class Mean Sex and Parenthood Beliefs

Figure 2.4 indicates that adolescents experienced a significant decline in their level of agreement with the statement “It is usually a good idea to live together before marriage” (t=2.09, p=.04). Adolescents agreed less with this statement after completing the class
Figure 2.4. Pre-to-Post-Class Mean Cohabitation Beliefs

(\(M=2.82, M=2.68\)). Prior to taking the class, 28% of adolescents indicated that they Strongly Agree that cohabiting prior to marriage is a good idea compared to only 18% after taking the class. There was also a significant increase in agreement on this item among those who began with below average scores (\(t=-2.24, \rho=.03\)).

Figure 2.5 indicates no significant change in marriage beliefs over the course of the program. Lastly, adolescents did not significantly change their combined cohabitation and marriage expectations over the course of the program (not shown). Prior to the class, 58% teens indicated high expectations to cohabit and marry (\(N=163\)) while after the class this percentage declined to 53% (\(N=155\)). Forty-two percent of teens indicated low expectations to cohabit and high expectations to marry prior to the class (\(N=163\)) while after the class this percentage increased to 47% (\(N=155\)).

Although there were no other notable changes in beliefs for the total sample, qualitative findings suggest that participants learned a great deal about effective communication techniques with one’s partner. Ellen, a 15-year-old who anticipates cohabiting with her current partner in the future, explains how the program taught her how to diffuse tense situations with her
Figure 2.5. Pre-to-Post-Class Mean Marriage Beliefs

boyfriend: “we used to argue like everyday … I learned how to like stop. Like we can stop and talk and work out our problems instead of being mad at each other, arguing and making a big deal out of everything … we got our different opinions … But we just drop it at that.” Ellen learned that accepting differences in her partner is an important step in developing healthy relationships characterized by mutual respect.

*Parent’s Education and Change in Beliefs*

The effect of the program differed depending on parental education. Figures 2.6-2.10 present the magnitude of change experienced by adolescents according to their parents’ education. Figure 2.6 shows that teens with less educated parents (δ=.33) experienced a significantly greater increase in agreement (t=2.45, p=.0155) with the statement “It is important to get to know a partner’s family before committing” compared to those with highly educated parents (δ=.01). There are differences in initial mean response according to parents’ education with teens of less educated parents expressing slightly less agreement (M=3.03) with this statement compared to teens with highly educated parents (M=3.11). There were no other significant differences in the magnitude of change on items pertaining to dating ideals and
attitudes according to parents’ education. Thus, adolescents appear to be forming some of their beliefs about dating relationships outside the realm of familial influence.

Figure 2.7 indicates no significant differences in the magnitude of change on items pertaining to partner preferences (e.g., trust, sharing values, abuse) according to parents’ education. Among those who began with below average scores, there is a significant change according to parents’ education on the item concerning ending a relationship if a partner tries to change me (t=-2.54, \( \rho=.01 \)). These findings suggest that adolescent preferences for romantic partners may be formed by influences external to the family (e.g., friends). Partner preferences may also be less malleable and more personal, and therefore unlikely to change significantly over the course of a relationship program.
In terms of beliefs about sex and parenthood (Figure 2.8), there were no significant differences in the magnitude of change according to parents’ education over the course of the program. Adolescents’ beliefs about sex may be more dependent on the context of a particular romantic relationship and less so on parents’ education or a relationship program.

As Figure 2.9 indicates, teens with less educated parents ($\delta = -0.32$) experienced a significantly larger negative degree of change ($t = -2.00, p = 0.0475$) on the item pertaining to whether cohabitation is usually good way to get to know one’s partner prior to marriage compared to those with highly educated parents ($\delta = -0.03$). Importantly, both groups decreased their agreement with this item- a particular focus of the *Relationship Smarts* program.
Figure 2.8. Magnitude of Change in Mean Sex & Parenting Beliefs According to Parents’ Education

Figure 2.9. Magnitude of Change in Mean Cohabitation Beliefs According to Parents’ Education
Figure 2.10 shows that youth whose parents have less education ($\delta=.20$) experienced a significantly greater positive magnitude of change ($t=2.08, \rho=.039$) on the item “*I want to wait until I finish my education before getting married*” compared to those whose parents have greater education ($\delta=-.02$); these youth actually decreased their agreement with this statement over the course of the program. Teens with less educated parents indicated lower levels of agreement with this statement ($M=3.39$) on initial reports compared to teens with highly educated parents ($M=3.59$). Participants with highly educated parents experienced a significant change over the course of the program on only one item (results not shown) pertaining to the importance of marriage ($t=2.07, \rho=.0402$). These youth significantly decreased their belief in the importance of marriage from the initial assessment ($M=3.25$) to the end of the program ($M=3.12$). This change likely does not reflect a rejection of marriage as 40% of participants with highly educated parents still think of marriage as *Very Important* after taking the program. This

*Figure 2.10. Magnitude of Change in Mean Marriage Beliefs According to Parents’ Education*
change more likely reflects the importance of education impressed upon children of highly educated parents. Among those who began with below average scores, there is a significant change according to parent’s education on the item pertaining to having few examples of good marriages (t=2.03, ρ=.05). Adolescents did not experience any significant differences in the magnitude of their marriage beliefs according to parents’ education over the course of the program (Figure 2.10).

Lastly, the majority of adolescents with less educated parents (69%) and highly educated parents (72%) did not change their expectations to cohabit over the course of the program (not shown). Both groups of adolescents experienced an 18% decrease in likelihood to cohabit while 13% of adolescents with less educated parents and 11% of adolescents with more educated parents developed a greater likelihood to cohabit over the course of the program. There are no other significant differences in the magnitude of change in cohabitation beliefs according to parents’ education.

*Family Structure and Change in Beliefs*

Analyses conducted separately according to family structure reveal one key effect of the program (results not shown). Adolescents from non-two parent biological families experienced a significant decrease (t=2.15, ρ=.0330) in agreement with cohabitation belief “*It is usually a good idea for a couple to live together before marriage*”. In contrast, adolescents from two-parent biological families did not experience any significant changes in their relationship beliefs over the course of the program. Further, differences in the magnitude of change according to family structure did not vary significantly on any item (results not shown) indicating the program has a similar effect on teens from two-parent biological families and those from non-two parent biological families. These findings suggest that family structure may not significantly influence
adolescents’ experience of relationship education programs that focus on adolescents’ own relationship trajectories and goals.

**DISCUSSION**

The majority of youth experience their first romantic relationship in adolescence making this time period pivotal for ensuring that adolescents forge meaningful, healthy relationships as they transition to adulthood. Whether government policies concerning relationship education programs are effective and appropriately targeted will depend, at least in part, on an understanding of how adolescents think about and plan for romantic relationships over the course of adolescence and during the transition into early adulthood. This chapter examines the relationship beliefs of adolescents who have recently completed a relationship education course as part of their high school curriculum. Notwithstanding expectations to marry, adolescents maintain certain attitudes and beliefs concerning marriage, and relationships more generally, that may forestall efforts to achieve their relationship goals. This sample was drawn from two local high schools in close proximity to one another. As such, neighborhood characteristics are unlikely to vary to significant degrees. Additional research is warranted to flesh out the magnitude of these findings with a more generalizable sample of youth. The current study, while limited in sample scope, seeks to elucidate some of the attitudes and beliefs underlying adolescents’ union expectations and behavior.

Overall, the two messages that had a general resonance with adolescents were those relating to the importance of getting to know a partner’s family and living together prior to marriage. Teens increased their agreement with the importance of getting to know a partner’s family over the course of the program. At time 1, 76% of teens agreed that getting to know parents was important while after the program this percentage increased to 83%. Adolescents
decreased their agreement with the benefit of cohabiting over the course of the program. Prior to taking the Relationship Smarts program, 28% of adolescents indicated that they Strongly Agree that cohabiting prior to marriage is a good idea. This percentage decreased significantly to 18% over the course of the program. There was also a significant increase on this item among those who began with below average scores.

As hypothesized, adolescents expressed greater support for positive dating beliefs over the course of the program with the exception of two items. Although not a statistically significant decline, one indicator that showed a decline was the item pertaining to whether previous relationships influence partner choices. More specifically, disadvantaged youth (defined by both parents’ education and family structure) decreased their agreement with this item. This is a prime component of the Relationship Smarts curriculum- learning from one’s mistakes and experiences in past relationships so as to better future relationships. While not a significant decrease in agreement over time, these findings suggest that the program may need to further emphasize the connectedness of romantic relationships during the life course.

A second item that showed a slight decline (again not statistically significant) was belief that education is more important than romantic relationships. In accordance with previous research (Trent 1994), more advantaged youth (defined by both parents’ education and family structure) start the program with significantly higher levels of agreement with this item; however, they decrease in agreement over the course of the program. While the program emphasizes the importance of completing education before committing to a serious romantic relationship it also endows adolescents with relationship skills that may make them feel capable of handling a serious relationship in conjunction with achieving other life goals (e.g., education,
parenthood, marriage). It is important to note that all adolescents, regardless of parental resources, generally agree that education is more important than romantic relationships.

Not everyone responded to the program lessons in the same way. Teenagers from less advantaged backgrounds, defined by parents’ education, reported significant gains in the importance of getting to know a partner’s family before fully committing and desire to complete education prior to marriage. Teens from disadvantaged families also reported significant declines in the support for cohabitation after completion of the program. In contrast, teens from more advantaged backgrounds experienced a significant decline in beliefs about the importance of marriage. Analyses also consider how family structure influences the impact of the program. I find that teens raised in non-two biological parent families (66% of the sample) report a significant decline in the perceived benefit of cohabiting prior to marriage. Conversely youth who live with two biological parents did not report any significant changes over the course of the program. These findings suggest that the experience of relationship education classes may differ according to the participants’ characteristics and the accumulation of life experiences that teens bring to bear on program curriculum.

As indicated, parental resources predict some adolescent relationship beliefs, and these relationships are frequently mediated, and in some cases suppressed, by sociodemographic characteristics like race/ethnicity, dating status, and parenthood status. Race/ethnicity is associated with both parents’ educational and family structure in this study, though not in the typical ways. Consistent with previous research, minority youth are overrepresented in non-two parent biological families yet they are more likely to report highly educated parents. This may be a reflection of the general overrepresentation of minority youth in this sample (80%). Dating status does not significantly differ according to parental resources yet being involved in romantic
relationships does influence the association between parents’ resources and some relationship beliefs. There are more adolescent daters who report highly educated parents yet who also report living in non-two parent biological families. Previous research links the experience of dating with the capacity to consider a future with romantic partner, and daters, in general, have already begun the sequence of behaviors that precede cohabitation and marriage. Lastly, parenting status differs significantly according to parental resources. There are more teen parents with less educated parents yet, unexpectedly, there are also more teen parents living in two-parent families. Teen parents, like those who are currently dating, have begun a life course trajectory that may involve cohabitation and marriage sooner than non-parents. While there are significant differences in parenthood status according to parental resources, the number of overall teen parents, as in many samples of youth, is low (4%). Future research will benefit from studying a subsample of just teen parents.

There is generally strong consensus among teens concerning “dating partner preferences” and surprisingly little variation according to parental resources. Regardless of parents’ education and family structure, all adolescents generally agree that shared values are an important requirement of partners, that partners should be trustworthy, and that they would leave a relationship if they were being forced to change. In general, youth strongly disagree that they would stay in a relationship if they were being hit or cheated on. Qualitative findings reinforce the fact that program interventions did not significantly influence adolescents’ beliefs concerning dating partners, and suggest that teens may be more comfortable making personal decisions in the context of romantic relationships. Teens admit to acquiring information from parents, friends, the program, and significant others yet ultimately make their own decisions when it comes to dating and partner preferences. These findings suggest that program interventions
should focus on how problem behaviors operate in the context of a relationship (e.g., subtle manipulation) and reasons why some adolescents may choose to remain in problematic relationships rather than on “ideal” partners.

Results about “sex and parenthood” beliefs are mixed, and over the course of the program adolescents’ beliefs changed in unintended ways on two items. Among the total sample of youth, regardless of parental resources, there is a slight decrease in agreement that being a teen parent would hinder the achievement of future goals. Higher scores indicate that being a parent would not hinder achievement of future goals. However, in general, adolescents’ scores indicate that they believe children would delay or prevent them from achieving goals. In a related finding, adolescents with less educated parents report increased agreement that having children in a cohabiting relationship would be acceptable over the course of the program. Previous research also suggests that adolescents with highly educated parents are more likely to delay childbearing (Trent 1994) perhaps because they anticipate that parenting will interfere with other life goals; this may not be the case for children of less educated parents who may foresee less options in terms of education and employment opportunities. The vast majority of the sample are not parents however qualitative findings suggest that these youth have directly witnessed the influence of children on their peers. In many cases, adolescents indicate that, at least temporarily, having children actually results in greater respect and adoration. Youth may be unaware of parenting struggles when they witness their peers elicit positive reactions to having children and see their peers continue to attend school and, in some cases, graduate.

