

2014

The Rise of Non-Marital Cohabitation: Review and Analysis of Existing Research

Natalia Mosailova
Portland State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/honorstheses>

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Mosailova, Natalia, "The Rise of Non-Marital Cohabitation: Review and Analysis of Existing Research" (2014). *University Honors Theses*. Paper 86.
<https://doi.org/10.15760/honors.73>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access. It has been accepted for inclusion in University Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of PDXScholar. Please contact us if we can make this document more accessible: pdxscholar@pdx.edu.

The Rise of Non-Marital Cohabitation: Review and Analysis of Existing Research

by

Natalia Mosailova

An undergraduate honors thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Bachelor of Science

in

University Honors

and

Psychology

Thesis Adviser

Dr. Linda Gallahan

Portland State University

2014

Abstract

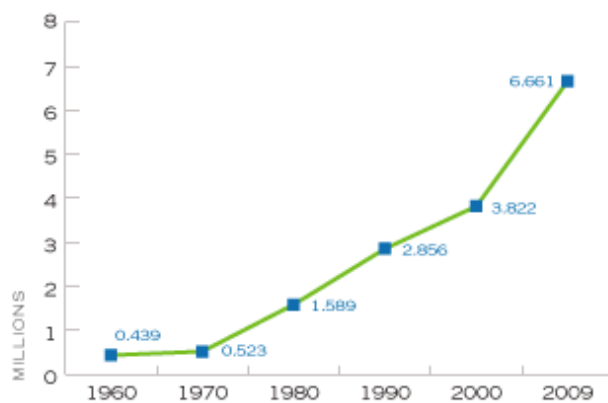
Beginning in the 1970's, young adults are more likely to announce that they are moving in with a partner rather than entering marriage. As rates of legal marriage between ages 16-26 are continuing to decline, the rates of cohabitation are rising two-fold. Compared to previous decades, individuals in our society are now more hesitant to enter marriage and are more likely to try out their relationships through cohabitation before making a commitment. Archival research on pre-engagement cohabitation suggests that, contrary to popular culture beliefs, pre-engagement cohabitation is a predictor of both marital divorce in marriages and relationship dissatisfaction. Despite the abundance of data on the adverse effects of cohabitation on subsequent marriage, young adults are increasingly continuing to engage in pre-marital cohabitation. Having noticed these contradictions, this study embarked on a quest to determine why the numbers of cohabitators are continuing to rise. The conclusions of this study propose that the existing research on cohabitation has overlooked important variables when comparing cohabitation and marriage and that the success of a marriage that comes out of cohabitation is mainly related to the level of commitment, intentions to eventually formalize their relationship, level of satisfaction, and overall well-being of the individuals rather than the status of their relationship prior to marriage.

Introduction / Background/ Hypothesis

A popular relationships blog led by Thomas Bradbury, a clinical psychologist and an expert in intimate relationships and marriage, titled *Testing, testing: How does living together affect a marriage* sparked a question that I decided to pursue in my research thesis (Bradbury, 2013). Bradbury examined why it is that couples in the modern day seem to prefer testing their compatibility in a shared home setting and are more likely than previous generations to enter cohabitation, a living arrangement without legal bounds, rather than marriage. Citing Bumpass and Lu, (2000), Bradbury notes that, “half of all couples entering their first marriage today, live together – or cohabit before marriage, and there are at least 10 times as many couples living together today than there were just 30 years ago” (p. 32). Bradbury also cites findings from a study by Kline et al., (2004), which suggested that in comparison to couples who did not cohabit before engagement, cohabiting couples, reported higher rates of verbal aggression and more negative interactions, and overall, faced more relationship risks after marriage. Bradbury mainly addresses the misfit between the rising trends in cohabitation and the research that shows its negative effects on subsequent marriage. These findings question the notion of an “advantage” to cohabitation due to which the numbers of individuals preferring to cohabit are rising. The research proposed herein seeks to explore why cohabitation has become increasingly popular, what the advantages and disadvantages of cohabitation might be, and whether the negative effects of cohabitation on marriage proposed by earlier research has possibly overlooked some important individual variables.

The research on pre-engagement cohabitation and subsequent marriage, detailed in the next section, shows an overarching trend in the negative effects of cohabitation on future legally bound relationships. Even so, U.S. Census Bureau data illustrate, that the number of individuals choosing to cohabit has grown rapidly across several decades (Fig. 7).

FIGURE 7. Number of Cohabiting, Unmarried, Adult Couples of the Opposite Sex by Year, United States[A]



A. Prior to 1996, the U.S. Census estimated the number of unmarried-couple households based on two unmarried adults of the opposite sex living in the same household. After 1996, respondents were able to identify themselves as unmarried partners.

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau: *Current Population Reports: "America's Families and Living Arrangements"* for 2009 (Table UC3). And earlier similar reports. Available online from www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/p20.html.

