The Same Old Song? --

Continuity and Change in Relationship Schemas from Adolescence to Young Adulthood


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Abstract

Relationship schemas are central to our understanding of interpersonal functioning. The aim of this study is to examine continuity and change in relationship themes across two developmental epochs — adolescence and young adulthood — in the stories that people tell about their interactions with others. Using the Core Conflictual Relationship Theme Method, relationship themes were coded from semi-structured interviews conducted in adolescence and again in early adulthood. The sample consisted of 20 male and 20 female participants in a longitudinal study of psychological development. There was considerable stability across time in the frequency with which particular themes were expressed relationship narratives. Significant changes from adolescence to young adulthood included a decrease in the perception of others as rejecting and of the self as opposing others. Young adults saw themselves and others more positively, and used a broader repertoire of themes in their relationship narratives than they had as adolescents. The basic continuity and particular changes in relationship schemas found in this study are consistent with knowledge about the adolescent-to-young-adult transition derived from other clinical and empirical sources. Tracking conflicting wishes and images of self and other over time sheds light on central developmental processes of this period.
INTRODUCTION

That the present is shaped by the past is one of the oldest and most enduring concepts in our understanding of human relationships. Psychoanalytic theory, social psychology, cognitive neuroscience, and folk wisdom are among the lenses through which students of human nature repeatedly observe that people internalize memories of their most important early relationships, and that these internalized memories may profoundly affect their experiences of and behaviors with significant others in the present. Such internalized models of relationships, or relationship schemas, are thought to be core elements of personality that are enduring and slow to change (Baldwin, 1992; Thorne & Klohnen, 1993).

Throughout the psychological literature we find the idea that people approach others with pre-formed expectations about what relationships will be like. Freud conceived of each person as having a central relationship pattern -- "a stereotype plate (or several such), which is constantly repeated--constantly reprinted afresh--in the course of the person's life" (Freud, 1912, pp.99-100). According to Freud's concept of transference, we approach new people with personal relationship templates comprised in large measure of the frustrated wishes, longings, and expectations left over from earlier attempts at need gratification. The idea of a central relationship pattern is reflected in Sullivan's (1953) concept of parataxic distortion, in Tomkin's (1963) work on nuclear scripts, and in Bowlby's (1969) internal working models of attachment. The use of attachment theory to formulate empirically testable hypotheses constitutes a major development in the study of relationship schemas. The careful, systematic observational research spawned by Bowlby's work provides empirical support for the theoretical links between early interactions with parents and later behavior, particularly in stressful situations (Ainsworth & Eichberg, 1991; Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985).

Relationship schemas generally include: (1) representations of the self, (2)
representations of the other person, and (3) an interpersonal script that links self and other. This script-like the script of a play—contains declarative elements (e.g., expected dialogue) and procedural elements (e.g., habitual behaviors) for both actors in the relationship, and includes feelings and goals. People who experience specific patterns of relating to others repeatedly in early life may over-learn these patterns and apply them to situations in the present even when those situations are inappropriate (Baldwin, 1992). Indeed, most psychological therapies aim to free people from the habitual misapplication of such over-learned patterns to current relationships (Linehan, 1987; Luborsky, 1984).

How relationship schemas develop and change over the life cycle remains poorly understood. Most often, researchers study representations of the self and representations of others separately, and from this work we have evidence of important developmental pathways that need to be examined. For example, it appears that representations of others in significant relationships become more complex and multifaceted over time (Markus, 1977; Sande, Goethals, & Radloff, 1988). Similarly, the concept of self undergoes differentiation into multiple facets of the self, with more categories of self-description and more trait labels added to one’s repertoire over the course of development from childhood through adolescence (Harter, 1990; Montemayor & Eisen, 1977; Rosenberg, 1986).

Much empirical evidence points to the fact that our relationship schemas are slow to change. Research on memory demonstrates that people preferentially notice and recall information for which they have relevant schemas. Failure-based memories may be particularly likely to become part of the personality and to shape expectations about the future (Cantor & Zirkel, 1990; Markus & Nurius, 1986). Moreover, we know that well-developed relationship schemas often lead people to disattend to or explain away information that is inconsistent with their expectations in relationships (Baldwin, 1992; Kulik, Sledge, & Mahler,
The Same Old Song?

1986; Swann & Ely, 1984), thereby promoting conservation of these schemas and distorting memory (Fiske, Haslam, & Fiske, 1991; Markus, 1977; Swann & Read, 1981). Numerous studies have demonstrated that social behavior often produces responses from others that confirm our interpersonal expectations and in this way reinforces previously-formed relationship schemas (Miller & Turnbull, 1986; Snyder, 1984).

