

Sliding vs. Deciding

How The **New** Courtship Paradigm
Imperils Couples and Undermines
Lifelong Happiness in Marriage.

Prof. Scott Stanley
University of Denver

June 1st, 2008

NACFLM San Francisco

How Commitment Develops

Attraction +
Satisfaction
Time Together

Attachment
With
Loss Anxiety

Attraction +
Satisfaction
Time Together

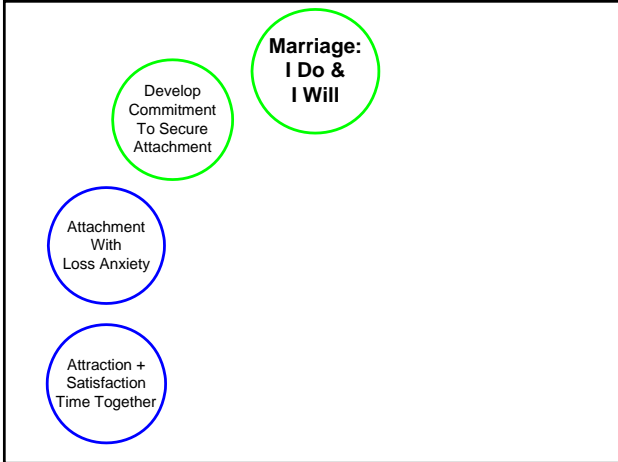
Attachment and Commitment

- Attachment can lead one to make a commitment, . . .
- . . . but attachment is NOT the same as making the decision to commit.
- Commitment secures the attachment.

Develop
Commitment
To Secure
Attachment

Attachment
With
Loss Anxiety

Attraction +
Satisfaction
Time Together



Fundamentals of Commitment

- Dedication vs. Constraint
- Us with a future: Taking the Long View

Fundamentals of Commitment

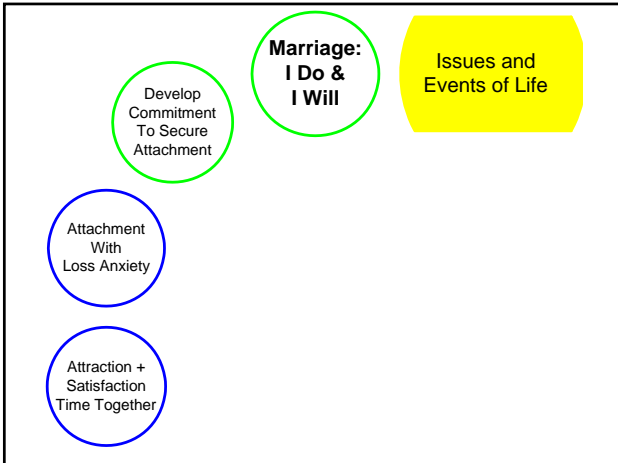
Commitment means:

“Making a choice to give up choices”

A *clear* choice is based on a conscious decision. (e.g., Joshua, “choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve”)

The Problems of Choice

- People have a hard time committing to one choice among many options.
see The Paradox of Choice: Why Less is More (Barry Schwartz, 2004)
- We are encourage to hang onto all our options.



A Strong Foundation

- A clearly understood, expressed, and acted on:

I Do.

Royal Bank of Scotland

“Of course that very much depends on what you mean by the question, ‘Do you?’”

“Maybe I do”

- Societal conditions are generating high numbers of people who have issues in relationships:

- insecurities about attachment
and
- low confidence about relationships and marriage

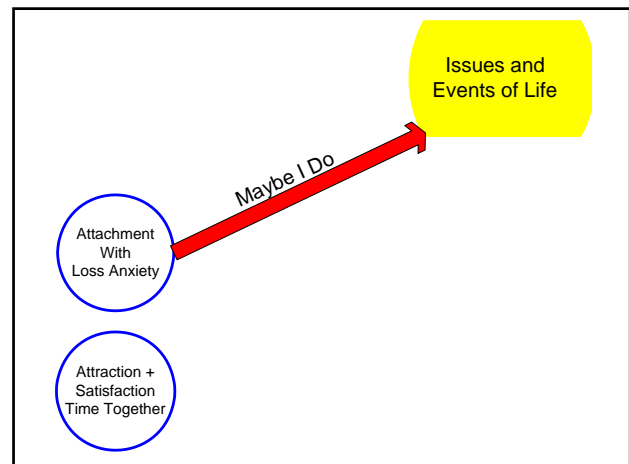
- For example:

– Experiencing parental divorce is associated with lower confidence in, and commitment to, **the institution of marriage.**

(Amato & DeBoer, 2001; Glenn & Kramer, 1987)

– Experiencing parental divorce is associated with lower confidence in, and commitment to, **one’s own marriage and spouse** as an adult.

(Whitton, Stanley, & Markman, in press)



Wind Watching

- Ecclesiastes 11:4 (NIV)

Whoever watches the wind will not plant;
whoever looks at the clouds will not reap.

The Foundational Passage on Marriage

- Genesis 2: 24 – 25

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

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Paperclips and Staples

Symptoms of the Loss of Confidence in Marriage

Marrying Later and Later

- Marrying very young is risky, but the trend is so far the other way, now.
- Median ages of first marriage now 27 (men) and 25 (women).
- People put off marriage until they have developed a total ability to be independent (as insurance, just in case).

Seeking the Perfect Love

- Popenoe and Whitehead conducted a national survey of 1,003 people aged 20 to 29 (61% never married).
- 94% of never-married singles agree that 'when you marry you want your spouse to be your soul mate, first and foremost.'

Popenoe, D., & Whitehead, B. D. (2001). Who wants to marry a soul mate? See <http://marriage.rutgers.edu/>

Growth of Cohabitation

- Blurring the edges around being in and out of relationships
- Belief that testing helps

Attitudes and Beliefs About Cohabitation: Ages 18 through 24: OSU Survey

	Males	Females
Believe cohabitation improves chances for good marriage	62%	55%

Johnson, C. A., Stanley, S. M., Glenn, N. D., Amato, P. A., Nock, S. L., Markman, H. J., & Dion, M. R. (2002). Marriage in Oklahoma: 2001 baseline statewide survey on marriage and divorce (S02096 OKDHS). Oklahoma City, OK: Oklahoma Department of Human Services.

Research on Cohabitation (Living Together)

A window on how relationships form and why some things don't work the way people think they do

Here is a turning point in this presentation:

I have been saying it's crucial to sit down somewhere, to make a choice, and to stick.

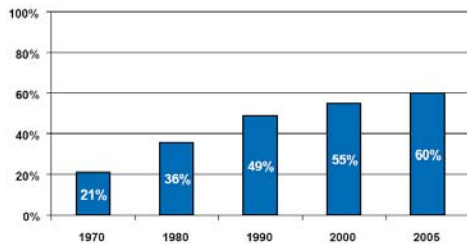
I'm now going to spend a lot of time saying it's important to be careful where you decide to sit down.

Colleagues in Research on Cohabitation

- Galena Kline Rhoades
- Sarah Whitton
- Howard Markman
- Tamara Williams, Erica Ragan, Amanda Maddox, Gretchen Kelmer, and the rest of our team at DU

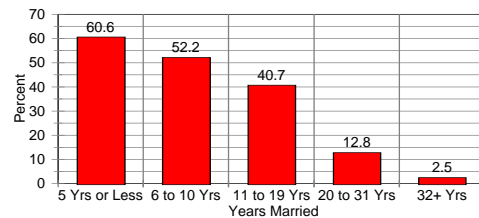
Source: William Galston, 2008
"The Changing Twenties"

Figure 9: Never Married at Age 25 (%)⁶



Steady Increases in Percent who Live Together Prior to Marriage
(probably around 70 to 75% now)

Married Couples Who Cohabitated



Stanley, S.M., & Markman, H.J.(1997) Marriage in the 90s: A Nationwide Random Phone Survey. Denver, Colorado: PREP, Inc.

