Intentions to Live Together Among Couples Living Apart: Differences by Age and Gender

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Abstract One of the central questions about LAT (living apart together) is whether these partnerships are short-term arrangements due to temporary constraints, and should be viewed as part of courtship towards cohabitation and marriage, or whether they replace cohabitation and marriage as a long-term arrangement. The current study addresses this question and examines intentions to live together among people living apart by age and gender. This study uses Generations and Gender Study (GGS) data for eleven European countries. The findings reveal an interesting interaction of age and gender. More specifically, younger women have higher intentions to live together than younger men, but older women have lower intentions than older men. These gender differences remain significant also in the multivariate analyses. These findings suggest that older women in LAT may be undoing gender to a greater extent than younger women, who still intend to live in a more traditional (and probably gendered) arrangement of cohabitation and possibly marriage. Having resident children reduces intentions to live together among people younger than age 50, but the effect does not differ by gender. The effect of non-resident children on intentions to live together is statistically non-significant.

Keywords LAT · Living apart together · GGP · Gender and generations

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1 Introduction

One of the central questions about LAT (living apart together) is whether these partnerships are short-term arrangements due to temporary constraints, and should be viewed as part of courtship towards cohabitation and marriage, or whether they replace cohabitation and marriage as a long-term arrangement. Addressing this question, the current study examines intentions to live together in cohabitation or marriage¹ among people in LAT relationships, by age and gender. I argue that intentions to live together are a useful way to distinguish transitory (“dating”) and stable LAT and that studying intentions will reveal new insights into understanding LAT relationships at different stages of the life course. Furthermore, focusing on differences by stage in the life course rather than on a narrow age group will make an important contribution to our knowledge of gender differences in relationship progression from LAT to cohabitation and marriage.

The role of non-cohabiting (LAT) relationships differs at different stages of the life course. For young never-married adults, living apart together may be a stage in the transition to adulthood. In that case, living apart together is a temporary arrangement, allowing partners to develop emotional and financial readiness for cohabitation and marriage (Australia—Reimondos et al. 2011; France—Regnier-Loilier et al. 2009; UK—Haskey and Lewis 2006; Duncan and Phillips 2010; Spain—Castro-Martin et al. 2008; Japan—Iwasawa 2004). Young professionals early in their career may choose to live apart from their partners because of a shortage of high occupational positions in their locality (Germany—Reuschke 2010). At somewhat older ages, for single parents, LAT relationships may reduce the conflict between caretaking responsibilities and maintaining a romantic relationship (e.g., in Canada—Funk and Kobayashi 2016; Milan and Peters 2003; France—Regnier-Loilier et al. 2009; Sweden and Norway—Levin, 2004; Levin and Trost 1999; the Netherlands—De Jong Gierveld and Merz 2013). For older adults, living apart together may combine a long-term intimate relationship with high levels of social and financial independence (Sweden—Karlsson and Borell 2002; UK Davidson 2002; the Netherlands—De Jong Gierveld 2002).

This study focuses on intentions to live together, by age and gender, among people in LAT relationships. I argue that understanding intentions to live together makes two theoretical contributions. First, intentions to live together are a straightforward indicator to distinguish transitory LAT, which is a stage in courtship towards a cohabiting relationship, from stable LAT, which is a goal in itself. Second, understanding gender differences in intentions to live together may shed light on understanding relationship progression and gender differences in actual re-partnering.

Studies show that women are less likely to re-partner than men (Ivanova et al. 2013). Some of this gender difference may be due to differences in constraints such as availability of suitable mates, but some may be due to differences in preferences

¹ In this study, I do not distinguish intentions to marry from intentions to cohabit because both indicate a transition from living apart to living together. Those intending to cohabit may also intend to marry at a later stage.

and desires (Poortman and Hewitt 2015). One way to isolate gender differences in preferences from gender differences in availability of partners in re-partnering is to focus on partnered adults and to exclude un-partnered adults. Another way to isolate preferences from constraints is to focus on intentions rather than on actual transitions.

Here I follow other scholars who have interpreted intentions to live together as reflecting desires, preferences and choice regarding relationship progression (Poortman and Hewitt 2015). True, it is not possible to discern the extent people's intentions are affected by their perceptions of their restrictions; still, intentions are likely to reflect preferences, and as such they express and shape people's choices. This argument is supported by studies that show that intentions in relationship progression reflect how people view their relationship and are good indicators of stability and commitment in the relationship (Hiekel et al. 2014, 2015).

Before turning to the study's literature review and hypotheses, I provide a definition of LAT relationships and a brief discussion of challenges surrounding it.

2 What are LAT Relationships?

Many studies have adopted Haskey's (2005) instrumental definition of LAT, as a romantic relationship between unmarried partners who maintain separate addresses, regard themselves as a couple, and are regarded as such by others. LAT relationships may be same sex or opposite sex, and each partner may be living with other people, and they are expected to be monogamous and long term (Haskey 2005). Haskey (2005) himself points to several challenges in this definition. For example, surveys typically collect information on one partner. The respondent may report being unmarried and in a LAT relationship, but the respondent's partner may be married. In addition, it is difficult to establish whether the couple is monogamous and even more how the couple perceive themselves and how others perceive them. Another challenge is measuring relationship duration and defining it as long term: it is substantially more difficult to determine the start of a LAT relationship than of a marriage or a cohabitation (Lewin 2017).