That relationship schemas matter in the real world—that they guide our behavior toward others—is a fundamental theoretical premise of most forms of interpersonal psychotherapy. Flexibility in how we respond to human interaction is often considered to be a hallmark of mental health and psychological maturity (Reich, 1987; Vaillant, 1971). Those who apply a limited number of relationship schemas rigidly and inappropriately in adulthood are often diagnosed with Personality Disorders (DSM-IV, 1994). Changes in relationship schemas—particularly a shift toward more positive perceptions of others—have been found to be pivotal to positive outcomes in some forms of psychotherapy (Greynier & Luborsky, 1996; Luborsky & Crits-Christoph, 1990).

The links between relationship schemas and interpersonal outcomes has received increasing empirical support in recent decades. For example, Simpson and colleagues (Simpson, Rholes, & Nelligan, 1992; Simpson, Rholes, & Phillips, 1996) have shown that knowing individuals’ typical attachment patterns allows one to predict with some accuracy how they will behave toward their romantic partner when placed in a stressful situation. In the realm of developmental psychopathology, maltreated children have been found to generalize negative representational models to new situations and relationship figures, thereby increasing the likelihood that they will perpetuate their relationship histories (Lynch & Cicchetti, 1991; Toth, Cicchetti, Macfie, & Emde, 1997; Toth & Cicchetti, 1996).

Relationship schemas have most often been studied by attempts at direct assessment,
The Same Old Song?
asking people to report on what they expect in their dealing with others (e.g., Rempel, Holmes, & Zanna, 1985). For example, Hazan and Shaver (1987) asked participants to read three descriptions of relationships and endorse the one that best characterized their relationships. The direct approach has the particular advantage of being relatively labor-efficient. A major disadvantage of this approach, however, is that some people are likely to distort their responses to direct questions about relationship patterns for defensive reasons (Main et al., 1985; Westen, 1991). For example, Main and her colleagues (1985) suggest that people with avoidant attachment styles do, in fact, see others as disappointing them, but will be unlikely to report this because it would be threatening to see themselves as disappointed by and therefore dependent on others.

A second major mode of studying relationship schemas -- the so-called idiographic mode -- offers less opportunity for response bias. It involves collecting stories about relationships from individuals' pasts or from their current day-to-day lives, or culling episodes from videotaped psychotherapy sessions (Carlson & Brincka, 1987; Horowitz, 1989; Luborsky, Crits-Christoph, & Mellon, 1986). Judges then examine these episodes for consistencies in themes, inferring that these consistencies constitute stereotype plates? or over-learned patterns. Researchers have found that they can reliably group these narratives according to a limited number of interpersonal themes (Luborsky & Crits-Christoph, 1990).

The most widely used of these coding systems, and the one used in the present study, is the Core Conflictual Relationship Theme (CCRT) Method (Luborsky & Crits-Christoph, 1990). In the CCRT coding system, judges locate stories about relating to others told by one person (e.g., in a psychotherapy session), and identify in these stories the person's wishes, perceptions of the other person's responses, and responses of the self to the interaction. For example, a man may tell several stories about dealings with different people, but in the
The development of close relationships is of particular importance during the transition from adolescence to young adulthood. According to Erikson (1959), the most important tasks of adolescence include formation of one’s own identity, the development of new relationships outside of the family, and increased autonomy from parents. While developing autonomy and maintaining relatedness with parents have often been conceptualized as opposite ends of a relational spectrum, there is growing evidence that a state of autonomous-relatedness is an optimal outcome for the adolescent-parent relationship (Allen, Hauser, Bell, & O’Connor, 1994; Allen, Kuperminc, & Moore, 1997). Adolescents’ coexisting concerns about maintaining close relationships and achieving independence would be expected to engender conflicting wishes and perceptions of self and other in relationships with peers as well as parents. The waning of this conflict in young adulthood is thought to pave the way for the achievement of sustained intimate relationships (Erikson, 1959).

Given the centrality of relationship schemas to our understanding of personality and to our attempts to effect therapeutic change in relationship patterns, an understanding of how these schemas function through the life cycle is of considerable importance. The present study is the first to use longitudinal data collected during two developmental epochs—adolescence and young adulthood—to examine relationship narratives across time. Based on prior research (Bachman, O’Malley, & Johnston, 1978; Block, 1971; Kagan & Moss, 1962), we hypothesized that people would demonstrate considerable stability in relationship themes over...
The Same Old Song?
the decade from adolescence to young adulthood; most particularly, that the wish to be close
to others would be the most frequently expressed wish in both eras. In terms of specific
changes, we hypothesized that: 1) participants would express more wishes for autonomy and
more conflicting perceptions of self and other in adolescence than in young adulthood, 2)
young adults would demonstrate a broader repertoire of perceptions of self and others than
adolescents, and 3) more positive images of others would be expressed in young adulthood
than in adolescence. Finally, based on recent theoretical work on gender differences in
interpersonal relationships (Chodorow, 1978; Jordan, Kaplan, Baker Miller, Stiver, & Surrey,
1991), we predicted that females would be more overtly concerned with relationships and
would tell more complex stories about relationships than males during both developmental
epochs.

