

Timing is (Nearly) Everything

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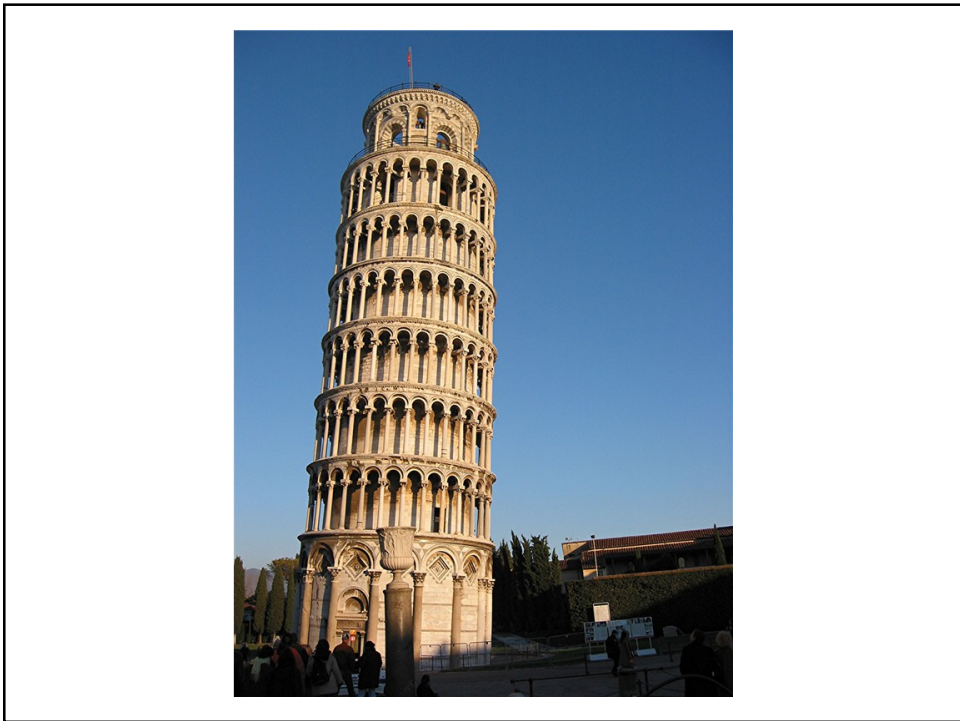
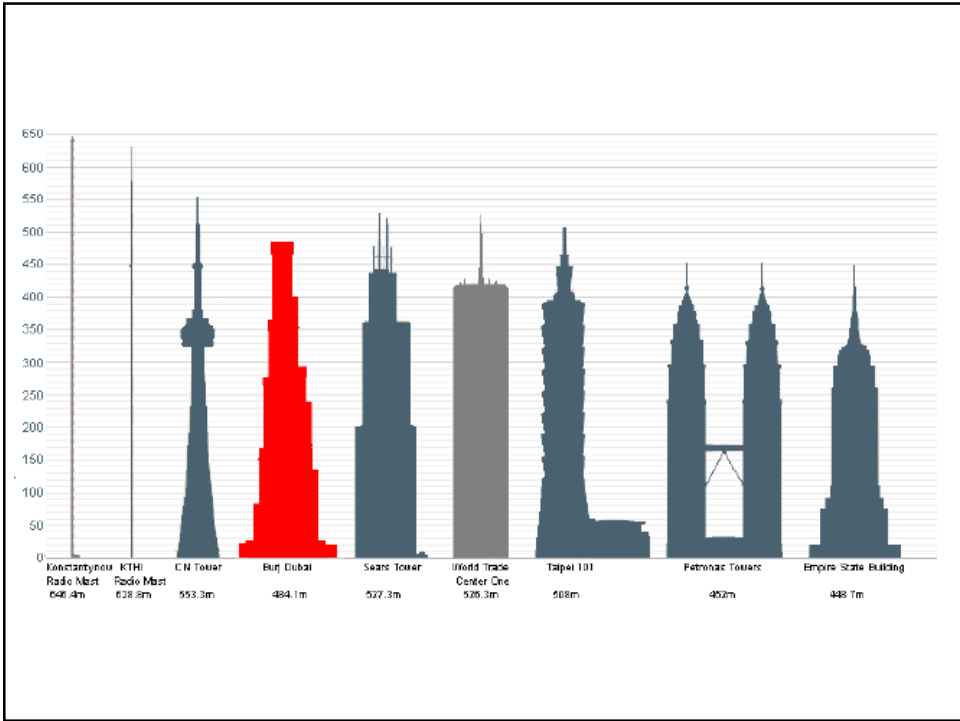
- Support for much of the work by the University of Denver team in these areas has been provided by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) and the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in the United States.