Despite these increasing trends, research on cohabitation in relation to the economic and personal well being of the couple shows some negative outcomes. For example, cohabiting couples generally are of a lower socioeconomic status and are more likely to remain at that level for the duration of cohabitation, whereas, married couples tend to be at a higher socioeconomic status and are generally economically more stable than cohabiting couples (Hsueh, Morrison, & Doss, 2009). More so, Wilmoth and Koso (2002) report that, “compared to those continuously

married, those who never marry have a reduction in wealth of 75 percent, and those who divorced and didn't remarry have a reduction of 73 percent" (p. 262). By the way of explanation, Chun and Lee (1991) note, "because of marital social norms that encourage healthy, productive behavior, men tend to become more economically productive after marriage" (p.315). Their study suggests that contrary to cohabitation, marriage is a force that ignites proactive behavior in both partners towards building a foundation for a strong future for themselves and their children.

Despite the abundance of research on adverse effects of pre-engagement cohabitation and contrasting reports on the benefits of marriage, I'm baffled by the steeply rising numbers in cohabiting couples as presented in figure 7. Perhaps there are other individual variables that the existing research has overlooked which act as a protecting factor in the cohabiting couples and allow for their relationships to grow without adverse effects. I hypothesize that the traditional model of marriage, one that is rooted in the patriarchal system, is no longer fully applicable to the modern day society and couples are now choosing to cohabit for mutual social and possibly monetary benefit and this choice will not adversely affect their potential for a healthy marriage.

Overview of the Literature

It is now a common practice that emerging adults cohabit regardless of future marriage intentions (Stanley, Rhoades, & Fincham, 2011). With availability of birth control and the increased likelihood of non-marital sex, the concept of cohabiting among never married adults is fundamentally changing and is becoming a part of our society, but has yet to be accepted by the majority of the older population (Stanley et al., 2011).

The main focus of initial literature on cohabitation is to show the relationship between pre-engagement cohabitation and marriage following cohabitation among never married adults. In a 2004 study on cohabitation, researchers Kline, Stanley, and Markman hypothesized that engagement status at the point at which the couple begins to cohabit is the key factor and predictor of the quality of marriage (Kline, 2004). While most research prior to year 2004 focused on cohabitation in general and its effects on the quality of the following marriage, this study particularly looked at the status of couples at the time they decide to cohabit. The findings showed that cohabitation post-engagement did not have any effects on the success of marriage and in general showed similarities with couples that did not cohabit until after marriage. However, couples that cohabited before engagement were at greater risk for poor marital outcomes, those poor marital outcomes that often include aggression in communication and relationship dissatisfaction were later categorized as the cohabitation effect. Multiple studies conducted by researchers worldwide suggest that the adverse effects of cohabitation are limited to those couples that move in together without explicit plans to marry.

Studies following the wave of research on the cohabitation effect began to focus on the quality and specific characteristics of married relationships among the previously cohabiting couples. A study by Kenney and McLanahan (2006) focused on high rates of violence in

cohabiting couples that carried over into later marriage and that is also likely to be the cause of divorce (Kenney, 2006). This research in particular emphasized differences in selection of cohabitation and marriage, including selection of the least violent cohabiting couples and most-violent married couples. Later, Hsueh described the general characteristics of cohabiting couples' relationships to include a variety of conflicts, such as communication problems, arguments, emotional problems, and affection-distance that may carry over into marriage. (Hsueh, 2009).

After getting a grasp on the characteristics and qualities of marriage and cohabitation, cohabitation research went on to examine why couples choose to cohabit in the first place. Two explanations proposed by Rhoades, Stanley, and Markman (2009) was that dating individuals who lived apart desired greater physical closeness and saw cohabitation as convenient. However, Rhodes and her colleagues also noted that by fulfilling their wish for physical proximity, cohabiting couples develop higher levels of insecurity, depression, and anxiety while cohabiting. Interestingly, men are more likely to engage in cohabitation than are women. With men being the more likely initiators of cohabitation, women might be passively complying in the hopes that cohabitation will carry over into later marriage, as it often does but with adverse effects on marriage. These adverse outcomes raise questions regarding commitment in relationships and whether level of commitment is gender and relationship status dependent. Rhoades, Stanely, and Markman (2006) research on gender asymmetry in pre-engagement cohabitation and marital commitment suggests that women are more likely than men to interpret cohabitation as a step toward marriage and an indication of increased commitment. However, their findings among married men suggest that men who cohabited with their spouses before engagement were less dedicated or committed in marriage in comparison to men who only cohabited after engagement

or not at all before marriage. If cohabitation has an effect on husbands' commitment to their wives in the couples' subsequent marriage, it is important to investigate if marital intentions in cohabitation have any effect on the success of later marriage. Cohabitation and commitment are two related factors that can affect marriage independently. Cohabitation without commitment may be setting the ground for an unstable marriage. Whereas commitment will have stabilizing effects on marriage whether it was expressed in cohabitation or in the dating experience prior to marriage. Guzzo (2009) also investigated the extent to which cohabitators begin their union with intentions to marry and how it is related to subsequent cohabitation transitions. Their findings suggest that for first cohabitations, nearly half of all partners believed their cohabitation to be a step towards eventual marital union. In fact, two thirds of men and women who began cohabiting with firm intentions to marry at the start of their union realized or acknowledged those intentions. These findings suggest that initial levels of commitment as well as intentions from both partners are the ultimate predictors of the later success of their union in cohabitation or in marriage.