METHODS

Design
This study is an analysis of data collected from participants in a longitudinal study of
psychological development conducted between 1978 and 1991. Transcribed interviews
collected from participants in adolescence (ages 14-16) and again at age 24 were analyzed
using the Core Conflictual Relationship Theme Method (Luborsky & Crits-Christoph, 1998)
described below.

Sample and Timing
The sample is derived from a cohort of 146 participants and their families first seen in
1978 as part of the Adolescent and Family Development Project (Hauser, with Powers, &
Noam, 1991). On entering this longitudinal study at age 14, subjects were members of
The Same Old Song?
primarily Caucasian middle- and upper-middle-class families.

Approximately half were recruited from the freshman class of a local high school (n=76), and half were non-psychotic, non-retarded psychiatrically hospitalized adolescents (n=70). There were 73 males and 73 females (mean age = 14.6 years). The rationale for sampling from these two contrasting groups was to obtain a range of levels of social and psychological functioning. The psychiatric sample was originally diagnosed using DSM-II and later reclassified using DSM-III-R through systematic chart review (Rappaport & Ismond, 1990; Spitzer & Williams, 1987), generating following distribution of primary diagnoses: disruptive behavior disorders (e.g., attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, conduct disorder) = 33; affective disorders = 18; anxiety and stress-related disorders = 11; and other diagnoses = 8.

All eligible patients approached during the recruitment period accepted the invitation to participate in the study, as did almost half (n=250) of the freshman class of one high school. From the latter group, 76 students were selected to match demographic characteristics of the psychiatric group. The groups did not differ in terms of age, gender, birth order, number of siblings, or number of parents living at home. The Adolescent and Family Development Project collected data on ego development and other aspects of psychological and interpersonal functioning from 146 adolescents over the period from age 14 to 17. Ninety-eight percent of the original adolescent participants were studied again at age 24 using age-appropriate measures of psychological and interpersonal functioning.

This study uses a sub-sample of 20 male and 20 female subjects, selected in equal numbers from the normal and psychiatrically hospitalized groups. Ego development, as measured on the Loevinger Sentence Completion Test, was used as an index of psychological maturity (Hauser, 1976), and this sub-sample was selected so that both the high school and
hospital groups included participants who ranged from the least mature (pre-conformist) to
most mature (post-conformist) in their Loevinger ego development scores.

Assessments

1. **Relationship narratives in adolescence** were collected using the Adolescent
Clinical-Research Interview (Hauser et al., 1991). This semi-structured one-hour interview
consists of open-ended questions that probe for adolescents’ descriptions of their current
lives, including relationships with parents and siblings, friendships, school, and other activities.
Participants were interviewed at ages 14, 15, and 16 by clinically trained interviewers
(psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers) who were blind to all other assessments of
the adolescents (e.g., ego development level, family interactions). Interviews were audio-
taped and transcribed. Relationship narratives were culled from transcripts of interviews at
age 14 and 15, and if necessary, age 16, to collect the minimum of 8 codable narratives
required for CCRT scoring (see description of CCRT method below).

2. **Relationship narratives in young adulthood** were collected using the Early Adult
Close Peer Relationship Interview (Schultz, Hauser, & Allen, 1990). This audio-taped semi-
structured interview lasts one to two hours and is designed to elicit participants’ networks of
social relationships and then focus intensively on their two closest peer relationships (one
romantic relationship and one non-romantic friendship). Within each of these close
relationships, experiences of connection, intimacy, autonomy, and conflict resolution are
probed with questions about recent experiences with these peers (e.g., ?How much time do
the two of you spend together?; ?What is the biggest decision you two have ever made
together?). Interviews were conducted by trained interviewers who were blind to all
adolescent data about the subjects (e.g., psychiatric history, ego development level) and did
The Same Old Song?
not interview a young adult subject they previously interviewed as an adolescent. Interviews were audiotaped and later transcribed.

The Adolescent Clinical-Research Interview included stories about non-peers (parents, teachers, and other adults) as well as peers, while relationship narratives from the Early Adult Close Peer Relationship Interview were exclusively about peers. This study focused on the comparison of narratives about peers from each epoch.