Forgoing cohabitation, in general, is a key component of the Relationship Smarts curriculum and having children in cohabitation is conveyed to adolescents as a particularly tenuous decision. Adolescents with highly educated parents express less traditional cohabitation
beliefs. These teens expressed greater agreement that cohabiting is a good idea prior to marriage, disagree more than teens of less educated parents that cohabiters are less committed, and indicate slightly greater likelihood to cohabit. These findings diverge with my hypothesis that teens with less educated parents would be more accepting of cohabitation. Further, the findings pertaining to expectations to cohabit also contradict previous research (Manning et al. 2007a) that finds children of less educated parents are more likely to cohabit. This finding may reflect the overall growing acceptance of cohabitation as a stepping stone to marriage. However, in line with my hypothesis, teens with less educated parents experienced a significant decrease in agreement that cohabitation is beneficial prior to marriage (t=2.66, p=.0096). They also experienced a significantly greater magnitude of change compared to teens with more educated parents who only slightly decreased their level of agreement. This finding supports my hypothesis that teens with less educated parents would experience a greater change in beliefs as they are exposed to curriculum that emphasizes the negative implications of cohabitation. Lastly, teens from non-two parent biological families expressed less traditionalism on items pertaining to cohabitation. Based on previous research (Crissey 2005), I hypothesized that teens from biologically intact families would express greater disapproval of cohabitation. In general, this hypothesis is supported by lower levels of agreement among teens from married two-parent biological families that cohabitation is beneficial prior to marriage, and a lower likelihood of cohabiting in the future. However, it is important to note that in general and regardless of parental resources, teens indicated rather low expectations (about half) to cohabit relative to marriage (82%). Teens from biologically intact families expressed only slightly less agreement that people who cohabit are less committed compared to teens from non-two parent biological families.
Beliefs about marriage are also somewhat mixed. While 82% of teens think marriage is an important goal, more than half (58%) see so few good or happy marriages that they question whether to get married and two-fifths (42%) do not think marriage is for life. I anticipated a greater increase in support for marriage based on the program’s positive emphasis on achieving marriage; yet there was little indication of this among participants. One explanation for these findings is the prominence of topics dealing with relationship issues and problems that may actually make teens more pessimistic about their chances of achieving marriage. Rather than feeling empowered to improve the quality of their relationships some teens may be responding to the curriculum with an increased pessimism about their odds of having successful romantic relationships. Lastly, adolescents with more educated parents significantly lessened their agreement that marriage should be postponed until finishing education ($t=-2.55$, $p=.01$). This finding is in direct opposition to previous research which finds that adolescents with highly educated parents are more likely to delay childbearing due to educational and occupational goals (Trent 1994; Rosenfeld 2006). Further, adolescents’ extended education contributes to later age at marriage and delayed childbearing (Rosenfeld 2006). This sample of youth became more receptive to the idea that marriage does not have to be postponed until after education has been completed. The magnitude of change experienced by teens with more educated parents is still significantly smaller than the increased agreement experienced by teens with less educated parents over the course of the program ($t=2.08$, $p=.04$). This finding may be a reflection of the belief that teens with highly educated parents can achieve multiple goals simultaneously and not necessarily in a traditional trajectory (e.g., education first and then marriage).

Cohabitation and marriage expectations do not operate separately for this generation of youth. As the data indicate, adolescents increasingly expect to cohabit and marry. The majority
of youth in the total sample and according to parents’ education follow this pattern. The only exception is among youth living in two-parent biological households. Among these youth, 54% do not indicate high expectations to cohabit and marry compared to only 46% who do expect to cohabit and marry. These youth differ significantly ($t=2.24, \rho=.03$) from those living in non-two parent biological households. This finding is not altogether surprising given previous research suggesting that adolescents who live in non-married and non-two parent biological households may be more accepting of non-traditional pathways to marriage that include cohabitation (Crissey 2005; Waller & McLanahan 2005; Manning et al. 2007a).

The program seems to have a greater influence on boys compared to girls. While the vast majority of participants are female, there are still marked gender distinctions across several relationship domains at the outset of the program. Gender is significantly related to beliefs about dating, partner preferences, sex, and cohabitation; however, notably, gender does not mediate or explain the effect of disadvantage. At the outset of the class, girls express significantly greater agreement concerning the need to get to know a partner’s family ($t=-2.99, \rho=.02$), and the need for partners to share values ($t=-2.89, \rho=.005$). Further, girls express greater agreement that teens should wait to have sex until they are out of high school ($t=-3.08, \rho=.003$), and that a person should only have sex if married ($t=-2.48, \rho=.02$). Conversely, boys express greater agreement that they would stay in a relationship if their partner hit them ($t=5.50, \rho\leq.0001$), that it would be okay to have children in a cohabiting relationship ($t=2.77, \rho=.007$), that it is usually a good idea to cohabit ($t=3.69, \rho=.0003$), and that they will likely cohabit in the future ($t=3.16, \rho=.0022$). Over the course of the program girls experienced only one significant change pertaining to the belief that they are too young to be tied down to one girl/guy ($t=-2.03, \rho=.04$). Prior to the class 45% of girls agreed/strongly agreed with this statement compared to 56% after
the class. Boys significantly lessened their agreement with the item concerning whether it is okay to have children while cohabiting (t=2.44, \( \rho = .02 \)). Prior to the class close to half of all boys agreed/strongly agreed with this belief (48%) compared to only 28% after the class. Boys also experienced a significant decline in agreement on the item pertaining to the benefit of cohabiting (t=2.55, \( \rho = .01 \)). About three-quarters (76%) of boys agreed/strongly agreed with this statement after taking the class compared to 85% at the beginning of the class. Lastly, boys experienced a significant increase in agreement that married people are generally happier than unmarried people (t=-2.29, \( \rho = .03 \)). Forty-three percent of boys agreed/strongly agreed with this statement at the outset of the class compared to 46% of boys after the class. The change that boys experience as a result of the program may be contributable to the notion that adolescent girls already center much of their time and energy on romantic attachments (Giordano, Longmore, & Manning 2006) therefore boys have a greater emotional and social leap to overcome. Boys with access to relationship education classes appear to respond more strongly to the curriculum in part because they may lack other outlets for exploring relationship beliefs with same-sex friends or dating relationships. Much research on adolescent romantic relationships has devalued the male view in part because it is assumed that romantic relationships are of less importance to boys compared to girls (Giordano et al. 2006). This study provides a direct assessment of boys’ views about romance and dating from their own perspective. Future research will benefit from larger and more representative samples of male participants as a means of ascertaining any additional influence of gender on relationship education outcomes.

Relationship education classes targeted at teenagers may prove to have long term implications for the development and maintenance of healthy adult relationships. Ultimately, a more complete understanding of adolescence as a stage in the life course will stem from an
account of why and how adolescents acquire certain beliefs about romantic relationships. It will also be an imperative goal for relationship education programs seeking to address the root causes of disadvantage among those less likely to achieve their relationship goals. The current work illustrates that there are significant differences between youth according to parental resources that may delay or prevent some youth from achieving their relationship goals. This sample of youth is rather unique given the overwhelming level of disadvantage—neighborhood characteristics suggest that unemployment and poverty are not uncommon occurrences for these teens. Disadvantaged teens launch their relationship trajectories without as many skills and pro-social beliefs as their advantaged peers. Although no relationship education program to date solely targets disadvantaged adolescents, their experiences and the difficulties they face suggest the importance of developing curricula to help them achieve their relationship goals. Relationship programs can help address the unique needs of disadvantaged youth by tailoring curriculum to address, not only what participants hope to achieve in the future, but also their current family circumstances, and past events that may be contributing to their present life course trajectory. Program evaluations that are able to assess the benefit of such curricula may be more beneficial for understanding the different relationship trajectories facing all youth. To this end, qualitative assessments can be a more insightful and appropriate means of allowing adolescents to address their beliefs about relationships in a holistic sense—as they relate to the entirety of experiences characteristic of this stage in the life course (e.g., educational attainment, moving away from home, seeking employment, and unmarried childbearing).
CHAPTER 3: ADOLESCENT DATING BELIEFS:  
TOLEDO ADOLESCENT RELATIONSHIP STUDY

This chapter replicates and extends analyses from Chapter 3 using a larger, more diverse sample of youth (Toledo Adolescent Relationship Study). Current research addressing union beliefs and opinions among adolescents is scarce (Thornton et al. 2007; Manning et al. 2007a; Whitehead & Pearson 2006; Crissey 2005; Lichter et al. 2004; Martin et al. 2003). The handful of studies that exist do not fully address or focus on how relationship beliefs are shaped by parental resources (e.g., educational attainment and family structure). Given the literature on disadvantage (Bumpass, Sweet, & Cherlin 1991; Bennett et al. 1995; Brooks-Gunn & Chase-Lansdale 1995; Brown 2000; Lerman 2002; Carlson et al. 2004; Schoen et al. 2009) and findings from prior chapters, I expect that relationship beliefs will be associated with parental resources. I specifically examine whether the effects of parental resources can be partially explained by adolescents’ sociodemographic characteristics.

This study seeks to understand the dating relationship beliefs that disadvantaged youth may bring to their adult relationships. Further, this study examines the existence of socioeconomic differences in dating beliefs using parental resources as a proxy for socioeconomic status. Socioeconomically disadvantaged youth are at risk for a number of factors (e.g., early sexual debut, intergenerational transmission of divorce) associated with an increased likelihood of teen pregnancy or marital disruption; therefore it is particularly important to understand how their beliefs about dating form during this critical period of development. Given the differentially poor outlook for disadvantaged populations, it is particularly important to assess how beliefs about dating may steer disadvantaged youth on a less traditional relationship trajectory into adulthood and more consequential relationships.
Much research on relationship beliefs and expectations focuses on college-aged youth or adults; however, relationship beliefs emerge far earlier in the life course. While it is valuable to assess relationship expectations among college-aged youth, results may be misleading given the social desirability of marriage. It is necessary to address the underlying beliefs about relationships and romantic partners that may influence adolescents’ expectations to marry and ability to transition into healthy marriages at later ages. Given the great number of changes that occur during adolescence (e.g., education decisions, first relationships, and the shifting role of parents and friends), it is perhaps most important to examine how beliefs about dating emerge during the onset of these earliest relationships. It is particularly important to understand how disadvantaged youth may differ from their more advantaged counterparts in their beliefs and expectations concerning dating relationships because these youth are often at greater risk for poor quality and more tenuous relationships.

Using the life course perspective as the guiding theoretical framework, this study builds on prior studies of adolescent views of cohabitation and marriage (e.g., Gassanov et al. 2007; Manning et al. 2007a) in two key ways. First, I examine adolescents’ relationship beliefs as they pertain to a) desire to date, b) gender distrust, c) sex, and d) parental involvement. While some researchers have examined relationship expectations among adolescents (e.g., Plotnick 2007) existing research does not adequately examine the role of adolescents’ relationship beliefs in relationship behavior. Second, I consider how relationship beliefs differ by parental resources. It is important to consider how relationship beliefs differ by markers of socioeconomic disadvantage given the numerous barriers to marriage among disadvantaged populations. I expect that socioeconomically disadvantaged youth will indicate a more negative orientation to dating relationships that includes greater gender distrust and greater acceptance of early sexual
initiation. Further, I expect that disadvantaged youth will be more inclined to be involved in serious dating relationships, and less willing to divulge relationship information with parents. The control variables included in this study are gender, race/ethnicity, age, dating experience, current relationship status, grades received in school, and parenthood status. Prior studies have not included such a wide array of sociodemographic characteristics that are important when assessing effects of parental disadvantage.

DATA AND METHODS

This study utilizes data from the Toledo Adolescent Relationship Study— a comprehensive assessment of adolescent relationships with parents, peers, and romantic partners. Data are collected from Toledo-area adolescents in grades 7, 9 and 11 in Lucas County, Ohio, encompassing 62 schools across 7 school districts. The stratified, random sample was devised by the National Opinion Research Center, and includes over-samples of African American and Hispanic/Latino(a) adolescents. The sampling frame, including a final total of N=1316, was legally obtained under the Ohio open records act. The TARS investigates the nature and meaning of adolescent heterosexual romantic relationships, and how differences in these experiences are a function of friend, peer, and familial influence. Interviews were conducted in-person with adolescent participants, and data were entered directly into a laptop computer by the interviewer and by respondents to ensure privacy. Parents were also administered a paper and pencil questionnaire, generally at the same time that adolescents were interviewed.

The TARS data are particularly well-suited for my research questions because they allow for a more in-depth assessment of how demographic factors may contribute to socioeconomic differences in dating beliefs. The relational emphasis of the TARS data is highlighted by a wide array of indicators of dating beliefs and attitudes— something few other data sources provide.
These data provide a more diverse picture of youth in terms of gender, education, and family background compared to analyses in prior chapters that focused on a more specific sample of participants in relationship education classes. Additionally, there are a large number of direct questions that address the influence of parents in terms of their communication with teens about dating, acceptance of adolescents’ dating partners, and desire for teens to date. These items allow for a direct analysis of the ways that parents matter. Furthermore, TARS includes questions that directly correspond to items asked in the previous chapter examining the Relationship Smarts relationship education program.

The analytic sample is based on a sample of 1,316 adolescents. They all have complete data on family structure and mean substitution of “some college/trade school experience” was applied for the indicator of mothers’ education for n=73 adolescents missing these data.

Parental Resources

Mothers’ educational attainment (Crissey 2005) is coded into four categories: 1) Less than High School, 2) High School Graduate, 3) Some College/Trade School, and 4) College Graduate. Among mothers, 12% (n = 159) report having less than a high school education, 30% (n = 389) are high school graduates, 38% (n = 501) have some college or trade school experience, and the remaining 20% (n = 267) are college graduates (Table 3.1). Only 2% of respondents have missing information on mother’s education and the mean value of education representing “some college/trade school experience” is applied in those cases.

Another parental resource is family structure is treated as one measure of parental resources. Participants’ reported family composition is coded into five categories 1) Married Biological Two-Parent, 2) Single parent, 3) Stepparent, 4) Cohabiting Stepparent, and 5) Other. Table 4.1 indicates that half the sample (46% or n = 611) report living in a married biological
two-parent family. One-quarter (26% or n= 337) live in a single parent family and 16% (n= 212) live in a stepparent family. Only 6% (n= 84) of respondents live in a cohabiting stepparent family and the remaining 5% (n= 72) live in an ‘other’ family structure. There is a significant difference in family structure according to mothers’ education (F=29.35, $p\leq.0001$) (not shown). Although data on family income is available I chose to focus on maternal education and family structure to reflect analyses from previous chapters.

**Sociodemographic Characteristics**

Table 3.1 presents the distribution of sociodemographic characteristics and I describe below how the sample differs according to the parental resources described above (mother’s education and family structure). Age ranges from 12 to 19 and is coded as a continuous variable ($M=15.25$ years). Participants’ race and ethnicity are divided into four categories: White, African American, Hispanic/Latino(a), and Other (i.e. Asian, Native American, biracial or tri-racial). There are not sufficient cases to provide more refined measures of race/ethnicity. The majority of respondents are White (62%) with 25% African American, 11% Hispanic/Latino(a), and 2% listed as Other. There are significant differences in racial composition according to family structure (F=21.60, $p\leq.0001$) and mothers’ educational status (F= 35.31, $p\leq.0001$) (not shown). In this sample, there are slightly more female respondents (n= 679) than males (n= 637). Parenting status is established with the questions “How many kids do you have?” Participants who responded affirmatively are coded as Parents while all others are listed as Non-Parents. Only 3% (n= 43) of participants are parents. While parenting is not common in this sample, there are significantly differences in parenting status according to family structure (F= 4.84, $p=.0007$) and mothers’ education (F= 4.21, $p=.0056$ (not shown). Relationship status is established with the questions “Is there someone you are currently dating?” and “Have you ever
Table 3.1. Percentages and Means (SD) for Sociodemographic Characteristics and Dating Beliefs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variables</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>M (SD)</th>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>M (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Desire to Date</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Age (Range= 12-19)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too young to be tied down to one girl/guy.</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>15.26 (1.72)</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither Agree nor Disagree</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How interested are you in dating?</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Race/Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all Interested</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not too Interested</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Interested</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretty Interested</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Parent</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Interested</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender Distrust</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Parenthood Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You can’t trust most guys.*</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Currently Dating</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Never Dated</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Not Currently</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither Agree nor Disagree</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You can’t trust most girls around other guys.**</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mostly A’s</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mostly A’s and B’s</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mostly B’s</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither Agree nor Disagree</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mostly B’s and C’s</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mostly C’s or less</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex Attitudes</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Grades Received in School</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A person should only have sex if married.</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mostly A’s</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mostly A’s and B’s</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mostly B’s</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither Agree nor Disagree</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mostly B’s and C’s</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mostly C’s or less</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfortable having casual sex.</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Married Biological Two Parent</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Single Parent</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Stepparent</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither Agree nor Disagree</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Cohabiting</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent Involvement</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Mother’s Educational Attainment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t like to talk to my parents about girls/guys I like.</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Less than High School</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>High School Graduate</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Some College/Trade School</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither Agree nor Disagree</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td></td>
<td>College Graduate</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of argument with parents about dating.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td>1316</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardly Ever</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Several Times a Year</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twice a Month</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a Week</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or More Times a Week</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Only asked of girls (N=679)
**Only asked of boys (N=637)
dated a girl/guy?” The majority of participants are not currently dating (48%) and about two-fifths (44%) are currently dating. Only 8% of teens have never dated. There is a significant difference in dating status according to mothers’ education (F=3.75, ρ=.01) (not shown). Lastly, grades received in school is established with the question “What grades did you get in school this year?” Thirty-two percent (n= 426) of youth report receiving Mostly C’s or less, 25% (n= 325) of youth receive Mostly A’s and B’s, 24% (n= 318) receive Mostly B’s and C’s, 11% (n= 145) receive Mostly A’s, and the remaining 8% (n= 102) receive Mostly B’s. There are significant differences in grades received in school according to family structure (F=25.88, ρ≤.0001) and mothers’ education (F=36.15, ρ≤.0001) (not shown).

Dating Beliefs

Adolescents’ dating beliefs are based on the following four domains: a) Desire to Date, b) Gender Distrust, c) Sex Attitudes, and d) Parental Involvement. Desire to date is measured using two items that capture interest and commitment to dating: “I am too young to be tied down to one person” and “How interested are you in dating?” Responses for the first item range on a five point scale from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree” with the midpoint category of “Neither Agree nor Disagree”. Responses range on a five point scale from “Not at all Interested” to “Very Interested” for the second item. Gender distrust is captured by two items: “You can’t trust most guys” and “You can’t trust most girls around other guys.” Responses for these two items range on a five point scale from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree” with the midpoint category of “Neither Agree nor Disagree”. Sex attitudes are also captured by two items measuring a traditional belief (sex only in marriage) and a liberal belief (accept casual sex): “A person should only have sex if they are married” and “I would feel comfortable having sex with someone I was attracted to but did not know very well.” Responses for these two items range on
a five-point scale from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree” with the additional category of “Neither Agree nor Disagree”. Lastly, parental involvement is captured by two items: “I don’t like to talk to my parents about the girls/guys I like” and “How often do you and your parents have disagreements about your dating?” Responses for the first statement range on a five-point scale from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree” with the additional category of “Neither Agree nor Disagree”. Responses for the second statement include “Never”, “Hardly Ever”, “Several Times a Year”, “Twice a Month”, and “Once a Week or More.”

Analysis Plan

Mean dating belief values for the sample are presented, and general linear modeling is used to determine significant differences according to mother’s education and family structure. Ordinary least squares regression models are used to estimate the bivariate relationship and then the multivariate relationship between parental resources and dating beliefs. I focus on whether and how sociodemographic characteristics mediate the effects of parental resources on dating beliefs. Regression coefficients indicate how a unit change in the independent variables is associated with a unit change in the dependent variable.

RESULTS

Adolescent Dating Beliefs

Below I present bivariate and multivariate models for each outcome. Differences according to parental resources are examined as well as whether control variables mediate the effects of parental resources. Lastly, the effects of control variables are presented in a separate section.

Desire to Date
Table 3.1 presents dating beliefs for the sample of adolescents. In terms of *desire to date*, participants responses fall in the “somewhat disagree” category that they are too young to be tied down in a relationship ($M=2.84$). However, about one-third (32%) of teens agree that they *are* too young to be in a serious relationship. The sample of youth is generally interested in dating ($M=3.58$) with one-fifth (20% or $n=263$) of teens “Very Interested” in dating and another 40% ($n=496$) “Pretty Interested” in dating. Only 4% ($n=58$) of teens indicate no desire to date.

Table 3.2 presents the zero-order and multivariate models using parents’ education and family structure to predict *desire to date*. The indicators of parental resources (mother’s education and family structure) are not related to beliefs about being too young to be tied down to one partner at the bivariate and multivariate levels (Table 3.2). Interest in dating does not vary significantly according to mother’s education. As indicated in Table 3.2, there is a significant relationship between family structure and interest in dating. Adolescents living in married two-parent biological families indicate a significantly greater interest in dating compared to teens from all other family types. Many of these family structure differences are explained in the full model. The effect of living in a stepparent family, compared to a married two-parent biological family, on interest in dating is no longer statistically significant after the addition of maternal education, age, grades received in school, or the race and ethnicity covariates (results not shown) in the model. Further, being in a cohabiting or other type of family, compared to a married two-parent biological family, is no longer significantly related to interest in dating after the inclusion of race and ethnicity covariates (not shown). Further analyses indicate that the significant relationship between race/ethnicity and family structure may partially explain this mediation effect (not shown). Being in a single-parent family remains significantly negatively related to interest in dating with the inclusion of all covariates (Table 3.2).
Table 3.2. *Regression Analysis Predicting Desire to Date*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Zero Order</th>
<th>Multivariate</th>
<th>Zero Order</th>
<th>Multivariate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mothers' Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than High School</td>
<td>-0.23</td>
<td>-0.22</td>
<td>-1.09</td>
<td>-0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(High School Education)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College/Trade School</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>1.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Graduate</td>
<td>-0.49</td>
<td>-0.46</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family Structure</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Married Biological Two-Parent)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Parent</td>
<td>-0.50</td>
<td>-1.27</td>
<td>-4.53†</td>
<td>-3.00**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stepparent</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>-1.97*</td>
<td>-1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohabiting</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>-2.44**</td>
<td>-1.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>-0.30</td>
<td>-0.84</td>
<td>-2.37*</td>
<td>-1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>-4.54†</td>
<td>-3.01**</td>
<td>4.26†</td>
<td>2.05*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race/Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(White)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>2.72**</td>
<td>3.29**</td>
<td>-6.61†</td>
<td>-5.34†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>-2.03*</td>
<td>-1.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>-1.05</td>
<td>-0.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Male)</td>
<td>--</td>
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<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2.76**</td>
<td>3.26**</td>
<td>-1.44</td>
<td>-2.15*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parenthood Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Not a Parent)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>-0.42</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relationship Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never Dated</td>
<td>5.09†</td>
<td>4.32†</td>
<td>-7.19†</td>
<td>-6.76†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Currently Dating</td>
<td>5.21†</td>
<td>4.90†</td>
<td>-6.55†</td>
<td>-6.70†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Currently Dating)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grades</strong></td>
<td>-1.07</td>
<td>-1.17</td>
<td>-2.25*</td>
<td>-0.37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| N                              | 1316       | 1316         |
| R²                             | 0.06       | 0.10         |
| Adjusted R²                    | 0.04       | 0.09         |

*p ≤ .05, **p ≤ .01, ***p ≤ .001, †p ≤ .0001
Gender Distrust

Questions about beliefs concerning gender distrust are asked separately for boys and girls. Girls (n=679) agree that guys cannot be trusted (M=2.99); however, one-third (32%) of girls are undecided about the trustworthiness of guys. Boys generally believe that girls cannot be trusted around other guys (M=3.06). About one-third (34%) of boys agree that girls are untrustworthy yet another one-third (34%) are undecided about girls’ trustworthiness.

Table 3.3 presents the zero-order and multivariate models using parents’ education and family structure to predict gender distrust. Among girls, the indicators of parental resources (mother’s education and family structure) are related to beliefs about gender distrust at the zero-order (Table 3.3). Compared to those whose mothers have a high school education, having a mother with less than a high school education is positively associated with greater distrust of guys (Table 3.3). Conversely, having a mother with a college degree is negatively associated with distrust (Table 3.3). Thus, there appears to be an education gradient where gender distrust is greatest among girls from the most disadvantaged backgrounds. This effect of disadvantage persists in the full model. However, the relationship between having a mother who is a college graduate and trusting in guys is no longer significant after accounting for family structure, race/ethnicity, or grades (not shown). Having a mother with less than a high school education remains a significant predictor of trust in guys, and having a mother with some college experience remains unrelated to trust in guys after the addition of all covariates (Table 3.3). Girls living in stepparent and single parent families have greater gender distrust than girls raised in two biological parent families (Table 3.3). Living in a single parent or stepparent family is no longer related to trust in guys in the multivariate model after the addition of a covariate for grades received by teens (not shown).
Table 3.3. Regression Analysis Predicting Gender Distrust

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>You can’t trust most guys.</th>
<th>You can’t trust most girls around other guys.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>Males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zero Order</td>
<td>Multivariate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mothers’ Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than High School Education</td>
<td>2.46**</td>
<td>2.69**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(High School Education)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College/Trade School</td>
<td>-0.26</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Graduate</td>
<td>-2.15*</td>
<td>-0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family Structure</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Married Biological Two-Parent)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Parent</td>
<td>3.54***</td>
<td>1.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stepparent</td>
<td>3.10**</td>
<td>1.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohabiting</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race/Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(White)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>5.59†</td>
<td>3.02**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>2.04*</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>-0.75</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Male)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parenthood Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Not a Parent)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>0.38</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Relationship Status</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never Dated</td>
<td>-0.60</td>
<td>0.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Currently Dating</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>-0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Currently Dating)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grades</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.48†</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>1.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ \begin{array}{c|c|c|c|c}
\text{N} & 679 & 637 \\
\text{R}^2 & 0.03 & 0.03 \\
\text{Adjusted R}^2 & 0.02 & 0.02 \\
\end{array} \]

*ps.05, **ps.01, ***ps.001, †ps.0001
Among boys there are higher rates of distrust among those with the least educated mothers. This effect is not present in the full model after the addition of covariates for family structure or race/ethnicity (not shown). Dating status suppresses the relationship between having a parent with a college degree and trust in girls (not shown). There is not a significant relationship between family structure and trust in girls at both the bivariate and multivariate level (Table 3.3).

Sex Attitudes

Concerning sex attitudes, the sample of adolescents generally agrees that people should only have sex in the context of marriage \((M=3.24)\). About two-fifths \((43\%)\) agree that sex should only take place within marriage. This sample does not think they would be comfortable having sex with someone they did not know well \((M=1.90)\). Almost half of all teens \((49\%)\) think they would be uncomfortable having casual sex; yet 11% of this sample would be willing to have sex with someone if they were attracted to them but did not know them well.

Table 3.4 presents the zero-order and multivariate models using parents’ education and family structure to predict sex attitudes. Mother’s education is not significantly related to the belief that one should only have sex if married in both the bivariate and multivariate models; however, family structure is significantly related to this item. Being from a single parent family, cohabiting family, or an ‘other’ type of family is negatively related to the belief that sex should only occur within marriage in the bivariate and multivariate models (Table 3.4). However, the addition of covariates for mother’s education, race/ethnicity, or grades mediates the relationship between living in a cohabiting family and believing that sex should only occur within marriage (not shown).
Table 3.4. *Regression Analysis Predicting Sex Attitudes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A person should only have sex if married.</th>
<th>Comfortable having sex with someone I was attracted to but did not know well.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zero Order</td>
<td>Multivariate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mothers’ Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than High School Education</td>
<td>-1.51</td>
<td>-0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(High School Education)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College/Trade School</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Graduate</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family Structure</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Married Biological Two-Parent)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Parent</td>
<td><strong>-4.92†</strong></td>
<td><strong>-4.98†</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stepparent</td>
<td>-1.61</td>
<td>-1.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohabiting</td>
<td><strong>-2.00</strong>*</td>
<td><strong>-2.21</strong>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td><strong>-2.71</strong></td>
<td><strong>-2.54</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td><strong>-10.53†</strong></td>
<td><strong>-9.51†</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race/Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(White)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>-0.95</td>
<td>1.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td><strong>-2.35</strong>*</td>
<td>-0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Male)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td><strong>5.72†</strong></td>
<td><strong>5.99†</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parenthood Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Not a Parent)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td><strong>-2.82</strong></td>
<td>-0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relationship Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never Dated</td>
<td><strong>6.90†</strong></td>
<td><strong>4.81†</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Currently Dating</td>
<td><strong>3.14</strong></td>
<td>1.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Currently Dating)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grades</strong></td>
<td><strong>-5.83†</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.49</strong>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

* N = 1316
* $R^2$ = 0.16
* Adjusted $R^2$ = 0.15

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$, † $p < 0.0001$
Mothers’ education is significantly related to comfort with casual sex (Table 3.4). Specifically, compared to those whose mothers have a high school education, having a mother with a college degree is negatively associated with comfort having casual sex (Table 3.4). The addition of covariates for family structure, race/ethnicity, or grades mediates this relationship (not shown). At the bivariate level, living in a stepparent family is positively related to comfort having casual sex (Table 3.4). The addition of covariates for mothers’ education, race/ethnicity, or grades mediates this relationship in part because of the significant relationship between family structure and mothers’ education, race/ethnicity, and grades (results not shown). The addition of gender suppresses the relationship between living in a single parent family or other type of family (not shown).

*Parental Involvement*

Concerning *parental involvement* in dating, the sample of adolescents somewhat disagrees ($M=2.88$) that it is uncomfortable talking with parents about dating partners; yet, more than one-third (35%) of teens are uncomfortable talking to their parents about romantic partners. Almost half (48%) never argue or disagree with their parents about dating.

Table 3.5 presents the zero-order and multivariate models using mothers’ education and family structure to predict beliefs about *parental involvement*. Mother’s education is significantly related to willingness to talk to parents about romantic partners at the bivariate level (Table 3.5). Having a mother with some college experience or a college degree is positively associated with not wanting to talk to parents about dating partners (Table 3.5). When a covariate measuring grades earned in school is added to the model the relationship between having a mother with a college degree and this belief is mediated (not shown). Family structure
Table 3.5. Regression Analysis Predicting Parental Involvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Don't like to talk to my parents about girls/guys I like.</th>
<th>How often do you have disagreements or arguments about dating with parents?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zero Order</td>
<td>Multivariate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mothers' Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than High School Education</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>1.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(High School Education)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College/Trade School</td>
<td><strong>2.07</strong></td>
<td><strong>2.00</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Graduate</td>
<td><strong>2.05</strong></td>
<td>1.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family Structure</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Married Biological Two-Parent)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Parent</td>
<td>-1.00</td>
<td>-0.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stepparent</td>
<td>-0.68</td>
<td>-0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohabiting</td>
<td>-0.54</td>
<td>-0.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td><strong>1.96</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>-1.15</td>
<td>-0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race/Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(White)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>-0.49</td>
<td>-0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>-0.23</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Male)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td><strong>-5.04</strong>†</td>
<td><strong>-4.91</strong>†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parenthood Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Not a Parent)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relationship Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never Dated</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Currently Dating</td>
<td><strong>3.32</strong>*</td>
<td><strong>2.61</strong>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Currently Dating)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grades</strong></td>
<td>-0.65</td>
<td>-1.23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[N = 1316\]

\[R^2 = 0.04\]

\[Adjusted R^2 = 0.02\]

*p≤.05, **p≤.01, ***p≤.001, †p≤.0001
remains unrelated to this belief at the bivariate and multivariate levels with the exception of being from an ‘other’ type of family (Table 3.5). Teens from ‘other’ family types are more uncomfortable talking about dating with parents in the full model, but not the zero-order model.

At the zero-order having a mother with less than a high school education is positively related to disagreements teens have with their parents (Table 3.5). The addition of covariates for race/ethnicity mediates this relationship in part because of the significant relationship between mothers’ education and race (not shown). Family structure remains unrelated to the amount of disagreements teens have with their parents at both the bivariate and multivariate levels (Table 3.5).

Control Variables

The set of covariates examined are strongly associated with a number of the relationship beliefs. Older teens state significantly greater disagreement concerning being too young to be tied down, greater interest in dating, and less trust in girls and guys compared to the youngest teens. The youngest teens express greater support for waiting to have sex until marriage, greater willingness to talk to parents about dating partners, and indicate fewer arguments with parents about dating compared to the oldest teens sampled. Age is not significantly related to beliefs about talking to parents about romantic partners. Not surprisingly, as teens age they become more deeply enmeshed in romantic relationships. These results indicate that age of participants is a key factor influencing how adolescents view dating and relationships.

Compared to Whites, Blacks report greater support for feeling too young to date, not trusting guys or girls, and comfort with having casual sex. Whites report greater interest in dating than Blacks and Hispanics. Hispanic youth express greater support for having sex only in marriage, greater distrust of guys or girls, and more arguments with parents about dating than
Whites. Race is not related to discussing romantic partners with parents. These findings suggest that race and ethnicity is an important characteristic that influences relationship beliefs and relationship readiness.

The effect of gender varies across models. Girls express significantly greater agreement that they are too young to date, agree more than boys that sex should only occur within marriage than boys, and disagree more with their parents about dating. Boys report significantly greater willingness to have casual sex and greater displeasure talking to parents about romantic partners. Gender differences are not found for interest in dating. These findings suggest that there may be gender-specific relationship concerns and beliefs that influence the relationship trajectories of boys and girls.

Teen parents report less support for the belief that a person should only have sex if married and have more arguments with parents about dating than teens who are not parents. Teen parenthood status is not related to feeling too young to date, interest in dating, distrust of guys and girls, comfort with casual sex, and discussing romantic partners with parents. Becoming a teen parent starts youth on a life course trajectory that may influence fundamental relationship beliefs in ways that increase barriers to achieving healthy relationships.

Dating status is positively associated with all relationship beliefs with the exception of those concerning gender distrust. Compared to those who are currently dating, those who have never dated believe more strongly that they are too young to be tied down and think that sex should only occur within marriage. They express less interest in dating, indicate less comfort with casual sex, and report less frequency of arguments with parents about dating. Those who are not currently dating report feeling too young to date, think that sex should only occur within marriage, and experience greater displeasure talking to parents about romantic partners. These
youth have less interest in dating and less frequency of disagreement with parents about dating. These findings suggest that adolescents who are currently dating may filter class information through the context of their own relationship thereby lessening or perhaps magnifying the influence of certain topics.

Lastly, adolescent with greater academic achievement believe more strongly that guys cannot be trusted and express greater comfort with casual sex; however, they also indicate less interest in dating. Students who perform well in school may be less inclined to become enmeshed in romantic relationships that curtail education and career goals.

DISCUSSION

Adolescence is a pivotal time period during which the majority of youth experience their first romantic relationships. These relationships form the foundation for more serious permanent romantic relationships in the future. The beliefs that adolescents garner about the opposite sex, appropriate dating timeframes, and how relationships fit in the context of other major life goals are important markers for predicting the health and stability of future relationships. This chapter broadens analyses in the preceding chapter with a larger, more diverse sample of youth. This sample was drawn from a variety of Toledo-area schools. Unlike in the preceding chapter, neighborhood characteristics vary according to poverty level, employment, and residential composition. This sample of youth is drawn from a population wherein 17% of families are female headed with no husband present and their own children under 18 years of age present. On average, this population is about one-quarter (24%) minority, and about one-fifth (19%) 25 years or older without a high school degree. The median family income is just over $50,000 and on average, 15% of the population is living below the poverty level. This sample is significantly less disadvantaged than that in the Relationship Smarts study.
This sample of youth is generally interested in dating and do not feel that they are too young to be tied down in a relationship. Contrary to hypotheses, willingness to be tied down in a relationship does not differ significantly according to family structure or mothers’ education. Interest in dating does vary significantly according to family structure. Specifically, teens from married two-parent biological families express significantly greater interest in dating compared to teens from all other family types. Contrary to hypotheses, teens whose mothers have less than a high school education express significantly less interest in dating compared to those teens whose mothers have a college degree.

Girls and boys express distrust concerning the opposite sex and many are unsure about the trustworthiness of potential dating partners. As hypothesized, socioeconomically disadvantaged youth indicate a more negative orientation to dating relationships characterized by greater gender distrust. Specifically, girls from married two biological parent families express significantly more trust in the opposite gender compared to teens living in single parent and stepparent families. Girls whose mothers have less than a high school education express significantly greater gender distrust compared to those with mothers at all other levels of educational attainment. Gender distrust does not vary significantly according to family structure for boys but it does vary according to mothers’ education. However, there is not a linear relationship between gender distrust and mother’s education among boys.