Cohabitation and Relationship Quality

- Premarital cohabitation is associated with:
 - More negative communication in marriage (Cohan & Kleinbaum, 2002; Kline et al., 2004; Stanley et al., 2004; Thomson & Colella, 1992)
 - Lower levels of marital satisfaction (Brown, 2004; Brown & Booth, 1996; Nock, 1995; Stafford et al., 2004; Stanley et al., 2004)
 - Higher perceived marital instability (Kamp Dush et al., 2003; Stafford et al., 2004; Thomas & Colella, 1992)
 - Lower levels of men's commitment to their spouse (Kline, et al., in press; Stanley et al., 2004)
 - Greater likelihood of divorce (DeMaris & Rao, 1992; Kamp Dush et al., 2003; Philips & Sweeney, 2005; Teachman, 2003)

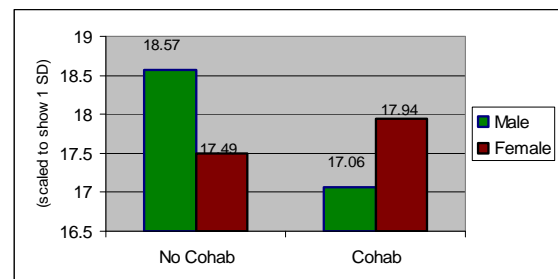
Selection vs. Experience

What explains this added risk associated with cohabiting before marriage?

Summary of Findings: Stanley, Whitton, & Markman, 2004

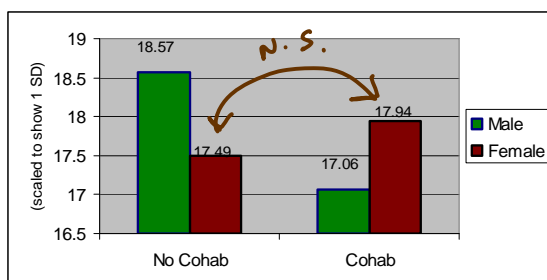
- **For men**, with cohabitation history being associated with:
 - Lower marital satisfaction
 - Higher ratings of negative interaction
 - Trend for lower level of religiosity
AND
 - **Lower interpersonal dedication to the mate**

Premarital Cohabitation and Dedication to Partner



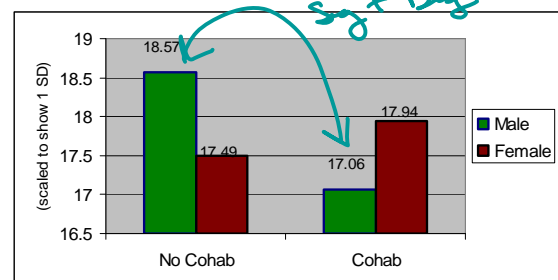
Stanley, Whitton, & Markman, 2004 JFI

Premarital Cohabitation and Dedication to Partner



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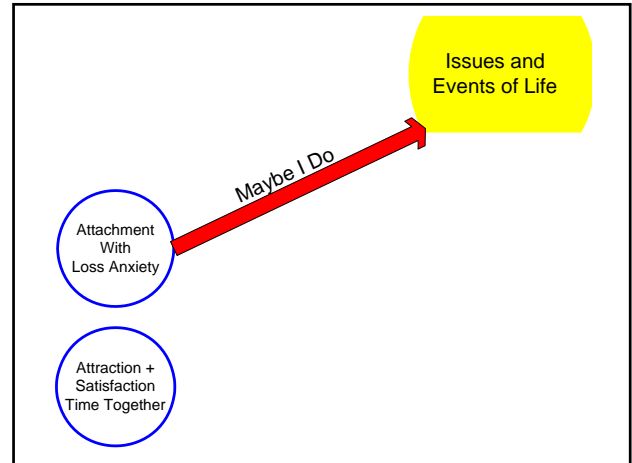
Premarital Cohabitation and Dedication to Partner



Stanley, Whitton, & Markman, 2004 JFI

Inertia

- Are there a *subset* of cohabiters who marry someone they would not have married had they not started living together and created inertia to stay together?