3. **Relationship themes** were scored from the relationship narratives in adolescent and young-adult interview transcripts using the Core Conflictual Relationship Theme (CCRT) Method. The CCRT Method is an assessment system for reliably extracting relationship schemas from narratives about interpersonal interactions (Luborsky & Crits-Christoph, 1990; Luborsky & Crits-Christoph, 1998). It has been empirically demonstrated that the CCRT Method guides the delineation of relationship elements that have considerable stability over time and across relationships (Luborsky & et al., 1985), and there is good evidence for the reliability and validity of this instrument (Crits-Christoph, Luborsky, Dahl, & Popp, 1988b; Levine & Luborsky, 1981; Luborsky et al., 1986; Luborsky & Diguer, 1998). Quantitative studies reveal extensive similarities between the CCRT Method and other methods of measuring central relationship patterns, including the Structural Analysis of Social Behavior (Benjamin, 1974) and the Role Relationship Models Configuration (Horowitz, 1989). Accurate delineation and interpretation of CCRT Themes in psychotherapy is positively correlated with improvement in psychotherapy (Crits-Christoph, Cooper, & Luborsky, 1988a).

Relationship episodes (REs) are identified in interview material, in which the subject speaks of an interaction with another person in sufficient detail to enable scoring of specific components. The CCRT rater identifies wishes (Ws), responses from others (ROs), and
The Same Old Song?

responses from the self (RSs) in each relationship episode describing an interaction with another person. The CCRT scoring system uses approximately 30 individual categories to classify wishes, responses from others, and responses of self. Using cluster analysis, Luborsky and his colleagues (1990) reduced these individual categories to 8 clusters of wishes, 8 clusters of responses from others, and 8 clusters of responses of self (see Table 1). In this paper, we use "standard categories" to refer to Luborsky's clusters. Raters scored narratives using the more finely-grained individual categories, recording both the best-fitting and the next-best-fitting categories for each item rated. These ratings were then aggregated into clusters both for purposes of reliability testing and for data analysis.

Relationship themes are defined as the most frequently-occurring standard categories of wishes, responses of other, and responses of self occurring over the entire set of relationship episodes. (The following is a sample CCRT formulation based on the most frequently occurring components in an interview transcript: "I wish to be close to the other person [W]; but the other person is rejecting [RO], and I am disappointed and depressed [RS].") Responses of other and responses of self are also rated as positive or negative from the subject's perspective, resulting in ratios of positive to negative responses of other and responses of self for the entire transcript.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Complexity of stories about relationships was conceptualized in two ways: 1) as the number of components used in each subject's relationship episodes, computed by summing the number of wishes, responses of other, and responses of self coded for each subject and dividing by the number of that subject's relationship episodes; and 2) as the breadth of the
The Same Old Song?

repertoire of themes expressed in each subject’s relationship episodes, computed as the sum of the number of different wishes, responses of other, and responses of self used by each subject to describe relationships. So, for example, a subject may tell stories with many components, but with monotonous themes, yielding a high score on mean number of components, but a low score for breadth of repertoire.

Raters were undergraduate or recently-graduated psychology majors whom we trained using both standardized interview materials provided by Dr. Luborsky and interview transcripts from the Adolescent and Young Adult Development Project from participants who were not part of the sub-sample used in this study. Two sets of interviews were then scored for each participant: the Early Adult Close Peer Relationship Interview conducted at age 24, and adolescent clinical interviews conducted yearly between age 14 and 16. Data from the age 14 and 15 interviews (and where necessary, the age 16 interviews) were combined in order to obtain at least eight codable relationship narratives, the minimum number required to establish a relationship theme. In each epoch, therefore, comparable data consisting of at least eight relationship narratives were rated to arrive at predominant relationship themes. Raters were blind to all other data collected on these subjects, and raters did not code the narratives of the same individual subjects in adolescence and again in young adulthood.

RESULTS

Interrater reliability

Raters demonstrated good agreement in identifying relationship episodes, in rating responses of other and responses of self as positive or negative from the subject’s point of
The Same Old Song?

view, and in categorizing wishes, responses of other, and responses of self according to eight standard categories (Luborsky & Crits-Christoph, 1990). Weighted Cohen’s kappas were calculated for pairs of six independent raters. According to Cohen (1968), when certain disagreements are less important than others, kappas may be weighted in order to have a more reliable estimate of the reliability. This weighting has been used in several studies on the CCRT (Luborsky & Diguer, 1998). In counting matches between judges, the following weights were used: (a) agreement between judges on the best-fitting CCRT category was given a weight of 1.0; (b) a weight of .66 was given when the match was based on agreement between the best-fitting CCRT category of judge 1 and the next-best-fitting category of judge 2; (c) when the match was based on agreement between the next-best-fitting categories of the 2 judges, a weight of .33 was given. Kappas for reliability of pairs of judges ranged from 0.60 to 0.85. These are comparable to those obtained in other studies (Luborsky & Diguer, 1998).

The relationship narratives coded from the Adolescent Clinical-Research Interview included stories about non-peers (parents, teachers, and other adults) as well as peers, while narratives from the Early Adult Close Peer Relationship Interview. To examine the comparability of the data in these two eras, we compared adolescent narratives about peers with those about non-peers on the variables of interest. Because we found significant differences between stories about peers and non-peers on the frequency of particular themes and the valences (+/-) of responses from others and responses of self, we excluded stories about non-peers from further analyses. Thus, all analyses were conducted on narratives about peers in adolescence and in young adulthood.