The Conference of European Statisticians' Task Force on Families and Households (2009) points to additional challenges in defining LAT relationships. These are more subjective than other relationship types, and either partner may see it differently. For example, if a couple spend a few nights a week together, one partner may view it as a cohabiting or commuting couple, while the other may view it as a LAT couple. Indeed, LAT is more flexible than other relationship types, and people in LAT may choose at times to see themselves as autonomous individuals and at other times as part of a committed couple (Karlsson et al. 2007).

Until recently, non-cohabiting relationships have been invisible in survey data, but interest in LAT has arisen, resulting in some large-scale surveys including questions about non-cohabiting relationships. For example, the Family and Fertility Survey included questions about non-cohabiting relationships, but it does not represent the older population (Kiernan 2000; Castro-Martin et al. 2008). At the other end of the age range, some studies focus on the older population and do not

include younger people, in both quantitative (Lewin 2017) and qualitative frameworks (Davidson 2002; Funk and Kobayashi 2016; Karlsson and Borell 2002; Koren 2015). The British Household Panel Studies (BHPS) and the international Generations and Gender Survey (GGS) include questions on non-cohabiting relationships over a wide range of ages. Indeed, much of what we do know about LAT relationships is based on the BHPS and on the GGS.

Scholars typically distinguish transitory LAT from stable LAT. The former are short-term relationships with low levels of commitment and characterize primarily young adults (Pasteels et al. 2017). The latter are long-lasting relationships that are alternatives to marriage and cohabitation, and characterize older adults (Amato and Hayes 2014). Recent studies on LAT have focused on reasons for living apart and distinguish temporary constraints, which may indicate transitory LAT, from a desire for independence, which may indicate stable LAT ((Duncan et al. 2013; Liefbroer et al. 2015; Stoilova et al. 2014).

3 Intentions to Live Together Among People Living Apart: A Life-Course Approach

The following review of the literature presents a series of hypotheses regarding the effects of age, gender, children and personal resources on intentions to live together among people living apart. I expect some effects to differ by age, some by gender.

3.1 Age

I argue that the decision to cohabit at older ages is more complicated than it is earlier in life because it requires the merging of already established finances, careers, children and lifestyles. Older adults may want to keep finances separate and avoid the merging of property and resources to secure transfers to (adult) children (Haskey and Lewis 2006; Upton-Davis 2015), and this desire may reduce intentions to cohabit. Furthermore, older adults may want to live apart from their partners in order to avoid conflict with their adult children (De Jong Gierveld and Merz 2013).

Another reason older adults may prefer living apart is to avoid the responsibilities of caring for a partner when health issues arise (Klinenberg 2012). Indeed, studies show that older adults may prefer to maintain their independent living arrangement in a living apart together relationship (De Jong Gierveld 2002, 2004) and that age reduces the desire to marry (Mahay and Lewin 2007) and to cohabit (Coulter and Hu 2017). Studies of LAT among older adults have found that partners in these relationships emphasized boundaries and maintained separate finances (Karlsson and Borell 2002). Therefore, I expect that older people in LAT relationships will have lower odds of intending to cohabit than their younger counterparts.

H1 Older people have lower odds of intending to cohabit than younger people.

3.2 Gender

There is a debate whether women choose LAT with the intention to undo gender or whether women in living apart relationships still idealize marriage and cohabitation. Upton-Davis (2012) argues that women use LAT to escape unequal gender divisions of labour and to resist powerful patriarchal structures. In her study of women over age 45 in LAT relationships, Upton-Davis (2015) interprets LAT as a political act that subverts and transforms the gendered norms of cohabitation. In contrast, Duncan (2015) argues that even if women in LAT are undoing gender in their daily lives, they still idealize marriage and cohabitation.

I suggest that age may account for part of the difference between Upton-Davis's and Duncan's conclusions: Upton-Davis's (2015) study focused on older women, whereas Duncan's (2015) study included younger women. Older women may have different expectations from their romantic relationships than young women because the benefits of cohabitation and marriage change with age. Young women who desire to build a family may benefit from having a lifelong partner to share child-rearing, but older women with adult children may have different desires. The current study informs this debate because it examines intentions to cohabit at different stages of the life course. Having intentions to cohabit may reflect a perception of marriage and cohabitation as ideals to strive for, whereas lack of such intentions may be interpreted as a rejection of this ideal, and possibly an intentional undoing of gender.

Among older adults in LAT, autonomy is more important for women than for men (Karlsson and Borell 2002), possibly because women in LAT are reluctant to assume the gendered roles of caregiver and homemaker that tend to characterize cohabitation and marriage (Funk and Kobayashi 2016; Karlsson et al. 2007). I argue that women have less to gain from marriage and cohabitation than men later in life. Older men may benefit from a gendered division of labour manifested as having a committed live-in caregiver later in life; as for women, studies have shown that they, who tend to be younger than their partners, are less likely ever to have the opportunity to benefit from reciprocal care (Spitze and Ward 2000). Caring for an elderly partner may be an inevitable cost in a long-term relationship contracted at a young age, but it may make cohabiting at an older age less attractive, and LAT more attractive, because prospective partners, especially women, may foresee such caretaking as an unbearable cost (Davidson 2002).

