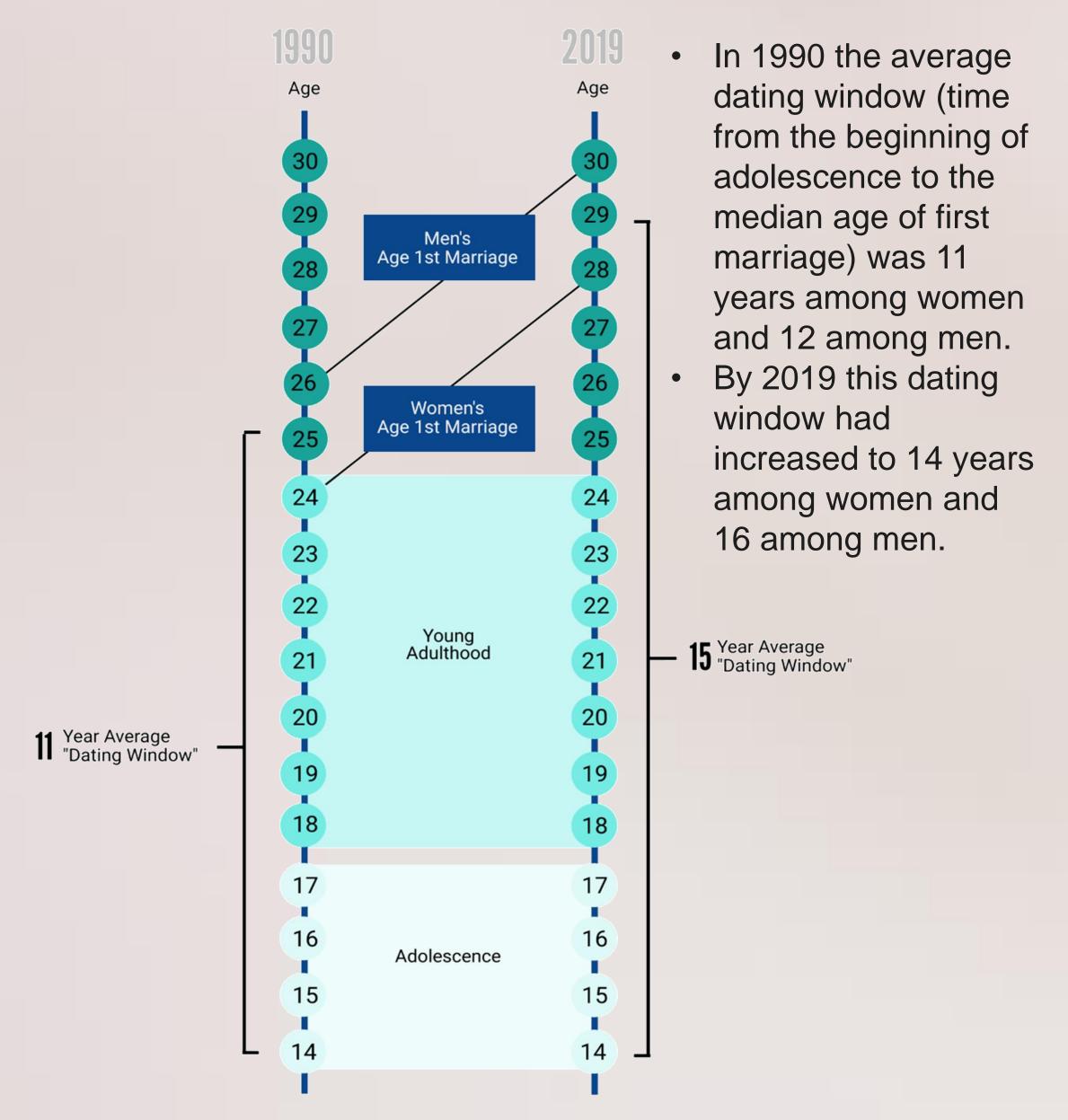
Relationship Quality and its Measurement Among Adolescents and Young Adults: A Review of the Literature

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Abstract

Although there is growing interest in the quality of adolescents and young adults' (A&YA) romantic relationships, the way relationship quality is defined, conceptualized, and measured is not consistent throughout the literature, making it difficult to draw general conclusions on the correlates and implications of A&YA's relationship quality. The purpose of our project is to present an overview of the measurement trends and findings regarding relationship quality among A&YA. We conducted a comprehensive review of journal articles, book chapters, and reports published over the past decade. Our investigation uncovered a wide range of measures but a consistent emphasis on instability and conflict. We conclude with an overview of the implications with a focus towards comprehensive measurement construction and policy directives addressing instability among A&YA.

Figure 1. Timeline of Adolescent and Young Adult Relationships



How is **relationship quality** defined in the scholarship on A&YA relationships?

Relationship Quality (RQ) = How "Good" or "Bad" is the relationship?

• An individual's or a couple's subjective evaluation of their relationship.

However...

• It is difficult, and may not make sense, to capture RQ for A&YA's the same way we do older adult relationship quality. So, multiple different factors need to be considered.

A&YA Specific Factors

- Compared to adolescence, commitment and other contexts (e.g., duration, union status) are more salient in young adulthood.
- Adolescent RQ is more complicated to study than young adulthood—affection, intimacy, sexual activity, and conflict emphasized.