Themes that were expressed most frequently
As noted above, each wish, response from other, and response of self was coded for the best-fitting and the next-best-fitting standard category, yielding two coded categories for each component. Using both scores for each component, frequencies were calculated as the proportion of relationship narratives containing a particular theme, and ranged from .06 to .48. Adolescents expressed the wish to be close to others with greatest frequency (x = .48, s.d. = .28), followed by the wish to achieve and help others (x = .41, s.d. = .32), and by the wish to be distant from others (x = .40, s.d. = .28). In young adulthood, the wish to be close remained the most frequently expressed wish (x = .35, s.d. = .22), but the next most frequently expressed wish in young adulthood was the wish to be independent (x = .20, s.d. = .12). With respect to participants’ perceived responses of the other, adolescents most frequently saw others as opposing and rejecting (x = .48, s.d. = .20), followed by the perception that the other was bad (x = .20, s.d. = .13). In young adulthood, participants continued to see others as opposing and rejecting with the greatest frequency (x = .27, s.d. = .11), but their next-most-frequent perception was that the other was understanding (x = .16, s.d. = .08). Finally, adolescents saw themselves in their dealings with others as independent (x = .20, s.d. = .12), disappointed (x = .20, s.d. = .12), and unreceptive (x = .18, s.d. = .12); while in young adulthood, these same participants saw themselves most frequently as helpful (x = .23, s.d. = .12), followed by feeling respected by others (x = .18, s.d. = .12).

The complexity of relationship narratives

We performed a repeated-measures analysis of variance to examine links between the number of components used in each subject’s relationship episodes and developmental era, gender, and cohort (high school vs. hospital). The difference between the mean number of components used in adolescent relationship episodes (4.28, n=40, s.d. 1.59) and young adult
relationship episodes (3.74, n=40, s.d. 0.70) approached significance (F [1,36] = 3.18; p=.08). There were no significant differences on gender or cohort, and no significant interactions among these variables. On average, participants used fewer components in their relationship narratives as young adults than they had as adolescents.

We next explored the breadth of the repertoire of themes expressed, comparing the number of different wishes, responses of other, and responses of self used by each participant across all relationship episodes in adolescence with those in young adulthood. Because the numbers of wishes, responses of other, and responses of self were correlated (Pearson correlations ranging from .45 to .66), we performed a repeated-measures MANOVA on these 3 variables together, along with gender and cohort, and developmental era. Participants differed significantly with respect to developmental era, using greater numbers of wishes, responses from others, and responses of self in young adulthood than they did in adolescence (F[3,30] = 30.07, p=.0001). ANOVAs then revealed that young adults used a significantly broader repertoire of wishes, responses of other, and responses of self in their relationship narratives than they had as adolescents:

**Breadth of Repertoire -- Mean numbers of different components used in relationship narratives**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Adolescents</th>
<th>Young Adults</th>
<th>F (1,32)</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wishes</td>
<td>2.89 (1.55)</td>
<td>5.08 (1.38)</td>
<td>49.09</td>
<td>.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROs</td>
<td>4.80 (1.76)</td>
<td>7.02 (0.92)</td>
<td>36.50</td>
<td>.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSs</td>
<td>5.80 (1.59)</td>
<td>7.45 (0.88)</td>
<td>24.37</td>
<td>.0001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We found no differences for gender or cohort in either the number of components per relationship episode or the number of different themes used in relationship episodes.
Changes in most frequently expressed relationship themes from adolescence to young adulthood

The pervasiveness of each type of wish, response of other, and response of self in each developmental era was calculated by summing the number of times a participant expressed a particular theme and dividing by the total number of themes he or she expressed in that category. So, for example, the pervasiveness of the wish to be close would be calculated using the total number of times a participant expressed the wish to be close in all relationship narratives, divided by the total number of wishes he or she expressed.

For each of the three categories (Ws, ROs, RSs), repeated-measures ANOVAs were carried out examining developmental era, gender, and cohort, along with possible interactions among these 3 variables. To maintain an overall alpha level of 0.05, the Bonferroni correction was used and the alpha level for individual tests was set at 0.00625. Numbers of observations vary, because not all relationship episodes were coded as containing all elements.

a. Wishes: An ANOVA revealed a significant decrease from adolescence to young adulthood in the frequency with which the wish to oppose others was expressed. (mean T1 = 40.5, SD = 28.2, mean T2 = 17.1, SD = 11.1, F[1,31] = 11.05, p = .01). There were no other significant differences between T1 and T2 in the frequency of wishes. Participants in the hospital group expressed the wish to be helped more frequently than those in the high school cohort (mean hospital = 23.1, SD = 24.5, mean high school = 15.6, SD = 7.3, F[1,21] = 4.42, p = .05). Similarly, the hospital group expressed the wish to feel good more frequently than the high school group (mean hospital = 16.9, SD = 8.5, mean high school = 11.6, SD = 7.4, F[1,17] = 5.06, p = .04), and a significant cohort*gender interaction
The Same Old Song?

reveals this difference to be between hospitalized males and high school males:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohort</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Cohort*Gender F(1,17) = 8.11, p = .01</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>hospital</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>5.70</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hospital</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high school</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>9.38</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high school</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

b. Responses of Other: An ANOVA revealed a significant decrease from adolescence to young adulthood in the perception of others as rejecting (mean T1 = 48.1, SD = 19.7, mean T2 = 27.1, SD = 11.4, F[1,36] = 59.70, p = .0001). This decrease was more pronounced for males than for females:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Gender*Time: F(1,35) = 6.13, p=.02</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>53.6</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition, participants expressed the perception that others liked them more frequently in adolescence than they did in young adulthood (mean T1 = 12.7, SD = 10.8, mean T2 = 6.2, SD = 3.6, F[1,30] = 7.65, p = .0001). No significant differences were found with respect to the other 6 categories of responses from others. There were no other significant interactions among developmental era, cohort, and gender.
c. Responses of Self: An ANOVA revealed three significant differences in the frequency with which responses of the self were expressed at T1 and T2: (1) adolescents perceived themselves as opposing others more frequently than they did in young adulthood (mean T1 = 17.5, SD = 10.4, mean T2 = 9.5, SD = 4.7, F[1,23] = 14.22, p = .001); (2) adolescents described themselves as feeling anxious in response to interactions with others more frequently than they did in young adulthood (mean T1 = 15.1, SD = 14.0, mean T2 = 6.9, SD = 4.2, F[1,13] = 5.02, p = .04); and (3) adolescents described themselves as feeling self-confident more frequently than they did as young adults (mean T1 = 19.7, SD = 11.7, mean T2 = 12.2, SD = 7.9, F[1,23] = 4.20, p = .052). One significant interaction emerged between cohort and gender: males in the hospital group saw themselves as unreceptive to others more frequently than males in the high school group, but females in the hospital group saw themselves as unreceptive to others less frequently than females in the high school group:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohort</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Cohort*Gender F(1,36) = 3.53, p = .05</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>hospital</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high school</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hospital</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high school</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Change and stability of components across time

Change in each participant’s most frequently expressed wishes, responses of other, and responses of self over time was scored by examining his or her most frequent and the
next-most-frequently expressed categories in adolescence and young adulthood. Analyses were in terms of a continuous scale from 0 to 1, where 0 was no change (complete agreement) between the two developmental eras, and 1 was complete change (lack of any observed agreement). When, for example, the participant expressed the same wishes in adolescence and young adulthood, the change score was 0. When the most frequently expressed wish was the same at both times, but the next-most-frequently expressed wish was not the same, the change score was 0.25. When the participant’s most frequently expressed wish in adolescence was the next-most-frequently expressed wish in young adulthood, the change score was 0.5. When the most frequently expressed wish differed, but the next-most frequently-expressed wish was the same at both times, the change score was 0.75. When both the most and next-most-frequently expressed wishes differed from adolescence to young adulthood, the change score was 1.

Mean change scores were calculated for wishes, responses of other, and responses of self for all participants. These change scores for wishes, responses of other, and responses of self were not correlated, and an ANOVA was performed to examine the change scores for these 3 variables in terms of gender and cohort. No significant main effects and no significant interactions were found. Thus, gender and psychiatric status were not associated with the degree to which an individual’s most frequently expressed relationship themes changed between adolescence and young adulthood.

Two specific questions about change were posed:

a. **Did the most frequently expressed wishes, responses of other, and responses of self change from adolescence to young adulthood?** T-tests on the change scores described above were conducted, and the alpha level was set at 0.0167 for individual tests of significance using the Bonferroni correction to maintain an overall alpha level of 0.05. T-tests
revealed that the change scores for wishes, responses of other, and responses of self changed significantly:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>n</th>
<th>MEAN (s.d.)</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>std. error</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>W:</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>0.50 (0.33)</td>
<td>9.02</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RO:</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>0.55 (0.32)</td>
<td>9.00</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RS:</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>0.30 (0.31)</td>
<td>14.23</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>.0001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

b. Do some components change less over time than others? T-tests were conducted between change scores of each of the 3 pairs of components (W-RO, W-RS, RO-RS). These showed no differences between wishes and responses of other (t= -.33, p=.74) but significant differences between the change scores of wishes and responses of self (t=2.30, p=.03) and between responses of other and responses of self (t=3.36, p=.002), indicating that responses of self changed less between adolescence and young adulthood than did wishes or responses of other.

