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The effects of cohabitation before marriage on fifteen Black couples

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THE EFFECTS OF COHABITATION BEFORE MARRIAGE
ON FIFTEEN BLACK COUPLES

A SUBSTANTIVE PAPER
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to show the effects of cohabitation before marriage on black couples. Since the divorce rate is rapidly growing among Blacks - it seems that something is needed to reverse this trend. Thereby bringing greater stability to Black Families especially where Black Children are concerned. Consequently, the statement of the problem is: Are couples that have cohabitated better equipped to deal with the institution of marriage?

By using the Symbolic Interactionist and Exchange Theories, the researcher demonstrates that cohabitation before marriage provides a viable and much needed period of adjustment prior to marriage.
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Heterosexual cohabitation is not a new phenomenon, as most people tend to believe. Trost (1975), Clatworthy (1975), Berger (1971), Kieffer (1972), and Whitehurst (1973) point out that data on cohabitation indicate that the custom of heterosexual mates living together without legal sanction is "well documented throughout history". But, in the late sixties it became, instead of a furtive way of life only "other poeple" indulged in, a new life-style embraced by the young. The largest growth in cohabitation appears to be with young persons, particularly college students.

Also, many older Americans are choosing to live together without marriage for financial reasons. Such as continuing social security payments, different pensions and other incomes or means of supports from their late spouses.

However, many people disapprove of it. President Carter "heartily dissapproves of couples living together without marriage" according to the GH Poll from Good Housekeeping Magazine entitled "Living Together Without Marriage". Parents worry that their children will get involved in it. Additionally, parents, ministers and their congregations, the news media, along with others think that living together is sinful and dirty, and lowers the couples moral standards (especially the females). Some people take a stand, partly because of "what - will - people say" reasons.

As a result of this disapproval, numerous young persons discontinue familial relationships, while others just simply don't care whether or not their family accepts the living - together without marriage arrangement situation.
Cohabitation, like marriage, has its advantages and disadvantages. Although, there have not been a great number of studies done on the subject outside of college campuses. Also, it has been shown that some of the couples lived together in order to learn more about their partner on a mental, social and sexual basis in preparation for marriage. While others termed the relationship as either a substitute for marriage or as a temporary involvement.

Lester Kirkendoll, author of *A New Bill of Sexual Rights and Responsibilities*, summed-up this same aspect by saying,

"Although we consider marriage, where viable, a cherished relationship, we believe that other sexual relationships also are significant. In any case, human beings should have the right to express their sexual desires and enter into relationships as they see fit, as long as they do not harm others or interfere with their rights to sexual expression."

Because cohabitation arouses an enormous concern, some positive and some negative, from young and old, rich as well as poor, it is an area where much search and study can be utilized. Consequently, I have chosen to research: The Effects of Cohabitation on fifteen (15) black couples before marriage. Answering the following question: Are couples who have cohabited better equipped to deal with the institution of marriage? The following variables are included: length of the relationship, role of significant others, religion, the legal system, advantages and disadvantages, costs and morality. These variables are chosen because they each play vital functions in proving that couples who have cohabitated are more understanding in marriage than couples who have not cohabitated.

Also, in some of the studies that were conducted on college campuses, a small number of Blacks were included in the sample population because the schools were predominately large, white universities. Since Blacks make up a large portion of college students, it seems only fair that studies should
include the feelings and convictions of our race as well as others.

Since most parents and (other significant others) hold deep religious, as well as moral convictions and commitments, there is little reason to expect them to approve of such relationships. And since many young people tend to think of their parents as role-models and want to give and show respect for them they are inclined not to enter relationships of the cohabitation sort. Or on the other hand, some young people make it a point of not letting their parents know. Consequently, some people involved in these relationships are deeply troubled by the idea that they are "living in sin", according to UCLA counselor Harrington Ingham.

Cohabitation also creates problems for law abiding citizens, particularly because it is illegal in more than half of the states of the United States of America. With penalties ranging to a five year maximum jail term and a thousand dollar fine. "The law is almost unenforceable but not totally", says Fulton County Solicitor Hinson McAuliffe.

Most legal difficulties for cohabiting couples stem from the lack of legal tradition to govern their situation. Cohabiting couples have essentially the same general relationship as married couples. However, for married couples there are laws to define their rights and obligations to each other, while this is not true for cohabiting couples.

Another legal problem of cohabitation arises when one partner dies. The surviving partner is treated by law as a stranger and can not inherit anything from the deceased partner unless specified by a will. A cohabiting partner is also at a legal disadvantage in cases of fatal accidents caused by the negligence of a third person. Also social security benefits could be tragic for couples who live together for many years.

Some states even require a divorce or an annulment for dissolving cohabitational relationships, especially if the man and woman have presented themselves to society as husband and wife. However, if this has not
taken place nor has property been obtained jointly -- then there would be no need for costs as in divorce or annulment. Which could be looked upon as an advantage or disadvantage -- just as the relationship itself might be. By cohabitating, a couple or person might come to realize that he/she can not live with another and be committed to him for a lifetime, or vice-versa. Either way, my belief is that a person or the couple involved will have grown enough mentally and emotionally thereby being able to come to such an important conclusion of self. Instead of first venturing into the holy sanction of marriage and then finding out that your spouse is not right for you -- subsequently divorce might be the ultimate. Which definitely costs in many ways: financial, emotional and mental strain to mention a few. Although, I am of the opinion that emotional and mental stress can follow a dissolving relationship depending on commitment, love and the length of the relationship.