Studies indeed show that LAT protects women from assuming the full caretaker role typical of marriage and that older men in LAT receive fewer services from their partner than they did when they were married (Karlsson et al. 2007). Nonetheless, LAT does not entirely eliminate gendered caregiving roles. Karlsson et al. (2007) found that older men in LAT received more services from their partner than did women, and Duncan (2015) found that some women in LAT took upon themselves cooking, cleaning and other household chores for their partners even though they had their own home to maintain.

I expect that older women in LAT relationships will have lower intentions to cohabit than will older men in LAT relationships.

H2 Older women have lower odds of intending to cohabit than older men.

3.3 Personal Resources: Education, Employment, Homeownership

People with more personal resources may expect higher gains from cohabitation and marriage than people with fewer resources because they are attractive mates and they are likely to have high-quality partners, with similar personal resources (Goldstein and Kenney 2001; Oppenheimer 1994). Moreover, education is a personal resource that signals potential earnings, and a good indicator of long-term economic prospects, values and lifestyle (Oppenheimer 1988). Education has been found to increase the odds of marriage and cohabitation (Jalovaara 2012; Oppenheimer 1994). Education as a sign of readiness and maturity may be more relevant in young people, who have yet to establish their careers, than in older people, who have accumulated work experience and have had time to achieve a degree of financial independence.

H3a Higher education increases intentions to cohabit among young adults.

Employment is another personal resource that signals financial readiness to maintain an independent household and has been found to increase the odds of marriage and cohabitation (Jalovaara 2012; Kalmijn 2011; Oppenheimer 1994). I expect the effect of employment on intentions to cohabit to be important for those of working age. I do not expect employment to be important for older adults because this group includes retired people who are not expected to work.

H3b Employment increases intentions to cohabit among the younger age groups.

One advantage of cohabitation and marriage is the pooling of resources. But this advantage may differ by stage in the life course. Pooling may benefit young people entering a first union, but it may be viewed as a cost for older people in higher-order relationships. In fact, commitments to children from previous relationships may reduce the benefits of pooling resources in a higher-order relationship because parents may want to ensure their children's financial well-being by keeping their finances independent of the finances of their new partner. Therefore, I expect the effect of homeownership on intentions to cohabit to differ at different ages. For young never-married people living apart from their partner, homeownership may be a personal resource that signals readiness to cohabit, but for older people with children it may discourage cohabitation because parents want to assure their children of a bequest.

H3c Homeownership increases intentions to cohabit among young adults and reduces intentions to cohabit among the two older groups.

3.4 Children

Children from previous relationships introduce complications and conflict into the forming of new families (Cherlin 1978; De Jong Gierveld and Merz 2013), in terms of both their acceptance of the new partner and concerns over the allocation of their

parents' financial resources. Moreover, children are a resource drain that reduces the time and money parents can invest in romantic relationships. Although parents may benefit from a cohabiting partner who may share parental responsibilities, partners may not want to shoulder these responsibilities. Cohabitation with a partner may deprive some parents of welfare or alimony support, which is another factor that might make cohabitation less desirable. Indeed, studies show that one reason for parents' choosing a LAT relationship is responsibility for young children in the household (e.g., in Canada—Milan and Peters 2003; France—Regnier-Loilier et al. 2009; Sweden and Norway—Levin 2004) and that parents of children of all ages may choose a LAT relationship to maintain ties with children and to avoid conflict (De Jong Gierveld and Merz 2013).

Studies have found that the presence of children reduces the desire to marry (Mahay and Lewin 2007) as well as the actual odds of re-partnering (Ivanova et al. 2013). Poortman and Hewitt (2015) distinguished the effects of resident and non-resident children on parents' desire to cohabit and found that both resident and non-resident children had a negative effect on partnered parents' intentions to live together; however, these effects were non-significant, possibly due to small sample size. In the current study, I distinguish the effects of resident and non-resident children on intentions to live together, and I expect resident children to reduce these intentions, in all age groups.

H4a Resident children reduce intentions to cohabit, in all age groups.

I expect the effect of children on intentions to live together to differ by gender. Although I expect resident children to reduce parents' intentions to cohabit with a partner, I expect this effect to be weaker among men. Poortman and Hewitt (2015) found that resident children reduced the desire to cohabit among women, but the effect among men was non-significant. Similarly, studies on re-partnering have found that resident children reduce the odds of mothers' re-partnering, but have no effect on fathers (Stewart et al. 2003). One explanation for this gender difference could be that, due to gendered parenting roles, fathers with resident children desire to live with a (female) partner who might share parenting responsibilities, whereas mothers with resident children do not expect a new partner to share parental responsibilities.

H4b The negative effect of resident children on intentions to cohabit is stronger for women than for men.

The effect of non-resident children on intentions to live together is likely to be substantially weaker than that of resident children (Poortman and Hewitt 2015), but this effect too may differ by gender, especially in the oldest age group where women may have a stronger desire than men to keep their finances separate from their new partner to ensure their children's inheritance. Studies show that older women are more concerned than older men about transferring resources to their biological children after remarriage (Clark and Kenney 2010). This finding is supported by an international study that found that married mothers were more likely than married fathers to bequeath part of their estate directly to their children (Hacker 2010).

H4c Non-resident children reduce intentions to cohabit in women in the oldest age group.

