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The myth of the superwoman: comparing young men and women's stories of their future lives

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ABSTRACT

Past research into the hopes and dreams of individuals has mostly focused mainly mid-adolescence. This study investigated how dreams unfold beyond this age period, by exploring: (a) the transition period from adolescence to adulthood (17-22 years); and (b) the "age thirty" transition period (28-33 years). The sample (140 men and 140 women) formed two age-based groups with 140 participants in each group. The younger group were found to have developed more grand dreams for the future compared to the older group. Women more than men foresaw the need to juggle their dreams, such as relationships, children and a career. Furthermore, a particular type of woman was identified, who was named here as the 'superwoman'. These women typically found in the younger age group, wanted to find the perfect partner, have children, and become very successful in their careers, as well there was little time for leisure in these women's narratives.

Key Words: hopes; dreams; goals; future lives; superwoman; story writing

INTRODUCTION

The literature on hopes and dreams has focused mainly on how adolescents, particularly those in their mid-teens, have perceived their future lives (e.g., Gillies, 1989; Greene, 1986; Greene & Wheatley, 1992; Nurmi, Poole, & Seginer, 1995; Seginer, 1992; Trommsdorff, Lamm, & Schmidt, 1979). The reason for this focus is has been because adolescence is generally understood to be a period where people begin to make important decisions about their futures, such as career, marriage, and having a family. However, researchers have not addressed the question of what happens to these hopes and dreams after adolescence. Do individuals continue to construct possible worlds for themselves after their mid-teens, or do people simply begin to live the life story that we constructed during adolescence?

Researchers have found that adolescents' hopes and goals for the future primarily concern the major developmental tasks they expect to achieve by the end of their 20s and early 30s. In his review of studies on adolescents' future orientation and planning, Nurmi (1991) concluded that adolescents are most interested in future occupation and education (e.g., Mönks, 1968; Gillies, 1989; Gillies, Elmwood, & Hawtin, 1985; Poole & Cooney, 1987; Seginer, 1988). Adolescents' dreams about occupation and education have also been evident across cultures (e.g., Mehta, Rohila, Sunberg, & Tyler 1972; Nurmi et al., 1995). In addition, studies found that adolescents become more interested and concerned about their future occupation and education as they grow older (Gillies, 1989; Gillies et al., 1985; Nurmi, 1991; Nurmi, Poole, and Kalakoski, 1994; Trommsdorff et al., 1979).

There appear to be mixed results when comparing sex differences for occupational hopes and dreams. For example, Lueptow (1984) found no sex differences in the importance of occupation as a life goal. Similarly, Trommsdorff et

al. (1979) found no sex differences for hopes or fears in the occupational domain for 14-16 year old adolescents. In contrast, Porteus (1979) and Gillies (1989) found that 14 and 15 year old girls expressed more worries than boys about unemployment. Thus, the general findings are that girls and boys in their mid-teens find occupation to be an important goal.

According to Nurmi's (1991) review, the next most popular adolescent dreams after occupation and education, included future family and marriage, leisure activities, travel, and the material aspects of life. Religion, politics, physical wellbeing, self and personality were hopes and concerns also sometimes mentioned by adolescents. It has also been found that family dreams increase in frequency with age. In contrast, it has been found that adolescents report fewer leisure dreams as they grew older (Nurmi, 1991).

Aims of the Present Study

The four main aims of this study were:

1. To examine the hopes and dreams of individuals in greater detail than in previous studies. Although earlier research provided some information about adolescents' studies on a broad level, researchers typically did not investigate dreams on a microlevel. For example, how well do individuals want to do in their careers, and what types of careers would they most like to enter?
2. To examine the obstacles that young people believe might impede achievement of their dreams. In particular were encouraged to consider how the dreams and obstacles might be linked, in order to elucidate the compromises people make when developing and re-forming their dreams.