It is my belief that the above mentioned variables, as well as unmentioned others, are dependent upon whether couples who have cohabitated are better equipped to deal with the institution of marriage. Since the same basic needs and desires exist in the institution of marriage as well as in cohabiting relationships.

In 1970, the Population Reference Bureau indicated that nationwide, 523,000 couples were living together not married. The 1970 Census indicated that 18,000 couples over the age of 65 were unmarried and living together. "In 1978, there were 1,137,000 couples living together. That's more than double the number in 1970. In two-thirds to 3/4ths of the cases ... the couple is under 35 ... in 10 per cent of the cases ... one of the people in the relationship is 65 or older as in the case below.

Luther, a 68 year old retired railroad man, and Mattie, a 65-year old widow, met three years ago. Their relationship bloomed into a romance. Two years ago Luther sold his house
and moved in with Mattie. Both admit that their relationship is as close and committed as if they were legally married. They would have preferred to be married and planned to do so until they discovered that she would lose a substantial amount of her social security payments if they married. 9

For Luther and Mattie, as with many older couples, a legal marriage would have penalized them financially. Because of this, a surprisingly large number of older couples are choosing to live together without legal marriage.

An increasing number of persons are choosing cohabitation as a temporary or permanent replacement for marriage. A U.S. Census Bureau survey in 1976 revealed that the number of persons living with unrelated members of the opposite sex had increased to 1.3 million. This figure represents 1% of all households in the United States.

Living together has increased as a form of courtship among youth, and most likely will continue to increase in the future.

Many youth involved in cohabitation do not see living together as a trial marriage or an engagement period. But rather as a natural component of a close, affectionate dating relationship.
"Statistically, you're much better off marrying than living together, 75% of those who live together break-up", according to G. and B. Remsberg in an article from Seventeen Magazine. "Cohabitation, the legal term for living together as husband and wife", is referred to by various names on the street as living together, the living-together arrangement (LTA), shacking-up, playing house, trial marriage, and living in sin. The usual elements of such a relationship are 1) two members of the opposite sex 2) living under the same roof 3) in a conjugal or sexual relationship 4) for any length of time 5) without benefit of marriage.

According to Charles T. Hill in Breakups Before Marriage: The End of Affairs: Having sex or living together may bring a couple closer, but they may also give rise to additional problems such as coordinating sexual desires or agreeing on the division of household tasks. Hill also states that the best divorce is the one you get before you get married. Regarding the variable cost, Hill states that, "although the psychic cost of a pre-marital breakup is often substantial, by breaking up before marriage couples might spare themselves the much greater costs of breaking up afterward".

When unmarried people live together, what kind of relationship do they really have? A study which sheds light on the subject was presented to the American Sociological Association by Robert A. Lewis, associate professor of Human Development, and Graham B. Spanier, assistant professor Human Development, Pennsylvania State University, published in Intellect Magazine entitled, "Examining Relationships of Unmarried Cohabitants". Their study compared the relationships of sixty-one unmarried cohabitants which matched equal numbers of engaged and married students.

The study revealed three distinct subgroups among the unmarried cohabitants - those who described it as a preparation for marriage, as a substitute for marriage, and as a temporary involvement. Dr. Lewis explained that these
distinctions should enable future studies to investigate cohabitation more accurately. "In the past, everyone has lumped them together".\textsuperscript{13}

Drs. Lewis and Spanier found that couples who live together as a substitute for marriage tend to be more committed to each other than those who are living together as a temporary involvement. Unmarried couples who live together are generally just as committed to each other as engaged couples who do not live together. They are generally not, however, as committed to marriage. A large amount of data useful in further studies on the subject was compiled from the study, which was conducted at the University of Georgia.

Recent studies suggest that the number of unmarried youth who have lived with a member of the opposite sex at least once ranges between 10\% and 33\% of the college population. A 1972 study by Dan J. Peterman, assistant professor of Human Development at Pennsylvania State University, found that "32.8\% of the undergraduates who responded indicated they had done so".\textsuperscript{14}

Although there have been no definite studies on the reason that more and more college students are living with members of the opposite sex, Dr. Lewis suggests that the relaxation of rules on campuses around the nation would be a contributing factor. He theorized that those who live together as a trial marriage do so because they think they will have a better chance of staying married once they do decide to get married. Others who choose to live together instead of getting married, he suggests, do so out of love and because of a disillusionment with marriage, perhaps because of the high rate of divorce.

The third group of cohabitants isolated in the study are those who live together as a temporary arrangement "probably because it is the in thing to do, according to Dr. Lewis." He says that there is a certain amount of peer pressure encouraging students on college campuses to try cohabitation. Other contributing factors are a growing independence from the family and greater opportunity for students to live off campus. "But the primary
reason for cohabitation», as Dr. Lewis points out, "it that they want to do it". 

Good Housekeeping Magazine asked its readers what their attitudes and practices were on men and women living together as husband and wife without benefit of marriage. It was found that "30% -- almost a third of those who answered the poll had a family member involved at some time in a living-together situation". Predictably, a larger number of younger people - 54% claimed to have a relative who was part of such an arrangement.