All analyses include a measure of duration of the relationship. Duration of the relationship is likely to have an effect on intentions to live together, and this relationship is likely to be nonlinear. People in a very new LAT relationship may still feel uncertain about their long-term intentions for it (Duncan et al. 2013; Liefbroer et al. 2015). People in a medium-length LAT relationship may feel that it has matured and may intend to live together. People in a LAT relationship of very long duration may be a select group that perceives it to be a satisfactory long-term arrangement and may not intend to transition to cohabitation or marriage (Coulter and Hu 2017; Pasteels et al. 2017).

The hypotheses stem from theories that focus on individual-level determinants of intentions to live together in couples living apart; I do not expect these effects to differ substantially by country. Nevertheless, countries do differ in their tolerance of non-marital family forms (de Jong Gierveld 2004; Levin and Trost 1999) and in their normative age at marriage, which is a good indicator of the desirability of marriage (Dixon 1971; Kalmijn 2007; Kiernan 2000). Therefore, in the main body of this study I use pooled data and control for country. In a side, country-level analysis, I control for normative age at marriage to see whether it is related to country-level differences in intentions to live together. Intentions to live together may indicate tolerance of LAT; that is, low tolerance of LAT may be reflected in more intentions to live together, and higher tolerance of LAT may be reflected in fewer intentions to live together. In that case, countries characterized by early marriage may exhibit lower tolerance of LAT, namely more intentions to live together, than countries characterized by later marriage.

4 Methods, Data and Variables

This study draws on the first wave of the cross-national comparative Generations and Gender Survey (GGS) which focuses on family relationships in a series of Eastern and Western European Countries, and Australia (United Nations 2005). The first GGS wave currently has data for 18 countries, but only 11 of them have sufficient sample sizes and information on all the variables included in the current analyses.²

In this study, I define LAT as a romantic relationship between unmarried partners who do not cohabit. These LAT relationships may be same sex or opposite sex, and each partner may be living with other people (Strohm et al. 2009). This definition excludes married respondents, although some partners may be married because GGS does not ask about partner's marital status.

I selected respondents who were unmarried and responded affirmatively to the question "Are you currently having an intimate (couple) relationship with someone you're not living with?" The final sample sizes for each country were Austria

² Georgia ($n = 67$) and Estonia ($n = 58$) have too few valid cases to be included in the analyses.

($n = 1580$), Belgium ($n = 641$), Bulgaria ($n = 634$), France (reference category, $n = 957$), Germany ($n = 648$), Lithuania ($n = 423$), the Netherlands ($n = 480$), Norway ($n = 1191$), Romania ($n = 378$), Russia ($n = 883$) and Sweden ($n = 837$). All analyses included country dummy variables and were conducted separately by age. Age was collapsed into three categories: age 20–30, age 31–50, age 51 and over. Analyses of the oldest age group did not include Austria, for which where GGS data are restricted to the two younger age groups.

The dependent variable was “intentions to live together”. Respondents were asked, “Do you intend to start living with your partner during the next 3 years?” Responses were coded to a binary variable: 0 (definitely not, probably not); 1 (probably yes, definitely yes). In some countries, respondents were also asked “Do you intend to marry your partner during the next 3 years?” Here too, responses were coded to a binary variable: 0 (definitely not, probably not); 1 (probably yes, definitely yes). Respondents with intentions to live together or to marry (or both) were coded 1; respondents with no intentions to live together or marry were coded 0. Independent variables were demographic variables, duration of the relationship, and variables that indicated personal resources.

Demographic variables were gender (0 = male; 1 = female) and age (in years). Two binary variables account for children; whether the respondent has any resident children (0 = no; 1 = yes), and whether the respondent has any non-resident children (0 = no; 1 = yes). Duration of the relationship was coded into three categories to account for nonlinearity in its effect on intentions to live together: very new relationships (less than one year, reference category in regressions), medium-length relationships (1–5 years), long-term relationships (6 years and more).

Personal resources were homeownership, education and employment. Homeownership was measured by the response to the question, “Does your household own or rent this accommodation or does it come rent-free?” Responses were coded into a binary variable 1 (owner); 0 (tenant or subtenant paying rent, accommodation is provided rent-free, other). Among respondents in the youngest age category, home ownership was coded as 0 if they were still living with their parents. Education was measured as the highest level of education completed and coded as a binary variable 0 (less than academic); 1 (academic). Employment was coded as a binary variable 0 (not employed); 1 (employed).

Women’s mean age at first marriage, 2003, is a country-level variable indicating normative age at marriage, and it is used to examine country differences. This variable was drawn from the Gender and Generations Contextual database and ranges from 23.1 in Russia to 31.3 in Sweden.³

Analyses were conducted separately for three age groups (20–30; 31–50; 51 +), and a continuous variable for “age” was included to account for age heterogeneity within the age groups. Analyses were conducted with Stata version 13 with listwise deletion for missing data.

³ Data for The Netherlands and Sweden were not available in the GGS contextual database and were drawn from the UNECE database (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe).

5 Analytic Strategy

The project has three analytical stages. I start with descriptive statistics of the characteristics of people in LAT relationships by age. Next I look at intentions to live together by age and gender. Finally, I turn to a multivariate analysis to understand the factors associated with intentions to live together and to test the hypotheses set out earlier.