3. To examine the dreams of individuals beyond adolescence. Given that identity is neither determined nor fixed by the end of adolescence (Clausen, 1995; McAdams, 1993), research suggests that there is a need to extend the examination of individuals' dreams beyond the mid-teens. Therefore, this study attempted to yield a better understanding of older adolescents' and young adults' dreams for their future. The two age groups examined were chosen because they were both nominated by Levinson (1978a, 1978b, 1996) as transition periods: the *early adult transition period* (17 years to 22 years), when dreams are being formed; and *the age-thirty transition period* (28 years to 33 years), when they are re-formed.
4. To explore gender differences. Past research has found some difference in the hopes and dreams of males and females. For example, Roberts and Newton's (1987) review of four unpublished dissertations based on Levinson's theory found that, unlike those of men, women's dreams were usually split between occupational and interpersonal goals. Other studies of adolescents' dreams have found that boys tended to be more interested in material dreams, whereas girls were more interested in dreams relating to future family (Nurmi, 1991). Accordingly, this paper explicitly examined gender differences in young adults' dreams and obstacles to these dreams.

METHOD

Participants

First year psychology students from two universities participated in this study. One university was located in a higher socio-economic area (Macquarie University), while

the other was located in the outer suburbs of Sydney, in a lower socio-economic area (University of Western Sydney Nepean). There were 50 respondents from each of the universities. Other groups who participated included: students' friends (38); two Christian groups (14); and people attending two of Sydney's markets (one in the inner city, and the other located in the outskirts of Sydney, with 64 participants from each market).

The sample consisted of 140 men and 140 women. They formed two age-based groups with 140 participants in each group: one group of 17-22 year olds ($\underline{M} = 19.0$, $\underline{SD} = 1.61$), and a second group of 28-33 year olds ($\underline{M} = 29.9$, $\underline{SD} = 2.02$).

In considering the highest level of education achieved by this sample, 3% had achieved a high school education, 9% had a school certificate, 5% had technical qualifications, 54% had completed the higher school certificate (year 12), 23% had a degree or diploma, and 7% had achieved postgraduate qualifications. Although this sample is a little skewed in the direction of higher educated, when compared with the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (1997) data it was considered to be a reasonable representation of the Australian population. In May 1997 (close to the time this sample was obtained), the ABS reported that of 15-34 year olds, 46.0% had not completed the Higher School Certificate, 32.3% had completed the higher school certificate, 21.7% had post-school qualifications. However, it should be noted that 24.9% of the ABS population (considering it begins at 15 years) were still at school. Taking into account that the age groups are somewhat different, with more people expected to be at school in the ABS population, the sample appears to be fairly representative.

Although the present sample was more skewed toward professionals and intermediate clerical workers, salespeople, and personal-service workers, the sample

was considerably younger than the total employed population. As an alternative measure of social-class status, the educational level of participants' parents was also taken into account, and for those participants who were employed, type of occupation was considered. Once again, it appeared that this sample is skewed toward professionals and managers, suggesting that we need to treat the final results with some caution.

Finally, 89% of the sample were born in Australia, another 2.5% came from English speaking countries, and 9% came from non-English speaking countries.

Instrument

Participants first completed a short questionnaire asking for their demographic details. They were then asked to write a story about how they would like to see themselves in 10 years time. They were given 1 hour to complete the task, although most participants took about 40 minutes to write their stories. The instructions were as follows:

Write a story about how you would like to see yourself in the next 10 years. Write the story in the third person. Include as much detail as possible and particularly avoid censoring details that seem irrelevant. Avoid psychological interpretation. Include any obstacles that get in the way of achieving your dreams/goals. Produce the most vivid story about how you will achieve your dreams/goals.

Writing in the third person has been encouraged by some researchers as it allows the person to have a 'bird's eye view' of their lives (Crawford, Kippax, Onyx, Gault, Benton, 1992; Haug, 1987). As Crawford et al. (1992) have said, "the subject

reflects on herself/himself from the observer, and so is encouraged to describe rather than warrant” (p. 47). The instructions of including as much detail as possible were given to avoid the possibility that the subject might only include details that they thought the researcher desired or expected. Participants were also specifically asked to avoid using psychological interpretation, so that they would not attempt to evaluate their lives and actions.