This sample generally agrees that sex should only occur within marriage and the majority would be uncomfortable having casual sex. As hypothesized, disadvantaged youth expressed greater acceptance of early sexual initiation. Specifically, teens living in married two parent biological families agree more strongly that sex should only occur within marriage compared to those living in all other family types. Compared to teens whose mothers have less than a high
school education, teens whose mothers have some college/trade school experience and a college degree agree more strongly that sex should occur within marriage. Teens living in married two parent biological families also express greater discomfort with the idea of having sex with someone they do not know well compared to teens living in stepparent families. Similarly, teens whose mothers have a college degree express greater discomfort having casual sex compared to teens whose mothers have a high school degree and some college/trade school experience. There is not a significant difference in mean values on acceptance of casual sex according to family structure. Overall, teens from disadvantaged backgrounds have more liberal sex attitudes.

Lastly, adolescents generally express willingness to talk to their parents about dating partners, and the majority does not argue or disagree with their parents about dating. Contrary to hypotheses, disadvantaged youth are actually more willing to divulge relationship information with parents. Specifically, teens whose mothers are high school graduates are more open with their parents about the girls/guys they like compared to teens whose mothers have some trade school/college experience and who are college graduates. However, teens whose mothers have less than a high school education indicate greater disagreements or arguments with their parents about dating compared to teens with mothers at all other educational levels.

Parental resources predict some adolescent relationship beliefs, and these relationships are sometimes mediated or suppressed by sociodemographic characteristics like race/ethnicity, grades received in school, dating status, and gender. Race/ethnicity is associated with both mother’s educational attainment and family structure in this study. Commensurate with previous research, minority youth are overrepresented in non-two parent biological families and indicate that their mothers have less education than White teens. Grades achieved in school also differ significantly according to parental resources. Specifically, teens with the least educated mothers
report significantly higher grades received in school compared to all other maternal education levels. Teens living in married two-parent biological families also report significantly lower grades in school compared to teens from all other family types. These results are not consistent with previous literature that suggests parity between parents’ and children’s educational achievement. However, the small range of difference ($M=4.03$ and $M=2.71$) may not reflect a substantive difference in grades according to parental resources. Dating status varies according to mother’s education but not family structure. There are significantly more youth that are currently dating whose mothers have the least amount of education compared to all other educational levels. Previous research suggests that dating relationships expand teens’ capacity to consider more serious romantic relationships that may eventuate in cohabitation and marriage. Lastly, gender differs significantly according to family structure yet not mothers’ education. There are significantly more female youth represented in other parent families compared to boys. Girls who live in non-traditional family structures may have greater access to risky behaviors (e.g., casual sex) compared to those living in married two-parent biological families. Thus, these control variables often mediate the effects of parental resources on relationship beliefs.

Understanding adolescence as a stage in the life course is dependent upon a more complete understanding of what adolescents believe, and why and how adolescents acquire certain relationship beliefs. Adolescence is a period during which youth are pulling away from family yet parental resources continue to influence adolescents’ relationships beliefs. The current work illustrates that there are significant differences between youth according to parental resources that may delay or prevent some youth from achieving healthy relationships. The findings from this work contribute to knowledge concerning adolescents’ relationship orientations and progression.
CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION

The primary intent of this dissertation was to examine the relationship beliefs of adolescents, and how these beliefs may differ according to socioeconomic status. I argued that the effects of disadvantage do not merely present themselves in adulthood; rather, they emerge as early as childhood in shaping the relationship trajectories of adolescents. Thus, I focused on examining the differential relationship beliefs between disadvantaged and more advantaged youth using parental resources (e.g., parents’ education and family structure) as proxies for socioeconomic disadvantage. Of interest was whether certain key variables mediate the relationship between parental resources and adolescents’ relationship beliefs. This dissertation utilized three separate samples of youth to achieve these goals.

The life course perspective served as an organizing framework to examine the period of adolescence. This approach is ideally suited for the study of transitions from adolescence to adulthood because it helps explain how beliefs, expectations, and behaviors develop and potentially influence or be influenced by one’s life events (e.g., early parenthood). The life course perspective also highlights the compounding consequences of early life experiences and their influence on developing beliefs and expectations. This research demonstrated that parental resources play an important role in determining how adolescents think about, plan for, and expect their romantic relationships to unfold.

This dissertation addressed three principal research questions: 1. “What are the beliefs concerning dating, sex and parenthood, cohabitation, and marriage among adolescents in relationship education programs and a more general sample of youth?” The first question required a broader assessment of adolescents’ relationship beliefs and moved beyond prior research that focuses on expected future behavior (cohabitation and marriage) (Manning et al.
Using data from the *No Jerks* relationship education program I found that adolescents are generally supportive of marriage and are seeking ways to improve their chances of achieving a healthy marriage. Yet these youth also expressed an ample degree of skepticism concerning the viability and sustainability of marriage. These findings support previous research on the greater acceptance of divorce and lower expectations for marriage among those from non-two parent biological families (Amato & Booth 1991; Axinn & Thornton 1996; Crissey 2005).

A unique contribution of this dissertation is the use of qualitative findings that allow adolescents’ voices to emerge to explain the dating challenges they face in today’s world. Adolescents are a unique group that is faced with experiences, challenges and responsibilities that were not part of the life course experience of their parents. As such, more complete understanding is supported by research that allows adolescents to voice the entirety of their experiences in such a way that the nuances of navigating this period in the life course become clearer. The qualitative findings in this dissertation supported this assertion and allowed us to better understand the factors that influence meaning, decision-making, and behaviors that are pivotal to determining life course trajectories beyond adolescence. Adolescents from the *Relationship Smarts* program echoed findings from the *No Jerks* sample. The majority of these youth believe that marriage is an important goal, yet more than half lack sufficient examples of positive marriage role models. Adolescents’ skepticism about marriage is presaged in their expression of distrust concerning the opposite sex, and general lack of trust in potential partners. In general, adolescents maintain strong beliefs about partner requirements and are unwilling to accept negative control behavior in their relationships. However, these beliefs do not preclude teens from dating and being involved in serious romantic relationships.
2. “How does participation in relationship education programs influence adolescents’ relationship beliefs?” To date there are no assessments of the impact of relationship education on teenager’s attitudes and views toward relationships. Previous research demonstrates that program interventions can influence the timing of sexual initiation and self-esteem (Philliber et al. 2002), in addition to educational attainment (Myers & Schirm 1999); yet no research examines how these classes actually change the way adolescents’ think about romantic relationships. To answer this question I examined data from two relationship education programs: No Jerks and Relationship Smarts. In addition, I interviewed a sub-sample of participants shortly after completion of the Relationship Smarts program. Over the course of both programs adolescents experienced significant positive changes in accordance with program curricula. Teens learned to require more of dating partners, and to take time building a foundation of communication and commonalities with partners. Participants were also positively influenced to become acquainted with the people and influences in the life of their potential romantic partner. In general, the programs have a positive, healthy influence on teen participants, and encourage teens to think more broadly and long-term about their relationship choices. Given the heightened emotionality of adolescence, teens may be less inclined to consider the consequences of their actions in romantic relationships. Programs like No Jerks and Relationship Smarts allow teens to situate themselves, not only in the context of their romantic relationships, but also in terms of their family history and future plans.

This dissertation also examined the influence of parental resources on programmatic change. Relationship Smarts data revealed that teens with less educated parents reported significant gains in their desire to complete education prior to marriage, and to getting to know a partner’s family prior to committing. Adolescents with more educated parents became
significantly more receptive to the idea that marriage does not have to be postponed until after education has been completed. I argued that this finding may be a reflection of the belief that teens with highly educated parents can achieve multiple goals simultaneously and not necessarily in a traditional trajectory (e.g., education first and then marriage). Over the course of the program, teens with less educated parents also reported significant declines in support for cohabitation, yet they also increased their agreement with the acceptability of having children in a cohabiting relationship. Similarly, more advantaged teens experienced significant declines concerning the importance of marriage. Teens living in non-two biological parent families also reported significant declines in the perceived benefit of cohabitation, while youth who live with two biological parents did not report any significant changes over the course of the program. These findings suggested that the experience of relationship education classes may differ according to participant characteristics and the accumulation of life experiences that teens bring to bear on program curriculum.

3a. “How do relationship beliefs differ by parenthood status and parental resources?

Another key goal of this work was to examine how relationship beliefs differ according to parenthood status. To address this question I relied primarily on data from the No Jerks program. Most prior studies suggest that teen parents are less likely to expect to marry, less likely to actually marry, and more likely to divorce if they do marry (Bennett et al. 1995; Lichter & Graefe 2001; Graefe & Lichter 2002; Lichter et al. 2004; Karney & Bradbury 2005; Ventura et al. 2006). No Jerks results indicated that teen parents are actually less fearful and doubtful of marriage compared to their non-parenting peers. However, teen parents expressed less agreement that marriage is better for children. I suggested that teen parents may be compensating for their current situation by diminishing the significance of marriage in their
child’s life. Teen parents also agreed more strongly in the importance of getting to know a partner and expressed less agreement concerning the importance of how partners’ react to having their feelings hurt. The importance of dating rituals and a prolonged courtship process may be less desirable and more impractical for parents who seek a partner that can offer practical financial support and childcare to meet their immediate needs. Parenthood takes precedence over many typical adolescent developmental milestones, and may set youth on a different life course trajectory than their non-parenting peers. Qualitative data from the Relationship Smarts program indicated that teens recognize the burden having a child at a young age poses, yet there are some who continue to engage in risky sex, putting themselves at risk for unwanted pregnancies. Further, among a general sample of teens (TARS) parenthood status was positively related to comfort having casual sex.

A primary focus of this work was the differential influence of parental resources on adolescent relationship beliefs. Prior research illustrates the influence of parental resources on adolescents’ educational, occupational, and romantic goals (Amato 1996; Manning & Lamb 2003; Brown 2006; Manning & Brown 2006; Cavanagh et al. 2008). Using data from participants in a relationship education program, Relationship Smarts, and a general sample of adolescents, Toledo Adolescent Relationship Study, I examined how parents’ education and family structure influence adolescents’ developing relationship beliefs. Less advantaged teen participants in the Relationship Smarts program, defined by parents’ education, initially reported less agreement concerning whether to date someone parents like, and whether completing education is more important than relationships. Teens from two-parent biologically intact families reported less agreement that completing education is more important than relationships. A greater percentage of teens who were not raised in two parent biological families (34%) also
reported that they think having a child will prevent them from achieving their future goals compared to only 25% of teens from two-parent biological families. Lastly, teens who grew up outside of two biological parent families were more likely to have high expectations to both cohabit and marry. Thus, parental resources have some influence but it is not overwhelming. Perhaps the disadvantaged nature of the sample, approximately 85% students in schools received free lunch, 40% had low parental education and 66% were from non-two biological parent families, influenced the effects of parental resources.

Findings from the TARS project indicated that parental resources influence teen views of relationships. Teens from two-biological parent families expressed significantly greater interest in dating, and teens with less educated mothers expressed significantly less interest in dating. Parental resources also predicted more negative orientations to dating relationships characterized by greater gender distrust. Teens from two-parent biological families were more supportive of the notion that sex should only occur within marriage, and were more uncomfortable with the idea of engaging in casual sex, as were teens whose mothers have some college/trade school experience or a college degree. Lastly, teen communication with parents about dating also varied according to parental resources. Teens with less educated parents were more open with their parents about the girls/guys they like; however, they also indicated greater disagreements and arguments with parents about dating. This dissertation contributed to understanding of the sources of socioeconomic differentials in relationship beliefs among youth, and provided a more complete picture of adolescence in the life course. Recognizing the importance of this time period, I examined how adolescence serves as a bridge to understanding how parental resources in the childhood home may influence subsequent adult relationship beliefs and behaviors. I
showed that parental resources shape adolescents’ views about dating, cohabitation, and marriage.

3b. “Do demographic indicators explain the relationship between parental resources and relationship beliefs?” Lastly, this dissertation examined whether sociodemographic indicators explain the relationship between parental resources and adolescents’ relationship beliefs. While parental resources predicted some adolescent beliefs, these relationships were often mediated by race/ethnicity, academic achievement, gender, dating status, and parenthood status. Race and academic achievement were the most common mediators of these relationship beliefs in the TARS sample. Race and academic achievement were associated with both mother’s educational attainment and family structure, and partially explained the effects of parental resources. Race and academic achievement both separately explained the relationship between parental resources and interest in dating, gender distrust, parental involvement, timing of sex, and comfort with casual sex.