The Best Times to Reach Couples

- Traditional times: crucial transitions
- For example, Harry Benson's advice:
 - Premarital educational
 - Transition to parenthood, e.g.
 - Lamaze
 - Family Expectations (Oklahoma BSF Site)
 - BCT: Let's Stick Together
- But, this model is getting trickier for some things like pre-marriage education.

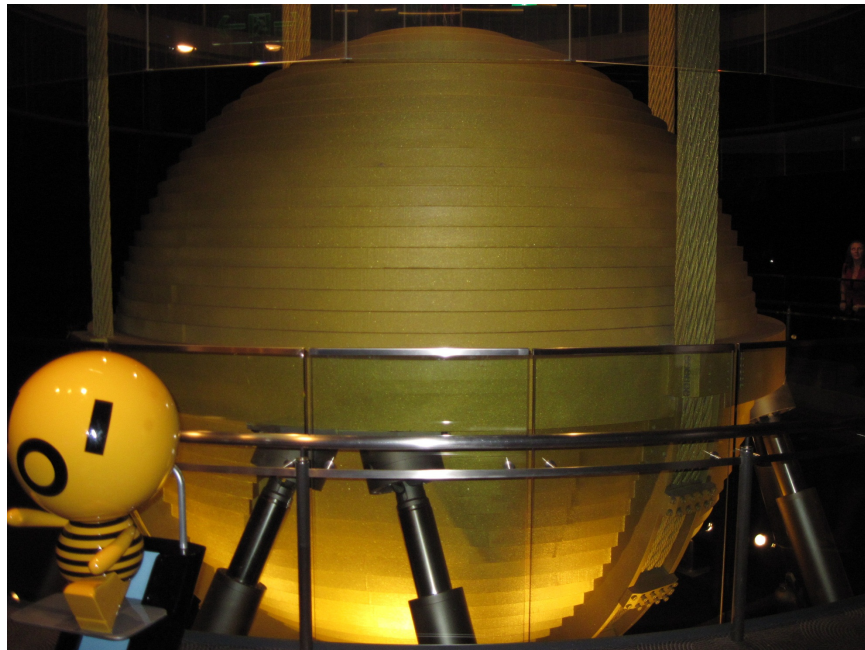
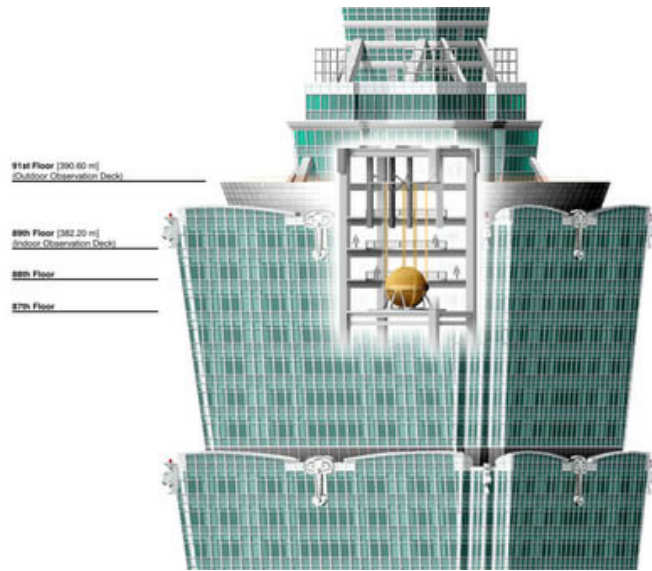
An Expanded View