RESULTS

Content Analysis

A content analysis was carried out to clarify the number and types of dreams and impediments included in their stories. This analysis focused on the content of the stories. It provided text units, which were then quantified. An initial reading indicated the presence of many of the themes revealed in past studies (e.g., occupation, marriage, having children, and financial dreams). However, the overriding impression was the complexity of the interwoven identities. It became a challenge to code the stories without sacrificing too much of their richness. In line with the narrative stance to psychology (e.g., Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998), it was considered a necessity to document as many of the themes as possible, even if only a few of the participants mentioned them.

To check reliability of the coding procedure, a trained scorer recoded 10% of the data. Inter-coder reliability was high, ranging from Kappa 0.75 - 1.00. As the two major aims of this paper were to determine any differences between men's and women's dreams, and older adolescents' and young adults' dreams, age and gender were the two independent variables included in the analysis. Logistic regression was used to analyse the data. Initial analyses for the main categories of dreams (occupation, finance, family, marriage, friends, children, leisure, travel, religion and

politics) included the independent variables and their interactions. The word count for each story was also included as a variable in the original analysis. However, it was found to be insignificant in each case and was, therefore, excluded in the final model. The same variables were also used in the analysis of the sub-categories. If the interaction was significant, tests of simple effects were carried out, using a p value of 0.025. If there were any empty cells, the Pearson Chi-square was used to test for simple effects. Significance for the variables age and gender were taken to be at a p value of 0.05 or less.

The Main Dreams and Obstacles

The most frequently mentioned dreams were occupational (94.3%), financial (73.6%), romantic (72.5%), and children (59.3%). Other dreams included: travel (54.3%), leisure/hobbies (36.4%), friendships (29.3%), parents/siblings (16.8%), religion/spiritual (11.1%), and political beliefs (8.2%). In terms of total number of dreams mentioned no significant differences were found between age and gender; $F(3, 277) = 0.98$; $p = .40$. There were fewer obstacles mentioned than dreams. Therefore, rather than examining the obstacles separately, they were included as sub-themes of the main dreams. The following section sets out the main dreams and the significant sub-themes.

Occupation

A large percentage of the sample (94.3%) mentioned an occupational dream. There were no significant age or gender differences for occupation overall. However, there were many significant differences found for sub-themes of occupation. Only

51.1% of participants mentioned obstacles to their careers. Table 1 outlines the significant sub-themes for occupation.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

Financial

Seventy-four percent of the sample included a financial or money dream in their stories. Financial dreams were often linked to occupation. There were no age or gender differences for people who included financial dreams in their stories. However, there were some significant differences in financial sub-themes (Table 2).

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

Romantic relationships

Table 3 presents romantic relationships and its sub-themes. It was found that more women (80.7%) than men (78.6%) wrote about being either married or in a de facto relationship, $\chi^2 (1, N = 280) = 9.41, p < .01$. Moreover, more older participants (78.6%) than younger (66.4%) wrote about being married or in a de facto relationship, $\chi^2 (1, N = 280) = 5.28, p < .05$. There were also a number of age and gender differences revealed for the sub-themes.

INSERT TABLE 3 HERE

Children

Women (72.9%) wrote more often than the men (45.7%) about wanting children or caring for their current children in the future, $\chi^2 (1, N = 280) = 20.71, p <$

.001, the ideal age to have children, $\chi^2(1, N=280) = 12.27, p < .001$, and to balance travel and having children, $\chi^2(1, N=280) = 6.45, p < .01$.

Travel

Fifty-four percent of the participants wrote about wanting to travel. Some participants wrote about their hopes to travel with a partner, while others wanted to travel to gain experience. Some hoped to travel before they had their children or before they decided to marry. Money was the only impediment to travel. No age or gender differences were found for travel.