Positivity and negativity of responses of other and responses of self

The mean valence (positive versus negative rating) of each subject’s responses of other and responses of self was calculated, weighting a negative as -1 and a positive as +1. There was a significant correlation between the valence of responses of other and of responses of self (r=0.51, p=.0001). We therefore conducted a repeated-measures MANOVA, and found a significant main effect for change between adolescence and young adulthood (F[2,34] = 12.87, p=.0001). Separate follow-up repeated-measures ANOVAs examining developmental era, gender, cohort, and their possible interactions revealed significant shifts from more negative to more positive responses of other and responses of self from adolescence to young adulthood:
The Same Old Song?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Adolescents (s.d.)</th>
<th>Young Adults (s.d.)</th>
<th>F (1,36)</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ROs</td>
<td>-0.46 (0.49)</td>
<td>-0.06 (0.33)</td>
<td>25.46</td>
<td>.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSs</td>
<td>-0.10 (0.57)</td>
<td>0.29 (0.33)</td>
<td>11.15</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No significant differences in valence were found between men and women or between the hospital and high school cohorts, nor were there significant interactions among these variables.

Number of relationship narratives told

In young adulthood, there were no significant differences between hospital and high school participants, or between males and females, in the number of stories they told about relationships. Due to the extensive nature of the interviews conducted in adolescence, examination of the total numbers of relationship narratives told during the interviews in adolescence has not yet been completed.

DISCUSSION

The present study is unique in its application of an established method of identifying interpersonal themes to longitudinal data that spans the crucial developmental decade between adolescence and young adulthood. It is also unique in the use of such a method to move beyond the clinical context of psychotherapy studies to explore relationship schemas as a normative developmental phenomenon.

Our findings support the hypothesis that there is moderate stability along with theoretically-predicted change in relationship needs and concerns over the period from adolescence to young adulthood. As predicted, the wish to be close to others was the most
frequently expressed wish in relationship narratives in adolescence and in young adulthood. Over this period, perceptions of others remained particularly stable: interpersonal wishes and responses of the self changed more than perceptions of others, but these changes were not extensive.

These findings are consistent with the work of other investigators, who have found moderate stability in interpersonal needs (Holmlund, 1991; Teichman & Teichman, 1987), personality traits (Bachman et al., 1978; Block, 1971; Stein, Newcomb, & Bentler, 1986), and affective experiences of parent-child relationships (Tubman & Lerner, 1994) over the period from adolescence to adulthood. The fact that the wish to be close to others was expressed most frequently in adolescence and in young adulthood is consistent with other findings in the empirical literature using the CCRT Method (Luborsky & Crits-Christoph, 1998).

Relationship narratives changed more in form than in content over the period from adolescence to young adulthood. Subjects’ narratives about relationships grew more complex over this period of time: young adults told stories that included a greater variety of wishes, responses from others, and responses of self than did the stories they told as adolescents. This change may reflect progressive ego development over this decade (Hauser, 1976), as well as young adults’ greater experience with close relationships that prompts more complex perceptions of self and other in relationships (Hauser & Greene, 1987). Contrary to our hypothesis, adolescents told stories with more parts to them (i.e., a larger number of wishes, responses of other, and responses of self) than they did as young adults. So while young adults demonstrated a broader set of options in their narratives of relationship episodes, they described them more succinctly than they did in adolescence. This may be due to a decrease in ambivalence in relationships over time, allowing subjects to describe any one event more concisely.
The Same Old Song?

Changes in story content? the particular themes most frequently expressed? were relatively few but theoretically meaningful. Adolescents expressed the wish to oppose others and saw themselves as responding to others with opposition more frequently than they did as young adults. This difference may be understood as reflecting adolescents? developmentally appropriate concerns about establishing autonomy (Allen et al., 1994; Grotevant & Cooper, 1985), concerns which are typically less pressing as one moves into adulthood. In light of their more frequent opposition to others, it is not surprising that adolescents perceived others as rejecting more often than they did as young adults. Adolescents? perceptions of self and other in stories about relationships were, as a whole, more negatively tinged than they were a decade later. This is consistent with research on relationship functioning during these two developmental epochs (Elliott, Huizinga, & Menard, 1989; Kandel & Davies, 1982).

As expected, adolescence was characterized by more contradictory themes than young adulthood. Adolescents? most frequent wishes in their relationship narratives were for closeness to others, but their next-most-frequent wish was to be distant from others. While adolescents saw others as rejecting, they also saw others as liking them more frequently than they did as young adults. Similarly, while adolescents saw themselves as anxious more frequently than they did as young adults, they also saw themselves more often as self-confident. These may reflect the fluid and comparatively less well-integrated images of self and others that are part of the developmentally normative adolescent search for identity (Erikson, 1963; Hauser et al., 1984). The fact that young adults? two most frequently expressed wishes were for closeness and for independence suggests that the struggle to achieve autonomous-relatedness does not resolve with the end of adolescence.

