

Cohabitation

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“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
 - etc. etc.

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.



New National Quantitative Study

- Funded by National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD)
 - Co-Is: Stanley, Rhoades, & Markman
- Random, national, diverse 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 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 (or never married) parents
 - Experienced more conflict in their families growing up
 - Have more favorable attitudes toward divorce and less favorable attitudes toward marriage
 - Are less religious

Is Selection Everything?

- It surely plays an important role, for example:
 - Lillard, Brien, & Waite, 1995
 - Woods & Emery, 2002
- But, many studies show cohabitation effect not covaried away, for example:
 - Demaris & MacDonald (1993)
 - Cohan & Kleinbaum (2002)
 - Kamp Dush, Cohan, & Amato (2003)
 - Stafford, Kline, & Rankin (2004)
 - Kline, et al. (2004)
 - Stanley, Whitton, & Markman (2004)

Explaining the Cohabitation Effect

- 2) It's about the experience of cohabitation changing values about marriage.

Axinn & Thornton, 1992
Axinn & Barber, 1997



- 3) It's about cohabitation creating inertia that makes it harder to break up.

Stanley, Rhoades, & Markman, 2006

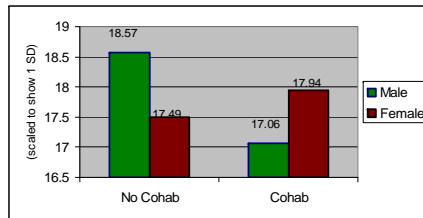
A Core Concept: Inertia

Inertia (physics):
resistance to change in motion or direction

Inertia

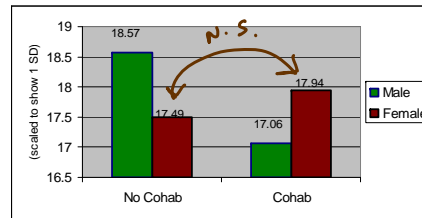
- Our work emphasizes a negative effect of inertia, starting with national survey data from 1996 (published in 2004).
- Similarities with Norval Glenn's Premature Entanglement, but many differences.

Premarital Cohabitation and Dedication to Partner

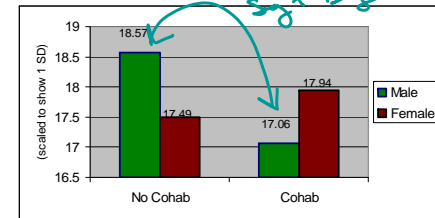


Stanley, Whitton, & Markman, 2004 JFI

Premarital Cohabitation and Dedication to Partner



Premarital Cohabitation and Dedication to Partner



This dedication difference remains significant when controlling for religiosity.
Effect size for male dedication difference = .68

The Inertia Hypothesis

(Stanley, Rhoades, & Markman, 2006)

- Would some of these men not have married their wives if they had not cohabited with them?
- Do the increased constraints of cohabitation (sharing a single address) keep some relationships together that would otherwise end?

- Inertia should be a non-factor for those who have already clarified **mutual**, long-term commitment prior to cohabiting.
- Cohabiting couples who begin to cohabit before engagement (for example) will be at higher risk in marriage.

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Prediction Supported

- We find this prediction to be supported everywhere we have been able to test it.
 - A longitudinal sample (those married in late 90s)
 - A large survey sample (those married in 1990s)
 - A recent, national married sample (those married between 1997 and 2007)
 - In new national sample, before people marry

KEYs of the Proposed Risk Model

- **FACT:** Couples with poorer quality relationships are more likely to cohabit prior to engagement or clarity about commitment to the future.
- **PREDICTION:** Cohabitation inertializes some of these higher risk relationships to continue.

What is Commitment? (as couples experience it over time)

- Stanley & Markman (1992)
 - Personal Dedication
 - Constraint
- In proposed risk model, constraints increase before dedication fully develops (for some couples).

Other Complexities in Understanding Cohabitation Risk

- Lower risk if cohabit only with person you marry?
 - Teachman (2003)
- Impact of serial cohabitation?
 - Lichter, Turner, Sassler (forthcoming)
- Do non-marital births explain the risk?
 - Tach & Halpern-Meekin (2009)

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Sliding vs. Deciding

What Selection May Not Explain

Qualitative Research on Cohabitation

- Couples are **Sliding** across the line 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.

- Hyper **Deciding**

Nock, S. L., Sanchez, L. A., & Wright, J. D. (2008). *Covenant marriage and the movement to reclaim tradition*. Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

From Our New Sample

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."