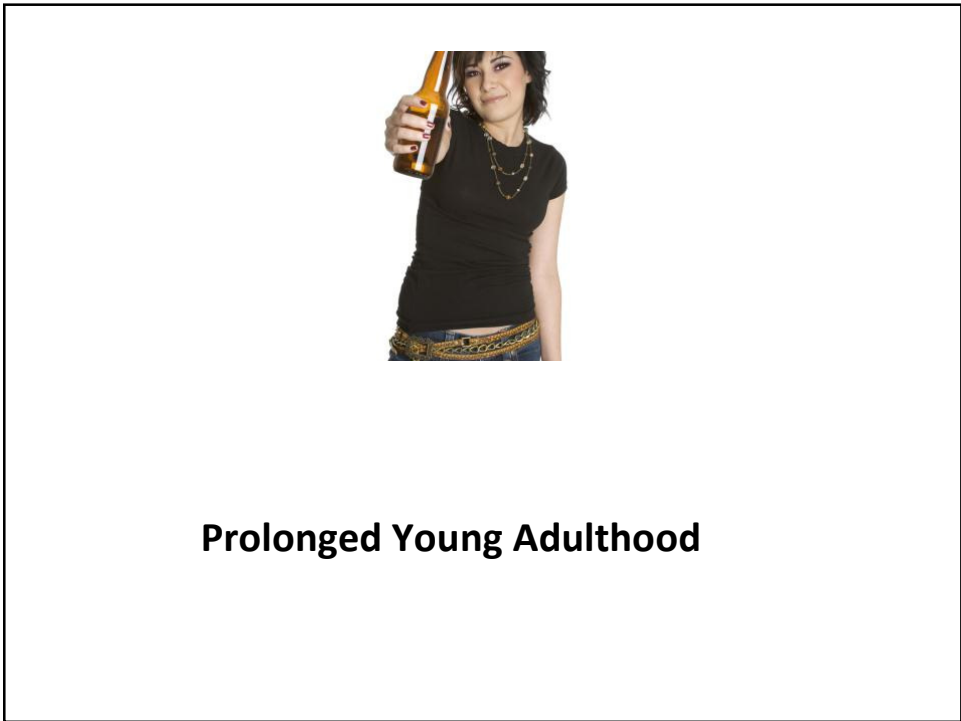
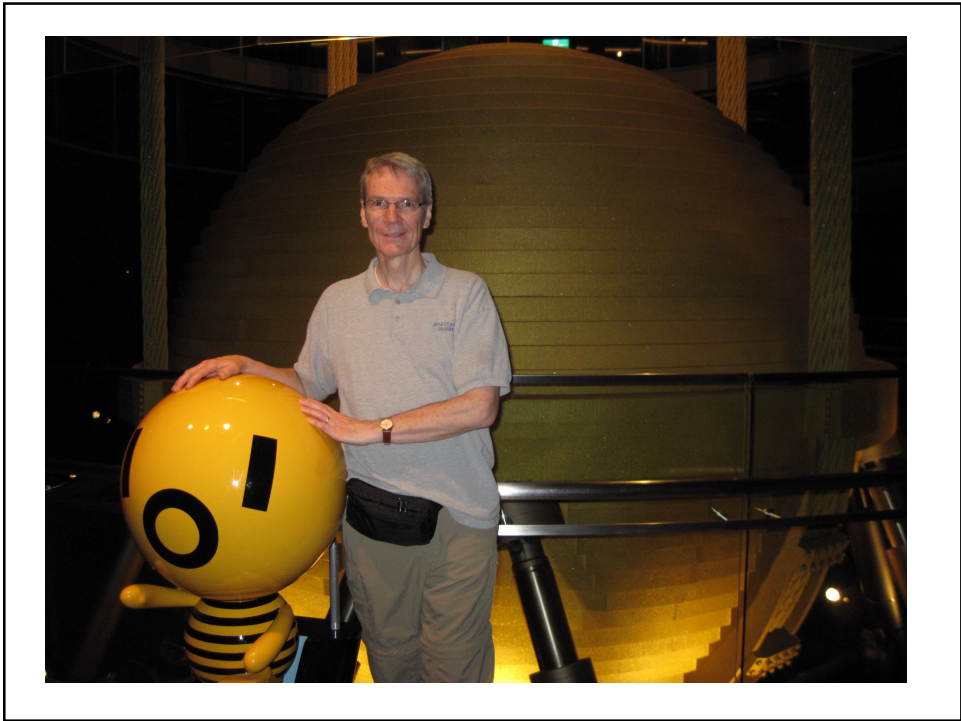
- Times of transition for committed couples are excellent points to reach them if strengthening committed couples is your goal.
- But, for many couples, those transition points are late in the game of risk.
 - This is important and valuable work.
 - But, it's late for some because so much is determined so much earlier.