The themes in relationship narratives of the hospital and high school cohorts were much more similar than different. Of the 24 CCRT themes measured, there were significant
distinctions between high school and hospital groups only in the frequencies with which they expressed wishes to be helped and to feel good, and saw themselves as unreceptive to others. These differences may reflect the higher levels of psychological distress in the hospital group and the greater prevalence of externalizing disorders among hospitalized males. However, the most frequently expressed wishes and perceptions of self and other were the same in both the high school and hospital groups. In understanding the similarity of interpersonal themes in the two groups, we must allow for the possibility that sample size made it difficult to detect other existing differences. Another possibility, however, is that analysis of relationship narratives using the CCRT method taps into basic issues in interpersonal development that are not tied specifically to one’s level of psychological distress.

It is noteworthy that males and females differed neither in the number of stories told about relationships in young adulthood, nor in the complexity of these stories both in adolescence and in young adulthood. While many recent discussions of gender differences have focused on women’s greater orientation toward close interpersonal connections (Chodorow, 1978; Jordan et al., 1991), others argue that men are equally invested in relationships, but that the types and quality of these relationships may differ from those of females (Osherson, 1986; Pollack, 1998). The finding of no gender differences in our study needs to be replicated, but it suggests that, when thinking about and discussing their lives, males and females may differ less in their emphasis on relationships than some theorists believe.

One prior study of the developmental nature of relationship narratives yielded somewhat different results from those in this study. Thorne and her colleagues (Thorne, 1995; Thorne & Klohnen, 1993) used a modified version of the CCRT Method to examine stories about interactions with others who, at age 23, were asked to recall relationship
episodes from childhood through age 23. They found that memories about wanting help from others were prevalent in childhood and waned over the transition to adolescence, while memories about wanting closeness with others became more prevalent over this period. Wishes to help others were relatively sparse in childhood and adolescence, but increased steadily with age. In our sample, we did not see the waning of expressed wishes for help from others, nor did we see the increase in wishes to help others and to be close to others seen in the Thorne study. One likely explanation for this discrepancy involves different sources of data: Thorne’s study used retrospective data collected at age 23, while our study used data collected at each point in time.

The results of this study must be interpreted in light of several important limitations. The CCRT method is labor-intensive, and the study included only 40 subjects, limiting our power to detect differences. Data from the adolescent and young adult eras came from semi-structured interviews that were overlapping but not identical in their focus. The Adolescent Clinical-Research Interview covered several developmentally-relevant domains, including school, family life, relationships with friends, and future plans. The Early Adult Close Peer Relationship Interview focused on only one of these domains—relationships with friends and romantic partners—asking open-ended questions about experiences with two specific people identified by the participant as important in his or her life. Young adult relationship narratives were taken from the peer interview conducted at age 24. In order to collect a sufficient number of narratives for adolescents, data from two (and, as needed, three) interviews conducted between age 14 and 16 were pooled, and only narratives about peers were included in data analyses. These differences between the adolescent and young adult interviews are one possible source of differences in relationship themes across time periods. Given these differences, the considerable stability in relationship themes across developmental epochs
This study is the first to apply a method of analyzing relationship narratives to longitudinal data spanning the decade from adolescence to young adulthood. Many of the findings are consistent with knowledge about the adolescent-to-young-adult transition derived from other clinical and empirical sources. Additional planned analyses of this data include examination of gender differences in the number of stories told by adolescents, and examination of links between level of ego development and relationship themes in adolescence and young adulthood.

In their capacity to shed light on inner representations of the self and others, relationship schemas may be rich units of study for developmental psychology and, particularly, for learning about the development of interpersonal functioning. The CCRT Method is a tool that lends itself to the analysis of longitudinal data, in that it can be applied to a wide variety of narrative materials. Further research in this area has the potential to enhance our understanding of links between relationship schemas and other psychological variables (e.g., ego development, self-esteem), and how these links may change over time. In addition, the analysis of relationship narratives in combination with observational data on interpersonal behavior could make valuable contributions to our understanding of the connections between how we perceive relationships and how we behave in them.
The Same Old Song?

Table 1 -- CCRT Categories

**Wishes:**
to be independent
to oppose others
to be helped
to be distant
to be close
to be loved
to feel good
to achieve and help others

**Responses of Others**
strong
controlling
upset/angry
bad
rejecting
helpful
likes me
understanding

**Responses of Self**
am helpful
am unreceptive
feel respected/accepted
oppose others
feel self-confident
feel helpless
am disappointed/depressed
feel anxious
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The Same Old Song?


The Same Old Song?


The Same Old Song?


The Same Old Song?

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The Same Old Song?


The Same Old Song?