In this study, I use data for 10–11 European countries and I employ three different strategies for dealing with country differences.⁴ First, in the main analyses, I pool data for all the countries, and I include country dummy variables in the logits to account for country fixed effects. In this case, all country-level factors are absorbed into the country intercepts. My main theoretical interest is in the regression coefficients, but differences between countries are statistically significant. Next, I conduct separate analyses by country (“[Appendix 1](#)”). In this case, country effects are not separately identified, and all parameters are country specific. The separate analyses by country show no substantial country differences in coefficients, though many coefficients are statistically non-significant, possibly due to small sample size. Finally, I adopt Bryan and Jenkins’ (2016) two-step approach to explore country differences when there are too few countries to conduct a reliable multilevel analysis. This two-step method leads to a descriptive approach that provides a graphic display of country-level variation. In the first step, I generate country intercepts from the full multivariate logistic regression, and in the second step I use OLS regression to predict these intercepts with a country-level variable (normative age at marriage). Here too, no clear pattern emerges from plotting the results (“[Appendix 3](#)”). I conclude that pooling the data and controlling for country dummy variables is the best approach for the current analysis, and it is the method I choose for the main body of this study.

6 Findings

Table 1 shows means and percentage distribution of variables in the analysis by age. Table 1 shows that personal resources differ by age. Only 10% of respondents under age 30 own their own home, whereas 67% of those over age 51 own their own home. About a quarter of those aged 20–30 have an academic degree (some may still be students), 37% of those aged 31–50 have an academic degree and 32% of the oldest (age 51 and older) have an academic degree. About half of the youngest group are employed (54%), compared to the great majority of those aged 31–50 (85%). The percentage employed in the oldest group is substantially lower (48%) than in the younger groups, most probably because many have retired. The mean age for the youngest group is 23, the mean age for the middle group is 40 and the mean age for the oldest group is 61.

⁴ Bryan and Jenkins (2016) conduct Monte Carlo simulations that demonstrate that at least 30 countries are necessary to estimate a multi-level logit model with random effects (Mills and Prag 2016).

Table 1 Means (standard deviations) and percentage distributions of variables predicting intentions to live together among people in LAT relationships, by age. *Source:* GGS wave 1

	(1) Age 20–30	(2) Age 31–50	(3) Age 51 +
Female	51%	57%	52%
Age	23.314 (3.300)	39.758 (5.506)	60.905 (7.727)
Owns home	10	51	67
Duration < 1 year (reference)	24	13	7
Duration 1–5	69	63	42
Duration 6 +	7	24	51
Employed	54	85	48
Has BA	24	37	32
Has resident children	4	38	16
Has non-resident children	1	15	63
France (reference)	15	11	14
Bulgaria	10	6	2
Russia	10	12	8
Germany	6	9	9
Netherlands	4	7	8
Romania	5	4	4
Norway	11	13	24
Austria	23	20	–
Belgium	8	6	8
Lithuania	6	4	4
Sweden	8	8	19
Observations	4585	2682	1385

Among aged 20–30, own home only for those not living with parents

As expected, there is a relationship between age and having any children and between gender and having any resident children. Only 4% of the youngest age group have any resident children (almost all are women, not shown), and 1% have non-resident children (most are men, not shown). About half of those between age 31 and 50 have any children, 38% are resident children (31% women, not shown) and 15% have non-resident children (5% women, not shown). Of those aged 51 and older, 16% have resident children (9% women, not shown) and 63% have non-resident children.

Interestingly, the relationship endures longer with age: while only 7% of the youngest age group have been in the relationship for more than 6 years, about a quarter of those aged 31–50 are in long-term LAT relationships and about half (51%) of those aged 51 and older are in such long-term relationships.

Figure 1 shows intentions to live together by age and gender. First, there seems to be a relationship between age and intentions to live together, whereby these intentions decline with age among people in LAT relationships. Figure 1 also

Fig. 1 Percentage intending to live together in the next 3 years among people in LAT relationships, by age and gender. *Source:* GGS wave 1 ($n = 8966$)

reveals an interesting interaction of age and gender. In the youngest age category, a higher percentage of women than of men intend to live together (77.1 vs. 72.2%), whereas in the oldest age category a higher percentage of men intend to live together (36.3 vs. 24.8%).

I now turn to a multivariate analysis that examines the effects of demographic attributes and personal resources on intentions to live together. Table 2 shows logistic regression coefficients predicting intentions to live together among people in LAT relationships, by age. First, the findings do not support H1 that intentions to live together decline with age. Instead, the findings show a nonlinear relationship between age and intentions to live together among people in LAT relationships. Within the youngest age category (age 20–30) the effect is positive, and within the older age categories it is negative. All the age effects are statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

Second, the findings regarding gender are consistent with Fig. 1 and provide support for hypothesis H2. Among the youngest people in LAT relationships, aged 20–30, women have higher odds of intentions to live together than men, but among the oldest age group the pattern is reversed: women have lower odds than men of intending to live together, controlling for all the variables in the equation. Even after controlling for personal resources, demographic attributes and duration of the relationship, older women have lower odds of intending to live together than older men. Interactions of age and gender are statistically significant at the 0.01 level (see “Appendix 2”).

The effects regarding duration of the relationship are interesting as well. Duration has a positive effect on intentions to live together, but only among the youngest age group. Among the older age groups, the effects of very long duration are negative.