Sliding Into Home: The Observations of Manning and Smock

- “As described by the respondents, the lines between cohabitation and singlehood are quite blurry, with the movement into cohabitation often described as a gradual or unfolding process that occurs over a week, or even months.”

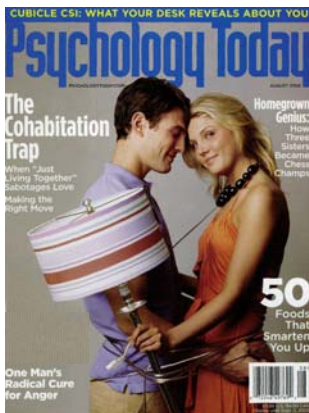
Manning, W. D., & Smock, P. J. (2005). Measuring and Modeling Cohabitation: New Perspectives from Qualitative Data. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 67, 989 - 1002.

Sliding vs. Deciding

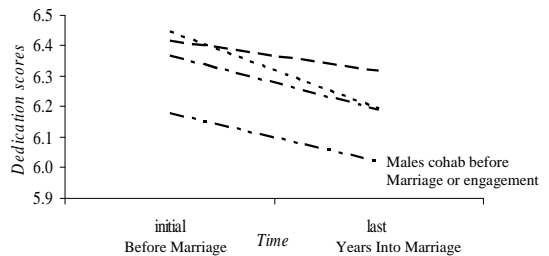
Scott Stanley, Galena Rhoades, & Howard Markman (2006, *Family Relations*)

- *The Inertia Hypothesis*

Regardless of income, race, and culture, *sliding will be associated with more risk* than deciding because people find themselves in places that are hard to get out of that they did not clearly choose.



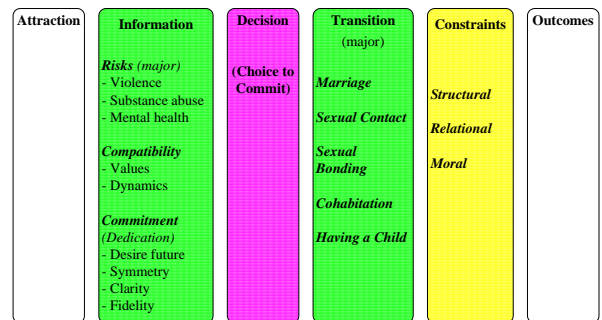
Dedication Levels Before Marriage and Up to 7 Years Into Marriage (Ave. 4 Years Into Marriage) Rhoades, Stanley, and Markman (2006)



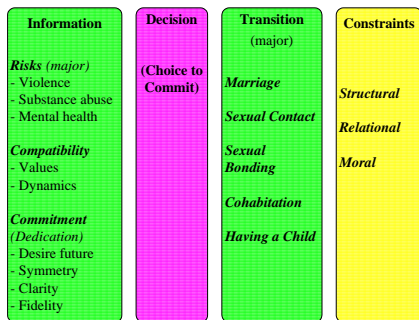
Transitions Without Decisions: The New Paradigm of Partnering

Something the research on
cohabitation led us to think about, and
now we see it all over the place.

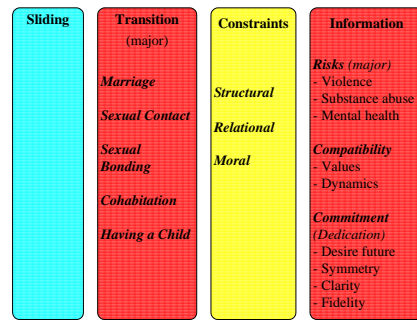
A Solid Sequence



A Solid Sequence



Higher Risk Sequence



What's Cooking?



The Crux of the Problem with Sliding

- Constraints are increased before a clear choice and commitment has been made.
- . . . and, usually before information is gathered that might have led to a different path—a different decision.



For More Information
www.PREPinc.com

Book Resources:

Stanley, S. M. (2005). *The Power of Commitment*.
San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc.