

Living with Cohabitation: *What it Means for Relationship Education*

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Principal Investigators:

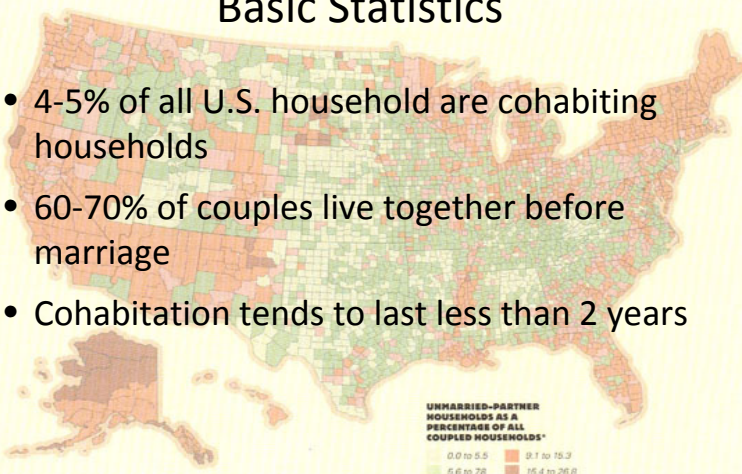
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Basic Statistics

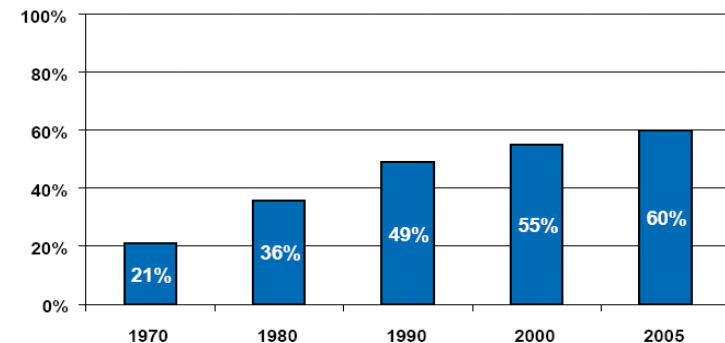
- 4-5% of all U.S. household are cohabiting households
- 60-70% of couples live together before marriage
- Cohabitation tends to last less than 2 years



Bumpass & Lu, 2000; Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2009; Stanley, Whittori, & Markman, 2004; U.S. Census Bureau, 2007

Source: William Galston, 2008 "The Changing Twenties"

Never married at 25 (%):



Children and Cohabitation

- 39% of cohabiting households include children
- At least 20% of children in the U.S. will at some point live in a cohabiting household.
- The odds of a couple being together two years after the birth of a child are 6 times greater in marriage than cohabitation.

Bumpass & Lu, 2000; U.S. Census Bureau, 2007; Galston, 2008

“The Cohabitation Effect”

- Couples who cohabit premaritally are 1.26 – 1.86 times more likely to divorce
- Premarital cohabitation is associated with:
 - Lower marital satisfaction
 - Poorer perceived and observed communication in marriage
 - More marital conflict
 - Higher rates of domestic violence
 - Higher rates of infidelity

Cohan & Kleinbaum, 2002; Forste & Tanfer, 1996; Kamp Dush et al., 2003; Phillips & Sweeney, 2005; Stafford et al., 2004; Stanley et al., 2004; Teachman, 2003

Explaining the Cohabitation Effect

- 1) It's about the people who cohabit.
- 2) It's about the experience of cohabitation changing values about marriage.
- 3) It's about cohabitation creating inertia that makes it harder to break up.



Inertia

- Cohabitation may make it harder to break up.
- Constraints such as sharing debt, having a lease, or major purchases increase in cohabitation and are associated with thinking it's less likely the relationship will end.
- Some might marry a person they would not have married if they hadn't been cohabiting.

Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2009; Stanley, Rhoades, & Markman, 2006

The *Pre-engagement* Cohabitation Effect

Once married, . . .

- Those who did not live together until marriage or engagement are at lower risk.
- Those who cohabited before clear commitment to the future are at higher risk.
- This finding holds across many aspects of marital quality.

Who, How, When, Why, and So What?

Who cohabits: selection

How it begins:
sliding or deciding

When it begins relative
to clarity of commitment

Why people cohabit:
what are their reasons



So what? Implications for
helping individuals and
couples

New National Study

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

Who?

Who Cohabits?

- Compared to daters with plans to marry, those cohabiting with plans to marry...
 - Are older
 - Have less education
 - Are more likely to already have children
 - Have had more sexual partners
 - Are more likely to have divorced parents
 - Experienced more conflict in their families growing up
 - Have more favorable attitudes toward divorce and less favorable attitudes toward marriage
 - Are less religious

Religiousness and Cohabitation

“My religious beliefs suggest that it is wrong for people to live together without being married”:

- 49% of those dating agree (35% strongly)
- 30% of those cohabiting agree (16% strongly)

“Her family
kicked her
out.”