Taipei 101



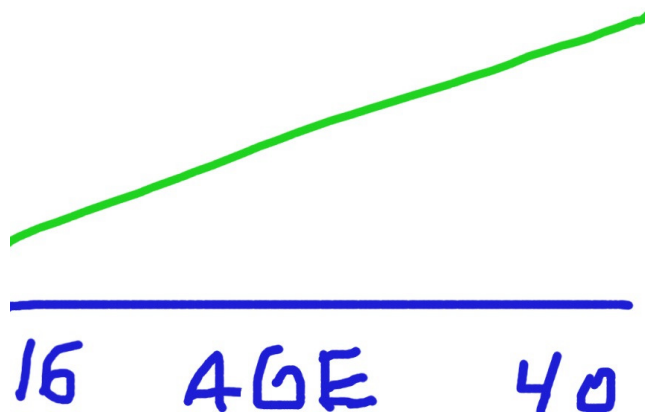


Prolonged Young Adulthood

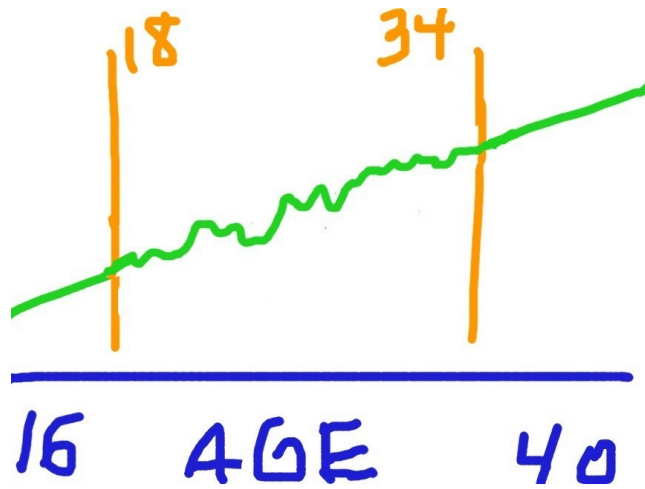
You know the changes . . .

- People are marrying later and later
- Settling down later but becoming sexually able and interested far earlier

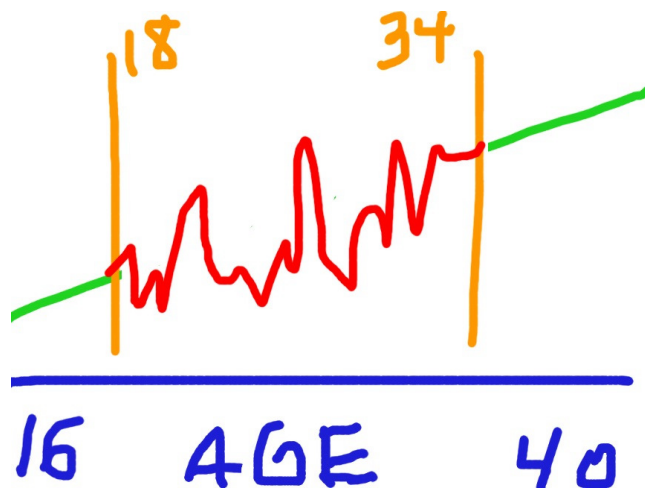
Ideal Path in Romantic Development in Relationships