Employment has a positive effect on intentions to live together only among the youngest age group; the effects are statistically non-significant among the older people in LAT relationships. This finding supports H3b and the argument that for younger adults, employment is a personal resource signalling readiness for establishing an independent household. The effects of education and

Table 2 Logistic regression coefficients predicting intentions to live together among people in LAT relationships. *Source:* GGS wave 1

	(1) Age 20–30	(2) Age 31–50	(3) Age 51 +
Female	0.420*** (0.076)	– 0.349** (0.128)	– 0.672* (0.294)
Age	0.082*** (0.014)	– 0.086*** (0.009)	– 0.052*** (0.011)
Has BA	0.084 (0.101)	– 0.041 (0.093)	0.101 (0.140)
Employed	0.576*** (0.078)	0.109 (0.119)	0.181 (0.158)
Owens home	– 0.203 (0.125)	0.045 (0.092)	– 0.204 (0.143)
Duration 1–5	0.681*** (0.081)	– 0.140 (0.133)	– 0.392 (0.242)
Duration 6 +	0.816*** (0.174)	– 0.550*** (0.149)	– 0.876*** (0.243)
Resident children	– 1.581* (0.708)	– 0.578** (0.191)	0.409 (0.275)
Non-resident children	0.391 (0.416)	0.189 (0.164)	0.238 (0.200)
Female*non-resident children	– 1.213 (0.793)	– 0.276 (0.263)	0.015 (0.334)
Female*resident children	0.802 (0.725)	0.384 (0.221)	– 0.106 (0.417)
Bulgaria	– 1.110*** (0.176)	0.160 (0.237)	– 0.209 (0.475)
Russia	– 1.205*** (0.176)	– 0.962*** (0.180)	– 0.270 (0.270)
Germany	– 1.501*** (0.197)	– 0.798*** (0.187)	– 0.841** (0.271)
Netherlands	– 1.157*** (0.222)	– 0.624** (0.202)	– 1.388*** (0.335)
Romania	– 0.373 (0.233)	0.981** (0.339)	0.492 (0.336)
Norway	– 0.563** (0.180)	– 0.105 (0.177)	– 0.538** (0.209)
Austria	– 0.935*** (0.160)	– 0.374* (0.160)	– –
Belgium	– 0.891*** (0.189)	– 0.096 (0.209)	0.001 (0.257)
Lithuania	– 0.915*** (0.199)	– 1.179*** (0.253)	– 0.331 (0.357)

Table 2 continued

	(1) Age 20–30	(2) Age 31–50	(3) Age 51 +
Sweden	– 0.033 (0.205)	0.591** (0.210)	0.063 (0.209)
Constant	– 0.935	4.524	3.332
Observations	4585	2682	1385
χ^2	377.763	356.623	154.960
<i>df</i>	21	21	20

Standard errors in parentheses. Among aged 20–30, own home only for those not living with parents

* $p < 0.05$

** $p < 0.01$

*** $p < 0.001$

homeownership on intentions to live together are statistically non-significant and do not support H3a and H3c.

The findings provide partial support for my hypotheses about resident children (H4a). Resident children reduce the odds of intending to live together, but the effect is not significant among the oldest age group. The interactions of children with gender are statistically non-significant and provide no support for H4b. Non-resident children have no effect on the odds of intending to live together in any age group, and the interaction with gender is non-significant in all age groups, thus providing no support for H4c.

The analyses presented in Table 2 include country dummy variables to account for country differences. Some of the country coefficients are statistically significant, suggesting that there are country differences that are not accounted for by the variables in the equation. These country differences in intentions to live together are not related women's mean age at first marriage (“Appendix 3”). Although Eastern European countries have substantially earlier age at marriage than Western European countries, age at marriage does not appear related to country intercept. Instead, country intercepts seem to vary independently of normative age at marriage.

7 Discussion

This study set out to explore the role of LAT relationships throughout the life course and to learn more about how intentions to live together differ by age and gender. It also set out to distinguish transitory LAT (“dating”) from stable LAT by intentions to cohabit or marry. The findings show that among young adults in the midst of their “transition to adulthood”, LAT may be a stage in courtship, similar to “dating”, during which people develop emotional and financial readiness to progress towards

a more committed relationship. Nonetheless, this group is heterogeneous, some young adults may be preparing to settle down, some may want to delay cohabitation and marriage, and some may not desire to live together at all. Older adults are a heterogeneous group as well, but here there is a substantial portion who maintain long-term LAT relationships with no intention to live together. Qualitative studies show that this group is satisfied with the companionship LAT relationships provide and the independence they enable (Klinenberg 2012; Koren 2015).

I expected older people to have lower odds of intending to cohabit than younger people (H1), and the findings support this partially. I found a nonlinear relationship between age and intentions to live together. Among the youngest age group intentions to live together increase with age, whereas among the two older age groups intentions to live together were negatively related to age. This pattern suggests that among young adults, age is associated with readiness, maybe because young people in LAT relationships wait until they finish their schooling and achieve financial independence before they express intentions to live together. Furthermore, these findings suggest that young people in LAT are not rejecting cohabitation and marriage, whereas older adults may be rejecting traditional living-together arrangements. This seems like a paradox because we typically assume that younger people will hold a more liberal approach to family than older people, yet here we find younger men and women aspiring to what may seem more traditional relationships. This paradox is grounded in our sociocultural and religious regimes, and it also has an economic rationale: the perceived gains from cohabitation (and marriage) may be higher for young people than for older people, especially if they desire to have children and buy a home. Achieving these goals is more feasible for two-parent families, preferably with two incomes, and pooling resources and living together is more economical than maintaining separate households because of economies of scale. Older people may perceive fewer gains from pooling resources than younger people, and the findings suggest that these perceptions are gendered.