This brings us to another study by Miller, Sassler, and Kusi-Appouh (2012) that looked more into intentions of individuals, as well as reasons for delaying marriage and preferring cohabitation in the modern day. The practice of cohabitation initially arose as a precursor to marriage, however, beginning in the 1990's fewer cohabiting relationships resulted in marriage compared to cohabiting relationships in the 1980's. Something changed in a decade that shifted cohabitation from being a precursor to marriage to becoming its own type of a relationship. Miller and colleagues suggest that there are several factors that help to explain why couples may choose cohabitation over marriage. These include the belief that marriage is an ultimate commitment that can only happen once, the difficulties couples might face exiting a marriage

later on, and couples' past negative experiences with divorce (Miller, Sassler, & Kusi-Appouh, 2011). Some or all of these factors tend to hold back the surveyed individuals from entering marital unions hastily and choosing cohabitation for the time being. This brings us to the notion of individuals' value of relationships based on their personal beliefs or past experiences which might primarily affect their decision making in choosing to cohabit prior to marriage or not. The latter findings of Miller and colleagues, present next, also investigated the socioeconomic variables in relation to couples' beliefs about cohabitation and marriage.

Miller and colleagues found that working-class and middle-class individuals differed on their views of cohabitation and marriage (Miller et al., 2011). Middle-class participants emphasized marriage as a deep commitment between partners that is made once and for life, a view that may reflect their levels of initial commitment and subsequent decisions to cohabit. Cohabitation for these individuals is, then, a "trial" in which partners test their compatibility with one another. Working-class participants more often viewed marriage as an institution that binds partners together legally and financially, making it a relationship that is difficult to exit. As such, working-class individuals may prefer cohabitation to marriage because they may view it as less financially risky than marriage. Further, working-class women express concern that their roles may change, becoming more gender traditional once they enter marriage. Traditional roles often dictate that, whereas a husband is expected to contribute financially to a marriage, a wife is expected to contribute financially, as well as perform household and child-rearing duties. This may, then, influence their levels of commitment and decisions to stay in a cohabiting relationship. Among working class women, then, cohabitation is a more beneficial agreement that may avoid the strict division of gender roles that marriage usually implies (Miller et al., 2011). Miller's research also suggests that working class participants see marriage as something

that is finite and may even become burdensome, unlike middle class participants who see it as a “till death do us part” commitment.

Other cohabitation research focuses on the decision making process through which a cohabiting couple decides to transition into marriage. Stanley and Rhoades (2006) looked into decision-making processes among cohabiting couples in their study on the sliding versus deciding paradox. The sliding paradox infers that cohabiting partners transition into marriage, seeing marriage as the next natural step in their relationship, whereas the deciding paradox infers that couples give their decision to marry considerable thought and weigh the pros and cons of that decision. According to the findings, relationship transition for cohabiting couples is often characterized more by the sliding paradox than deciding. Because individuals are cohabiting, once the time for change comes they slide into a marriage regardless of relationship’s current quality and partners’ mutual level of satisfaction in that relationship (Stanley, 2006). These findings suggest that cohabiting couples are more likely to stick together for a marriage by inertia because their cohabiting relationship becomes their lifestyle (sharing home, resources, time). Because the decision to get married is not made through an extensive cognitive process by these couples, marriage simply becomes the natural step following cohabitation. Next then, we want to look at what kinds of individuals are more likely to enter cohabitation before marriage, which is when the selection effect first comes into play.

The selection effect suggests that couples that tend to cohabit are already coming from lower socioeconomic level with less education and due to these adverse external factors they tend to have relationships of poor quality. This might suggest that the initial causal inference that pre-engagement cohabitation leads to unsuccessful marriage might have been incorrect, and that

there is an external variable affecting this relationship, such as the socioeconomic status of the individuals involved. Couples of the lower socioeconomic status transition through the sliding effect from unsuccessful cohabitation to similarly unsuccessful marriage and high divorce rates. While the cohabitation effect and selection effect are different, they tend to produce the same results. Whether couples choose to slide into marriage after cohabitation or make a thoughtful decision, the research findings suggest that pre-engagement cohabitation is the factor that is common to all of those cases and it most often leads to the same result – an unsuccessful marriage with a high risk of divorce.