Does this high incidence signal an end to marriage as a life goal? Evidently not. Only 16% of those living together without marriage did so because they didn't believe in marriage. In fact more than half of the couples eventually went on to marriage, though not always to each other. And many of the couples were living together because one or the other or both were waiting for a divorce to become final so they could marry each other.

For the most part from the poll results, living-together arrangements were not permanent.

"Seventy-five percent of the relationships lasted less than two years. Forty-nine percent of those involved went on to marry the person with whom they were living. Twenty-four percent were continuing to live together when the poll ballot was filled out, so the fate of their relationships is not known. A large but not overwhelming 27% separated or married someone else." (Coincidentally, the United States Census Bureau projects that 30% of all marriages taking place this year will end in divorce.)

What were the couples' own attitudes toward their living arrangement?

"According to our poll, 32% openly admitted they weren't married, only 13% tried to keep it a secret and 55% didn't care if people knew or not".

Evidently, most family members are aware of what is going on and their reactions are surprising.

"A whopping 55% accepted the living-together situation. Thirty-seven percent of the families were actively opposed. Only 8% actually didn't care to take a stand. But among those who did accept the living-together arrangement, there were many families who pointedly refused to condone it. Eighteen percent
of the respondents said that when the couple visited they insisted the couple sleep separately. A sizable 16%, though actually gave the couple a bedroom of their own. And 21% let them make their own decision. For the rest, the situation never came up because the couple never visited together.

Interestingly, of the total group of respondents, 30% said that their attitudes about unwed couples living together have recently changed. But a larger number - 58% - said that their attitudes have stayed the same. "Only 12% hadn't given the question enough thought to answer," Generally, those who have changed their minds are now tolerant of cohabitation where they once opposed it. But it is still a burning issue.

Those polled were asked to give an overall picture of their attitudes: 30% declared their belief that living together without marriage should be strictly avoided. Only two percent said they thought it helps form a more permanent relationship. "Twenty-one percent said they thought it detracts from a more permanent relationship."

A substantial 47% asserted that living together without marriage should be up to the individuals involved. Many of those noted that they themselves wouldn't do it, wouldn't want their children to do it, but feel firmly that a "live-and-let-live" policy is best. Others had more personal reasons for their tolerant views, saying that they themselves had tried the arrangement and felt that others should be free to do the same. One woman explained her situation this way:

"I lived with my husband prior to our marriage for approximately eight months. My previous marriage of eleven years had failed and for my children's sakes, as well as for my own, I wanted to be sure about my relationship with my husband-to-be. I don't feel this is the answer to everyone's problem, but in some situations it is best for all concerned."

Those in the 30% opposed to unwed couples living together were most vociferous in their condemnation of the arrangement. One claimed, "To me the family is the most important organization in the world today. Living together without marriage does not contribute to strong ties and is morally a sin against God."
In November of 1977, *Farm Journal* printed an article about a young couple that lived together without marriage. Later, in its February, 1978, issue, they printed some of the responses received from their readers—reactions to the subject ranged from "I commend you for printing the article—all the way to—Get that trash out of your magazine." A few parents confided that they were "going through the same ordeal", and it helped to know they were not alone.

Religious and moral convictions lead some parents to take a firm position: "We felt that, as Christians, we could not be so accepting when our son Bob and his girlfriend began living together", responded a Kansas mother. "We took a stand partly because of 'what-will-people-say' reasons. By people, however, I don't mean folks our age who love a tinge of gossip. I mean teen-agers who are watching. This includes our own 16-year-old daughter. To teen-agers, silent acceptance can mean approval".

"We are the parents who said hurtful things sometimes when our confrontations with Bob, unhappily, became angry." Our emotions and beliefs were too involved to remain coolly objective at all times. The result of this is loneliness.

"We have told Bob many times that we love him deeply, as much as is humanly possible, but first and foremost is our love of the Lord who gave him to us. In reality, the confrontation is between our son and God. We are only on the side, deciding whom we must follow".

An Iowa woman, from working with young people as a high school and college counselor, has observed all forms of "living together" and alternative lifestyles:

"Young people have come to me with their dreams, their problems and their revolts", she writes. "They were sure they had discovered all the new answers to all the old problems of our society." They were sure their ideas of a new morality would offer relief from the social, psychological and legal problems of the institution we call marriage.
Now, some ten or twenty years later, the proof of their choices begins to take shape.

"I believe the real test of a lifestyle is how it worked out in life. Has it made for happiness or sorrow? Has it made richer lives, or has it degraded them? Has it built strength and stability to pass on to the next generation? What about the welfare and happiness of the children born to these unions? Has society gained or lost by it all?"28

I can only make some observations based on my experiences, is the Kansas woman's reply.

"Most of the meaningful relationships I witnessed have long since disappeared." Few lasted longer than the honeymoon of a conventional or traditional marriage. About the breakups -- there was no divorce -- that was one of the so-called benefits of this lifestyle. "When it doesn't work, there are no ties, no tears and no regrets."29 Few words could be more deceiving.

Answering from her own knowledge, "some of the breakups of non-marriages present greater strains, deeper troubles and bigger voids than does divorce, especially for the girls."30 There were scars and shattered dreams, but there was no comfort of family or support from society.