Leisure

An age by gender interaction was found for leisure, $\chi^2(1, N=280) = 9.00, p < .01$. The younger women (10.0%) stood out as mentioning leisure dreams far less than the other three groups (45.2%). The simple effects tests showed that the younger men, scored significantly higher than the younger women, $\chi^2(1, N=140) = 25.14, p < .001$; the older women scored significantly higher than the younger women, $\chi^2(1, N=140) = 15.54, p < .001$, and the older men scored higher on this category, in comparison to the younger women, $\chi^2(1, N=140) = 25.14, p < .001$.

It was also clear that the younger women (2.9%) mentioned far fewer outdoor activities than the other three groups (24.8%). The simple effects tests revealed that the older women scored significantly higher than the younger women, $\chi^2(1, N=140) = 6.87, p < .01$, and the younger men (31.4%) scored significantly higher on this theme compared to the younger women, $\chi^2(1, N=140) = 20.11, p < .001$.

Furthermore, the younger women (1.4%) did not mention spending leisure time with their partner as much as the other three groups (9.5%). Tests of simple

effects suggested that the older women scored significantly higher than the younger women on this sub-theme, $\chi^2 (1, N=140) = 6.89, p < .01$. The older group wrote more than the younger group that they wanted to relax in 10 years time, $\chi^2 (1, N=280) = 9.67, p < .05$.

Friendships

There were no significant age or gender differences for friendship overall. However, it was found that women scored higher than men on giving or receiving support from friends, $\chi^2 (1, N=280) = 4.63, p < .05$, while men mentioned more than women that they would go out with their friends in 10 years time, $\chi^2 (1, N=280) = 4.56, p < .05$.

Parents/siblings

A small number of respondents (16.7%) mentioned their relationships with parents and siblings in 10 years time. Women included this theme in their stories more than the men, $\chi^2 (1, N=280) = 8.76, p < .001$. The only sub-theme for parents or siblings was the desire to be close to one's parents and siblings.

Religion

Eleven percent of the participants wrote about having religious or spiritual dreams in 10 years times. No significant age or gender differences were found for religious dreams or its sub-theme to become more spiritual.

Politics

Eight percent of the participants wrote about having political beliefs or dreams in 10 years time. The younger group mentioned more political themes than the older group, $\chi^2(1, N=280) = 7.05, p < .01$. There were no sub-themes for political dreams.

DISCUSSION

This current research demonstrates the importance of going beyond the broad categories outlined in past hopes and dreams studies, to reveal the micro aspects of the dream. For example, there were no significant age or gender differences obtained for an occupational dream. However, differences were found for wanting a glamorous job, a high paying job, work that will benefit society, and a job that involves caring for others. Nevertheless, similar broad categories for dreams found in past research were also revealed in this study. For example, occupation and romantic relationships were the most frequently mentioned dreams. This is congruous with past research (e.g., Nurmi, 1991).

Grand dreams

This study further revealed that some 17-22 year olds were developing heroic stories about themselves, and thus described many grandiose dreams for the future. Compared with the older participants, the younger participants were more inclined to write personal narratives that contained fairly extraordinary dreams. To give some examples from extracts from the stories:

“While concentrating on her career, she has also managed to maintain a steady relationship with her boyfriend of 2 [sic] years, actor (...). The couple receive a lot of

media attention due to (...) acting ability and her personal achievements in making channel 9..." (18 year old female).

"She would go to London and become that rock star Yelp! That life style could suit for awhile. You could just imagine the suicide blonde dreadlocks with colours and wire through them and the skimpy little hipsters just completely decked out in rock star clothing" (21 year old female).

"Here he worked tirelessly for a breakthrough that you dream about, towards the cause and cure of cancer" (18 year old male).