While early cohabitation research mainly suggests that cohabitation has adverse effects on relationships and subsequent marriage, some of the more recent studies reveal flaws in the methodology and suggest that cohabitation practices are more normalized, even beneficial for certain individuals choosing to cohabit. Forerunners in the field of cohabitation and relationships, Rhoades, Stanley, and Markman analyzed the impacts of transition from a dating relationship to a cohabiting relationship. Data gathered from both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies revealed that in the modern day society a couples' transition from dating to cohabiting is often met with mixed messages in which some approve and others ostracize (Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2012). Their study proposes that because the “societal or interpersonal roles are unclear and relationship expectations are not communicated between partners, personal distress and relationship conflict are more likely” (p. 348). This suggests that additional research is needed to identify if “the transition [from dating to cohabitation] truly increases the amount of conflict or if it merely increases the likelihood that conflict will be handled poorly” (p. 356).

It seems that cohabitation simply does not have a true category in the structures of our society and until it takes its own concrete place this ambiguity will continue to baffle the couples deciding to cohabit and possibly negatively affect their overall quality of the relationship. The lack of categorization contributes to cohabitation being a part of the limbo relationships, where it must either lead to something like marriage eventually or not exist at all. The change in a couples' status from dating to cohabiting and the time and resources that the couple begins to share can become significant factors that negatively affect the relationship overall. Cohabiting couples in the earlier stages of cohabitation are in the transition mode and might be in a more stressful state than couples that have cohabitated for a prolonged period of time. I suspect that in order to accurately assess the benefits and disadvantages of cohabitation, data must be gathered from couples who are at least 6 months into their cohabitation, when they have settled into a routine lifestyle and arranged their daily activities and duties around one another. This way the stressful transition from dating to cohabitation will not be an extraneous variable affecting data gathered from cohabiting couples. Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard came to a similar conclusion in their study (2009). The researchers depicted a flaw in cohabitation studies that show negative qualities of cohabitation. The problem that they identified was that the studies on cohabitation usually are done with couples living together in early stages of their relationship and not later on (Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2009). The suggestion is that the studies that compared cohabiting couples to married couples most often used incomparable samples, in that data from married and cohabiting couples were gathered at different periods in their relationship. The cohabiting couples studied were most often cohabiting for a period of less than one year, compared to married couples that had lived together for a significantly longer period of time. Comparisons of both the married and cohabiting couples who have lived together for an

extended period of time show that, “both types of couples differ as for demographic and personality variables, while they are [actually] similar on the relational sphere” (Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2009). These findings encourage taking a closer look at all cohabitation studies to see how long the interviewed cohabitants were living together. It is possible that the couples interviewed for initial cohabitation research were questioned at the early stage of their cohabiting relationship and in that transition stage couples are prone to having more conflict. The presence of conflict in early stages of the relationship could have been the factor contributing to the negative quality of cohabiting relationships reported in those studies.

The previously mentioned study by Rhoades et al., (2012) regarding the transition effect on negative cohabitation interaction showed another interesting finding. It is “the first study to show that although cohabiting couples report more frequent sex, soon after transitioning to cohabitation, frequency declines” (p. 356). This is a factor that is actually common between cohabiting and married couples and hints at the possibility that cohabitation and marriage might actually be more similar. This also suggests that the time spent in cohabitation or marriage at the time of the research contributes to the quality of the relationships reported in the study.

Similarly, a study by Stafford, Kline, and Rankin (2004) attempted to compare and contrast individuals in three different types of relationships: those who entered directly into marriage, those who cohabited first and then married, and long term cohabitators. Very importantly, the comparison among these three groups was conducted with specific attention to one important factor existing in each group, the time that the couple has been together. Despite several demographic and situational differences among the three groups, “the most notable finding was the remarkable consistency among the three groups across time” (p. 315). The consistency was especially observed in the decrease of companionship behaviors and frequency of sex across all

of the couples in the three groups. While companionship decreased, disagreement in relationships increased. The researchers finally concluded that “regardless of relationship type, the passage of time may influence several areas of interaction in close relationships in a similar manner” (p. 317). Here we notice again the lack of connection between relationship type or status with the overall quality of interaction experienced by couples.

Brown and Booth (1996) conducted a similar study comparing cohabitation and marriage to identify relationship quality differences. Their initial findings did suggest that cohabitators in general reported more negative relationship qualities than married individuals. However, the researchers found yet another factor that significantly affected their reports, cohabitators’ marriage plans. The unions between cohabitators that intended to marry were not significantly different from those of married couples, and in fact cohabitators reported more frequent interaction with their partners than did the marrieds (Brown & Booth, 1996).

Another area of cohabitation that could be of a potential concern as researchers Lichter, Turner, and Sassler (2010) identified is serial cohabitation. The concept of serial cohabitation implies that an individual has multiple premarital cohabiting relationships. Lichter’s and colleagues’ study indicates that serial cohabitation has increased by 40 percent over the late 1990s and 2000s with the rates being particularly high among young adults. Although “a large majority of women - 75 percent - nevertheless lived only with men they eventually married,” serial cohabitation is largely popular among women that never marry (p. 761). Such practices might potentially lead to increases in single parent homes and sexually transmitted diseases among cohabiting individuals. The findings also show that serial cohabitation is heavily concentrated among disadvantaged populations. For future studies on cohabitation we might have to be more aware of including the serial cohabitators in the sample as those might be

influencing the link between pre-marital cohabitation and its negative effects in the subsequent marriage.