This same counselor watched a few disillusioned young people drift into more and more frequent relationships. She also saw others mature and gain a sense of responsibility. "Many eventually married, hopefully carrying into their new relationship greater wisdom and a determination to make the marriage work."31

After working with young people for two generations, the counselor states:

"I have come to the conclusion that marriage, with all its faults and failures, is still the best method devised by man to fulfill our needs. My hope is that the 'new morality will soon be abandoned for the new fidelity'."32

In this same article, several successful relationships were reported by young people themselves. One non-married couple lives on a farm in
Oregon, and the woman states that:

"To me, marriage is a public announcement that you've committed yourselves to each other for a lifetime. After one look at divorce statistics, I feel that marriage itself has been made a farce. We have done the same things any married couple has, except that we simply did without the license, pomp and ceremony. We have exchanged commitments and promises. We just didn't do it publicly."

She says that society is hung-up on tradition. For example, "People look with contempt on a couple that is living together." But the day those same two people get married, they are welcomed into the community and society with open arms. "Suddenly, everything is okay."

Another woman, twenty-eight years old, wrote from Oklahoma, saying that she has been married for eight years and farming for seven. And they have a little girl that's two years old. She and her husband Jim, attribute their "excellent marriage to the fact that they lived together for seven months before they were married. (They had dated for a year.)" Our regret was that we couldn't share this with our parents," she adds,

"When my parents found out, they didn't speak to me for six months. But we know that many older people slept together before they were married, and many 'had' to get married. "We believe in God, hard work, honesty, the love of farming and the freedom to live with a person before marriage," she adds. When our daughter grows up, I hope she will accept our values."

Amusement and concern were the reaction of a South Dakota woman when she read the November article.

"The amusing thing was that the mother appeared to be convinced that her son and daughter - in - law to be were living together out of a sincere dedication to the sanctity and permanency of marriage and held rational fears of making a mistake: Nonsense! I know from experience that young people live together out of lust, immaturity and impatience."

When she was younger, she thought she was doing the right thing by living with a man. "But he fell in love with someone else and left her devastated." Soon, she was living with another, and they eventually married. However,
it has not been without serious problems. Guilt marred the sexual relationship the first few years. "I feel that God has forgiven me, but it took years for me to forgive myself." She and her husband have two children and a "stable marriage." However, she regrets that her past is more known and discussed than she would like. And men are constantly flirting with her, and she is afraid because they must figure that she's an "easy mark." Also, she admits that she doesn't know how to handle this gracefully.

Consequently, she doesn't think that we should reject children who live together without benefit of clergy but we should not condone their behavior or make "high - sounding" excuses for it. When they are young teens,

"we should explain to them, boys and girls, that sex before marriage is unwise and unsafe, that it does not prepare them better for marriage and that it forms emotional ties that are difficult to break."40

In a recent study of cohabiting couples done by Eleanor Macklin at Cornell University, living together was seldom the result of a considered decision, at least initially. Most relationships involved a gradual (and sometimes not so gradual) drifting into staying together. She was the first to use the time dimension as a key component in classifying cohabitation relationships. Defining cohabitation as "share a bedroom and/or bed with someone of the opposite sex to whom not married for 4 or more nights a week for 3 or more consecutive months.

Most of the couples in her study indicated that living together just seemed natural. The couples insisted that living together is a

"natural progression in the man - woman relationship; as time passes and they share more of their lives, sharing an apartment or living arrangement is the next logical step."

From the results of her study, Macklin concluded that cohabitation was a common experience for students at Cornell and was viewed as a "to-
be-expected" occurrence by many students. Her study included only 44 persons, however, who were actually involved in cohabitation.41

Macklin reported that the benefits of cohabitation as seen by her sample of couples include "gaining a better understanding of themselves, gaining a greater knowledge of what is involved in living with someone else, increased ability to relate to others, gaining a better understanding of what they desire in marriage, and increased emotional maturity."42

However, most often the living arrangements do not encompass the needs of the cohabiting couple. Couples do not usually make their living arrangement jointly, but more often try to adapt themselves to existing arrangements. In her research study, Macklin noted, "living arrangements were not usually jointly arranged until the second year of a relationship."43

In such cases the woman maintains an additional separate residence, such as a dormitory or sorority room, or shares an apartment with several other women. The additional residence may serve several functions, such as a place to

"get messages or mail, change clothes, shower, or study. Maintaining separate residences precludes having to explain to parents, ensures a place to live if the relationship is not working well, helps maintain contact with female friends, serves as a convenient place to study, and provides often necessary storage space (the boy's room being too small to hold both sets of belongings). A living arrangement of this sort may present conflict or frustration for couples."44

Also, if each of the two people in a cohabiting relationship enter it with very different expectations of the outcome of the relationship, conflict can be the outcome. Another recent study of cohabiting couples revealed that, for the males, marriage was not relevant to any aspect of the relationship, but that the females expressed a desire for marriage. By contrast "among a group of non-cohabiting, steadily dating couples, both partners were more usually committed to marriage."45
An implication of these findings is that, when the lack of desire for marriage by the males is permanent rather than transitory, and when the female's desire for marriage results in pressure on the male, he may frequently respond by finding a new partner. Women in this situation might very well feel that they have been exploited.

Social interaction between cohabitant partners suggests that each partner takes the other into account and continually adapts and adjusts to the social situation as he or she subjectively defines it. Research has identified several social processes applicable to cohabitation including dyadic formation, decision making, relationship maintenance, conflict and change and dissolution. These processes, of course, are not unique to cohabitation and apply at a general level to all social relationships.

Cole viewed the cohabitation relationship as a special type of primary relationship in which the partners meet socioemotional, sociosexual, sociophysical, and socioeconomic needs and maintenance functions. His view "implies that the cohabitation relationship involves a relatively large degree of interpersonal commitment in order to meet interpersonal need and support system functions." 46

His definition of cohabitation is stated as a "more or less permanent relationship in which two unmarried persons of the opposite sex share a living facility without legal contract." 47 The notion of time, which Macklin suggests is important, is implicit in Coles definition also.

His research involved forty couples, done longitudinally, and consisting of in-depth interviews with them after a year or more of cohabitation. Because cohabitation relationships, like all relationships, change over a period of time, they have to be studied this way.

Cole proposes that cohabiting couples develop interpersonal existential commitments to each other and their relationship. Interpersonal commitments
promote future transactions, self-other investments and dyadic cohesion.

Tentative results of his research suggest that most cohabitants considered their relationship as strong, affectionate, and excluding outside dating when they began living together. Based upon data on the degree of commitment they had to the relationship at the beginning of cohabiting, only a minority of cohabitants were committed to marry their partner (6%) or to definitely work hard to develop a lasting relationship (7%). The majority were committed to stay together as long as the relationship was mutually satisfying (38%) or personally enjoyable (31%). "Almost one fifth (18%) of the cohabitants I interviewed entered the relationship with no stated commitment to make it permanent." These data suggest that most cohabitants will invest time and energy in a relationship as long as the rewards (satisfactions and enjoyments) outweigh the costs (sacrifices). Bower reports that the majority of cohabitants (both male and female) indicated that they benefited from their relationship in the sense that they "increased their understanding of what was involved in a relationship. The experience will also shape their expectations for future relationships." Glatworthy notes that "cohabitants felt that the most important characteristics one could have in order to successfully cohabit were maturity and self-confidence." Cole's research has shown that the couple's emotional maturity and self-esteem determine their ability to communicate feelings and needs. Additionally, his data suggests that fairly complex decision-making patterns are established among long-term cohabiters. For example: 75% evidenced segmentalized decision-making, where primary decision-making responsibility was allocated to one partner more than the other or both. The couples that he interviewed usually made decisions on the basis of who was most involved in a particular area or affected by the outcome of the de-
cision. "All couples indicated, however, that some of the decisions were made jointly." 

A critical assessment of the literature on cohabitation reveals problems in the areas of conceptualization, measurement, and sampling. Few studies have adequately drawn from sociological and social psychological theory in formulating theoretical models to explain the social significance of the cohabitation lifestyle. The work done prior to the 1973 Groves Conference Workshop on Cohabitation is very difficult to interpret with regard to what is meant by cohabitation and its prevalence. A wide variety of labels were used to refer to the phenomenon of an unmarried heterosexual couple sharing a common bedroom. There were also about as many definitions and measures of cohabitation as there were studies. Most work since the workshop has attempted to use uniform labels and operational measures of the phenomenon. Since most research to date has been limited to a few college communities, it is difficult to generalize beyond the campuses surveyed. Most of the surveys discussed in this paper drew their respondents from probability samples. Samples composed of a class of students in family studies or any other specialized area tell us little about the larger university community. Therefore, we must concede that our data bases for understanding and explaining cohabitation are very limited.

Since cohabitation involves a pair-bond relationship, it is important to focus upon the couple as the unit of analysis. This can be accomplished by developing unit measures that reflect both partners' perspectives. A variety of behavioral observation techniques, such as simulation gaming (as recommended by Straus, 1971), interaction over revealed differences from partners observed in conjoint interviews (as recommended by Strodbeck, 1951), etc., could be used to obtain data on pair-bond interaction patterns and
processes, communication styles, conflict management and resolution patterns and process, as well as power and decision-making patterns and processes. Data obtained from direct behavioral observations could then be combined with retrospective life histories (as recommended by Stein, 1975) and questionnaire data to develop a more complete picture of the dynamics of cohabitation.

As mentioned earlier, the cohabitation relationship, like all relationships, changes over time and must be studied longitudinally. Panel studies could be used with age and relationship type cohorts followed over time. Although the costs of panel studies are great, the pay off in terms of our understanding of the complexities of relationship processes would be even greater. Panel studies would need to employ control groups of married couples and possibly, individuals engaged in multilateral relationships as well in order to determine which relationship processes are unique to cohabitation and which also are characteristic of marital dyads and/or more complex intimate relationships. Such research would call for a national probability sample, and it will be a long time before adequate funding can be secured for a project of that scope. Therefore, it is important for cohabitation researchers now to pool their limited resources, to do cooperative and collaborative research (as suggested by Macklin, 1974), and to work toward building a reliable data base.
The theoretical approach taken in this research project integrates elements from symbolic interaction, role, and exchange theories. Symbolic Interaction refers to the peculiar and distinctive character of interaction as it takes place between human beings. The peculiarity consists in the fact that human beings interpret or define each others actions instead of merely reacting to each others actions. Their response is not made directly to the actions of one another but is based on the meaning which they attach to such actions.

Thus, human interaction is mediated by the use of symbols, by interpretation, or by ascertaining the meaning of one-another's actions. This mediation is equivalent to inserting a process of interpretation between stimulus and response in the case of human behavior.