The unrealistic tone evident in more of the younger group's stories is in line with Levinson's concept of the 'Dream'. Levinson (1978a) argued that initially the 'Dream' is poorly developed and is not necessarily connected with reality. As a consequence it may start by taking a dramatic or unrealistic form. He also argued that if the 'Dream' is unrelated to the person's life structure it will fade away and lose purpose, and that the 'age thirty transition period' (28-33 years) is a time when people begin to settle down and a 'de-illusioning process' begins (Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, & McKee, 1976). If the Dream is not well formed it might become abandoned or re-worked at this stage. This conceptualisation is supported by the younger groups' unrealistic ambitions, while the older group are more cognisant of the real opportunities available, together with what real talents they possessed.

These results can be further explained by Elkind's (1974a, 1974b, 1978, Elkind & Bowen, 1979) notion of the 'personal fable'. Elkind argued that adolescents go through a stage where they develop heroic stories about themselves. He considered that lack of experience in the world partly explained adolescents' egocentricity. This idea of the 'personal fable' could explain why more of the younger group in this present study desired a career where they would be famous and acquire great wealth.

Although Elkind argued that the personal fable is more evident during mid-adolescence, it is clear from this study that some older adolescents and young adults still develop narratives that resemble a 'personal fable' (Whitty, 1997, 1998).

Consolidating the dream

Levinson (1978a) argued that age 28-33 years is a period when one begins the process of consolidating one's 'Dreams'. This was partly supported in the present study. The 28-33 year olds were less likely to form dreams that contained lofty ideals: compared to the younger group, they were more likely to write about striving for success in their current job, saving money, and providing for their children. In addition, the older participants were better able to understand the difficulties involved in achieving their dreams. For example, the older group was more concerned that they would not have enough money or time to achieve their occupational dream, and they perceived a number of financial obstacles to achieving their dreams.

It could, however, be argued that the older groups' narratives were not solely focused on consolidating the dream. For example, although dreams such as falling in love, marriage and activities for relaxation might be considered as settling down, they could also be understood as new chapters in the life story, rather than consolidation of the dream.

The split dream

In addition to these developmental differences, there are some important gender differences that need to be addressed. What clearly emerged was that the women wanted a career just as much as the men. However, the women foresaw that achieving this career dream would be more difficult (Whitty, 1997, 1998). These

results are reminiscent of Roberts and Newton's (1987) theory of the 'split dream' and Archer's (1985) findings that adolescent men have career, marriage, and children goals, but they do not connect these dreams. More women than men wrote that they would have to balance time dedicated to having children and having a career. Furthermore, more women than men wrote that they would need to balance time spent on their relationship with time spent on a career. A few women even wrote that they would give up their career once they were married.

The women did not seem to be resentful, and often found these compromises to be a desirable outcome. It appears that the women who mention the need to balance their careers with having children, their relationships, or both, understand this as their role, and instead of complaining about this balancing act they consider practical compromises. For example, more women than men wrote that they hoped to reach the pinnacle of their career before having children. In this way they could easily return to work in a comfortable position after taking time off to have the children. Other compromises considered by the women included: working part-time once they have their children; working at home after having children (some thought about setting up a business so they could work at home); having some time out of their career to care for children; leaving work altogether once they have children; or arranging child-care so that they can still work once they have children.

These results suggest that despite the growing strength of the women's movement in the nineties, women still see themselves as the primary caregivers. It seems that women's desires to have careers, and to be successful in these careers has increased, but these increased opportunities are accompanied by an increase in concerns and obstacles to achievement of occupational dreams. In line with this

commitment to child rearing, it is noteworthy that more women than men wrote that they would like a career that involved caring for others.

The superwoman

One particular type of woman was identified in this research, was the young woman who wants to fit in everything, before she has to take time out to have her children. I have named this type, the 'superwoman'. To give an example:

“While maintaining such a high profile and busy career the couple have decided to wed in 6 [sic] months, she doesn't want to have children in her mid 30's, so she will be looking at taking 6 [sic] months off in 2 [sic] years time, then coming straight into work again” (*18 year old female*).