Realistic Development in Relationship



The Reality for a Growing Number

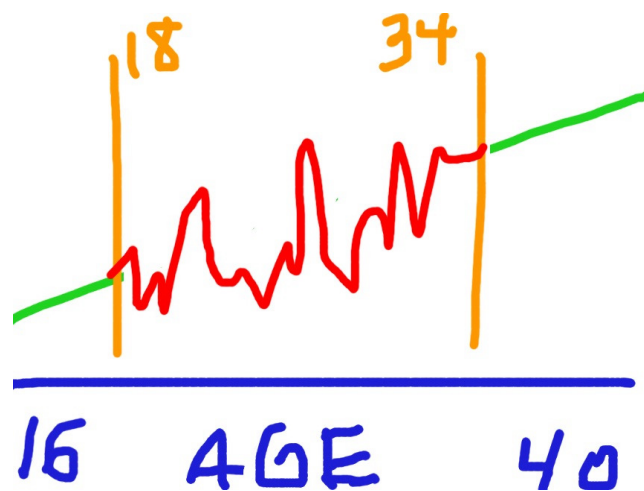


The Riskier Path

- Children from multiple partners
- Serial cohabitation
- Greater numbers of sexual partners
- Cohabitation, especially before engagement

The Reality and the Fantasy:

“What I do before I settle down won’t affect the rest of my life.”



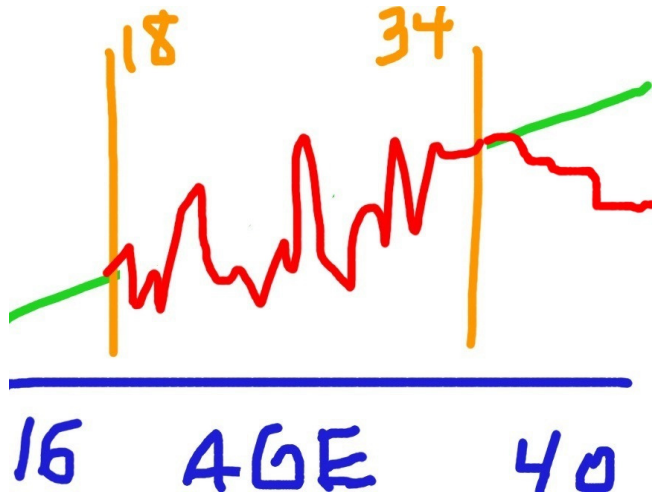
What happens in the sandbox stays in the sandbox.
Or not . . .



Romantic and Sexual Relationships Affect Everything

- “Your love life is not neutral.”
Marline Pearson (co-author *Within My Reach*
for adults, *Love U2* or *Love Notes* for Teens)
 - This principle underlies most all of our curricula
for singles (or those who attend as singles)
 - Single parents
 - Single military service personnel
 - Correctional settings
 - College students

The Reality for Too Many



So Sexual, So Early

Our Large Longitudinal Study of Un-marrieds

- Funded by National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD)
- Random, fairly representative sample of
 - 1,294 individuals
 - 18-34 years old
 - 60% women, 40% men
 - All unmarried (68% dating, 32% cohabiting)
- Longitudinal: mail surveys every 4 to 6 mo.
- Principle Investigators: Scott Stanley, Galena Rhoades, & Howard Markman

Sex Before Relationship “Did you have sex

- Long, long ago, in a galaxy far, far away:
 - Most people did not have sex before marriage (but many did, keep in mine)
 - People tried not to have sex before marriage (that was the goal)
- A few decades ago in this galaxy:
 - People would try not to have sex before marriage or at least before some strong commitment.
 - But what now?

- The question we asked:
- *Did you and your partner have sex with each other before you were in a relationship together?*

How Relationships Start

- 40% report that they had sex with their current partner before being in a relationship with him or her.

How Relationships Start

- Those that report that their (serious) romantic relationship began this way also report . . .
 - More negative communication
 - Less dedication to their partner
 - Less confidence in their relationship
 - Lower overall quality of relationship



Ambiguity

Stanley, S. M., Rhoades, G. K., & Fincham, F. D. (2011). Understanding romantic relationships among emerging adults: The significant roles of cohabitation and ambiguity. In F. D. Fincham & M. Cui (Eds.), *Romantic relationships in emerging adulthood* (pp. 234-251). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Ambiguity Reigns

- Hooking up patterns
- Cohabitation is an ambiguous form of union (Lindsay, 2000).
- Even break-ups are ambiguous (Halpern-Meekin, et al. 2010)

Infidelity in Unmarried Relationships

- In our Relationship Development Study
 - Maddox, Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman (in press)
- Assessed 28 possible predictors of infidelity in a random sample of 993 individuals in unmarried romantic relationships.
- Prediction of sexual unfaithfulness over 1.5 years time

- 14% of the 993 (n = 141) were unfaithful in the 20 month period studied
- Of these . . .
 - 43.3% broke up
 - 56.7% remained together (so far)

What is associated with infidelity?