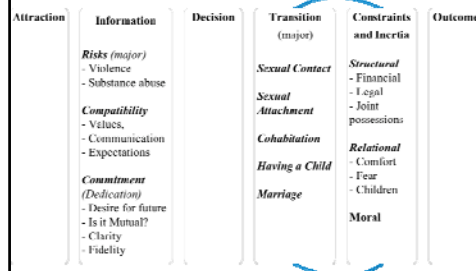


A Universal Transition and Risk Model

Sliding vs. Deciding

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A Lower Risk Sequence (A Theoretical Model)



A Higher Risk Sequence (A Theoretical Model)



Elements of Risk (proposed)

- Sliding** (vs. Deciding)
- Low commitment** to future
- Speed** of events and transitions (Sassler, 2004)

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What's the big deal about **sliding**?

- Losing options before making a choice.
- Healthy commitment is about freely chosen constraints.
- Sliding generates constraints before dedication is fully developed.

Why **Deciding** Matters: Decisions Set up Follow-Through

- Deciding transitions should set up stronger follow-through.
 - I choose you.
 - I chose this path.
 - Cognitive Dissonance and action tendencies (e.g., Harmon-Jones & Harmon-Jones)

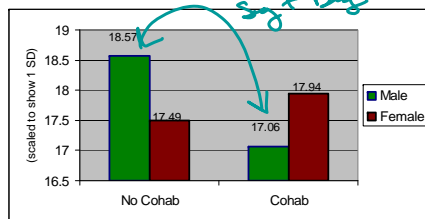
- What is the role of commitment?
- Why does it matter if it's clearly formed or not?

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- Thoughts on sex differences in cohabitation and the development of commitment.

Sex Differences in Transitions

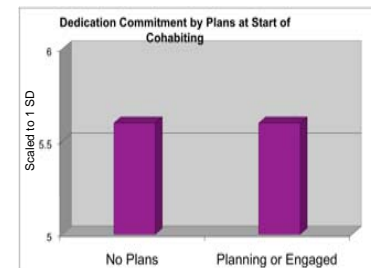
Premarital Cohabitation and Dedication to Partner



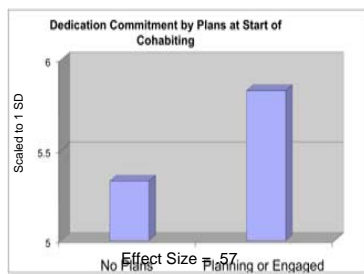
Stanley, Whitton, & Markman, 2004 JFI

- The precursor of that finding is clearly evident in the new longitudinal, national study.

Males: Current Commitment Based on Planning Status at the Time of Beginning to Cohabit



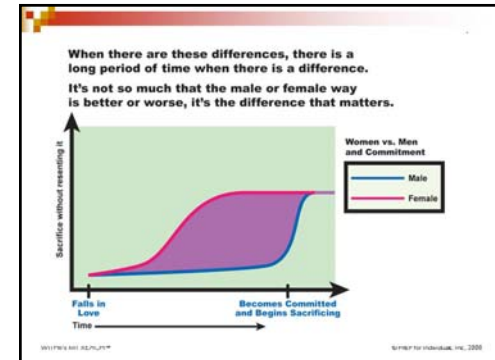
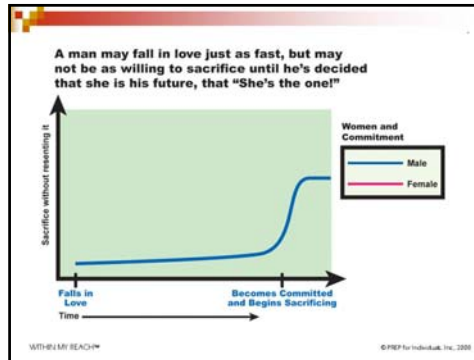
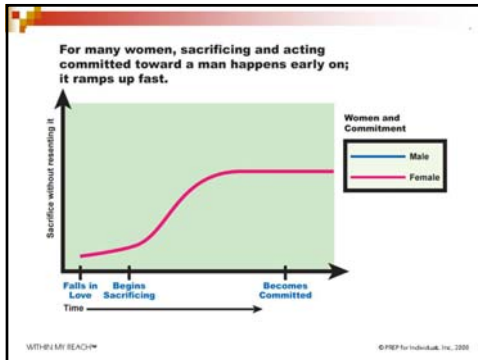
Males: Current Commitment Based on Planning Status at the Time of Beginning to Cohabit



The Simplest Findings Web Study, partner data (Rhoades)

- Men are more likely than their female partners to report:
 - that they moved in "because I think he/she would have left me if I hadn't." ES = .79
 - "I feel trapped in this relationship but I stay because I have too much to lose if I leave." ES = .45
 - That they moved in to test the relationship/had doubts ES = .27

Hypothetical Differences in The Development of Commitment



For more information . . .

- Scott's blog: www.slidingvsdeciding.com
- PREP inc. website: www.PREPinc.com
- Access to a chapter that covers much of the ground I covered in this talk:
<http://www.relationshipeducation.info/>
 See chapter listed on right side of page, by Stanley and Rhoades (especially the part that begins with "transition and risk").

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