There is yet another factor that was compared between married and cohabiting couples that revealed the importance of individual variable, not the relationship type, in predicting the likelihood of a successful relationship. A study by Forste and Tanfer (1996) examined sexual activity and in particular sexual exclusivity as a descriptive relationship factor in dating, cohabitation, and marriage. Their findings suggest that sexual exclusivity differs among cohabitators as well as married individuals and is highly dependent on time and interestingly the education level of both partners. More so, “cohabitation before marriage is still associated with reduced sexual exclusivity after marriage” (p. 45) which means the popular assumption that sexual exclusivity is less likely in cohabitating than married relationships is not supported, as sexual exclusivity is a factor mainly associated with the person rather than the status of the relationship. They also found “a strong relationship between educational homogamy and sexual exclusivity” among married women as much as among cohabiting women (p. 38). For example, women with a higher educational level than their partner are at higher risk of not being sexually exclusive regardless of being in cohabiting or married relationships. As for the important differences between cohabiting and married individuals, this study and previous research “suggested that individuals who choose cohabitation are more likely to value independence and equality in a relationship, whereas individuals who choose marriage value interdependence” (p. 45). I believe that this finding highly coincides with the current trend for cohabitation in our society. Young adults might be especially striving for independence and autonomy in the modern day, which could be one of the reasons why marriage isn’t usually their first consideration when they start dating.

Through these conclusions I'm attempting to infer that the research on negative effects of cohabitation is applicable but it has overlooked some important individual variables. I suggest that when both partners are equally committed, are at the same educational level, have the similar outlooks for the future of their relationship, and have moved beyond the transition from dating to cohabitation, their cohabiting relationship can be just as functional as a married relationship with similar circumstances. I believe that increasing trends in cohabitation have not been satisfactorily explained in the existing body of research. To address these still unanswered questions, I'm proposing a possible design for a study to measure the factors that may contribute to increasing rates of cohabitation in the modern day and beliefs and attitudes of society about cohabitation (Appendix A and B).

Discussion and Implications

Extensive review of the literature on cohabitation revealed several areas that call for attention in future research. The proposed methodology for a larger scale experiment, presented in appendices A and B, are designed to assess what factors contribute to the increasing popularity of cohabitation in modern day society, and attempts to address several important factors that may account for the adverse effects of cohabitation on subsequent marriage, as noted in existing research.

One factor must be considered when conducting research comparing cohabiting and married couples is the amount of time couples have been in a certain form of a relationship. Many of the reviewed studies do not report the duration of cohabitation or marriage in the sample of their participants but rather just note the status of the relationship. Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard (2009), for example, particularly focused their study on cohabiting and married couples that were invested in a long-term relationship, rather than limiting their analysis as did prior studies to cohabiting couples in early stages of their relationship. Although their study's findings showed differences on personality and demographic variables between long-term married and cohabiting couples, on relational factors the couples were similar. Similarly, Hardie and Lucas (2010) suggest economic conflict arises most often in both cohabiting and married couples, however, the form of economic conflict is different. Whereas married individuals come together to increase economic well being, cohabiting couples often times enter cohabitation out of financial needs. The length of couples' cohabitating or married relationship is an important factor that should be accounted for in reports of relationship satisfaction because time spent together correlates with how well partners know one another and the amount and type of conflict that can potentially occur between them. As many of the reviewed studies suggested a causal

relationship between cohabitation and dissatisfaction in marriage, I am concerned with those studies only accounting for the variable of relationship status (cohabiting or married), while failing to account for the amount of time the couple has been in the relationship. Therefore, I call for future studies to compare cohabiting and married couples that have been in a long-term relationship for the same period of time.

Another underinvestigated factor revealed in the current review is the concept of serial cohabitation. Individuals who have had several cohabiting partners are more likely than those who have had fewer cohabiting relationships to have more short-term cohabiting relationships. Some research shows that about half of first-time cohabitations begin with both partners intending to marry, and about two thirds actually go on to marry (Guzzo, 2009). Although serial cohabitation may be a rising alternative to marriage or single-instance cohabitation (cohabitation followed by marriage), I suggest that future studies that set to examine the qualities of married v. cohabiting relationships focus on non-serial cohabitators and marrieds. Including data from the serial cohabitators/marrieds may present additional personality and SES variables in the participants' pool; Guzzo suggested that serial cohabitation is disproportionately concentrated in the disadvantaged population with essentially higher risk factors for serial cohabitation (pg. 764). It would be beneficial, however, to study serial cohabitators/marrieds separately to get a better understanding of the character of individuals who are prone to having multiple short-term relationships.

