

Reassessing Differences in Work and Income in Cohabitation and Marriage

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Abstract:

Are cohabiters different than married couples who cohabited before marriage? This study used the 2002 wave of the National Survey of Families and Households to determine how work behavior might differ for 4 relationship types: (a) cohabiters with uncertain marriage plans, (b) cohabiters with definite marriage plans, (c) premarital cohabiters who recently married, and (d) premarital cohabiters married 5 or more years ($n = 638$). The results are compared with differences found in overall comparisons of all cohabiters and married couples ($N = 916$) and were markedly different, indicating that overall comparisons do not adequately capture the range of behavior across cohabitation and marriage. Evidence of increased specialization was found in marriage, yet steep behavioral differences were not found between cohabiters with definite marriage plans and recently married couples but instead were associated with longevity in marriage. This implies that any possible causal effect of marriage on behavior may accrue with time spent married.

Keywords: cohabitation | family roles | marital status | National Survey of Families and Households | paid work | spousal roles

Article:

The majority of marriages in the United States now begin with premarital cohabitation, but remarkably little is known about how entrance or selection into marriage might be associated with changes in behavior among premarital cohabiters. Prior research has suggested that entrance into marriage may carry significant and beneficial differences in the behavior and outcomes of couples (Nock, 1995; Rindfuss & VandenHeuvel, 1990; Waite, 1995; Waite & Gallagher, 2000). This research has generally compared all married couples with all cohabiters to determine overall differences between these two groups and then theorized why these differences may be due to entrance or selection into marriage.

Such research could speak only to overall differences between cohabitation and marriage relationships and did not yield much insight into how behavior might differ because of entrance

or selection into marriage. These comparisons included cohabiters who did not intend to marry their partner, a group significantly different than cohabiters with marital intentions (Brown, 2000; Brown & Booth, 1996). This research then compared cohabiters to all married couples, including both premarital cohabiters and those who did not cohabit before marriage, groups increasingly distinct from each other (Kuperberg, 2010). Differences previously found between cohabiters and married couples may be due to a priori differences between these two types of married couples, or between cohabiters with and without marital intentions. Furthermore, this research compared cohabitation, a relatively short-term relationship, to both recent and longer term marriages, which could result in differences that are due to the longevity of married relationships as compared to cohabitation, rather than entrance or selection into marriage.

To answer the question of whether entrance into marriage among premarital cohabiters may be associated with significant behavioral differences, a more selective examination of cohabitation and marriage must be undertaken in which cohabiting couples who are most likely to marry are compared with recently married couples who cohabited before marriage. Although some attrition occurs between these two states, these two groups are the closest approximation to studying the same group at two different points in their relationship when using cross-sectional data. In this study, I examined differences in behavior among cohabiters with both strong and uncertain marital intentions and compared them with married couples who cohabited before marriage in both recent and longer term marriages. My intent was to assess the extent to which prior cross-sectional comparisons of cohabitation and marriage may misrepresent possible behavioral changes associated with marriage among premarital cohabiters. Specifically examined behaviors and outcomes were related to work behavior and included income, employment, hours worked, and housework hours, areas in which prior research has suggested behavior may significantly change following entrance into marriage (Shelton & John, 1993; South & Spitze, 1994; Waite, 1995; Waite & Gallagher, 2000).

Behavior in Cohabitation and Marriage

Why might behavior change between cohabitation and marriage among premarital cohabiters? Explanations include the added trust among married couples due to external barriers to separation, the symbolic importance of marriage, the noninstitutionalized status of cohabitation, and selection into marriage. Marriage also carries over 1,000 legal federal rights and benefits and various state rights that may affect the behavior of couples after they marry.

Enforceable Trust

The additional barriers to separation in marriage may affect behavior due to what Cherlin (2000, 2004) called *enforceable trust*, Lundberg and Pollak (2007) called *enforceable agreements*, and Waite and Gallagher (2000) called *the promise of permanence*. Enforceable trust is the added trust married couples have that their relationship will endure because of barriers external to the relationship that restrict a couple's willingness or ability to separate after marriage, such as

laws, norms, and institutions (Lundberg & Pollak), as well as the public nature of a couple's commitment to each other (Cherlin, 2000). These factors increase the chance that a marriage will endure when compared with cohabitation, in which these external barriers to separation either do not exist (in the case of legal barriers and a public commitment) or are not as strong (in the case of normative barriers). Enforceable trust can affect behavior following marriage because it increases the ability of married couples to make decisions in which they assume they will have a long-term commitment with their spouse (Cherlin, 2000; Waite & Gallagher, 2000, pp. 25, 30, 42).

Cohabitors do not have this level of enforceable trust, in part because they have not made a public and legal commitment to each other and in part because the future of their relationship is uncertain. This uncertainty limits the changes that individuals are willing to make to their behavior if those changes can result in negative consequences in the event of relationship dissolution (Waite, 1995; Waite & Gallagher, 2000, p. 45). The logical extension of this argument is that cohabiters who are more certain about the permanence of their relationship will behave more similarly to married couples than cohabiters who are less certain about their future. In this study I distinguished between cohabiters who indicated that they would definitely marry their partner and those who were uncertain about marriage to examine the extent to which uncertainty about the future, rather than relationship status itself, affects the behavior of cohabiters.

Enforceable trust can allow individuals to specialize in certain skills while neglecting others, leading to overall greater gains for the couple. Married individuals can trust their partner to offer them the benefits of the skills in which they do not specialize, and they have the added protection of the legal status of their relationship to restrict the long-term consequences of this specialization (Waite & Gallagher, 2000, pp. 26–27). For instance, one member of a married couple may reduce or drop his or her labor force participation and specialize in household-based labor, with the expectation that the partner who is specializing in market-based work will support him or her financially in the long term (Becker, 1991). In practice, specialization falls along gender lines: Women tend to spend more time on household-based unpaid work than men, even among couples in which both partners are employed (Hochschild, 1989; Sayer, 2005). Without the added burden of hours spent on household work, men can focus their energies on market-based work, raise their market productivity, and therefore increase their overall wages (Becker, p. 39). Gray (1997) found that an increase in men's wages following marriage was reduced for men whose wives spent more hours on market-based work compared with men whose wives spent less time on market-based work, suggesting that specialization is an important mechanism through which marriage may increase men's wages.

Because of the increase in divorce rates in the United States over the past 40 years, the overall level of enforceable trust in marriages that allows partners to specialize has eroded. Shifts in U.S. divorce laws during the 1970s that established no-fault divorce have reduced the amount of enforceable trust in marriages by reducing the legal barriers to ending a relationship (Lundberg

& Pollak, 2007) and have resulted in the skyrocketing of divorce rates in the United States (Nakonezny, Shull, & Rodgers, 1995). The shift in divorce rates has been accompanied by an increasing acceptance of divorce, a factor that has further eroded enforceable trust in marriage, which previously was influenced by high levels of disapproval toward divorce (Cherlin, 2004; Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2001). As a result, marriage no longer implies the long-term contract that it did before no-fault divorce was legalized. Women facing a high risk of divorce may be less willing to specialize in housework when specialization means they must forgo investments in employment skills that are transferable to other relationships in favor of investing in relationship-specific housework and child-rearing skills that are nontransferable (England & Farkas, 1986). Becker (1991, p. 77) noted that women who think they are likely to divorce will invest more in their own employment skills and credentials. This logically should result in a convergence of behavior in cohabitation and marriage in recent decades as divorce has become more accepted. Therefore, differences in behavior between cohabiting and married individuals may be reduced compared with earlier research.