How?

“It just kind of happened.
Circumstances created the
situation.”

Sliding vs. Deciding

- Inertia and accumulating constraints:

Stanley, S. M., Rhoades, G. K., & Markman, H. J. (2006). Sliding vs. Deciding: Inertia and the premarital cohabitation effect. *Family Relations*, 55, 499 - 509.

- While commitment requires decision, couples tend to slide into cohabitation:

Manning, W. D., & Smock, P. J. (2005). Measuring and modeling cohabitation: New perspectives from qualitative Data. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 67, 989 - 1002.

How does it Begin?

How did you start living together?

- 1/3 “We didn’t think about it or plan it. We slid into it.”
- 1/3 “We talked about it, but then it just sort of happened.”
- 1/3 “We talked about it, planned it, and then made a decision together to do it.”

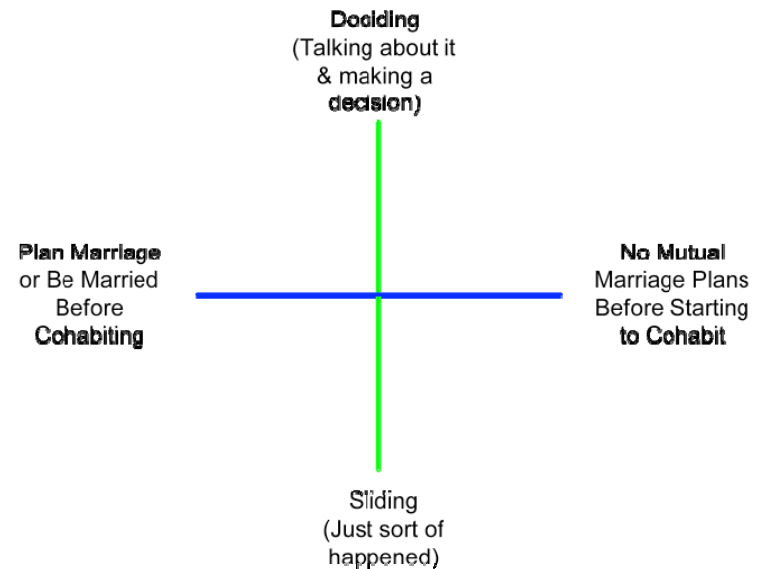
“He said: To give the relationship a chance at becoming very serious. To see if we can live together.”

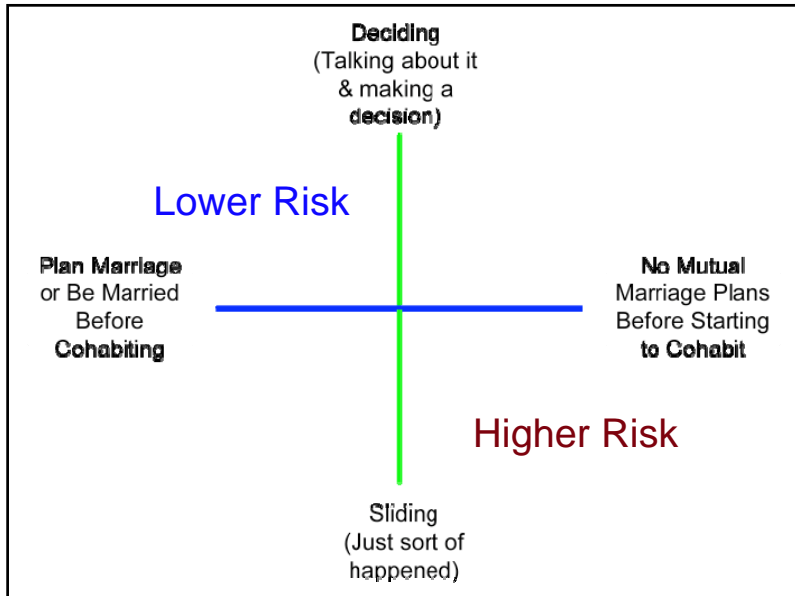
When?

“She said: He was moving to my city and we already were engaged. And, it made sense financially.”

When does it Begin?

- Among those cohabiting:
 - 66% started cohabitation before plans
 - 23% started cohabitation with plans, but no engagement
 - 11% started cohabitation with engagement
- People who were already engaged are more likely to have made a decision about cohabiting.