The key features of Symbolic Interaction include: I (Individual), Self (Which can react to his own actions) and Action (is the central mechanism which individual deals with his world). Three premises that can be easily verified empiracally in the basis of symbolic interaction, according to George H. Mead are:

1. human society is made up of individuals who have selves

2. Individual action is a construction and not a release, being built up by the individual through noting and interpreting features of the situations in which he acts.

3. Group or collective action consists of the aligning of individual actions, brought about by the individuals interpreting or taking into account each others' actions.

As Libby and Carlson indicate the relative costs and rewards of any relationship include not only observable rewards and punishments, "but inner feelings, motives, and other less tangible but extremely important emotional and cognitive states."52 For example, one factor which
contributes to a person's perception of fairness in relationships is the relative degree of interdependence (with reciprocity) or dependency. Usually dependency entails an unbalanced interaction with one person both incurring greater costs than the other person and being less satisfied with the relationship.

There are several ways to conceptualize a sequence of interactions and decision-making in terms of exchange theory. Thibaut and Kelley used reward-cost matrices to depict the possible outcomes of social interaction. Outcomes are evaluated through comparison levels which are "the lowest level of outcomes a member will accept in the light of available alternative opportunities" and by comparison level for alternatives, which is "the standard the member used in deciding whether to remain in or leave the relationship"\textsuperscript{53} (or, when comparing other relationships or potentials for relationships with current relationships. Decisions are based on the assumption that people enter and remain in relationships (or lifestyles) only as long as they are evaluated by the interactants to be profitable (profit in exchange terms is rewards minus costs.)

Secord and Blackman have pointed out that changes occur in the perception of rewards and costs for any given relationship:

Rewards and costs may change as a function of (1) past exchanges which shift reward-cost values of current behaviors, (2) changes in the characteristics of the dyad members occurring through training, education, or other experiences, (3) changes in external circumstances that introduce new rewards and costs or modify the values of old ones, (4) sequential factors in the relation itself, such as the augmentation of satisfaction in current relationships as a result of previously rewarding experiences if the dyad, and (5) associations with other behaviors having different reward-cost values (Secord and Blackman, \textsuperscript{1974}, p. 234).

The reevaluation of the relative costs and rewards of relationships over time is central to the exchange theory conceptualization used as a basis for explaining and predicting transitions in relationships. Thibaut
and Kelley and others have published various interpretations of exchange theory (sometimes called interpersonal attraction or equity theory) which have recognized the importance of the sequential effect of past decisions on present and future decisions about relationships.

The costs and rewards associated with each relationship change as the individual's personal and social situation, expectations, needs, and desires change; this affects whether the person maintains or abandons various relationships.

If the rewards in terms of costs of a cohabiting couple are great, then it is possible to hypothesize that the relationship is worth while and may develop into something more. That is to say, if both parties or persons are happy then the relationship continues, whereas if the opposite occurs then the relationship ends.

My main hypothesis is that couples who have cohabitated are more understanding in marriage than couples who have not cohabited. It can be measured in terms of interactions and decision-making in terms of exchange theory. In that decisions are based on the assumption that people enter and remain in relationships or move on to marriage only as long as they are evaluated by the interactants (couples) to be profitable. That is to say, couples remain in cohabiting relationships or move on to marriage as long as rewards in the relationship outweigh the costs. Providing the independent variables: emotional maturity and self-confidence are present. It is also fair to hypothesize that, if a couple has developed interpersonal commitment to each other and their cohabiting relationship, they should be as committed in marriage. In addition, as stated previously, the same dynamics appear in a cohabiting couples relationship as in a married couples.
Although cohabitation has been practiced in some form in a variety of cultures throughout history, sociological research in this area has traditionally been limited. In fact, the literature on cohabitation to date has been mainly comprised of journalistic accounts in the popular press (e.g. Newsweek, 1966; Esquire, 1967; Grant, 1968; McWhirter, 1968; Schrag, 1968; Time, 1968; Block, 1969; Karlen, 1969; Rollin, 1969; Sheehy, 1969; Life, 1970; Hunt, 1971; Coffin, 1971; Lobsenz, 1973, 1974; Proulx, 1973; Peer, 1973; Sheraton, 1973; and Otten, 1974). Many of these journalistic accounts are little more than sensationalistic attempts to capitalize on the novelty of the life-style. They are usually based upon very small samples and focus on subjective accounts that are little more than case studies. In some instances the accounts reflect prejudices and constitute ideological ax-grinding (usually tainted with conservative values and labeling cohabitation as a deviant behavior).

Social scientists interested in cohabitation are attempting to develop collaborative networks whereby researchers can pool their efforts in order (a) to design research instruments that will facilitate collecting reliable data (b) to develop conceptual models and research hypotheses for the future. The 1973 Groves Conference on Marriage and the Family, held in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, marked the beginning of an ongoing effort to hold workshops periodically for the purpose of collectively working toward sociological and social psychological explanations of the cohabitation phenomenon. The Cohabitation Research Newsletter is a recent vehicle for disseminating cohabitation research.

