Development in Young Adulthood (HDFS 3318),
Alan Reifman, Texas Tech University

Romantic Relationships

Topics to Address

*Traditional Dating:* Is it obsolete in the era of hook-ups and social media?

*Cohabitation:* Helpful or harmful?

*Marriage:* Definitely delayed!

*Break-Ups and Repartnering:* An American Tradition
Basic Information

- Percentages of never-married 18-23 year-olds in different relationship statuses (p. 16).

- Young adults’ attitudes toward marriage
  - “Young Adult Attitudes About Relationships and Marriage...” (2009); 83% of unmarried young adults said it was “very important” or “important” to get married “someday”
  - “Belief in Marriage and Family Life Remains Strong” (2002); 85% and higher of young adults have long said it was “quite or extremely” important to “have a good marriage and family life”
  - However, half of 20-29 year-olds in another poll (2008) answered that they “don’t believe that they need to be married to validate the commitment of a long-term relationship.”
  - When it comes to marriage, are you an Enthusiast, Hesitater, or Delayer?
Dating and Hook-Up Culture


- Discusses different types of casual sexual behaviors and their prevalence (under heading “Generalizability”)


Reviewed by Dr. Reifman [here](#)
Evolution of Experts’ Thinking on Cohabitation

1. (Before any scientific research on the topic had been done.) Cohabitation should be beneficial for later marriage, as partners can learn about each other and gauge their compatibility.

2. Early studies tended to show greater divorce in married couples who had cohabited beforehand than in those who did not cohabit. Cohabitation was seen as harmful (perhaps because it led couples to “slide” into marriage, rather than actively and intentionally “decide” to wed).

3. Later research suggested that, if couples began cohabiting after committing themselves to marriage and thus saw cohabitation as a lead-in to marriage, cohabitation was not harmful.

4. Most of the early research had what some now consider a major flaw (“comparing couples by their age at marriage rather than by their age when they moved in together”), leading one scholar to conclude that, “cohabitation doesn’t cause divorce and probably never did.”

We’re not quite at the point of going back to the original thinking (item 1 above). Saying that cohabitation doesn’t increase the divorce rate (compared to non-cohabitors) is not the same thing as saying cohabitation lowers the divorce rate.
Further Cohabitation-Related Information

“Stayovers” – A possible stage on the road to cohabitation


Long-term cohabitation in Europe

Hiekel, N. (2014). The different meanings of cohabitation across Europe: How cohabiters view their unions and differ in their plans and behaviors. Amsterdam University Press. (LINK)

See Figure 1.3. Even though most couples in the various countries were married [light blue] five years after starting to cohabit, sizable proportions in the youngest birth cohorts were continuing to cohabit [dark blue.]

See also Table 2.2 and Figures 2.1-2.4 on meanings of cohabitation and what correlates with them.
Factors Associated with Propensity to Cohabit or Get Married (from two late 2000's articles)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictive Factor</th>
<th>Chances of Cohabiting</th>
<th>Chances of Marriage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Enrollment/Greater Educ.</td>
<td>Decrease (ED, TAX)</td>
<td>Decrease (ED, TAX)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Attitudes Toward Careers</td>
<td>Increase (TAX)</td>
<td>Decrease (TAX)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>Increase-Men (TAX)</td>
<td>Increase-Men (TAX)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church Attendance</td>
<td>Decrease (ED)</td>
<td>Increase (ED)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grew Up with Single Mother</td>
<td>Increase (ED)</td>
<td>Decrease (ED)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Marriage Statistics** from U.S. Census Bureau (see Figure MS-2);

- As of 2017, men’s median age at first marriage approaching 30 and women’s 28


- "Can't afford it," need to be "financially set," importance of education and career.
- Need time to become one's "own person," go through changes in personality and outlook.
- Early 20s "too soon" for children.
- Want to travel, explore the world.
- "Parental resistance" to early marriage, want children to finish education, become financially independent
- Search for partner who is the "right fit," with whom person has "sexual chemistry."
- Losing confidence in the "institution" of marriage (e.g., due to high divorce rate).


Also see blog posting and related article on "dating for a decade."
Based on Cahn, N. & Carbone, J. (2010). *Red Families v. Blue Families*, New York: Oxford University Press. Women's median is the age that half the women in a state are below at the time of their first marriage, and half the women are above (like an average); the same principle holds for men's median age.

**Why people in Oklahoma marry “sooner”**

**International comparisons** (thanks to Paulina Velez).

- Fitting within the EA theme of exploration, this study examines stability and change in young women’s (18-25 years from college and community samples) sexual identities, attractions, and behavior.

- “Developing a meaningful sense of one’s sexual orientation and identity is an important undertaking during emerging adulthood” (p. 52).
- “…sexual orientation and identity development during emerging adulthood, especially for those whose sexuality might diverge from normative models, may be both rife with opportunities for exploration and simultaneously constrained” (p. 53).
- “Non-exclusivity” (e.g., gay- or lesbian-identified individuals indicating other-sex attraction, or vice-versa; p. 57) not uncommon.
- At least five pathways of EA sexual development: “…there is a cohort of sexual minority youth who transition into emerging adulthood having already developed a highly integrated sexual-minority identity. There [are also] emerging adults who are just starting to explore same-sex interests and may continue to do so into young adulthood. There [are also] emerging adults who subscribe to two or more different sexual orientation labels and another cohort who will maintain the same sexual orientation label throughout emerging adulthood and beyond. Some emerging adults will resist labeling their sexual orientation altogether” (p. 61).

...A key theme is that Americans not only have high rates of marriage and divorce, but also of relatively quick re-partnering (see p. 19 on having 3 or more marital or cohabitation partners). You can find this book in Google Books and then search with the term "thirty-five."
Research Centers, Organizations, and Other Resources

- **National Marriage Project** (University of Virginia, formerly at Rutgers University)
- National Center for Family and Marriage Research (**NCFMR**, Bowling Green State University)
  - NCFMR Compendium of “Family Profile” Reports
- **Williams Institute** (UCLA Law School): “[D]edicated to conducting rigorous, independent research on sexual orientation and gender identity law and public policy”
- National Council on Family Relations (**NCFR**)
- International Association for Relationship Research (**IARR**)
- Dr. Reifman's [Emerging Adulthood blog](#) contains several postings on Marriage-Relationships