The findings show that among younger people in LAT relationships, women have higher odds of intending to live together than men, but in the oldest age group women have lower odds of intending to live together than men (supporting H2). These results contribute to resolving the debate between Upton-Davis (2012, 2015), claiming that women choose LAT to undo gender, and Duncan (2015), arguing that women in LAT still idealize marriage and cohabitation. These findings show that most young women in LAT still strive for a living-together relationship (supporting Duncan (2015), but most older women do not (supporting Upton-Davis 2015). These findings suggest, paradoxically, that older women in LAT may be undoing gender to a greater extent than younger women, who still intend to live in a more traditional (and probably gendered) arrangement of cohabitation and possibly marriage.

Here too, the paradox may be grounded in an economic rationale: the financial burden for a lone mother to maintain an independent household is great, especially given mothers' inferior economic returns in the labour market. Older women, who presumably have fulfilled their childbearing desires, may perceive lower gains from cohabitation, especially if they have achieved some degree of financial independence. Moreover, older women, primarily widows, may reject marriage and

cohabitation to avoid caregiving responsibilities (Carr 2004; Davidson 2002), especially if they have already experienced giving late-life care to a partner (Karlsson et al. 2007).

This study found partial support for my hypotheses regarding the effects of personal resources on intentions to cohabit. Employment increased intentions to cohabit in the youngest age group (H3b), suggesting that it signals readiness for establishing an independent household, but education (H3a) had no such effect. Homeownership, which is a measure of readiness for young people and a measure of property for older people, had no effect on intentions to cohabit (H3c), despite my expectations. Future studies may fine-tune measures of income, wealth and property, and may investigate whether intentions to cohabit differ by class and whether class differences are gendered.

The findings show that resident children reduce intentions to live together among those under age 50, providing partial support for my hypothesis (H4a). This is consistent with studies that found that children from previous relationships are a barrier to re-partnering (De Jong Gierveld and Merz 2013; Ivanova et al. 2013). Further study is necessary to understand the complex ways in which this barrier operates, and whether it is self-imposed by parents, or whether children play an active role in reducing their parents' intentions to cohabit or marry.

Contrary to my expectations (H4b), interactions of resident and non-resident children with gender were statistically non-significant in all age groups. That the effect of resident children on intentions to live together does not differ by gender may reflect the draining effect of childcare responsibilities on parents' intentions to cohabit. It may also reflect parent's perceptions of the effect of cohabitation on children's well-being. However, it may also be a result of small sample size due to gendered custody arrangements, namely the small number of fathers in LAT with resident children, compared with mothers.

The findings do not support my hypothesis that non-resident children will reduce intentions to cohabit in older women (H4c). That non-resident children have no effect on intentions to cohabit, even in older women, may suggest that other factors play a role here, for example, geographic proximity to children, or the amount of support they require and the amount of support they provide.

This study focused on intentions to live together; future studies will examine the actual transition to living together and will ask whether intentions affect actual transition. Furthermore, this study has taken a first step in exploring the effect of normative age at marriage on intentions to live together; future studies may explore the effects of other country characteristics.

This study has demonstrated the different roles of LAT at different stages of the life course, and how they are related to relationship progression. LAT may also have different demographic implications at different stages of the life course. For example, prolongation of LAT relationships among young never-married people may delay the timing of marriage and cohabitation, which in turn may carry important implications for the timing of childbearing and overall fertility. LAT relationships among single parents affect the type of households in which children are raised and may also bear on their economic standing. LAT relationships among older adults may affect the type of care and quality of emotional support partners

receive from each other (Lewin 2017). LAT relationships later in life may also have implications for bequests and other intergenerational transfers. Finally, LAT relationships may also affect loneliness, social connectedness and well-being, especially among older adults. Learning more about LAT relationships may contribute to our understanding of life-course transitions, and about how they are related to gender, economic resources, personal desires and emotional well-being.

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Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of interest The author declares there is no conflict of interest.

Appendix 1

Logistic regression coefficients predicting intentions to live together among people in LAT relationships. Source: GGS wave 1