What do we know about A&YA relationship quality from current scholarship?

RQ in Adolescence differs from RQ in Young

Adulthood—but they are connected

- In long-term relationships, compared to young adults, adolescents report lower confidence and more conflict in their relationships.
- Compared to adolescents, young adults report more intimacy and interdependence.
- While A&YA relationships vary in trajectories of stability and quality, most are either committed and healthy or informal/exploratory—*fewer A&YAs are in harmful or ambiguous relationships.*

Research Emphasizes Instability and Conflict

• Research on A&YA romantic relationships often focus on the "bad." There are two related reasons for this. First, marriage is increasingly delayed (see timeline). This leads to an increased potential for instability, dissolutions, and multiple partners. Second, this instability is associated with relationship conflict and violence.

BUT...

• Evidence indicates this emphasis may be flawed. First, as we state above, A&YA relationships tend to be either committed or exploratory, not volatile. Second, when these relationships dissolve, they do so for good reasons—A&YA's are selective. They break-up with partners when they are not fitting their relationship needs or expectations.



What are the limitations of current scholarship?

Available Data

- Nationally representative survey data rarely captures the complexities of RQ in A&YA, so studies often rely
- on small participant samples.

Other Challenges

Lack of Consistency

- Sample types
- Theory
- Measures of relationship quality
- Definition of relationship types
- Instability: A&YA relationships often end, even without conflict. Is stability central for A&YA RQ?
- Ambiguity: Not all A&YA relationships are well-defined. Should RQ measures address this?
- Complexity: How do we create measurements that capture all relevant factors for RQ?

Policy Recommendations

- For adolescents, emphasize exploratory dating, less on long-term commitment or stability.
- For young adults, emphasize communicating relationship needs and expectations.
- For all A&YA, emphasize knowing when to end a relationship and why.

Figure 2. Dimensions of A&YA Relationship Quality

Couple Interaction	Satisfaction	Context (for YA
 Affection Emotional support Instrumental support Coercion Controlling behavior Criticism 	 Fulfillment and met needs Communication Shared activities Support 	 Duration of relationship Expectations for future (commitme) Union status (dating, cohabitir

The MAST Center is made up of a team of national experts in marriage and relationship research and practice, led by Child Trends in partnership with Public Strategies and the National Center for Family and Marriage Research at Bowling Green State University. The MAST Center is supported by grant #90PR0012 from the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation within the Administration for Children and Families in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The MAST Center is solely responsible for the contents of this brief, which do not necessarily represent the official views of the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, the Administration for Children and Families, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The NCFMR is supported with assistance from Bowling Green State University. From 2007 to 2013, support was also provided by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are solely those of the author(s) and should not be construed as representing the opinions or policy of any agency of the state or federal government.

Featured MAST Center Research | Relationship Patterns & Trends

Our research is designed to understand marriage and romantic relationships in the U.S. and to improve programs that aim to strengthen these relationships. More specifically, our work on relationship patterns and trends is focused on population-based research and data to better understand trends, predictors, dynamics, and outcomes of marriage and relationships in the U.S..

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Dating, conabitation, M	annage, and Divorce
Kasey Eickmeyer, Paul Hemez, Wendy D. M and Karen Benjamin Guzzo	lanning, Susan L. Brown,
Overview	
Throughout the course of their lives, people form monain creationaries, which may involve dating, schabiting, or marrying, Recoputing the central any constraints of the schematic schematic schematic couple, and child well-being—some social service as support healthy relationships to individual, description and child well-being—some social service as support healthy relationships and marriage. ¹ Or a support healthy relationships and marriage in the schematic schematic schematic schematic relationships have changed considerably over time. The purpose of this herit is to provide an pack on these logics for the research community, as well as a concise review for practitioners.	A constraints of the second se
of the field of research on romantic relationships. In this series, we review what existing research tells us about the types of romantic relationships that people form, the stability of these relationships sover time, and how these patterns vary by important socidoemographic characteristics, such as socioeconomic status or racelethnicity. This first one'd details recent demographic transfs in dating, colabilation, and narriage for the population as	research on marriage and romantic relationships in the U.S. and relationships. The research aims to identify education (MMRE) programs designed to strengthen these relationships. This research aims to identify rolical insearch gays, generate are inknowledge, and help programs more effectively zerve the individuals and familis they work with. MAST Center research is concentrated in two areas: Relationship Reterns & Tends, Population-
a whole in the United States. We present common definitions of these relationship types, provide an overview of how researchers measure them, and review published estimates and trends across	based research to better understand trends, predictors, dynamics, and outcomes of marriage and relationships in the United States.
arrious dimensions of these unions (e.g., age at first marriage, prevalence of marriage, and rate of marriage among unmarried individuals). We additionally review existing research on patterns of union dissolution over time.	 Program Implementation & Evaluation. Research that helps build knowledge about what works in HMRE programming, for whom, and in what context.

MAST Center Data Tool | Relationship Quality *Coming Soon*

The MAST data tool is a detailed summary of relationship quality measures available in large national data sets. These summaries include survey question wording and responses, respondent descriptions (when applicable), variable names, and years/survey waves collected. The data tool will be searchable by topic area, key word, year, and data set.

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