The research on cohabitation, generally, includes few studies that specifically focus on similarities between cohabiting and married relationships. Those that do exist test hypotheses that emphasize differences, rather than similarities, between the cohabiting and married couples,

and often point to the negative effects of cohabiting relationships on marriage. I suggest that future studies attempt to focus on homogeneity rather than heterogeneity in qualities of married and cohabiting relationships. For example, it would be interesting to see if various relationship factors are expressed similarly or differently in married v. cohabiting unions. One illustrated example is given in research by Forste and Tanfer (1996) who focused on comparing sexual exclusivity between cohabitators and marrieds. Despite the general belief that cohabiting couples might be less sexually exclusive and more liberal than marrieds, their findings showed that sexual exclusivity is a function of personal values regardless of one's relationship status. This suggests that individuals who are not sexually exclusive will remain so in a cohabiting or married relationship. Also, findings that show greater exclusivity among marrieds than cohabitators may be biased in their sample selection, in that people who are less likely to be sexually exclusive may favor cohabiting over being married. If such is the case, then we might expect that a cohabiting union of two partners who value sexual exclusivity will have a similar rate of sexual exclusivity as would a married union, when those individual differences are experimentally controlled.

The research presented herein suggests that the status of the relationship alone may not be solely predictive of the quality of the relationship and that there might be missing or overlooked variables in the existing research. Miller and colleagues (2012) proposed in their research that individuals might enter cohabitation for varying reasons, among which are, beliefs that marriage is an ultimate commitment and preference to test living together before committing, that couples fear getting divorced in the future, or that couples simply don't believe they have found the partner for marriage yet but still wish to cohabit for other reasons. The current research on the cohabitation effect might suggest that their cohabitation might already have a potential adverse

effect on their future marriage. I would assume that if two partners make a decision to cohabit with a plan to later marry, their marriage may have a chance to be as satisfactory in quality as that of a couple who never cohabited. A contrasting example would also apply, if a mal-functioning cohabiting couple decides to enter marriage, the change in the relationship status from cohabiting to married might not solve the problem at the core of the mal- relationship. Thus, I propose that relationship stability and quality is primarily dependent on partners' compatibility and their commitment to the relationship, rather than their relationship status alone, be that cohabiting or married.

In conclusion, while I am not suggesting that research, which has revealed adverse effects of cohabitation on marriage, is invalid, I am proposing that there are some important variables, such as personality, intentions, and level of commitment, that have been overlooked in the research on cohabitation and, as a consequence, that relationship quality is not exclusively dependent on relationship status. By accounting for these missing or overlooked variables in future research on cohabitation and marriage, I would expect to find a weaker, possibly nonexistent, relation between cohabitation and the success of subsequent marriage, and that married and cohabiting partners' level of commitment, intentions to eventually formalize their relationship, level of satisfaction, and overall well-being are better predictors of relationship quality.

Appendix A

Methodology proposed for a future study:

Locale of the Study

The pilot study would be conducted on Portland State University campus. Although universities are not the best sites to obtain representative samples, PSU has one of the most diverse student bodies in the nation. Its 30,000 attendants vary widely by age, gender, and race/ethnicity, allowing for the study's sample to be more representative of the general non-college population.

PSU is also diverse in the "type" of student who attends. Its student body is composed of the traditional undergraduate students, students returning to school for additional degrees, graduate students, as well as adult learners from the community. Given that research shows that level of education is predictive of the success of a cohabiting or marital relationship (Miller et al., 2011), surveying a large sample across the full population of PSU students and staff would provide a fairly representative sample.

Research Design and Sampling Procedure

A sample of 1000 participants will be randomly selected from PSU campus by obtaining a list of student and staff emails and applying a randomizing computer selection process. The initial email with the survey will be sent out to 1000 participants. The body of the message will state requirements for participation in the survey. Requirements for participants will include that they must be single, dating, or currently in a cohabiting or married relationship, be between the ages of 18 and 30, and be heterosexual.

The 18 to 30 age range was chosen based on current socio-demographic trends among youth. For example starting at age 18, individuals are allowed to make decisions that can potentially affect the society, such as voting, and unlike past generations, couples are marrying at later ages. Compared to one generation ago when the first-time bride was on average 20-years-old, in the present day she is about 25-years-old. Similarly the first-time groom's age has leaped from 22.8 to 26.8-years-old in only one generation (Teachman et al., 2006). The sample will be limited to those of heterosexual orientation because those of homosexual orientation do not always have the legal option to transition into marriage; therefore, individuals with same sex orientation tend to live in long-term cohabitation instead.

A cross-sequential design will be followed in order gather data on participants' beliefs and attitudes about cohabitation at the initial time of data collection and with a follow up data collection 3 and 5 years later.