Dating status explained the relationship between parental resources and adolescents’ relationships beliefs among the Relationship Smarts and TARS samples. However, the relationship between teen dating and parental resources differed across the data sources. Among teens in the Relationship Smarts program adolescent dating was more common among teens with highly educated parents and those living outside of two-parent biological families. Among the TARS sample dating status did not vary according to family structure but dating was more common among those youth whose mothers have the least amount of education. These findings may reflect the more disadvantaged nature of the Relationship Smarts sample with the majority of participants indicating that their parents have high educational attainment yet also live in non-two parent biological families. Dating is related to relationship attitudes in both data sources and
explained parental resource effects on dating choices, the influence of children on achieving future goals, and the value of education over romantic relationships. I argued that teens who date have already begun a sequence of behaviors that allow them to conceive of a future that involves their romantic partners, and that precede more serious romantic involvement like cohabitation and marriage.

Parenting status differed significantly according to parental resources among Relationship Smarts program participants. While parenting is not common in the TARS sample, there were also significantly differences in parenting status according to family structure and mothers’ education. Similar to daters, teen parents have begun an alternative life course trajectory that may involve differential cohabitation and marriage rates compared to non-parents. Parenting status has a strong effect on getting to know a partner’s family, gender distrust, timing of sex, and disagreement with parents, and explains parental resources effects on dating choices and beliefs about how a child would affect achievement of future goals.

While not a focus of this dissertation, findings according to gender suggest a potential pathway for future research. Gender explained differences in the effect of family structure on comfort with casual sex among the TARS sample, and the effect of parental education on beliefs about parenting in a cohabiting relationship in the Relationship Smarts sample. There were more female youth represented in ‘other parent’ families compared to boys. Consistent with previous research, I argued that girls who live in non-traditional family structures may have greater access to risky behaviors (e.g., casual sex) compared to those living in married two-parent biological families. In the TARS sample girls expressed greater agreement that they are too young to date, agreed more strongly that sex should only occur within marriage, and admitted to arguing with their parents about dating more often than boys. Similarly, in the Relationship Smarts sample
girls expressed greater agreement that it is important to get to know a partner’s family, agreed more that sharing values with a partner is important, and believed that teens should wait until after high school and perhaps until marriage to have sex. Conversely, boys in the TARS sample reported a greater willingness to have casual sex and greater displeasure talking to parents about dating partners. In the Relationship Smarts sample, boys reported a greater willingness to leave an abusive relationship, and were more accepting of parenting in cohabiting relationships, thought cohabitation is beneficial, and were more likely to cohabit prior to marriage. As expected, girls expressed more traditional views about relationships than boys. These findings suggested that there may be gender-specific relationship concerns and beliefs that influence the relationship trajectories of boys and girls.

Assessments of the Relationship Smarts program suggest that program curriculum had a greater influence on boys compared to girls. The change that boys experience as a result of the program may be contributable to the notion that adolescent girls already center much of their time and energy on romantic attachments (Giordano et al. 2006). Relationship education classes may need to tailor curriculum to gender-specific concerns, and in some instances, a single-sex class may be more appropriate for course material. Qualitative findings from Relationship Smarts supported this notion. Female participants expressed discomfort with the notion of sharing program curriculum with male participants, and felt more open to conversation with the program leader when boys were not present.

Limitations

The results of this work contributed to our understanding of how adolescents think about, conceptualize, and plan for romantic relationships. Further, this work extended beyond previous literature on this topic by providing the unique insight of youth who have participated in
relationship education programs. However, this study is not without limitations. While the No Jerks sample examined differences attributable to parenthood status it is important to acknowledge the limited sample-size of adolescent parents. The No Jerks class is not tailored for adolescent participants, and more specifically, there is no stipulation encouraging the participation of adolescent parents. There were also limited numbers of adolescent parents in the Relationship Smarts and TARS samples. Another concern is the compulsory participation of youth in the Relationship Smarts program. Teens were enrolled in the Relationship Smarts program as part of their participation in high school health and physical education classes. While many youth acknowledged that they would have participated in the class voluntarily it is still important to consider whether participants felt their active participation and growth in the class influenced their course grade. This work was further limited by the available measures of adolescent beliefs. The No Jerks measures were determined by program staff and were not appropriately tailored to an adolescent audience. The Relationship Smarts questions were developed in conjunction with program staff but were limited by the necessity for a concise survey. The TARS provided some unique items but lacked inquiry into beliefs about marriage and cohabitation. Another measurement concern is the conceptualization of parental resources. The Relationship Smarts data was limited to parents’ educational attainment and family structure while the TARS data included measures of parents’ education, household income, and family structure. To provide a better comparison point between the two chapters I did not include measures of household income in the TARS analyses. Future research may benefit from additional indicators of socioeconomic status such as neighborhood context and parents’ employment status. Lastly, while the TARS sample was used to provide a larger, more generalizable counterpoint to the previous chapters it is not entirely nationally representative
given its basis in the Toledo, Ohio area. While the TARS sample mirrors the characteristics of teens in the nation, these findings may reflect adolescent beliefs and expectations that are unique to this region of the country.

Program and Policy Implications

Relationship education programs are often designed with the intention to promote better adult relationships with less focus on the implications of developing romantic relationships during adolescence. Importantly, socioeconomically disadvantaged youth may have already accumulated a substantial number of risk factors associated with an increased likelihood of poor relationship quality and subsequent marital disruption. Further, disadvantaged teens are launching their relationship trajectories without as many skills and pro-social beliefs as their advantaged peers. Understanding how teens view relationships is the first step to providing more tailored relationship program curricula to best meet the needs of these youth. Further, it is important to consider not only what adolescents believe, but how these beliefs play-out in the context of relationship behaviors and decision-making. While factors like poor parental resources may not be erased adolescent-tailored programs can adapt curricula to overcome some of the barriers that these family characteristics present.

Family context is only one factor that relationship education programs need to address. Some youth have made personal choices that have adversely impacted their life circumstances in ways that challenge traditional life course trajectories. To date there are no relationship education programs that are specifically tailored to meet the unique needs and challenges faced by teen parents. This dissertation illustrated that teen parents begin relationship education programs with more negative relationship orientations compared to non-parents. A future goal of relationship programs should be not only to prevent early teen pregnancy, but also to support
teens whose circumstances have left themselves and their children at risk for generational transmission of further disadvantage. Intervening in the lives of adolescent parents with curriculum designed to address their unique circumstances may forestall some of the detrimental effects of early parenthood on teens and their children. This dissertation proposed that curriculum like the No Jerks program can be easily tailored to accommodate teen parent participants. I suggested a parent-specific Relationship Attachment Model that includes a category accounting for the presence of children. For this group of teens, it is not enough to offer romantic guidance without exploring how children fit in the trajectory of a relationship. More generally, qualitative findings suggested that teens are actively engaged in program curricula and are eager to participate in additional support programs. Teens are eager to converse with one another in a structured, non-judgmental environment where they can explore relationship concerns and find commonality in their experiences. A recurring comment among participants was the importance of offering relationship education to pre-teens “…because the middle school kids are out of hand.” Abigail, 17-years-old, thought these programs should be offered “for freshman, because they’re coming into a situation where you … see seniors and you see juniors dating and of course you know, it’s the next best thing to do … but you really gotta know what you’re getting yourself into and what type of people you’re dealing with.” Many of the participants were adamant that earlier intervention could have prevented poor choices in their own relationships. Schools need to be aware of how non-academic circumstances (e.g., dating violence, early sexual initiation) influence adolescents’ performance in the classroom. Relationship programs may be incorporated into existing courses (e.g., health or physical education) in an effort to meet the myriad needs of students.

Next Steps
There are several new avenues to pursue in research on the development of adolescent relationships. One key factor is the influence of parents’ own beliefs about adolescents’ romantic relationships. The TARS data includes a number of questions that specifically ask parents to assess their hopes and reservations concerning adolescent dating and sexual involvement. While this study focuses on the influence of parental resources additional research may reveal a link between how parents think about and encourage teens to experiment with dating and adolescents’ subsequent beliefs about romantic relationships. While this may be one avenue to explore it is important to remember that adolescence is a dynamic period characterized by a shift away from family toward more complex relationships with friends and romantic partners. As such, future research should focus on the roles peers play in shaping, supporting, or hindering the romantic trajectories of youth. Some studies have focused on the negative peer dynamics, particularly among black males, but there may be relatively pro-social and variable effects of peers (Giordano, Longmore, Manning, & Northcutt 2009). Further, given the dyadic nature of romantic relationships, future research will also benefit from examining youth relationships from the perspective of both partners. Couple-level research on adolescent relationships may provide a more complete picture of relationship dynamics, specifically, the ways that partners encourage or discourage the development of a relationship. This time period is pivotal for personal and interpersonal development, therefore it is not unlikely that partners play a key role in shaping many of the relationship beliefs and expectations that adolescents carry with them into more meaningful, permanent adult relationships. Couple-level research also provides an interesting arena for qualitative work. Joint and separate interviews with partners may reveal ways that beliefs and opinions are developed and negotiated, including any asymmetries and other dynamics that develop within the couple context. Additional work is also
warranted to assess how these relationship beliefs operate in the context of different romantic relationships and in relationship decision-making. Along these lines, longitudinal research on adult relationships will benefit from the inclusion of adolescent experiences in an effort to trace the origin and development of relationship beliefs and expectations over time.
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APPENDIX A: SCHOOL-BASED RELATIONSHIP EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Below I review five examples of popular school-based relationship education programs:

1) Connections: Dating and Emotions, and Relationships and Marriage, 2) WAIT, 3) PARTNERS, 4) No Jerks, and 5) Love U2: Relationship Smarts (Dion, Devaney, McConnell, Ford, Hill, & Winston 2003).

Connections: Relationships and Marriage

Connections: Relationships and Marriage is a relationship education curriculum designed to teach high school students to develop healthy relationships and marriages. This program specifically targets youth in grades 11-12 while a variant of the program, Connections: Dating and Emotions caters to students in grades 8-10. First developed by Charlene Kamper, a family life teacher in California, the program now caters to teenagers in 35 states and over 200 California high schools. The Connections curriculum is based on 15 one-hour lessons divided into four units that address personality, relationships, communication, conflict resolution, and marriage. The Dating and Emotions curriculum helps younger adolescents develop insight into their own expectations and readiness for dating relationships (Pearson 2007). This program sets the stage for adolescents just beginning to date with lessons on how to relate to others, how to approach someone you are interested in dating, how to decline an invitation for a date, and how to deal with heartache. With these tools in mind, the program emphasizes moving slowly into relationships and developing strong bonds by getting to know one’s partner. The Relationships and Marriage program teaches about the meaning, purpose and practical responsibilities of marriage (Pearson 2007). The program aims to help older adolescents achieve greater self-awareness, develop healthy relationship skills and values, improve communication and conflict resolution skills, and learn what it takes to develop a healthy, successful marriage. Strong
emphasis is placed on understanding the difference between infatuation and lasting love (Pearson 2007). Students are led through various activities to simulate real-life marital concerns. In one particular activity, students pair-up and are assigned occupations, a family income, a particular number of children, and other family particulars. The ‘couple’ works together to determine family responsibilities like childcare issues, household management, and financial budgeting. Each ‘couple’ is assigned a family crisis to work through that may range from unemployment, to illness, death in the family, or infidelity. The ‘couple’ works together to resolve the issue while using healthy communication skills.

The Connections program was evaluated by Scott Gardner (2001) using a sample of youth from the Midwest and one in California. The Connections curriculum was presented to 375 students from rural Midwest high schools, and to 410 high school students in California. Results from the Midwest study suggest that students who participated in the Connections program improved their conflict resolution skills, became less likely to see divorce as an option for troubled marriages, improved communication with parents, and were more likely to participate in pre- and post-marital relationship education programs (Gardner 2001). The study from California involved a comparison of students who participated in the Connections program to those who did not. The Connections students showed an improvement in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors on a number of key relationship concepts and principles in comparison to those who did not participate in the program. The Connections curricula has been applauded by relationship skills proponents for dealing with practical issues that arise in dating and marriage in a straight-forward, no-nonsense manner that strongly resonates with adolescent participants (Pearson 2007).