	(1) Bulgaria	(2) Russia	(3) Germany	(4) Netherlands	(5) Romania	(6) Austria	(7) Lithuania	(8) France	(9) Norway	(10) Belgium	(11) Sweden
Female	0.504* (0.204)	0.320 (0.195)	0.188 (0.221)	- 0.161 (0.266)	0.238 (0.359)	0.048 (0.129)	0.155 (0.258)	0.059 (0.210)	0.091 (0.188)	0.259 (0.222)	- 0.158 (0.254)
Age 31–50	- 0.021 (0.355)	- 0.841*** (0.202)	- 0.694** (0.217)	- 0.722* (0.281)	0.218 (0.548)	- 0.789*** (0.154)	- 1.553*** (0.362)	- 1.275*** (0.234)	- 0.555** (0.211)	- 0.908** (0.286)	- 0.569 (0.303)
Age 51 +	- 1.214* (0.612)	- 0.874** (0.303)	- 1.726*** (0.330)	- 2.111*** (0.436)	- 0.883 (0.666)	- (0.508)	- 1.415** (0.271)	- 2.061*** (0.296)	- 2.087*** (0.271)	- 1.641*** (0.353)	- 1.582*** (0.338)
Owns home	0.585 (0.333)	0.181 (0.164)	- 0.006 (0.241)	- 0.206 (0.261)	0.299 (0.489)	- 0.044 (0.156)	- 0.154 (0.292)	- 0.206 (0.195)	- 0.357* (0.167)	- 0.524* (0.237)	- 0.225 (0.201)
Resident children	- 1.199 (0.657)	- 0.497 (0.591)	1.160 (0.638)	- 0.396 (0.948)	- 1.121 (0.845)	- 1.066 (0.664)	0.694 (0.903)	- 0.686 (0.464)	- 0.098 (0.280)	0.460 (0.465)	- 0.521 (0.367)
Non-resident children	- 0.647 (0.633)	0.346 (0.287)	- 0.049 (0.319)	- 0.173 (0.439)	- 0.506 (0.615)	0.397 (0.324)	0.292 (0.470)	0.149 (0.291)	0.411 (0.289)	1.159*** (0.376)	- 0.233 (0.351)
Has BA	0.278 (0.247)	- 0.161 (0.148)	0.224 (0.206)	0.030 (0.234)	0.243 (0.409)	0.093 (0.155)	0.648* (0.275)	0.074 (0.175)	0.054 (0.156)	0.504* (0.202)	0.125 (0.197)
Employed	0.366 (0.192)	0.318* (0.159)	0.155 (0.189)	0.728** (0.251)	1.019*** (0.299)	0.817*** (0.130)	0.651* (0.270)	0.534** (0.179)	0.572*** (0.160)	0.763*** (0.198)	0.563** (0.189)
Duration 1–5	0.363 (0.212)	0.218 (0.201)	1.207*** (0.337)	- 0.669 (0.399)	0.437 (0.354)	0.673*** (0.133)	0.467 (0.288)	- 0.069 (0.204)	0.640*** (0.183)	- 0.063 (0.325)	0.471* (0.225)
Duration 6 +	0.474 (0.328)	- 0.285 (0.260)	0.833* (0.387)	- 1.528*** (0.450)	- 0.119 (0.491)	0.519** (0.188)	- 0.217 (0.410)	- 0.522* (0.244)	0.076 (0.248)	- 0.102 (0.379)	- 0.460 (0.278)
Female*resident children	0.533 (0.706)	- 0.265 (0.611)	- 1.623* (0.695)	- 0.154 (0.998)	0.486 (1.007)	0.468 (0.680)	- 0.661 (0.944)	0.999 (0.522)	- 0.834* (0.348)	- 0.907 (0.529)	0.273 (0.434)
Female*non-resident children	- 1.522 (0.946)	- 1.869*** (0.443)	- 0.712 (0.470)	- 0.697 (0.655)	- 1.094 (0.819)	- 0.370 (0.520)	- 0.851 (0.797)	- 0.407 (0.374)	- 0.732* (0.359)	- 1.148* (0.542)	- 0.353 (0.403)

	(1) Bulgaria	(2) Russia	(3) Germany	(4) Netherlands	(5) Romania	(6) Austria	(7) Lithuania	(8) France	(9) Norway	(10) Belgium	(11) Sweden
Constant	0.032	0.351	- 0.581	1.392	0.616	0.099	0.120	1.620	0.629	0.618	1.266
Observations	634	883	648	480	378	1580	423	957	1191	641	837
χ^2	42.927	111.970	91.838	144.948	50.015	108.458	72.767	199.499	293.552	88.708	209.710
df	12	12	12	12	12	11	12	12	12	12	12

Standard errors in parentheses. Among aged 20–30, own home only for those not living with parents

* $p < 0.05$

** $p < 0.01$

*** $p < 0.001$

Appendix 2

Logistic regression coefficients predicting intentions to live together among people in LAT relationships.
Source: GGS wave 1

	Intention to live together
Female	0.353*** (0.071)
Age 31–50	– 0.311** (0.096)
Age 51 +	– 1.358*** (0.13)
Female*age 31–50	– 0.745*** (0.125)
Female*age 51 +	– 0.769*** (0.182)
Has BA	0.135* (0.057)
Employed	0.562*** (0.055)
Owns home	– 0.073 (0.062)
Duration 1–5	0.404*** (0.065)
Duration 6 +	– 0.019 (0.084)
Resident children	– 0.490** (0.149)
Non-resident children	– 0.097 (0.112)
Female*non-resident children	– 0.295 (0.178)
Female*resident children	0.201 (0.174)
Bulgaria	– 0.489*** (0.121)
Russia	– 0.956*** (0.108)
Germany	– 1.027*** (0.116)
Netherlands	– 0.897*** (0.127)
Romania	0.394* (0.16)
Norway	– 0.419*** (0.103)
Austria	– 0.538*** (0.098)

	Intention to live together
Belgium	– 0.419*** (0.12)
Lithuania	– 0.773*** (0.133)
Sweden	0.049 (0.113)
Constant	0.858
Observations	8652
χ^2	1419.28
<i>df</i>	24

Standard errors in parentheses. Among aged 20–30, own home only for those not living with parents

* $p < 0.05$

** $p < 0.01$

*** $p < 0.001$

Appendix 3

See Fig. 2.

Fig. 2 Model of intentions to live together: country-specific intercepts and mean age at marriage, GGS wave 1 (11 countries)

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