Data Collection and Instrument

Part I – Demographics Survey: Initially, participants will complete a demographics survey that will provide information on participants' age, sex/gender, socioeconomic status which includes educational level and occupation, race/ethnicity, religiosity, their cohabitation status (non-cohabiting or cohabiting), and the length of cohabitation (from less than 3 months, 3 to 6, or more than 6 months). The periods for length of cohabitation are based on prior research that shows cohabiting couples are generally experiencing an unstable transitional period in the first 3 months of cohabitation and generally become more familiar with the cohabiting routine at 6 months or more of cohabitation (Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2009). These demographic variables will be used to assess differences in participants' responses to the survey questions that ask about their beliefs and attitudes about cohabitation.

Part II – Cohabitation Survey: Participants will be asked questions that pertain to their beliefs and attitudes about cohabitation before marriage (a sample of questions is contained in Appendix B). Respondents will answer questions using a 5-point Likert-type scale in which participants rate the items, 1 - strongly disagree to 5 - strongly agree. The sample questions developed in the Appendix B incorporate the conclusions derived in this analysis.

The same survey will be administered 3 and 5 years later. The follow-up surveys will also include a measure of the participants' current relationship status. These measures will allow us to draw conclusions regarding participants' original views on cohabitation and their natural relationship progression.

Appendix B

PART I – Demographics.

Please tell us a little bit about yourself. All of the information that you provide will remain anonymous and all data will be held confidential by the survey author.

Age: _____ Gender: _____ Race/ethnicity: _____

Relationship status (e.g., single; cohabitating; married; divorced, etc.): _____

Are you currently dating anyone? ____ NO ____ YES For how long (in months): ____

Are you currently cohabitating (living with a partner)? ____ NO ____ YES For how long (in months): ____

Are you in a committed relationship? ____ NO ____ YES For how long (in months): ____

If in a relationship, is it sexually exclusive? ____ NO ____ YES

Cohabitation Survey

Instructions. For each of the following statements, please indicate your agreement from

1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree

If you are currently living with a partner (whether married or unmarried), please preface each question with “If I were living alone...”

<i>Please rate your agreement with each of the following items, from 1 - strongly disagree to 5 - strongly agree.</i>	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neither agree/disagree	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
I would consider living with the person I am dating.					
I believe that living together before marriage is important.					
I would live with a partner for convenience (e.g. seeing each other on regular basis).					
I would live with a partner to test how well we can live together.					
I would live with a partner for economic benefits (e.g., sharing resources, splitting rent and bills, etc.)					
I would live with a partner because I see them as a potential spouse in marriage.					

<i>Please rate your agreement with each of the following items, from 1 - strongly disagree to 5 - strongly agree.</i>	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neither agree/disagree	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
I would choose to live with my partner, as long as I could be assured that it would be followed by a long-term commitment such as marriage.					
I am hesitant to enter marriage without having lived with a partner first.					
I would live with a partner regardless of marriage plans.					
I would live with a partner if we are both committed to one another.					
I would live with a partner regardless of seriousness of our commitment.					
I would not live with a partner before marriage because of my personal values and/or beliefs.					
I would not live with a partner before marriage because I think that would rule out the possibility of marriage.					
I would not live with a partner before marriage because my family wouldn't allow it.					
I value independence in my relationships.					
I value interdependence in my relationships.					
I value sexual exclusivity (being sexually active exclusively with one's partner) in my relationships.					
I believe that seeing other people romantically is okay when you are dating.					
I believe that seeing other people romantically is okay when you are living together.					
I believe that seeing other people romantically is okay when you are married.					

Thank you for taking this survey. We would greatly appreciate your feedback and welcome your opinion. For example, how can we change or improve this survey? What language was difficult or confusing? Are there any suggestions you can offer for improvement? Etc.

References

- Bradbury, T., (2013). *Testing, testing: How does living together affect a marriage?* Retrieved from: <http://www.pbs.org/thisemotionallife/blogs/testing-testing-how-does-living-together-affect-marriage>. [Last Accessed October 8, 2013].
- Brown, S., & Booth, A. (1996). Cohabitation versus marriage: A comparison of relationship quality. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 58(3), 668–678. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/353727>
- Brown, S., Bulanda, J., & Lee, G. (2005). The Significance of Nonmarital Cohabitation: Marital Status and Mental Health Benefits Among Middle-Aged and Older Adults. [References]. *Journals of Gerontology*. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/geronb/60.1.S21>
- Bumpass, L.L., & Lu, H. H. (2000). Trends in cohabitation and implications for children’s family contexts in the United States. *Population Studies*, 54, 29-41. Retrieved from: <http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/2584631?uid=3739960&uid=2&uid=4&uid=3739256&sid=21103616800327>
- Chun, H., & Lee, I. (2001). Why do married men earn more: productivity or marriage selection? *Economic Inquiry*, 39(2), 307–319. doi:10.1111/j.1465-7295.2001.tb00068.x
- Cohan, C., & Kleinbaum, S. (2002). Toward a greater understanding of the cohabitation effect: Premarital cohabitation and marital communication. [References]. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 64(1), 180–192. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2002.00180.x>
- Forste, R., & Tanfer, K. (1996). Sexual exclusivity among dating, cohabiting, and married women. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 58(1), 33–47. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/353375>
- Guzzo, K. (2009). Marital intentions and the stability of first cohabitations. [References]. *Journal of Family Issues*, 30(2), 179–205. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0192513X08323694>