W.A.I.T.: Why Am I Tempted?
W.A.I.T. (Why Am I Tempted?) is an abstinence-based curriculum that teaches youth in grades 8-10 how to refuse sex and building relationship skills. W.A.I.T. also addresses sexuality and sex-related issues in the larger context of adult love and marital commitment (Pearson 2007). First developed by Joleen Krauth, a registered nurse and mother, and Lisa Rue, a former high school special education and sex education teacher, in the early nineties, the W.A.I.T. curriculum uses interactive exercises, role-playing, and related literature to support the presentation of key concepts. Adolescents are not only encouraged to delay sex until marriage, they are given the skills to say ‘no’ through confidence-boosting activities that help them rethink their decisions to engage in sex while framing dating as a fun and intimate activity that does not have to involve sex. Evaluations of the W.A.I.T. curriculum show significant changes in students’ attitudes in pre- and post-class surveys with more boys and non-virgins choosing to follow a path of abstinence, and more students ranking information about how to change one’s life if it starts down the wrong road and how to build healthy relationships that are not based on sex as more important than receiving information about contraception and reproduction (Pearson 2007).

PARTNERS

PARTNERS is a unique program that emphasizes divorce prevention by teaching adolescents about marital conflict, the legalities of divorce, and the social ramification of divorce on families and children. Targeting middle- and high-school students, the PARTNERS curriculum is sponsored by the American Bar Association Family Law Section. This program is designed to teach adolescents about common marital conflicts, key communication skills for avoiding and handling marital disagreements, and the reality of divorce (Pearson 2007). Comprising five two-hour units, the curriculum follows a young couple with a newborn baby as they confront common sources of marital conflict. At various points throughout videotaped
segments, students learn legal concepts and communication skills. The young couple in the video demonstrates responsibility sharing, family income disputes, childcare negotiations, premarital expectations, and domestic violence (Pearson 2007). Each segment details an argument about a particular topic and a negative response by each partner before students learn a communication skill that more appropriately settles the argument (Pearson 2007). Students learn about the legalities of marriage contracts, grounds for divorce, obligations for child support, custody disputes, placement and visitation issues, and the ramifications of domestic violence (Pearson 2007). Students engage in role-playing exercises to practice the communication and conflict resolution skills learned in the video segments with a particular emphasis on problems that arise in dating relationships. The PARTNERS program ends with curriculum that addresses mate selection and future expectations for work, family, and personal goals. After plotting out their life goals, students meet with happily married couples who share the secrets to their marital success.

No Jerks

The No Jerks program is designed for single individuals who want to learn what to look for in a marriage partner, and how to avoid marrying a jerk. A multi-method evaluation project is currently underway to assess the influence of the No Jerks curriculum among a group of N=57 participants in the Grand Rapids, Michigan area (Manning, Trella, Lyons, du Toit, & Gulbis 2007b). The evaluation combines survey data and qualitative interview data to establish participants’ views on how the No Jerks program has influenced their perceptions about successful relationships and their behaviors in relationships. The No Jerks class seeks to teach participants how to identify a ‘jerk’/‘jerkette’, how to establish knowledge, trust, reliance, and commitment in relationships prior to physical intimacy, how to establish a foundation of
communication, how to end troublesome relationships, how to forge healthy marriages, and how to find and follow an ideal relationship model. Survey and interview data indicate that participants hold positive views of marriage and would like to marry one day. The No Jerks class participants completed a survey before and after completion of their class to measure shifts in their parenting and relationship beliefs. Overall, results indicate that respondents improved their relationship skills however, there is only a statistically significant change ($p < .05$) in agreement with survey items that reflect the importance of knowing a partner’s relationship history prior to marriage and the belief that sex results in bonding (Manning et al. 2007b). The qualitative data confirm these findings. Participants indicate that they learned to compromise and communicate with partners, learned the importance of ‘taking it slow’ when it comes to physical intimacy, and indicated higher standards for potential partners.

Love U2: Relationship Smarts

The Love U2: Relationship Smarts curriculum uses hands-on activities to build relationship knowledge and skills among adolescents. Topics include maturity, identifying values, peer pressure, infatuation versus love, building positive relationships, assessing relationship health, establishing true intimacy, and ending unhealthy relationships (Kerpelman, Adler-Baeder, & Pittman 2006). Kerpelman et al. (2006) are currently conducting a five-year evaluation of the Relationship Smarts program in Alabama. Evaluation data from 1215 Alabama high school students who received the Relationships Smarts Plus curriculum indicate that the program successfully reduced faulty relationship beliefs (e.g., “there is only one person out there for you”, and “love is enough to solve all relationship problems”) and increased adolescents’ future orientations as they relate to relationships (Kerpelman et al. 2006). Participants displayed less verbal aggression in dating relationships (among those who began a new relationship while
taking the course), and indicated a greater emphasis on intimacy and loyalty in romantic 
relationships in post-class assessments (Kerpelman et al. 2006).

There is a limited timeframe to conduct evaluations of relationship education programs 
targeted toward adolescents. However, evaluative work using quasi-experimental methods exist 
for the programs *The Art of Loving Well, Connections: Relationships and Marriage, Within My 
Reach, No Jerks, and Love U2: Relationship Smarts* (Sparks 2008; Gardner 2001; Kreitzer 
1998). The Administration for Children and Families is also supporting evaluation research for 
the project *Healthy Marriage Precursors: Relationship Development among Low-Income Youth 
and Young Adults*- research that documents dating and relationship trends among low-income 
high school students and young adults with the goal of developing effective interventions to 
increase healthy relationships among youth (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 
Administration for Children and Families 2005). Lastly, evaluative research at Auburn 
University documents the effects of a youth relationship education component in low-income, 
racially-diverse high schools in Alabama (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 
Administration for Children and Families 2005).
APPENDIX B: NO JERKS PROGRAM

SAMPLE: A voluntary community-based relationship education program targeted toward single individuals seeking a healthy, committed relationship.

PROGRAM: 4 Classes

PROGRAM LESSONS:

   Session 1: Overview of the RAM scale that explains the importance of building safe relationships and knowing what to look for in a dating partner.

   Session 2 and 3: Develop the four key areas to explore in a partner in order to have an accurate understanding of how that person may act in a long-term relationship:
   a. Trust
   b. Reliance
   c. Commitment
   d. Touch

   Session 4: Explain the dynamics of trust, reliance, commitment, and sexual touch in the context of a romantic relationship.
APPENDIX C: PRE- AND POST- RELATIONSHIP ATTACHMENT SURVEY MEANS FOR TOTAL NO JERKS SAMPLE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-Class Mean</th>
<th>Post-Class Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Partner Requirements</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s important that my partner be willing to change and improve.</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>4.29*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How open-minded my partner is to seeing another point of view will affect our relationship.</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>3.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The relationship my partner had with their parent(s) affects our relationship.</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>3.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How my partner reacts when my feelings are hurt says a lot about them.</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>4.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How well my partner listens says a lot about them.</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>4.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal Responsibility</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking and spending time together helps me understand my partner.</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>4.44*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I should get to know my partner’s history in relationships.</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>4.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I should feel comfortable sharing dreams and goals with my partner.</td>
<td>4.26</td>
<td>4.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I should be able to rely on my partner to help or support me.</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>3.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex results in bonding.</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>3.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=72

*ps.05, **ps.01, ***ps.001
### APPENDIX D: PRE- AND POST- RELATIONSHIP ATTACHMENT SURVEY MEANS FOR NO JERKS SAMPLE ACCORDING TO PARENTING STATUS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Partner Requirements</th>
<th>Parents Pre-Class</th>
<th>Parents Post-Class</th>
<th>Non-Parents Pre-Class</th>
<th>Non-Parents Post-Class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It’s important that my partner be willing to change and improve.</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>4.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How open-minded my partner is to seeing another point of view will affect our relation</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>3.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The relationship my partner had with their parent(s) affects our relationship.</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>3.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How my partner reacts when my feelings are hurt says a lot about them.</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>4.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How well my partner listens says a lot about them.</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>4.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Personal Responsibility                                                             |                   |                    |                       |                       |
| Talking and spending time together helps me understand my partner.                   | 3.60              | 4.40               | 4.29                  | 4.45                   |
| I should get to know my partner’s history in relationships.                          | 3.90              | 4.30               | 4.15                  | 4.00                   |
| I should feel comfortable sharing dreams and goals with my partner.                  | 3.80              | 4.10               | 4.34                  | 4.23                   |
| I should be able to rely on my partner to help or support me.                        | 4.20              | 4.10               | 4.02                  | 3.87                   |
| Sex results in bonding.                                                             | 3.00              | 3.30               | 2.89                  | 2.98                   |

| N                                     | 10                | 10                 | 62                    | 62                     |

*p ≤ .05, **p ≤ .01, ***p ≤ .001
APPENDIX E: *RELATIONSHIP SMARTS* PROGRAM

SAMPLE: Mandatory participation of high school students in grades 9-12.

PROGRAM: 8 CLASSES

PROGRAM LESSONS:

- Session 1: Who am I and what I value
- Session 2: Attractions and infatuation/Love and intimacy
- Session 3: Principles of smart relationships
- Session 4: Low-risk approach to relationships
- Session 5: Healthy relationships
- Session 6: Breaking up and dating abuse
- Session 7: Communication
- Session 8: Finding and following your north star
Relationship Smarts Survey

Dating Beliefs: Ideals and Attitudes

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?:

1. My previous dating relationships influence what I look for in a [boyfriend/girlfriend].
   1. Strongly Disagree
   2. Somewhat Disagree
   3. Somewhat Agree
   4. Strongly Agree

2. I am too young to be tied down to one [girl/guy].
   1. Strongly Disagree
   2. Somewhat Disagree
   3. Somewhat Agree
   4. Strongly Agree

3. I would not date someone who my parent[s] dislike.
   1. Strongly Disagree
   2. Somewhat Disagree
   3. Somewhat Agree
   4. Strongly Agree

4. It is important to get to know my [boyfriend’s/girlfriend’s] FAMILY before fully committing to them.
   1. Strongly Disagree
   2. Somewhat Disagree
   3. Somewhat Agree
   4. Strongly Agree

5. Completing my education is more important than being in a romantic relationship.
   1. Strongly Disagree
   2. Somewhat Disagree
   3. Somewhat Agree
   4. Strongly Agree

Dating Beliefs: Partner Preferences

6. It is important that my [boyfriend/girlfriend] share my values.
   1. Strongly Disagree
   2. Somewhat Disagree
   3. Somewhat Agree
   4. Strongly Agree
7. I should be able to trust my [boyfriend/girlfriend] before fully committing to [him/her].
   1. Strongly Disagree
   2. Somewhat Disagree
   3. Somewhat Agree
   4. Strongly Agree

8. I would end a relationship if my [boyfriend/girlfriend] tried to change me into someone I am not.
   1. Strongly Disagree
   2. Somewhat Disagree
   3. Somewhat Agree
   4. Strongly Agree

9. I would stay in a relationship if my [boyfriend/girlfriend] hit me, as long as [he/she] loves me.
   1. Strongly Agree
   2. Somewhat Agree
   3. Somewhat Disagree
   4. Strongly Disagree

10. I would stay in a relationship if my [boyfriend/girlfriend] cheated on me, as long as [he/she] loves me.
    1. Strongly Agree
    2. Somewhat Agree
    3. Somewhat Disagree
    4. Strongly Disagree

Sex and Parenthood Beliefs

11. Teens should wait to have sex until they are out of high school.
    1. Strongly Disagree
    2. Somewhat Disagree
    3. Somewhat Agree
    4. Strongly Agree

12. A person should only have sex if they are married.
    1. Strongly Disagree
    2. Somewhat Disagree
    3. Somewhat Agree
    4. Strongly Agree

13. Do you think that being a teen parent would…
    1. not affect me from reaching my future goals.
    2. help me reach my future goals.
    3. prevent me from reaching my goals for the future.
    4. delay me reaching my goals for the future.
14. It would be okay for me to have children if I was living with my [boyfriend/girlfriend].
   1. Strongly Agree
   2. Somewhat Agree
   3. Somewhat Disagree
   4. Strongly Disagree

   **Cohabitation Beliefs**

15. It is usually a good idea for a couple to live together before getting married in order to find out whether they really get along.
   1. Strongly Disagree
   2. Somewhat Disagree
   3. Somewhat Agree
   4. Strongly Agree

16. People who live together without being married are less committed to one another than people who are married.
   1. Strongly Agree
   2. Somewhat Agree
   3. Somewhat Disagree
   4. Strongly Disagree

17. How likely is it that you will [ever/ever again] live with a [boyfriend/girlfriend] before marriage? Is it:
   1. Very Unlikely
   2. Somewhat Unlikely
   3. Somewhat Likely
   4. Very Likely

   **Marriage Beliefs**

18. How important is it to you to be married someday?
   1. Not Important At All
   2. Not Very Important
   3. Somewhat Important
   4. Very Important

19. Married people are generally happier than unmarried people.
   1. Strongly Disagree
   2. Somewhat Disagree
   3. Somewhat Agree
   4. Strongly Agree

20. I see so few good or happy marriages that I question whether I should get married.
   1. Strongly Agree
   2. Somewhat Agree
3. Somewhat Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

21. Marriage is for life and divorce is not an option for me.
   1. Strongly Disagree
   2. Somewhat Disagree
   3. Somewhat Agree
   4. Strongly Agree

22. I want to wait until I finish my education before getting married.
   1. Strongly Disagree
   2. Somewhat Disagree
   3. Somewhat Agree
   4. Strongly Agree
APPENDIX G- RELATIONSHIP SMARTS INTERVIEW GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

My name is Deanna and I work at Bowling Green State University. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. There are few things I want to remind you about this study. First, this is a study of the Relationship Smarts relationship education course, and I am interested in your unique experiences. Additionally, I am interested in learning more about how your experience in the class has influenced your relationship beliefs and expectations. Second, you can stop talking at any time. If I raise some issue you don’t want to talk about, just say so and we will move on to something else. No big deal.