Many of the women in this study, particularly in the younger group, wanted to achieve success in their careers as well as a fulfilling romantic relationship and having children. The narrative method utilised highlighted (more than many previous studies) how much the women wanted to achieve. It seems that the women who wanted high power careers, promotions and an ideal relationship with children, should be understood as trying to live out the narrative of the superwoman (Whitty, 1998).

A few theorists have used this term to describe women. For example, Henry (1984) has used the term to describe some of the articles written up in women's magazines. Henry found that all the magazines she examined contained articles about the 'superwoman', who is able to combine a job and family. Henry argued that these articles portray the superwoman as someone to be admired. Other noteworthy research in this area has been carried out by sociologists (Hoschschild & Machung, 1989; Machung, 1989), who discussed the strategies that 'supermums' used in order

to have a career, a relationship, and have children. They proposed that these women worked one shift as paid work, and a 'second shift' at home.

The narratives revealed in this current research highlight the problems women encounter with constructing their dreams. Being a superwoman requires some sacrifices. The lack of leisure themes in many of the younger women's stories suggests that they must put such luxuries on hold until they can achieve their occupation and relationship dreams. Some women decided there would be a point where they would give up their careers, while others put their relationships and having children on hold until they had achieved their desired success in their occupations. A sense of urgency was present in many of the women's stories. These women were aware of the biological and social constraints on them to fit in having children.

The narrative of the superwoman has a number of implications for gender roles in the nineties. It seems that women in the late nineties are very much aware that they can have success in an occupational dream. In fact recent research conducted within Australia indicated that, on average, women younger than thirty are earning as much, if not slightly more (1%) than men of the same age (Mark Wooden, 1999, as cited in Martin 1999). However, this current study suggested that women still have communal dreams such as having a relationship and a family. They seemed to unquestioningly accept the traditional role of caregiver and tried to add or take time out of this role to have a career. However, the men seemed satisfied with doing well in a career and not having to make too many sacrifices in order to have a relationship and a family. Few of the men wrote about any compromises they would have to make if their wives or partners wanted to work full-time. Interestingly, Wooden's research found that women over 30 earned considerably less than men earn. It seems that once women decide to have children, they either are not able to return to the positions they

were in before they exited the work-force or that they elect to work part-time, or leave the work-force altogether.

CONCLUSION

Despite the many strengths of this research, the methodology did had some shortcomings. Firstly, some respondents were limited by their written fluency; their stories restricted to including what they were capable of expressing on paper. Secondly, although it was seen as a strength to exclude prompts about particular dreams, this could have been a limitation, as some respondents might have included these dreams had they thought of them.

Finally, this study gives further support to the notion that identity is not fully achieved by the end of adolescence, but rather is being continually re-structured. The clear differences in the age groups' descriptions of their dreams and impediments to these dreams, suggest that identity formation continues beyond adolescence. Therefore, these results call forth the need to study dreams and identity formation beyond adolescence (Whitty, 1997, 1998). The study also demonstrates the importance of considering the development of the dream on a micro level. Such an approach allows researchers to understand in more detail the complexity of young people's dreams of their future lives.