Research reports published to date in professional journals have been primarily descriptive (Arafat and Yorburg, 1973; Berger, 1971; Clatworthy, 1975; Cole, 1976; Henze and Hudson, 1974; Hudson and Henze, 1973; Johnson 1973a; Lyness; Lipetz, and Davis, 1972; Macklin 1972, 1974; Peter-
man, Ridley, and Anderson, 1974; Smith and Kimmel, 1970; Thorman, 1973; Trost, 1975; and Wells and Christie, 1970). In addition, a number of graduate theses have been written on cohabitation (Bower, 1974, 1975; Gavin, 1973; Johnson, 1968; Kieffer, 1972; Lautenschlager, 1972; Montgomery, 1972; Mosler, 1974; Secrest, 1975; and Storm, 1973). The thrust of most of this research has been on describing cohabitation as a social phenomenon. Few attempts have been made either to conceptualize the meaning of cohabitation as a life-style or to place it into the larger realm of emerging alternative life-styles. Hennon (1974) is one of the few researchers who have attempted to apply sociological theory to cohabitation: he views cohabitation as an example of a variant life-style that can be systematically conceptualized in terms of a social systems model.

The interactionist's conception of human behavior assumes that behavior is self-directed and observable at two distinct levels -- the symbolic and the interactional (or behavioral). By self-directed, Denzin means, that humans can act toward themselves as they would toward any other object. As Blumer says, the human may "perceive himself, have conceptions of himself, communicate with himself, and act toward himself." This behavior, which Blumer calls 'self-interaction', permits humans to plan and to align their actions with others.
This analysis utilizes the interactive model of sampling. The interactive sampling model recognizes the fact of interrelationship between natural units and attempts to reflect those patterns accurately and directly.

Five types of interactive sampling units may be distinguished, each corresponding to a level of form of interaction between natural social units. These are commonly represented by marriages, engaged couples, friends, work partners, colleagues, or acquaintances. Cohabitating couples fit into this type of interactive sampling unit also. A relationship shall be said to exist between two or more persons when those persons engage in recurrent forms of symbolic interaction. For a relationship to exist, the parties involved must share the same, or a similar set of reciprocal definitions about the other. These definitions extend through time such that the influence of the other does not disappear when out of his co-presence.

The second type of interactive sampling unit involves the study of face to face encounters that represent situations of interaction where definitions and symbols do not extend beyond the point of co-presence.

These levels of interaction become units for interactive sampling activity. Before any interactive sampling model can be implemented, the following rules must be recognized. First, a clear theoretical definition of the unit must be given, and the unit must be a natural interactive form, or empirical outcropping. Second, this outcropping must conform as perfectly as possible with the concept as it is theoretically defined. Third, a triangulated-comparative sampling perspective must be adopted. Sampling should not be restricted to one class of empirical outcroppings; the researcher must attempt to locate as many comparison groups as possible. This sample includes one distinct group, however they consisted of another group (cohabitants) before making up the present group (marrieds).
In carrying out this case study, my sample consisted of fifteen (15) Black couples who cohabitated before going on to marriage. My total population being thirty individuals, (15 couples) all Black and selected at random.

Cohabitation is defined in this study as: a heterosexual couple living together without legal sanction.

Methods for the measurement process of this case study included a brief oral interview and a questionnaire. Data gathered from the interview included an introduction-consisting of: name, address, occupation, and views on cohabitation and marriage from an emotional, social, sexual, socioeconomic and legal aspect.

The questionnaire was an extensive one, which consisted mostly of open-ended questions requiring essay answers - all of course geared toward the subject and administered on an individual basis. For the sole purpose of allowing for individualism as well as dualism in terms of expression.

The reason for this method is to keep the subject mindful that many of his life expectations are of sociological importance even though sometimes they appear unimportant to him/her or maybe classisied as deviant behavior. Using this method I did not get scaled data. But rather, was able to make numerous decisions based on answers received through interactions from the cohabiting relationship and since marriage. Also, based on exchange theory, (as mentioned earlier) or on the assumption that people enter and remain in relationships or lifestyles only as long as they are evaluated by the interactants to be profitable (profit in exchange terms is rewards minus costs.) In reaching this point, the two persons act towards themselves as individuals, as well as against and towards their mates. Therefore during this process of interacting knowledge is gained about the self and the mate. As a result of this
self interaction, interactants can plan and align their actions with their mates.

Since these cohabiting relationships were taken a step further into marriage, it is safe to say that the rewards were great in cohabitation and have remained great in marriage, since the relationships are yet in existence.
Cohabitation is not more inherent to one group of people than to another. Included as cohabitants are rich as well as poor, young as well old, and educated as well as uneducated. As we have seen, cohabitation is also done for many reasons - such as: financial maintenance, love, as a first step in relationship building towards marriage and as part of the courtship pattern - to mention to a few.

Margaret Meade has suggested marriage in two stages: the first stage is Individual Marriage or Cohabitation without commitment. The second stage is Parental Marriage, which entails a ceremony and a commitment to bear and support children. These two stages of marriage gives a person time to learn his mate as well as grow and share with that person. Moving on to legal marriage and children as a next step should the living together relationship work and the couple desires to do so.

It is a unique idea to refrain from having children until after marriage takes place - so there'll be laws to protect his welfare providing the marriage does not work out.

The focus will now be on the outcome of this study:

The highest level of education completed among participants ranged from completing 12 years or G.E.D. to Masters Degrees. Occupations included: Building Maintenance, Artist, Nurse, U.S. Army musician, Health Services Technician, Secretary, Utility specialist, Duplicator, Engineer, Public Safety Planner, Statistical Analyst, College and Graduate Students, and unemployed persons.

All couples surveyed were in the 20 - 30 years age group with the exception of one, - being in the 41 - 50 year age range. As stated earlier, all couples being Black.