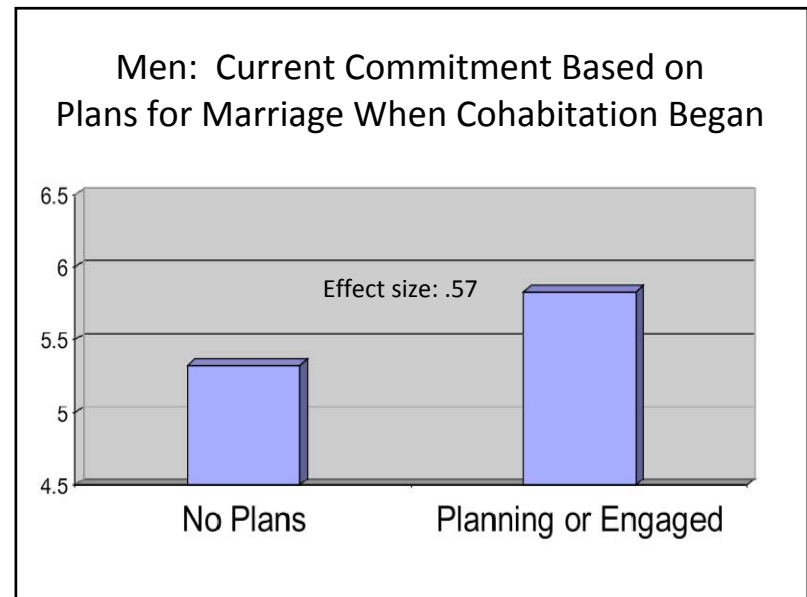
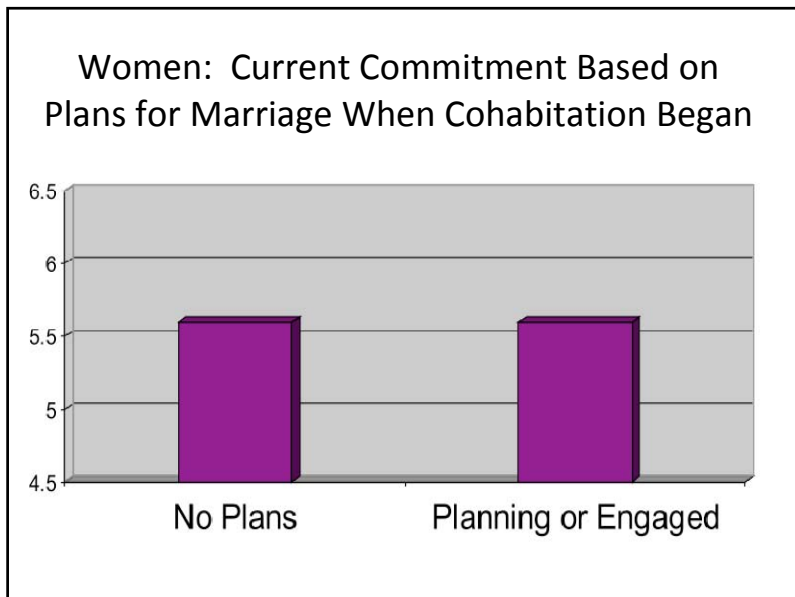




Gender and Commitment

- Men who cohabited premaritally are less dedicated in marriage than men who did not.
- For couples who cohabited before engagement, men are also less dedicated than their wives.

Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2006; Stanley, Whitton, & Markman, 2004



Why?

“I felt it was time to take the next step in my relationship. I feel that if I love him, I need to know if living with him will change anything.”

Why Live Together?

	Men	Women
I wanted to spend more time with my partner	46%	44%
It was inconvenient to live apart	24%	22%
I wanted us to take a step up in commitment	13%	16%
We had a child to raise together	7%	13%
I wanted us to test out our relationship before marriage	9%	5%
I don't believe in the institution of marriage	0.8%	0.4%

Gender and Reasons

Men were more likely than partners to endorse:

1. testing as a reason for living together
2. feeling trapped in their relationships
3. that they moved in with their partners (rather than marrying) because they didn't want to break-up, but also couldn't see a long-term future together

So what?

- We have entered the age of ambiguity.

Relationship Education: Who and How?

1. Who attends? Individuals or couples?
2. Recruiting issues
3. Cultural differences

Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2009

Relationship Education: What To Do

1. Communication skills
2. Don't forget the kids!
3. Reasons for living together
4. Commitment and constraints
5. Sliding vs. Deciding

Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2009

Resources

- Rhoades, G. K., Stanley, S. M., & Markman, H. J. (2009). Working with cohabitation in relationship education and therapy. *Journal of Couple and Relationship Therapy*, 8, 95-112
- Available for free July 8 – 17 at Taylor and Francis:
 - www.tandf.co.uk/journals/wcrt

Web Resources

www.PREPInc.com

www.withinmyreach.com

www.slidingvsdeciding.com (Scott's blog)

National Healthy Marriage Resource Center:

www.healthymarriageinfo.org

www.TwoOfUs.org