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Table 1

Summary of results for occupational themes

Occupational themes	Females		Males		Total freq (%)	Significant results
	17-22 freq (%)	28-33 freq (%)	17-22 freq (%)	28-33 freq (%)		
Requires qualifications/ for career dream	47 (67.1)	33 (47.1)	37 (52.9)	27 (38.6)	144 (51.4)	age** sex*
In the limelight/glamorous	28 (40.0)	13 (18.6)	28 (40.0)	22 (31.4)	91 (32.5)	age**
Having a high status/influential/powerful job	29 (41.4)	16 (22.9)	18 (25.7)	21 (30.0)	84 (30.0)	age x sex*
Work will benefit society	21 (30.0)	12 (17.1)	19 (27.1)	10 (14.3)	62 (22.1)	age**
Job that pays well	20 (28.6)	5 (7.1)	24 (34.3)	12 (17.1)	61 (21.8)	age***
Job involves caring for others	19 (27.1)	21 (30.0)	8 (11.4)	5 (7.1)	53 (18.9)	sex***
Promoted	22 (31.4)	5 (7.1)	10 (14.3)	14 (20.0)	51 (18.2)	age x sex***
Striving for success in current job	4 (5.7)	13 (18.6)	2 (2.9)	22 (31.4)	41 (14.6)	age***
Respect for one's work	9 (12.9)	3 (4.3)	7 (10.0)	1 (1.4)	20 (7.1)	age**
Achieves occupational dreams with support	5 (7.1)	7 (10.0)	1 (1.4)	2 (2.9)	15 (5.4)	sex*
No. of Occupational obstacles	46 (65.7)	43 (61.4)	27 (38.6)	27 (38.6)	143 (51.1)	sex***
Balancing children and a career	25 (35.7)	28 (40.0)	1 (1.4)	1 (1.4)	55 (19.6)	sex***
Balancing a relationship and career	8 (11.4)	9 (12.9)	1 (1.4)	1 (1.4)	19 (6.8)	sex**
Lack of money for career dream	2 (2.9)	6 (8.6)	2 (2.9)	7 (10.0)	17 (6.1)	age*
Lack of time for career dream	3 (4.3)	5 (7.1)	1 (1.4)	8 (11.4)	17 (6.1)	age*
Desire to reach the pinnacle of one's career before having children	11 (15.7)	4 (5.7)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	15 (5.4)	sex***

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 2

Summary of results for financial themes

Financial themes	Females		Males		Total freq (%)	Significant results
	17-22 freq (%)	28-33 freq (%)	17-22 freq (%)	28-33 freq (%)		
Wealthy	16 (22.9)	4 (5.7)	27 (38.6)	9 (12.9)	56 (20.0)	sex** age***
Car	17 (24.3)	8 (11.4)	19 (27.1)	8 (11.4)	52 (18.6)	age**
Expensive car	11 (15.7)	4 (5.7)	10 (14.3)	2 (2.9)	27 (9.6)	age**
Provide for children	4 (5.7)	9 (12.9)	3 (4.3)	8 (11.4)	24 (8.6)	age*
Savings	3 (4.3)	5 (7.1)	1 (1.4)	7 (10.0)	16 (5.7)	age*
No. of Financial obstacles	9 (12.9)	19 (27.1)	7 (10.0)	9 (12.9)	44 (15.7)	sex* age*

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 3

Summary of results for romantic relationship themes

Romantic relationship themes	Females		Males		Total freq (%)	Significant results
	17-22 freq (%)	28-33 freq (%)	17-22 freq (%)	28-33 freq (%)		
Marriage/de facto relationship	53 (75.7)	60 (85.7)	40 (57.1)	50 (71.4)	203 (72.5)	age* sex**
Gives a description of their partner	32 (45.7)	35 (50.0)	16 (22.9)	17 (24.3)	100 (35.7)	sex***
Partner loves them	14 (20.0)	14 (20.0)	2 (2.9)	12 (17.1)	42 (15.0)	age x sex*
Partner is sensitive/caring/supportive	19 (27.1)	13 (18.6)	3 (4.3)	5 (7.1)	40 (14.3)	sex***
Partner is powerful/successful	9 (12.9)	19 (27.1)	4 (5.7)	7 (10.0)	39 (13.9)	age* sex**
In love with partner/falls in love	9 (12.9)	14 (20.0)	1 (1.4)	12 (17.1)	36 (12.9)	age**
Make financial plans with partner	4 (5.7)	21 (30.0)	3 (4.3)	8 (11.4)	36 (12.9)	sex** age***
Partner of one's dreams/soul mate	13 (18.6)	2 (2.9)	1 (1.4)	6 (8.6)	22 (7.9)	age x sex**
No. of Relationship Concerns/Obstacles	11 (15.7)	13 (18.6)	5 (7.1)	7 (10.0)	36 (12.9)	sex*

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$