Couples may also delay specialization until they are more certain about the perseverance of their marriage. Recent qualitative research found that more than two thirds of cohabiters interviewed expressed apprehension about divorce (Miller, Sassler, & Kusi-Appouh, 2011), and this apprehension may persist when cohabiters marry. Because of the high divorce rate, certainty in the tenacity of a relationship might not come immediately after entering marriage, but it may accrue with time spent in marriage. To account for the degree to which certainty in marital perseverance may accrue over time rather than change immediately after moving from cohabitation to marriage, in this study I compared individuals in cohabiting relationships to those in both recent (<5 years) and longer term (5+-year) marriages. Five years was chosen as a logical cutoff point for comparisons of recent and longer term marriages because 5-year anniversaries are seen by many as more significant than other anniversaries in contemporary society; for instance, the famous etiquette writer Emily Post described traditional wedding anniversary gifts for the 1-year anniversary and thereafter only for anniversaries at 5-year intervals (Post, 1922). Having achieved a 5-year anniversary, married couples may experience some increased amount of trust because they feel they have a reduced risk of divorce because they have reached this significant symbolic milestone. Using a 5-year cutoff point also expedites reasonable comparisons to cohabiting relationships, 90% of which end in marriage or break up within 5 years of formation (Bumpass & Lu, 2000).

Symbolic Value of Marriage

The extent to which marriage has higher levels of enforceable trust than cohabitation that are due to real additional costs to exiting the relationship may be supplemented by the symbolic value of marriage as an enduring relationship, even if in reality many marriages do not reach this ideal. Cherlin (2004) argued that as the practical benefits to marriage have been reduced due to women's rising rates of employment, the symbolic significance of marriage has persisted and may have even increased. He theorized that the recent rise in elaborate weddings and the

increased ritualism in these weddings reflects a shift in the perceived value of marriage; marriage now represents an important milestone in personal achievement and status rather than a practical arrangement with important social and economic benefits.

This shift in symbolic status may result in shifts in behavior after marriage. Individuals who marry may view themselves differently once they have taken on the role of a spouse, and therefore they may change their behavior following marriage to meet what they perceive to be norms and expectations associated with that role. A change in relationship status can also affect the way that partners feel about each other and their perceived role in intervening in their partner's behavior (Waite & Gallagher, 2000, pp. 45, 116). This role change can therefore affect both the way in which individuals approach their own work behavior and the extent to which they intervene in their partner's work behavior, perhaps through encouragement to change jobs or through direct aid with employment efforts. Cohabitors with definite plans to marry their partner, however, likely feel as responsible for their partner's welfare as married couples, given that they expect to stay in a long-term relationship with that partner. This argument again highlights the importance of distinguishing between cohabiters with definite versus uncertain marriage plans.

The symbolic value of marriage may also have an impact on the way in which people outside of the relationship treat couples. Cherlin (2000) argued that marriage conveys the message that the individuals who marry have achieved their full adult social status. This change in status—whether caused by marriage or associated with marriage due to selection factors—may cause other people to treat married individuals differently than cohabiting individuals (Cherlin, 2000; Nock, 1998; Waite & Gallagher, 2000, pp. 14, 18). Changes in how other people perceive the couple can have direct benefits; for instance, married men receive higher employee performance ratings than single men, perhaps because of discrimination in which married men are perceived as more responsible (Korenman & Neumark, 1991). Married couples also receive more financial help from extended family compared to cohabiters (Waite & Gallagher, 2000, pp. 117–118) and, although this has not been studied empirically, extended family may similarly offer employment aid to married couples that they would not offer to cohabiting couples.

The Institutionalization of Marriage Versus Cohabitation

The above theories regarding why behavior may shift following marriage have much to do with the institutionalization of marriage. Marriage is a type of relationship with clear norms and legal status, whereas cohabitation does not have clear norms regarding behavior, is not legally recognized, and is therefore not “institutionalized” (Nock, 1995). Institutionalization of a relationship type can affect behavior within the relationship because of the clear norms regarding behavior as well as conformity of people in that type of relationship to those norms, specifically, traditional norms regarding the gendered division of labor. Marriage as an institution, however, has undergone deinstitutionalization in recent decades because of the breakdown of traditional gendered norms regarding the division of labor in the household following women's entry en masse into the workforce in the 1970s (Cherlin, 2004). Because of the shift in the roles

associated with marriage, the norms associated with marriage have weakened, and in recent decades marriage has therefore become more like cohabitation. Cherlin (2004) also argued that cohabitation has become more institutionalized during this time as some states, municipalities, and employers have begun to grant cohabiting couples some of the rights previously granted only to married couples. Therefore, differences in the behavior between cohabiters and married individuals due to the institutionalized status of marriage may not be as evident as in research conducted in previous decades.

Selection Into Marriage

Selection into marriage may affect differences in behavior found between cohabiting and married individuals. First, if only certain cohabiters are considered “marriageable” by their partners, then married couples will have a greater prevalence of those characteristics that increase the “marriageability” of cohabiters. For instance, Gray (1997) found that even as specialization in the household has declined, men who are married still have consistently higher wages than unmarried men, in part because men who earn more are considered more “marriageable” and are therefore more likely to get married. Smock, Manning, and Porter (2005) found that, among working- and lower middle-class cohabiters, obtaining certain financial goals before marriage is an important signal of respectability and change in status, signaling the preparedness of these couples for marriage.

Second, selection into cohabitation has changed in the past several decades as rates of cohabitation have skyrocketed (Kuperberg, 2010). Earlier cohabiters were an unusual group who defied conventional norms to live with their partner without a marriage contract; as more couples cohabit, and as cohabitation has become a modal precursor to marriage, those who cohabit before marriage are not as unusual (Kuperberg, 2010). This changing selection into cohabitation means that previously found differences between cohabiters and married individuals may no longer be present, or as large.

Cohabitation seems to be chosen as a first union more often among women who value equal economic partnerships or who defy gender stereotypes in other ways, such as being a female partner who is older than the male partner (Baxter, 2005; Casper & Bianchi, 2007, p. 181). Cohabiting women with more egalitarian ideas of gender roles may be using cohabitation as a “probationary marriage,” and Cherlin (2000) argued that one of the latent functions of cohabitation is to allow these women to assess the extent to which their potential husbands will contribute to unpaid work inside the home. Men with egalitarian gender ideologies are also more likely than men with more traditional ideologies to enter a cohabiting relationship (Kaufman, 2000). The issue of selectivity into cohabitation prior to marriage among less gender-traditional couples also underscores the importance of distinguishing between married couples who cohabited before marriage and those who did not in comparisons of cohabiting and married individuals: If both groups of married individuals are included in comparisons to cohabiters,

differences found may be due to selection into cohabitation prior to marriage rather than shifts in behavior that may occur because of a change in relationship status itself.

If cohabiting couples with more traditional gender roles are more likely to select into marriage or long-term marriage, this can also explain why married couples or long-term-married couples would be found to have a more traditional gender work role specialization. Sanchez, Manning, and Smock (1998) found that women's time spent on housework and men's earnings were both positively related to marriage, suggesting that it is conformity to traditional gender roles that makes cohabiters more likely to enter marriage. In a panel study of Australian couples, Baxter, Hewitt, and Haynes (2008) found that neither male nor female cohabiters who married significantly increased their housework hours following marriage but that married women spent more time on housework than cohabiting women. If the transition into marriage itself is not causing this change, as Baxter et al. found, then this discrepancy is likely due to selection into marriage.

Transitions to marriage and into long-term marriage may be more likely to occur among gender-traditional couples for two reasons. First, it may be that couples who have a more traditional gendered division of labor are also more traditional in their views of the importance of marriage and so are more likely to marry their partner and less likely to divorce due to their traditional views. Second, it may be that couples who are less traditional in terms of gender roles during cohabitation are not happy with this arrangement and refuse to marry before gender roles are more traditional; for instance, Sessler (2004) found some evidence among current cohabiters of a belief that men (but not women) must be financially secure prior to marriage.

This study focused on comparing cohabiters with some marital intentions to married couples who previously cohabited in order to isolate differences that occur because of changes in or selection into relationship status rather than differences due to the heterogeneity of comparison groups. Selection into marriage can affect the differences between cohabiters and married couples, and selection into longer term marriages based on couples who divorce in early marriage may influence the behavioral patterns of those married for longer periods of time; this can be definitively determined only by using panel data. In a cross-sectional comparison, however, these comparison groups minimize the extent to which selection can affect differences found between cohabiters and married couples.

In sum, several causal and selection mechanisms have been proposed by theorists to explain the differences in behavior between cohabiting and married individuals. In this study, I examined the extent to which differences between cohabiting and married couples are influenced by the conflation of married couples who both did and did not cohabit before marriage and cohabiters who were likely and unlikely to marry or whether entrance into marriage is indeed associated with shifts in behavior among premarital cohabiters. To reproduce previous findings, comparisons of all cohabiters to all married couples are presented to distinguish between

findings that may be due to the shifting meaning of marriage and cohabitation over time and findings that are due to the proposed change in comparison groups.

Marital Intentions and Cohabitation

Several studies have attempted to compare cohabiting and married couples; however, these have examined cohabiters as one group, without regard to marital intentions. Rindfuss and VandenHeuvel (1990) examined the differences among cohabiters, married people, and single people in a variety of different attitudes and behaviors and found that cohabiters tend to fall between married people and single people but tend to be closer to single people than to married people. Waite (1995) and Nock (1995) have presented similar findings. These results seem to indicate that cohabitation is a stepping stone or a precursor to marriage but is also significantly different from marriage. By then discussing theoretical reasons why entrance into marriage would change behavior, these prior studies seem to implicitly assume that differences in behavior between cohabiters and married couples are due to entrance into marriage. Cohabiters, however, have differing levels of commitment to their partners; some do not intend to marry their partner and likely never will.

One way of empirically measuring their level of commitment to their partners is by asking cohabiters whether they think they will marry their partner (and therefore determine whether they have *marital intentions*). Cohabiters have been characterized as comprising two groups: (a) those with marital intentions and (b) those without (Rindfuss & VandenHeuvel, 1990). Bumpass, Sweet, and Cherlin (1991) found that the vast majority of cohabiters fall into the first category; 50% of never-married cohabiters in their study said they had definite plans to marry their partner, and an additional 31% thought they would marry the person with whom they were cohabiting but had no definite plans as of yet. Bumpass et al. found that partners within a couple tended to have high levels of agreement as to whether or not they would marry each other; four-fifths of cohabiting couples were in agreement regarding future marital intentions. Marital intentions have significant effects on later probability of marriage, and couples in which neither partner expects to marry are only 17% as likely to marry within 5 years as couples in which both partners expect to marry (Brown, 2000). Intentions to marry can change over the course of a cohabiting relationship, although this should not have an impact on the measure of marital intentions used in this study, because it is *current* marital intentions that should affect the *current* behaviors of cohabiting individuals and not any change that may occur in marital intentions in the future.

Including cohabiters both with and without marital intentions in comparisons to married couples may result in findings skewed by cohabiters who do not intend to marry their partner. In the only study I found that compared cohabiters with and without marital intentions to couples who were already married, Brown and Booth (1996) found that couples who intended to marry were no different from already-married couples on several measures of relationship quality. On the other hand, couples who did not intend to marry had significantly lower relationship quality by these

measures, and Brown and Booth noted that this small group significantly skewed comparisons of all cohabiters to all married couples.

Brown and Booth (1996) distinguished between only two groups of cohabiters: (a) those who intended to marry and (b) those who did not. The degree of certainty of marriage plans may matter as well: Sassler and McNally (2003) found that cohabiters with definite marriage plans had a higher likelihood of later marriage than cohabiters with eventual (and therefore less certain) marriage plans. Therefore, cohabiters with definite marriage plans are the closest possible approximation to examining cohabiters who will eventually marry, in the absence of panel data. Cohabiters with uncertain or eventual marriage plans may differ considerably from married couples who previously cohabited, both because this group is less likely to eventually get married and because the uncertainty in marriage plans itself may be a result of, or affect, differences in behavior. In this study, I distinguished between cohabiters with strong marital intentions and those with weak marital intentions in order to examine the extent to which uncertainty about the future, as described by Waite (1995), is in fact the cause of differences between cohabiters and married couples. Individuals who indicate that they will probably or definitely *not* marry their partner were excluded from these select comparisons, because such couples are unlikely to marry and therefore should not be included in comparisons of cohabiters and married couples that aim to examine the possible effects of entrance into marriage on behavior. Overall comparisons of all cohabiters with all married couples will, however, include this group of cohabiters with no marital intentions to reproduce previous research.

Prior Research on Income, Work, and Marriage

In what ways may certainty about marriage and entrance into marriage among premarital cohabiters affect the outcome variables examined in this study, namely, income, employment, labor force participation, hours worked, and housework hours? Previous research on the relationship of income to marriage has been somewhat mixed. Brown (2000) and Smock and Manning (1997) have found that men's income was positively associated with marriage but that women's income had no relationship to the probability of cohabiters marrying. Sassler and McNally (2003) found the opposite—that men's income had a significant negative association with later marriage probability among cohabiters. Like Smock and Manning and Brown, Sassler and McNally also found that women's income had no relationship to marriage prospects. In a qualitative study of 115 working- and lower class cohabiters, Smock et al. (2005) found that over 70% of the cohabiters they surveyed mentioned economic circumstances and financial stability as an important prerequisite to moving on to marriage. Cohabiters who indicate they will definitely marry their partner may have higher income levels than those who indicate they are uncertain about their future marriage plans, because of selection into “strong” marital intentions.

One common explanation for why married men earn more income is the increased productivity among married men due to enforceable trust and gender-based specialization in market work. Alternative explanations include the shift in symbolic status of men following marriage and

selection into marriage or long-term marriage among men who earn more. Hours worked may provide some indicator of the extent to which productivity may increase following marriage. Brown (2000) found that working full time versus working part time was not associated with the probability of cohabiters moving into marriage; however, this finding does not preclude the possibility that behavior may change after marriage because of causal mechanisms resulting from increased enforceable trust and specialization or a shift in symbolic status. In this study, I examined reported usual hours worked to determine whether this is the case.

Enforceable trust and specialization may also increase the degree to which married women spend time on housework compared to cohabiting women. Specialization might also be a result of selection into marriage and long-term marriages among more gender-traditional couples. Prior research has found that married women spend significantly more hours on housework compared with cohabiting women, but married and cohabiting men do not significantly differ in their time spent on housework (Shelton & John, 1993; South & Spitze, 1994). In a study of Australian couples, Baxter (2005) found that cohabiting women spend less time on housework than married women. In this study, however, Baxter compared cohabiting couples with all married couples, including those who did not cohabit before marriage—a group she noted is significantly different in their gendered division of labor from those who do cohabit before marriage.

Enforceable trust and specialization in market-based and unpaid home-based work is a proposed causal mechanism whereby marriage may affect employment. The extent to which there is selection into marriage on the basis of employment is less evident; Brown (2000) found that neither men's nor women's employment was associated with the probability of cohabiters marrying. Smock and Manning (1997) found that men's full-time employment was associated with a lower probability of separation among cohabiters but had no significant relationship to their probability of marriage. They found no relationship of women's employment to either marriage or separation. In this study, I examined both employment rates and labor force participation rates to determine the extent to which marriage may be associated with differences in successfully obtaining employment among individuals actively looking for a job, and the extent to which individuals participate in the labor force, including both those currently employed and

Method

Data

To examine whether marriage among premarital cohabiters is associated with differences in income and work behavior compared to cohabiters, I analyzed the focal children subset of the 2002 wave of the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH) data set. The NSFH is a national sample of U.S. individuals that oversamples for select groups, including cohabiting couples, recently married couples, African Americans, Puerto Ricans, Mexican Americans,

single-parent families, and families with stepchildren (Sweet & Bumpass, 2002). The first wave of the data set is nationally representative, once oversampling is taken into account, and was collected in 1987 through 1988. During the first and second waves of data collection (collected from 1992 to 1994), one focal child was randomly selected from each household and was then interviewed in follow-up surveys that were collected in 2001 through 2002, during which the focal children who are the subject of this study were ages 18 through 34 and their partners ranged in age from 16 to 65.

This data set has several limitations. The sample did not include children of recent immigrants to the United States, so it is no longer nationally representative. Furthermore, weights were not generated to account for oversampling of the groups discussed above, and therefore it oversampled the children of those groups. Means presented in these analyses are therefore not nationally representative, and readers should focus on the differences between groups rather than the means within groups. This sample was also limited to those age 18 through 34 and their partners, 95% of whom were 38 or younger, and therefore may underestimate differences due to marriage that do not emerge until a later age.

Finally, this data set is cross-sectional rather than a panel data set, which precluded a fixed-effects analysis, and therefore differences found in behavior at different life stages can be due to selection into relationship stage because of factors not controlled for in models, a causal effect of relationship stage on behavior, or both. The purpose of this article is to specifically reassess previous cross-sectional comparisons of cohabitation and marriage, and cross-sectional data remain more readily available than panel data sets for researchers, so using a cross-sectional data set is appropriate. Furthermore, available panel data sets with a significant population of cohabiters generally do not have the information necessary to do these analysis, or they have surveyed a limited population; for instance, the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth does not ask respondents about their marital intentions; the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study surveys parents only, a group not representative of cohabiters at large; and ADDHealth has thus far gathered information only about partner data in one wave of data collection, during which respondents were age 18 through 26, an age range that is more restrictive than this data set and is below the national median age at marriage for both men and women.

This data set has the advantage of having a large sample size of cohabiters and their partners, information that is relatively recent, and detailed information on relationship history and behavior of respondents and their partners that is not available in other surveys focusing on cohabitation and marriage. Furthermore, by examining these focal children and their partners, this study examined a group that is in its prime relationship-formation years, for whom information has been recently collected. Given that this study focused on conditional probabilities and given that this data set was nationally representative in earlier waves, this data set is the best available recent source of information about behavior during cohabitation and marriage.

Predictor and Outcome Variables

Using these data, I examined differences in work behavior among cohabiters with weak and strong marital intentions and compared them with those of married individuals who cohabited before marriage who were married fewer than 5 years and premarital cohabiters married 5 or more years at the time of survey. Cohabiters were self-identified and were examined in two groups, as measured by responses to the following question: “Do you think that you and your partner will eventually marry? Would you say you definitely won't, probably won't, there is about a 50/50 chance, you probably will, or you definitely will?” The first group ($n = 126$) were cohabiters with weak marital intentions, who indicated that there was a 50/50 chance or that they would probably marry their partner. The second group ($n = 123$) comprised cohabiters with strong marital intentions, who indicated they would definitely marry their partner. I compared these groups with individuals who had been married fewer than 5 years and who cohabited before marriage ($n = 261$) and couples who had been married 5 or more years and who cohabited before marriage ($n = 128$). This yielded a sample size of 638 for these regressions, although some regressions were missing data on the outcome variable and therefore have a smaller sample size.

In addition, regressions were calculated that compared all cohabiting couples ($n = 276$) with all married couples ($n = 640$) in order to reproduce earlier research and compare those findings with regressions that included the more selective categorization of married and cohabiting couples discussed above, as an assessment of the accuracy of such comparisons (total $N = 916$). These comparisons included two groups that were not assessed in the more selective analysis described above: (a) cohabiters who did not intend to marry their partner ($n = 27$) and (b) married couples who did not cohabit prior to marriage ($n = 252$). These totals, and those for the more selective groups, also did not include cases that were excluded from the sample because they were missing one or more control variables; a total of 36 individuals were removed from the sample because of missing data on control variables, including 12 who were missing information on either race, education, partner's age, or number of children and 24 who were missing information on the duration of the relationship.

Outcome variables other than housework hours were based on the response of one member of the household and their reports of both their own behavior and their partner's behavior. Outcome variables were calculated separately by the gender of the partner involved and included income, employment rates, labor force participation rates, usual hours worked, ideal hours worked, the gap between usual and ideal hours, and housework hours. Labor force participation rates included both individuals who were looking for work and those currently working in the numerator and the total population in the denominator. Employment rates were calculated using the number of total employed as the numerator and the sum of both those currently employed and those who had actively looked for work in the past 4 weeks as the denominator. The gap between usual hours and ideal hours was calculated by subtracting usual hours from ideal hours;

positive numbers therefore indicate that respondents worked fewer hours than their ideal, and negative numbers indicate respondents worked more hours than their ideal.

Housework hours were based on self-reports only; information was not collected about partner's housework hours, yielding overall smaller sample sizes for these analyses. I conducted *t* tests of difference in demographic characteristics on those who reported housework hours for males and females and those who were missing reports on each gender's housework hours (data not shown but available from the author), and small differences in age and education were found, which were attributable to the gender of the main respondent: Compared to female respondents, male respondents were older, less likely to attend college, and more likely to have less than a high school education. Total housework hours was calculated by adding the total hours that the respondent reported spending on specific housework tasks, which included “preparing meals”; “washing dishes and cleaning up after meals”; “cleaning house”; “outdoor and other household maintenance tasks such as lawn or yard work, household repair or painting”; “shopping for groceries and other household goods”; “washing, ironing, and mending clothing”; “paying bills and keeping financial records”; “automobile maintenance and repair”; and “driving other household members to work, school or other activities.” Information on total time spent on child care was not collected in these data and therefore was not included in the housework hours measure.

Analytic Strategy

Several ordinary least squares and logistic regressions were estimated to predict outcome variables. First, to reproduce previous studies, these regressions were calculated accounting only for whether the respondent was cohabiting or married at the time of the study. Next, regressions were calculated to examine whether cohabiters with varying degrees of marital intentions persistently differed from married couples with prior cohabitation and whether behavior differed by marital longevity. The reference category for these regressions was cohabiters who would definitely marry their partners, and the results of *t* tests of difference between the two married groups also were estimated. Regressions were then rerun using control variables to distinguish between differences due to demographic selection into groups and differences that may be attributable to a change in relationship status or other selection factors not accounted for in these models.

The results are presented as category-specific means, first calculated with no control variables and then recalculated as regression-adjusted means using the “Margins” command in STATA. Regression-adjusted means calculated the mean for selected groups while adjusting for variables controlled for in regressions. These means represent what the mean would be if controlled-for variables within groups are set to the mean values for the entire population. For example, suppose one wanted to examine the average salary difference between cohabiting and married men. Unadjusted means would estimate overall differences in salary, but these differences could not be said to be attributable to a change in marital status, because married men might be older

on average than cohabiting men, and a difference in average salary might be due to age differences and not relationship status. The regression-adjusted mean for overall comparisons between cohabiters and married couples then answers the following questions: If one sets the distribution of age (and all other covariates) to the overall age distribution for the full sample used in the regression and everyone was married, what would be men's average salary? If a population had that same distribution of covariate values but everyone was cohabiting, what would be men's average salary?

The use of regression-adjusted means controlled for selection into the comparison groups of interest by the demographic covariates used in these models, which included respondents' and partners' age and respondent's race; level of education; whether they had cohabited with prior partners; whether they had previously been married to another partner; number of children; and total duration of relationship, including time spent both cohabiting and married for couples currently married. Controlling for the total duration of the relationship at the time of the survey, as well as respondents' and their partners' age at survey, accounts for the fact that sample members who have been married 5 or more years have, on average, formed their relationship and married at a younger age than those who have been married fewer than 5 years (results not shown but available from the author), a factor that might be correlated with other differences in behavior and attitudes. Controls were also added for whether the main respondent who answered the survey was male or female, to account for possible reporting differences by gender. These control variables were similar to those used by Nock (1995).

Controlling for the number of children in these regressions can be problematic, because having children may be a causal mechanism whereby entrance into marriage can affect behavior given that marriage is associated with an increase in the average number of children (see Table 1). Nonetheless, it was important to control for number of children in these analyses to disentangle differences in behavior that may be due to parental status from behavioral differences that may be due to entrance or selection into marriage.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics by Relationship Type

Relationship Type	Model 1		Model 2		
All Cohabiters (Ref.)	All Married	Cohabiter: 50/50 Chance or Probably Will Marry	Cohabiter: Definitely Will Marry (Ref.)	Married: Cohabited Before Marriage, Married <5 Years	Married: Cohabited Before Marriage, Married 5+ Years

Relationship Type	Model 1				Model 2	
	All Cohabitors (Ref.)	All Married	Cohabiter: 50/50 Chance or Probably Will Marry	Cohabiter: Definitely Will Marry (Ref.)	Married: Cohabited Before Marriage, Married <5 Years	Married: Cohabited Before Marriage, Married 5+ Years
Female primary respondent	62.32	57.66	63.49	62.60	56.32	53.91
Age	25.53	28.50***	25.49	25.36	27.64***	30.52***, #
Partner's age	25.15	29.80***	24.71	25.37	29.11***	32.08***, #
Race/ethnicity						
White non-Hispanic	86.59	88.91	84.13	89.43	86.21	92.97###
Black non-Hispanic	7.97	5.47	7.94	7.32	6.51	4.69
Hispanic or other race	5.43	5.62	7.94	3.25	7.28	2.34###
Education						
Less than high school	12.32	6.09**	15.87†	8.13	4.60	10.94##
High school	30.44	30.47	23.01*	34.96	36.02	34.38
Some college	38.04	34.22	42.86	34.14	35.63	31.25
Bachelor's degree plus	19.20	29.22**	18.25	22.76	23.75	23.44
No. of children	0.62	1.29***	0.62	0.48	1.00***	1.91***, #
Previously married	15.58	9.69**	15.08	16.26	14.18	7.81*, ###

Relationship Type	Model 1				Model 2	
	All Cohabitors (Ref.)	All Married	Cohabiter: 50/50 Chance or Probably Will Marry	Cohabiter: Definitely Will Marry (Ref.)	Married: Cohabited Before Marriage, Married <5 Years	Married: Cohabited Before Marriage, Married 5+ Years
Previously cohabited with partner other than current partner/spouse	28.26	11.09 ^{***}	30.16	24.39	20.31	4.69 ^{***, #}
Duration of cohabitation and marriage (months)	25.27	71.73 ^{***}	25.53	23.32	53.73 ^{***}	112.55 ^{***, #}
<i>N</i>	276	640	126	123	261	128

Note: Ref. = reference. Superscript pound signs denote results of a *t* test of differences between the two married groups in Model 2.

$p < .01$.

$p < .05$.

$p < .10$.

† $p < .10$.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

Tables are presented in a standard format. The first two columns, “Model 1,” include the mean value of each variable for all cohabiters and all married couples and a *t* test of difference between the two, referred to in the text as *overall comparisons*. The next four columns, “Model 2,” include the more select groups of cohabiters with uncertain or “weak” marriage plans, cohabiters with definite or “strong” marriage plans (reference), premarital cohabiters who had been married

fewer than 5 years, and premarital cohabiters who had been married 5 or more years and include a *t* test of difference for each group compared with the reference group as well as a *t* test of differences between the two married groups in this model. This model is referred to in the text as *the more selective analysis*.

Results

Descriptive statistics used as control variables are presented in Table 1 by relationship stage and immediately demonstrated that the use of overall comparisons of cohabitation and marriage is problematic. Important demographic differences from overall comparisons persisted in some cases in the more selective analysis; for instance, cohabiters were consistently younger and had fewer children than married couples in both models. Cohabitors may have fewer children because of the lack of enforceable trust in cohabitation or because of norms associating childbearing with marriage, which may affect selection into marriage among individuals who have children or desire them.

Other descriptive results reflected the importance of the more selective categories in determining behavioral differences. For instance, educational differences in overall comparisons that reproduced previous research (Model 1) indicated that cohabiters were significantly more likely to be high school dropouts and significantly less likely to have a college degree compared to married couples. In the more selective analysis, however, there were no significant differences found in likelihood of having a college degree by relationship status. High school dropout rates showed no difference between cohabiters with definite marriage plans and recently married premarital cohabiters and were in fact significantly higher among married couples who had been married for a long period of time compared with those who had married more recently. Similarly, cohabitation experiences with prior partners were found to be significantly more likely among current cohabiters in overall comparisons, but in the more selective analysis those who had been married 5 or more years were the only significantly different group, with lower rates than other groups. Differences in prior cohabitation experiences and high school dropout rates among those married 5 or more years may reflect selection into marriage at a younger age, which was more likely among this group (results not shown but available from the author).

Income

In overall comparisons of all cohabiters to all married couples, both married men and women were found to have significantly higher incomes than cohabiting men and women (see Table 2). Unadjusted means in the more selective analysis (Model 2) indicated that significantly higher income for both men and women was associated with a recent marriage, compared to cohabiters with definite marriage plans. Once demographic selection was taken into account in the regression-adjusted means, however, cohabiters with strong marriage plans were not found to be significantly different from recently married premarital cohabiters for all income measures,

indicating that higher income may be associated with selection into marriage instead of a causal effect of marriage.

Table 2. Means and Regression-Adjusted Means for Income (Employed Only), Employment, and Labor Force Participation Rates by Relationship Type

Relationship Type	Model 1			Model 2				Adj./ Pseud.R ²		
	All Cohabitors (Ref.)	All Married	N	Adj./ Pseud.R ²	Cohabiter: 50/50 Chance or Probably Will Marry	Cohabiter: Definitely Will Marry (Ref.)	Married: Cohabited Before Marriage, Married <5 years	Married: Cohabited Before Marriage, Married 5+ Years	N	
Income										
Men's	31,944	47,608***	732	.03	27,421	32,760	41,772*	54,222***,##	509	.07
Men's (adj.)	38,731	44,896	732	.10	29,186	35,272	41,305	51,330*,##	509	.16
Women's	19,793	26,540***	613	.03	17,564	21,981	26,503*	28,723**	441	.04
Women's (adj.)	22,237	25,409†	613	.18	19,498†	23,848	25,861	25,979	441	.20
Employment rate										
Men's	93.05	96.56*	869	.02	90.49	96.49	93.85	100.00#	603	.08
Men's (adj.)	95.37	95.62	869	.10	92.47	96.94	93.18	100.00#	603	.14
Women's	89.26	95.49**	730	.03	88.68	91.07	93.09	98.91*,###	527	.04
Women's (adj.)	92.06	94.50	730	.08	89.63	91.26	92.94	98.80†,###	527	.09
Labor force participation rate										
Men's	94.87	97.13†	901	.01	97.60	94.21	96.06	98.40	625	.02
Men's (adj.)	96.40	96.48	901	.05	98.13	94.77	95.69	97.98	625	.09
Women's	88.64	77.22***	905	.02	85.48	91.80	83.78*	71.88***, #	633	.03

Relationship Type	Model 1			Model 2				Adj./ Pseud. <i>R</i> ²	
	All Cohabitors (Ref.)	All Married	<i>N</i>	Adj./ Pseud. <i>R</i> ²	Cohabiter: 50/50 Chance or Probably Will Marry	Cohabiter: Definitely Will Marry (Ref.)	Married: Cohabited Before Marriage, Married <5 years	Married: Cohabited Before Marriage, Married 5+ Years	<i>N</i>
Women's (adj.)	85.22	79.13 [†]	905	.09	84.48	91.27	83.81 [†]	74.26 ^{*,###}	633 .10

Note: Regression-adjusted (Adj.) means control for respondent's gender; age; partner's age; respondent's race (reference [ref.]: White); education (ref: some college); presence of children; previously married; previously cohabited with other (not current) partner; and duration of coresidential relationship, including time spent both married and cohabiting. Superscript pound signs denote results of a *t* test of differences between the two married groups in Model 2. Pseud. = Pseudo.

[#] *p* < .01.

^{##} *p* < .05.

^{###} *p* < .10.

[†] *p* < .10.

^{*} *p* < .05.

^{**} *p* < .01.

^{***} *p* < .001.

Men's average income was higher in each progressive stage of cohabitation and marriage in unadjusted comparisons (see Figure 1 for Model 2 results). Overall, cohabiting men earned significantly less than married men, and income was highest among premarital cohabiters married 5 or more years. After accounting for demographic differences, however, the difference between the two key groups—cohabiters with strong marriage plans and premarital cohabiters who recently married—disappeared. Furthermore, in the regression-adjusted means that accounted for some selection, the difference in men's income between those who recently married and those who had been married 5 or more years remained significant. This indicates that marriage is indeed positively associated with men's income insofar as those who selected into marriage or long-term marriages had higher incomes but that the benefits to marriage due to factors such as specialization or a change in symbolic status and not explainable by selection may accrue only with time spent in marriage.

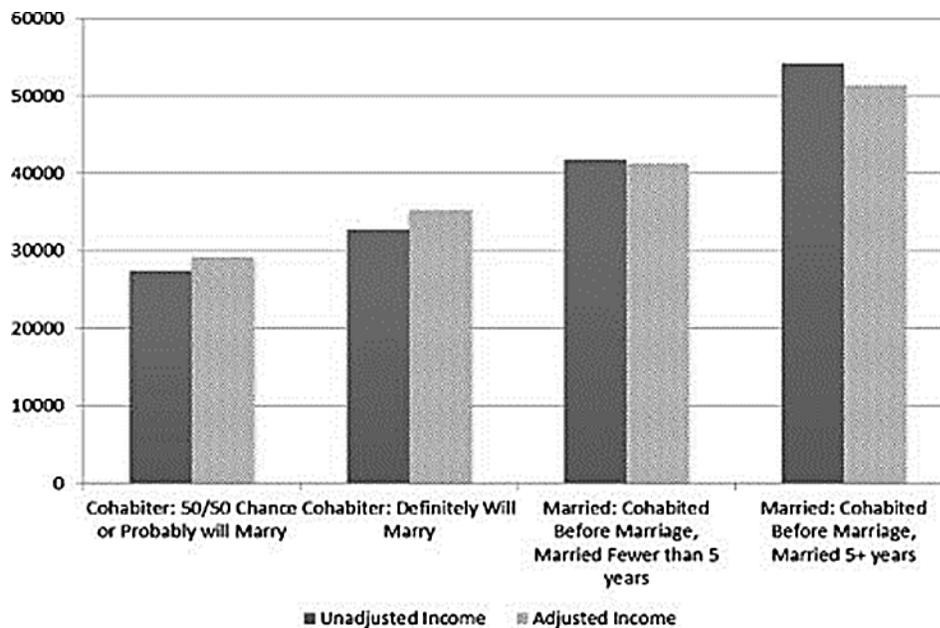


Figure 1. Men's Income by Relationship Type (Employed Only).

For women's income, employed married women earned significantly more than employed cohabiting women in unadjusted comparisons, even in the more selective analysis. Once demographic selection was accounted for in the adjusted means, cohabiters with weak marital intentions earned marginally less income, whereas cohabiters with strong marriage intentions, recently married premarital cohabiters, and premarital cohabiters married 5 or more years were no different from each other in terms of their average income. Although it is impossible to determine the direction of causality, these findings indicate that women's lower income was associated with uncertainty in marriage plans among cohabiters and selection into marriage and long-term marriage rather than a causal effect of marriage.

Employment and Labor Force Participation

An examination of employment and labor force participation rates again pointed to the importance of using a more selective analysis for comparisons of cohabitation and marriage. Cohabiting men had significantly lower employment rates compared to married men in Model 1, although these differences were explained by demographic differences between these groups (see Table 2). A more selective examination in Model 2 found that cohabiting men were no different than recently married premarital cohabiters in their employment rates but that employment rates were significantly higher among men who had been married for 5 or more years compared to those married fewer than 5 years. Women's employment rates had a similar pattern. In Model 1, all cohabiters had significantly lower employment rates than married couples, although these differences were fully explained by demographic differences between these two groups. In Model 2, women married 5 or more years had significantly higher employment rates than those married fewer than 5 years, both before and after adjusting the

means for selection. There were no significant differences between cohabiters and those married fewer than 5 years. This indicates that, as with income and men's employment, any changes in women's employment rates due to marriage or selection into marriage were associated not with entrance into marriage but with longevity in marriage.

Labor force participation rates showed some evidence for increased specialization associated with marriage. Men's labor force participation rates showed no significant change by relationship status in either Model 1 or Model 2, but women's labor force participation rates were significantly lower among married women in both models, even after adjusting for demographic differences that accounted for some selection between these groups (see Figure 2 for Model 2 results). Cohabiters with strong marriage plans were marginally more likely to participate in the labor force than women who recently married, and labor force participation rates were significantly lower among women who had been married 5 or more years.

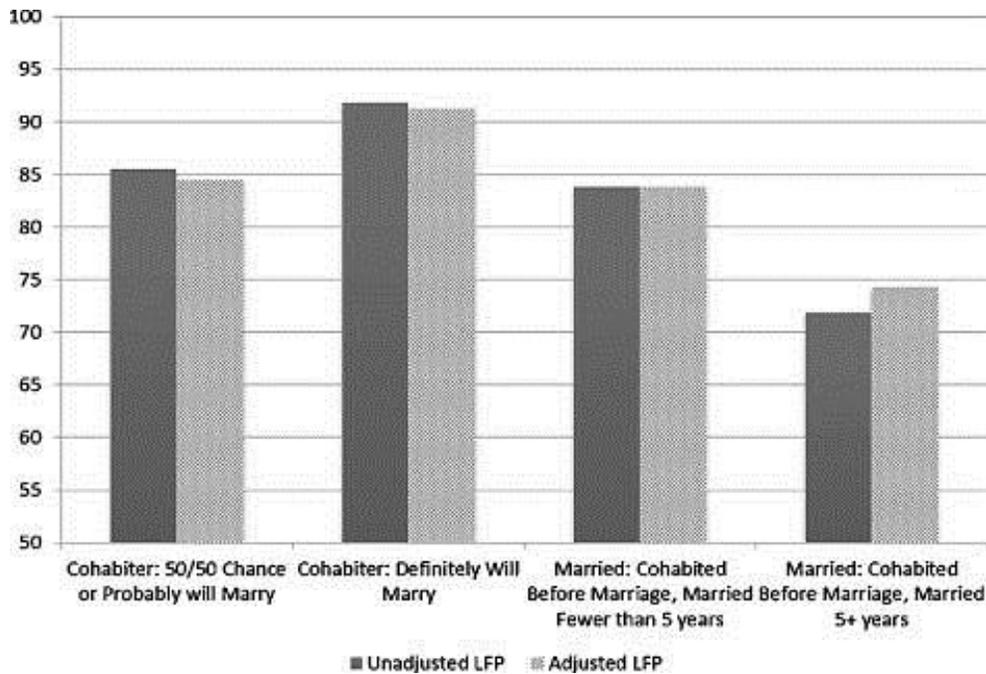


Figure 2. Women's Labor Force Participation (LFP) Rate by Relationship Type.

Hours Worked and Ideal Hours

To examine the extent to which work habits change between cohabitation and marriage, the usual hours that respondents work each week were examined in addition to the ideal number of hours respondents would like to work along with the gap between the two. These numbers were calculated for employed respondents only.

Although the results discussed above demonstrated that men who had been married for 5 or more years earned significantly more than those married recently, similar patterns were not found in hours spent at work. Comparisons of men found that cohabiting men worked significantly fewer

hours than married men in both overall comparisons and adjusted comparisons (see Table 3); however, in the more selective examination in Model 2 most differences disappeared. Before controlling for demographic differences, those married 5 or more years worked significantly longer hours compared to cohabiters with definite marriage plans, but once demographic differences were accounted for, there were no significant differences found between groups, indicating that this was an effect of selection into long-term marriages and not a causal effect of marriage on hours worked. Men's ideal working hours and the gap between ideal and usual working hours had no significant differences between groups in either model.

Table 3. Means and Regression-Adjusted Means for Hours Worked and Ideal Hours and Differences in Ideal and Actual Hours (Employed Only) and Housework Hours, by Relationship Type

Relationship Type	Model 1			Model 2						
	All Cohabitors (Ref.)	All Married	N	Adj./ Pseud.R ²	Cohabiter: 50/50 Chance or Probably Will Marry	Cohabiter: Definitely Will Marry (Ref.)	Married: Cohabited Before Marriage, Married <5 years	Married: Cohabited Before Marriage, Married 5+ Years	N	Adj./ Pseud.R ²
Usual hours worked										
Men's	42.57	45.80***	807	.02	41.83	43.76	45.68	47.37*	554	.03
Men's (adj.)	43.08	45.06*	807	.02	42.42	44.31	45.73	46.28	554	.03
Women's	37.87	37.75	667	.00	36.92	38.73	39.71	36.11 ^{†, #}	479	.01
Women's (adj.)	37.06	38.12	667	.05	36.51	38.54	39.74	36.69 ^{###}	479	.04
Ideal hours										
Men's	35.06	35.97	825	.00	34.81	35.90	35.52	37.75	568	.00
Men's (adj.)	35.43	35.82	825	.01	35.07	36.16	35.69	36.95	568	.01
Women's	29.85	25.20***	678	.02	28.78	30.99	27.33 [‡]	24.51 ^{**}	487	.02
Women's (adj.)	28.63	25.77 [‡]	678	.05	27.99	30.32	27.54	25.64	487	.04
Ideal-usual hours										

Relationship Type	Model 1			Model 2						
	All Cohabitors (Ref.)	All Married	N	Adj./ Pseud.R ²	Cohabiter: 50/50Chance or Probably Will Marry	Cohabiter: Definitely Will Marry (Ref.)	Married: Cohabited Before Marriage, Married <5 years	Married: Cohabited Before Marriage, Married 5+ Years	N	Adj./ Pseud.R ²
Men's	-7.82	-9.75	802	.00	-7.33	-8.20	-10.20	-9.03	550	.00
Men's (adj.)	-8.15	-9.62	802	.01	-7.78	-8.70	-10.00	-8.57	550	.02
Women's	-8.12	-12.4**	664	.02	-8.62	-7.81	-12.31*	-11.69†	477	.01
Women's (adj.)	-8.55	-12.2*	664	.03	-8.94	-8.25	-12.15†	-11.21	477	.02
Housework hours										
Men's	21.00	21.44	371	.00	20.56	20.89	21.67	24.15	263	.00
Men's (adj.)	21.05	21.42	371	.05	18.97	20.42	22.28	24.54	263	.04
Women's	26.24	33.30**	534	.02	27.75	24.87	32.47*	35.35**	369	.02
Women's (adj.)	30.04	31.53	534	.25	31.76	29.71	32.21	25.75	369	.21

Note: Regression-adjusted (Adj.) means controlled for respondent's gender; age; partner's age; respondent's race (reference [ref.]: White); education (ref.: some college); presence of children; previously married; previously cohabited with other (not current) partner; and duration of coresidential relationship, including time spent both married and cohabiting. Superscript pound signs denote results of a *t* test of differences between the two married groups in Model 2. Pseud. = Pseudo.

$p < .01$.

$p < .10$.

† $p < .10$.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

In overall comparisons in Model 1, married women's working hours did not differ from cohabiting women's hours. In Model 2, however, some differences emerged, again indicating the

importance of using more selective comparison groups in examining behavior. Employed women who had been married 5 or more years had significantly fewer working hours compared with those married fewer than 5 years, which brought their hours to a level nearly equivalent to that of cohabiters with uncertain marriage plans (see Figure 3 for Model 2 results). Similarly, women's ideal working hours were significantly lower after marriage, although, unlike their actual working hours, ideal work hours were significantly lower among the recently married compared to cohabiters with definite marriage plans and were lower still among those married 5 or more years. The gap between ideal and usual working hours was therefore significantly higher among the recently married women compared to cohabiters with definite marriage plans, and then, as a result of a drop in work hours, the difference in these gaps dropped to marginal significance when cohabiters with definite marriage plans were compared with those married 5 or more years. When accounting for demographic differences, cohabiters with definite marriage plans were no different than married couples who had been married 5 or more years in the gap between their usual and ideal hours worked, but those married fewer than 5 years demonstrated a marginally larger gap compared to cohabiters with definite marriage plans.

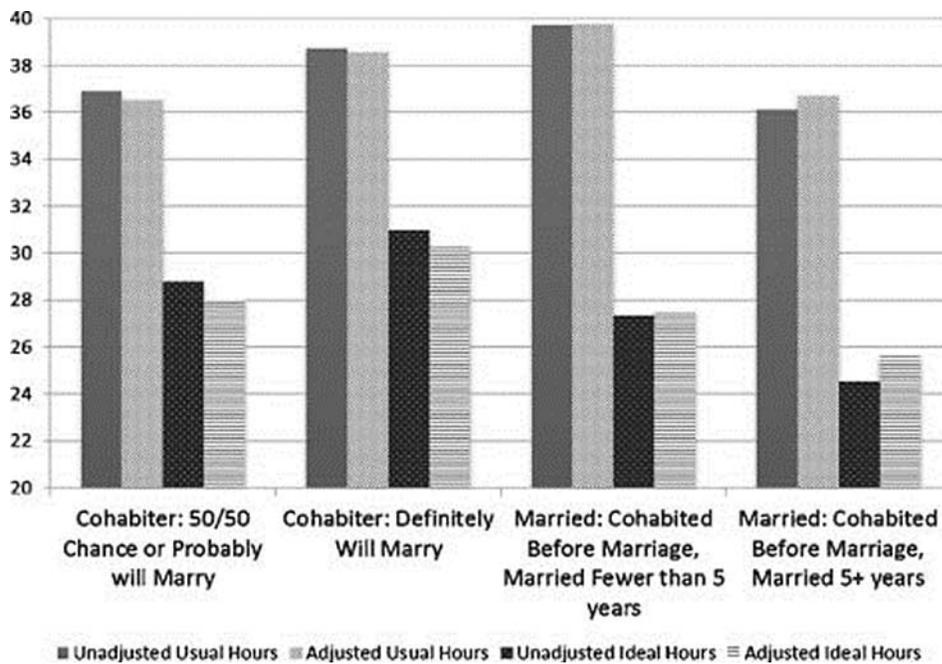


Figure 3. Women's Usual and Ideal Hours by Relationship Type (Employed Only).

Housework Hours

The results presented in Table 3 demonstrate that men's housework hours did not significantly change across any relationship type in either model, but women's housework hours were significantly higher among married couples in both overall comparisons and the more selective model. When controlling for demographic factors that might affect selection into each relationship stage, however, the difference in housework hours between cohabiting women and

married women lost statistical significance and no longer followed a clear pattern (see Figure 4). In a separate analysis (not shown but available from the author), the control variable for number of children was removed from the adjusted means to examine whether significant differences found in the unadjusted model may be due to a difference in parental status, but removing the control variable for children again yielded no difference in housework hours for women at various relationship stages once other demographic variables were controlled for. This implies that differences in housework hours among married couples were due to the selection into marriage and long-term marriage of more gender-traditional couples, rather than a causal effect of marriage on housework hours or a causal effect of marriage on number of children and, therefore, housework hours. In other words, cohabiting women who married did not start increasing their time spent on housework because of specialization; instead, it was the women who spent more time on housework (and who might therefore be more gender traditional in other ways) who were more likely to marry at all or to have married at a young age and been married for 5 or more years.

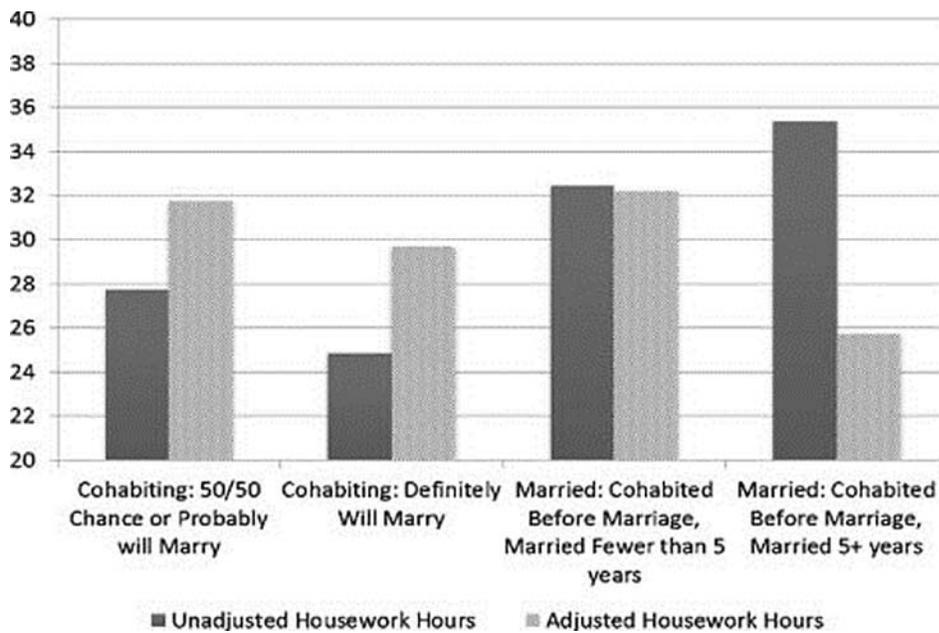


Figure 4. Women's Housework Hours by Relationship Type.

Discussion

Few significant differences were found between cohabiters with uncertain marriage plans and those with definite marriage plans. Those with uncertain marriage plans were more likely to have dropped out of high school and less likely to have a high school degree, and the women earned marginally lower incomes. These findings indicate that insofar as cohabiting couples intend to marry, there are not many differences in income and work behavior in terms of degree of certainty in marriage plans among cohabiters, as long as they have marriage plans of some kind. One group that was left out of the more selective comparisons in this article are cohabiters with

no marriage plans; this group was too small in these data ($n = 27$) to engage in meaningful comparisons as a stand-alone group, but they were included in overall comparisons. Prior research on relationship quality has found this group is significantly different than cohabiters with marriage plans (Brown & Booth, 1996), and some differences that appear in overall comparisons but not the more selective comparison may be driven by the inclusion of this group in overall comparisons, in addition to the group of married couples who did not cohabit before marriage.

Significant behavioral differences were found among current cohabiters, recently married premarital cohabiters, and premarital cohabiting couples who had been married for 5 or more years. The areas in which recent marriage was associated with a clear difference in behavior compared with cohabiters with strong marriage plans included women's labor force participation rates, which were lower among recently married premarital cohabiters, and the gap between ideal and usual work hours of women, which was marginally larger among recently married premarital cohabiters. Recently married couples were also significantly older and had more children compared to cohabiters with definite marriage plan.

Behavioral changes associated with marriage may be due to enforceable trust that can continue to accrue after marriage with marital longevity, as couples become more certain their marriage will persevere despite high divorce rates. The findings in this study indicated that enforceable trust and specialization in marriage may be delayed to some extent until marital stability is established with marital longevity. I found several significant differences when comparing premarried cohabiting couples married fewer than 5 years with premarital cohabiting couples who had been married 5 or more years that are consistent with increased specialization in later marriage. Men's income and employment rates were significantly higher among those married 5 or more years compared to those married fewer than 5 years, and women's labor force participation rate and usual hours worked were lower among those married 5 or more years compared with those married fewer than 5 years. For women, the gap between ideal and actual hours worked was reduced to nonsignificance for premarital cohabiters married 5 or more years after accounting for demographic selection, whereas it was marginally higher among recently married premarital cohabiters when compared with cohabiters with definite marriage plans. These differences can be due in part to the additional levels of trust present when a couple has been married a long period of time, when they can be more certain they will not be subject to divorce, given high contemporary divorce rates. The increased gap in ideal versus actual hours among recently married women may indicate that women are unwilling or unable to cut back their hours to match their ideal hours, and therefore undertake the personal risk of disinvestment in the labor force, until they have been married for some period of time. Alternatively, those who select into long-term marriage may be more adept at matching their actual hours worked to their ideal.

The presented findings may also reflect selection into longer term marriages by characteristics not controlled for in these models, if couples who do not have this level of specialization are more likely to divorce early in the marriage or if those who married at a younger age (as did the

group of those married 5 or more years) are more likely to have higher levels of specialization in their relationship. Regression-adjusted means controlled for selection to some degree, and the findings related to women's adjusted housework hours, ideal work hours, and income imply that married women's higher income and time spent on housework, along with their lower ideal work hours compared to cohabiting women, are entirely attributable to demographic differences captured in the parsimonious set of demographic characteristics controlled for in these models.

The one finding that seemed to indicate less specialization among those married for a long period of time was the significantly higher employment rate of women in this group; traditional gender specialization should lead to a lower employment rate among women who have been married 5 or more years compared to those married fewer than 5 years, instead of the significantly higher one found in these data. Higher employment rates among women married 5 or more years may be due to additional employment support from relatives more willing to help married couples, which may accrue with time spent married. In addition, employment rates were measured for individuals who were actively part of the labor force, and women's employment rates may be higher among those in long-term marriage because of women with low employment prospects exiting the labor force entirely. Labor force participation rates are a more accurate picture of how women's paid work involvement may change because of entrance or selection into marriage, and they followed a traditional specialization pattern in which rates were significantly lower among those married 5 or more years.

This study implies that overall, cross-sectional comparisons of marriage and cohabitation yield incomplete findings that may mislead researchers who are attempting to theorize the causal effects of marriage on behavior. Behavioral measures such as men's labor force participation and hours worked were significantly different between cohabiters and married men in overall comparisons, but in the more selective comparison, cohabitation or marital status made no difference at all, regardless of marital intentions or longevity of marriage. Furthermore, use of the more selective comparison groups proposed in this study yielded additional information on the timing of specialization in marriage versus cohabitation that did not emerge in more crude comparisons of all cohabiters to all married couples. Future research that examines the effect of marriage on the behavior of cohabiters should take into account whether cohabiters intend to marry their partner as well as the longevity of time spent in the marriage. As longitudinal data become available, these findings can be further tested to examine whether changes occur over the relationship life course of couples or are a result of selection into different relationship stages.

Note

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