I will tape record our conversation because I don’t want to take notes during the interview. If you want me to turn off the tape recorder for any reason or any time, just say so. No one will hear the tape except for the research team and then we erase the tape. We take out your name and other identifying information.

Is it okay to turn on the tape recorder now? {GET VERBAL CONSENT}

The tape recorder is now on. Any questions? Okay, let’s start.

BACKGROUND

I have just a few questions about your background ...

How old are you? [INTENT: Age]

What grade are you in now? [INTENT: Educational attainment]

Are you currently working for pay? [INTENT: Employment]

Do you work full-time or part-time?

Does your family currently receive any kind of public assistance [e.g., SSI, food stamps, subsidized housing]?

Do you live with both your biological parents? [INTENT: Family structure]

[If not] Why is one of your parents absent?

Who lives with you right now in your house?

Do they all live here regularly or most of the time? [Household relationship & stability]

[If kids present…] Are any of these your biological children? [INTENT: bio/step children?]

[If yes bio kids…] Do all of your biological children live with you?
[If not all biological children live with respondent…] Where do your other biological children live? [INTENT: physical custody of children]

PROGRAM

*Let’s start by discussing the Relationship Smarts Program. I am interested in your thoughts about the class.*

What did you think of the facilitator (name)?
[Probe: Did he/she make you feel comfortable at the class?]
[INTENT: response to facilitator]

What were your expectations about the classes? In other words, what did you hope to learn?

Do you think your expectations for the class were met?

How did the class meet your expectations?
[Intent: expectations met]

What are the most important things you think you learned there?
[INTENT: Noteworthy elements of class]

Do you think the *Relationship Smarts* program has given you the tools you’ll need to have a successful relationship?

Have you tried to use any of the skills you learned in the class with anyone?
[INTENT: Apply skills]

Have you tried to use any of these skills with others (i.e., co-workers, parents, customers)?

How did that work out?
[Probe - What happened when you tried? It can be with kids, partner, other parent, family or even work]
[INTENT: success of application of skills]

Would you recommend the class to friends or family? Why or why not?
[INTENT: network]

Have you recommended the class to friends or family? Why or why not?
[INTENT: network]

Did any of the lessons in the class help you in your relationships – Did you avoid getting involved with someone or did you get involved with someone based on lessons from class? Has the *Relationship Smarts* program influenced what you look for in a dating partner?
[INTENT: decision-making]
What about the worst thing about the class for you? If you could change one thing about the class, what would it be?
   [INTENT: problems in class]

   GENERAL RELATIONSHIP BELIEFS

   Now I have some questions about your general experiences and views about relationships:

   What do you think are the key issues/challenges to having a good relationship?
   [INTENT: Key relationship issues]

   How do you think the class you took addressed those issues/challenges?
   [Probe: Did the classes cover relationship challenges]
   [INTENT: Class question outside class section]

   Is there anything going on in your life that makes it hard to have a good relationship?
   [INTENT: other intervening factors – illegal activities, jobs, etc.]

   What are you looking for in an ideal partner?

   Do you think it is hard to find a good partner to date in today’s world?
   Why?

   Who influences you most when it comes to your dating choices? (e.g., parents, friends, coworkers, pastor?)
   [INTENT: Where are adolescents seeking dating advice?]

   Does your parents’ relationship influence your dating choices at all?
   [INTENT: Intergenerational transmission of relationship issues]

   Do you think you would ever date someone who has been to jail?
   [INTENT: Ideal partner]

   Do you think you would ever date someone who has been/is involved with drugs or alcohol?
   [INTENT: Ideal partner]

   Would you date someone who has children from another relationship?
   [INTENT: Ideal partner]

   Would you date someone who your friends dislike?
   [INTENT: Influence of friends on relationships]

   Would you date someone who your parents dislike?
   [INTENT: Influence of parents on relationships]

   SEX
Now I have a few questions about sex and relationships.

Have you ever had sex?
[INTENT: Sexual experience]
[If no…] Are you waiting to have sex until you get married?
[INTENT: Sex and marriage]

[If yes…] How old were you when you first had sex?
[INTENT: Age at first sex]

When you date someone do you think there is generally some pressure to have sex?
[INTENT: Sex in dating relationships]

Have you ever been pressured to be in a sexual relationship?
[INTENT: Sexual initiation]

Do you think that teens today are having sex too soon? Why/why not?
[INTENT: Perception of teen sex as an issue]

Do you think that it’s okay for teens to have sex as long as they are committed to one another?
[INTENT: Does commitment make having sex okay?]

DATING

Now I have some questions about your current dating, cohabiting, or married relationship.

Are you currently dating?
[INTENT: Relationship status]

[If yes…] How long have you been seeing each other?
[INTENT: Duration]

[If not dating]: Have you ever seriously dated someone before?
How many people have you seriously dated?

[Not in relationship- If never dated]: Why have you decided to not date?
[Probe: There are no eligible partners, too busy…]
[INTENT: Is that a decision they made or is there some other reason?]

[Not in relationship- If never dated]: Do you ever want to date someone? Why or why not?

[Not in relationship- If not dating currently – ever dated]: Tell me about your most recent serious dating relationship?
Why did you start that relationship?
How did that relationship end?
[In a relationship]: What would you say is the best thing about your relationship?

[In a relationship]: What makes you want to stay with x?

[In a relationship]: What would x say is the best thing about your relationship?
   [INTENT: Warm up for next question]

[In a relationship]: What do you think is the biggest problem in your relationship?

[In a relationship]: What would x say is the biggest problem in your relationship?

[In a relationship]: What gets in the way of having a good relationship?
   [INTENT: Do they see problems]

[In a relationship]: Had you ever considered living together with x? Why or why not?
   [INTENT: Thoughts about cohabitation]

[In a relationship]: Do you expect to live together with x at some point?

[In a relationship]: What would have to happen for you to live together with x at some point?

[In a relationship]: Did you ever consider getting married to x? Why or Why not?
[In a relationship]: Do you expect to marry x in the future?
[In a relationship]: What would have to happen for you to marry x in the future?
[In a relationship]: What do you think is the ideal age to get married?

[In a relationship]: How committed are you to this relationship? How committed is X?
   [INTENT: Commitment levels; mismatch in commitment levels]

[In a relationship]: Do you trust x? [why / why not]

[In a relationship]: Does X trust you? Why/why not?
   [INTENT: Reasons for trust/distrust; mismatch in levels of trust]

[In a relationship]: Have you talked about being sexually faithful to one another? [What is your agreement?]
   [Note – there may be no conversation and it is implied]
   [INTENT: Fidelity issues]

[In a relationship]: Has fidelity or being faithful been an issue at all in your relationship?
   [INTENT: Problems with fidelity]

[In a relationship]: What would be the “deal breaker” in the relationship – under what conditions would you break up?
   [INTENT: Why would they end relationship?]
[In a relationship]: Have you ever thought about leaving or breaking up? Why?  
[INTENT: Instability and conflict]

[In a relationship]: Did you ever break up and then get back together? Why did you get back together?  
[INTENT: History of instability]

[In a relationship]: What does your family think about your relationship?  

[In a relationship]: How does that influence your relationship? Examples of support?  
[INTENT: Family reactions]

[In a relationship]: What do your friends think about your relationship?  

[In a relationship]: How does that influence your relationship? Examples?  
[INTENT: Friends’ reactions]

[Everyone]: Sometimes men and women want different things out of their relationship … do you see that among your family and friends?  
[In a relationship]: How about in your own relationships?  
[INTENT: Gender issues – men traditional and women not]

[In a relationship]: How long do you think this relationship will last?  

[In a relationship]: Do you think you will still be together in one year?  
[INTENT: Future stability of the relationship]

[Everyone]: Have your past relationships influenced what you look for in a dating partner? How?  

[Everyone]: Has the Relationship Smarts program influenced what you look for in a dating partner? How?  

[Everyone]: Do you think the program will help you in your future relationship? How so?  

[Everyone]: How important is it to you to be in a relationship right now? (Scale from 1 to 10) Tell me why?  
[INTENT: Do people even want to be in relationships]

[Everyone]: How important is it to you be in a relationship sometime in the future? (Scale from 1 to 10) Tell me why?  
[INTENT: Relationship later?]

MARRIAGE ATTITUDES, EXPERIENCES, AND EXPECTATIONS

Now I have some questions about your marriage attitudes and experience.
Do you know anyone who has had a marriage or relationship that has worked out?  
[If yes…] Why do you think it worked out [probe: what was their secret for success?  
[INTENT: perceptions of what it takes to have a good relationship]

In general, do you see any advantages to being married rather than living together?  
[INTENT: advantage of marriage]
Are you concerned about divorce in the future?  
[INTENT: fear of divorce as motivator to avoid marriage or to test out partner via cohabitation]

In general, what do you think has to be in place to get married?  
[PROBE: money, job, mature]  
[INTENT: Barriers to marriage]

Have you discussed marriage with your partner?  
[If yes…] When do you think you might marry?  
[INTENT: Specific plans to marry]

Does your family pressure you about marriage or encourage you to get married?  
[INTENT: Pressure or influences to marry]

What is the ideal age to get married?

COHABITATION ATTITUDES, EXPERIENCES, AND EXPECTATIONS

Now I have some questions about your cohabitation attitudes and experiences.

Have you ever lived with someone (cohabitation)? How many different people?  
[INTENT: Cohabitation history]

[If no…] Would you ever consider cohabiting with someone before marriage?  
[INTENT: Intention to cohabit]

Do you think cohabitation is a generally a good idea for couples? Why/Why not?

Does it usually work out okay or not?  
[INTENT: general view of cohabitation]

Do you think there are any advantages to cohabiting with someone?  

In your experience, what are some of the advantages of cohabiting rather than dating?  
[INTENT: reasons to cohabit]

Do you expect to cohabit before marriage?  
[If no…] why not?
CHILDREN AND PARENTING

Now I have some questions about children.

Do you have any children?
  [If yes…] How old are your children?
  [If yes…] Do these children all have the same [father/mother]?
  [If yes…] Do you have a child support order for any of these children?
  [If yes…] Is this child support order being paid?

[Everyone…] Would you consider having children with your current partner?
  Why or why not?
  [INTENT: Partner’s parenting]
  [INTENT: Fertility intention]

Let me ask you some questions now about children as they pertain to relationships.

Do you think that having a partner who has children from another relationship can make it hard on your relationship?

How might the children’s other parents (e.g., mother/father/stepmother/ stepfather) affect your relationship with your partner if you were dating someone who had children from another relationship?
  [INTENT: How complex families influence relationships]

Would you marry someone who has children from another relationship?

Would you marry someone who is not the [father/mother] of your children? Why/Why not?
  [INTENT: Multiple partner fertility and marriage intention]

Do you think that people who have children together should get married? Why/Why not?
  [INTENT: Combination of marriage and parenthood]

Do you think children are better off if their parents are married rather than living together? Why/Why not?
  [INTENT: Is marriage better for kids?]

Do you think a single [mother/father] could bring up a child as well as a married couple? What are some difficulties a single [mother/father] might face?
  [INTENT: Can an individual parent as well as a couple?]

FUTURE PLANS AND GOALS

[Everyone…] How do you see your future shaping up … where will you be in 3-5 years?
Do you have any other thoughts or anything you would like to add to help us understand relationships?

THANK YOU!