- Hardie, J. H., & Lucas, A. (2010). Economic Factors and Relationship Quality Among Young Couples: Comparing Cohabitation and Marriage. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 72(5), 1141–1154. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2010.00755.x
- Hsueh, A., Morrison, K., & Doss, B. (2009). Qualitative reports of problems in cohabiting relationships: Comparisons to married and dating relationships. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 23(2), 236–246. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0015364
- Jose, A., Daniel O’Leary, K., & Moyer, A. (2010). Does premarital cohabitation predict subsequent marital stability and marital quality? A meta-analysis. [References]. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 72(1), 105–116. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2009.00686.x
- Kenney, C. T., & McLanahan, S. S. (2006). Why are cohabiting relationships more violent than marriages? *Demography*, 43(1), 127–140. doi:10.1353/dem.2006.0007
- Kline, G., Stanley, S., Markman, H., Olmos-Gallo, P., St. Peters, M., Whitton, S., & Prado, L. (2004). Timing Is Everything: Pre-Engagement Cohabitation and Increased Risk for Poor Marital Outcomes. [References]. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 18(2), 311–318. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0893-3200.18.2.311
- Lachance-Grzela, M., & Bouchard, G. (2009). Cohabitation and marriage, two worlds apart? A review of demographic characteristics, individual and relational. [French]. [References]. *Journal of Behavioural Science*, 41(1), 37–44. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0013407
- Lavner, J., Karney, B., & Bradbury, T. (2012). Do cold feet warn of trouble ahead? Premarital uncertainty and four-year marital outcomes. [References]. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 26(6), 1012–1017. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0029912

Lichter, D., Turner, R., & Sassler, S. (2010). National estimates of the rise in serial cohabitation.

[References]. *Social Science Research*, 39(5), 754–765.

doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2009.11.002>

Manning, W., & Smock, P. (2005). Measuring and modeling cohabitation: New perspectives from qualitative data. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 67(4), 989–1002.

doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2005.00189.x>

Miller, A., Sassler, S., & Kusi-Appouh, D. (2011). The specter of divorce: Views from working- and middle-class cohabitators. [References]. *Journal of Applied Family Studies*, 60(5), 602–616.

doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3729.2011.00671.x>

Rhoades, G., Stanley, S., & Markman, H. (2009). Couples' reasons for cohabitation: Associations with individual well-being and relationship quality. *Journal of Family Issues*, 30(2), 233–258.

doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0192513X08324388>

Rhoades, G., Stanley, S., & Markman, H. (2009). The pre-engagement cohabitation effect: A replication and extension of previous findings. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 23(1), 107–111.

doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0014358>

Rhoades, G., Stanley, S., & Markman, H. (2012). The impact of the transition to cohabitation on relationship functioning: Cross-sectional and longitudinal findings. [References]. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 26(3), 348–358.

doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0028316>

Rhoades, G., Stanley, S., & Markman, H. (2006). Pre-engagement cohabitation and gender asymmetry in marital commitment. [References]. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 20(4), 553–

560. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0893-3200.20.4.553>

Stafford, L., Kline, S., & Rankin, C. (2004). Married individuals, cohabiters, and cohabiters who

marry: A longitudinal study of relational and individual well-being. [References]. *Journal of*

Social and Personal Relationships, 21(2), 231–248.

doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0265407504041385>

Stanley, S. M., Rhoades, G. K., & Markman, H. J. (2006). Sliding Versus Deciding: Inertia and the Premarital Cohabitation Effect*. *Family Relations*, 55(4), 499–509. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3729.2006.00418.x

Stanley, S., Rhoades, G., & Fincham, F. (2011). Understanding romantic relationships among emerging adults: The significant roles of cohabitation and ambiguity. [References]. *Fincham, Frank D [Ed]*, 234–251.

Stanley, S., Whitton, S., & Markman, H. (2004). Maybe I Do: Interpersonal Commitment and Premarital or Nonmarital Cohabitation. [References]. *Journal of Family Issues*, 25(4), 496–519. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0192513X03257797>

Teachman, J., Tedrow, L., & Hall, M. (2006). The demographic future of divorce and dissolution. IN M. A. Fine & J. H. Harvey (Eds.), *Handbook of divorce and relationship dissolution* (pp. 59-52). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Thornton, A., Axinn, W. G., & Teachman, J. D. (1995). The Influence of School Enrollment and Accumulation on Cohabitation and Marriage in Early Adulthood. *American Sociological Review*, 60(5), 762–774. doi:10.2307/2096321

Wilmoth, J., & Koso, G. (2002). Does Marital History Matter? Marital Status and Wealth Outcomes Among Preretirement Adults. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 64(1), 254–268. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2002.00254.X