- Individual characteristics
 - more problems with alcohol
 - more previous sex partners
 - watching pornography (including if as a couple)
 - having parents who never married

What is associated with infidelity?

- Relationship Dynamics
 - relationship satisfaction (lower)
 - dimensions of commitment
 - plans to marry, dedication, etc.
 - communication quality (poorer)
 - aggression

What IS Not Associated with Infidelity

- gender
- age
- education
- religiosity
- sexual frequency or dissatisfaction
- dating vs. cohabiting
- relationship length
- long distance relationship

Of Special Note

- Cohabiters were not less likely to be unfaithful than daters, not cohabiting.
- In this sample, only about 15% of cohabiters say cohabiting was a step up in commitment.
- Ambiguity is everywhere/clarity is resisted.

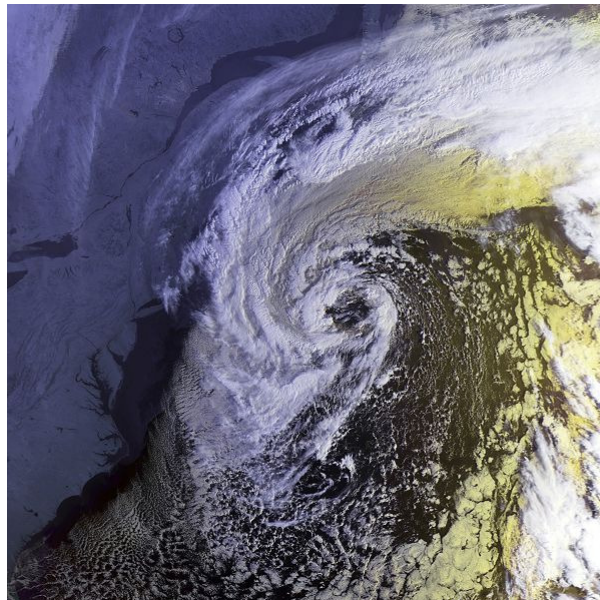
Contributions to the Rise in Ambiguity

- Loss of scripts (steps and stages) and social structures for developing romantic unions
(Stanley, 2002; Whitehead, 2002; Stanley, Rhoades, & Markman, 2006)
- Prolonged young adulthood
- Anxiety about commitment and marriage

The Perfect Storm

- Societal conditions are generating high numbers of people with:
 - insecurities about attachment
 - and
 - low confidence about relationships and marriage .
 - ..
- . . . at a time when we've been dismantling protective structures

The "Perfect Storm" October 30, 1991



Serious Attachment Issues: What's In It For Them?

- Avoidant Attachment
- Anxious Attachment

Why Does Ambiguity Matter?

- Commitment is unambiguous.
- Commitment's central role is to secure attachment.
- Marriages that thrive have emotional safety and commitment safety.

Stanley, S.M., Markman, H.J., & Whitton, S. (2002). Communication, conflict, and commitment: Insights on the foundations of relationship success from a national survey. *Family Process, 41*, 659-675.

Stanley, S. M., Rhoades, G. K., & Whitton, S. W. (2010). Commitment: Functions, formation, and the securing of romantic attachment. *Journal of Family Theory and Review, 2*, 243-257.

The Opportunity of Earlier Intervention with Educational Strategies:

Cut through ambiguity and poorly
formed dedication before there is no
turning back—while the foundation can
still be reset (for the individual, at least).

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You can get word.doc versions of some of our
papers at:

<http://www.box.net/shared/xnxx4fb1ao01p0750h9s>

[Scott's blog] www.slidingvsdeciding.com