The cohabitation relationship existed for at least one year among the
entire sample group. With 11 3/4 years being the longest period a couple lived together without being married. Everyone's marriage has existed for at least 1 3/4 years.

All couples agreed that they are independent individuals, and share in the household responsibilities. However role-flexibility exists in twelve couples relationships.

While living together most couple's significant others dissaproved of the relationship, however all friends approved of the relationship. Moreover, it didn't matter to the couples if significant others approved or dissaproved because it was their (couples) business; "what they wanted"; "I'm old enough to make my own decisions"; "I didn't give a damn"; "Because we were engaged to be married", "I'm not hurting anyone else"; and "I was tired of losing good men".

All persons are happy being married, most were happy when they were cohabitating - the one's that were not, wanted "something more." Marriage being ultimately that something else.

Cohabiting was viewed by all individuals as the adjustment period for their later relationship or lifestyle - marriage. Consequently, no adjustment or "getting used too" was necessary for anyone of them after marriage.

The religious faith of individuals included the following: Baptist, Methodist, No religious faith, Holliness, African Methodist Episcopal, Catholic and Pan - African Christian Nationalist. All religious faiths mentioned condemned the cohabitation of these individuals, however after the couples were married everything was fine. Everyone that dissaproved in the past were certainly accepting of the relationship. The couples viewed themselves as being mildly religious.

With the exception of two individuals, everyone said that they
would "not marry a person making a lifetime commitment to them without living with them beforehand". Reasons given were: "Because I would like to know the type of person that I am getting, mentally, socially and sexually"; "You never know a person until you live with them"; "I would like to know if we could make it"; and "Because I was married once before without living with that person first and it didn't work, so now I have to be precautions". The responses given by the two individuals that said they would marry a person without living with them first, were "If I loved that person, I don't think that it would matter"; and "If our goals were the same it would not matter too much I don't think".

Cohabiting meant the following things to the sample population:
"Sharing and learning"; "Sharing my life with someone that I care for and with someone that cares for me"; "Pure Joy"; "Living with a person whom I loved"; "Growing with and learning my mate"; "Fun"; "Having someone there when you needed them and not having to call or look for that person when you needed them"; and "Someone to understand and share time with".

All subjects agreed that cohabitation doesn't lower your moral standards, and if their present spouse had not married them after their living together - they would have considered it a part of life. Taking under consideration that there was a reason why the relationship didn't work out and it was probably for the best - for both parties involved.

Interestingly, some of the same answers were given for the meaning of marriage as for what cohabitation meant to couples. Additionally, the following statements were made: Marriage means: "Security"; "Money and lasting love"; "Commitment and obligation totally to your spouse"; "Binding together of ideas, goals, likes and dislikes, good times, bad times, honesty, integrity and moral standards to create another generation"; and "By law it helps
to protect one's interest in their mate".

Consequently, all couples believe that cohabitation will be accepted in the near future as part of the courtship pattern, because people have always lived together and will continue for many reasons. Such as "love, financial reasons, compatibility and most of all because 'they want too'!

Moreover, everyone agreed that cohabiting will not take the place of marriage as an institution primarily because of its religious sanction. Also, because, marriage is "something that you look forward to from a child until you are an adult".

My results from the study are termed as being positive. From the interview I was able to screen couples thereby choosing the ones that expressed more positive views on cohabiting as making them more sure of marriage.

Because of my findings, I can conclude that couples who cohabitate are better equipped to deal with marriage. Primarily, since they've gone through an adjustment period during cohabitation and in terms of (costs and Rewards) the exchange theory the fact that the relationship went from cohabitation to marriage. The couples have become accustomed to each other while cohabiting and are reasonably sure of what is to be expected from their mate and has learned to deal with these expectations. The couples are evidently happy in their relationships since they moved on to marriage. However, if the couples chose to remain in the cohabiting relationship instead of getting married, it would still be safe to say that rewards outweigh costs - since they've remained in the relationship. Otherwise, the relationship would not continue to exist.

Lastly, because independence exists among all individuals, (symbolic interaction) entailing a balanced interaction between both persons, with
both persons incurring equal costs and satisfactions with the relationship,
I feel safe in stating that - couples who have cohabitated are better equipped
to deal with marriage.
Couples who cohabitate before marriage are better equipped to deal with marriage. While cohabitating, couples become accustomed to each other and are reasonably sure of what is to be expected from their mate and have learned to handle these expectations. These positive findings from my study has great implications such as being older at the time of first marriages: Fewer divorces, because couples know each other better sexually, emotionally, and mentally. The cohabitation relationship serves as the adjustment period, therefore after marriage no adjustment period is necessary. Cohabitation also values the experience of intimate sharing (involving the whole relationship, not just the sexual aspects) with someone of the opposite sex as a means of exploring new levels of self-awareness and emotional growth.

Trends and Speculations on cohabitation from previous studies mentioned in the Review of the Literature Section, suggests that Cohabitation is becoming normative on a number of college campuses as a part of a new courtship pattern. Campus cohabitation is characterized as a relatively intense dyadic experience based upon a deep level of emotional involvement and interpersonal commitment.

It is highly likely that the incidence of cohabitation will steadily increase as the opportunities for more freedom in the selection of residence and roommates becomes more widespread. Many campuses already have co-ed dorms and generally enforce few, if any, restrictions on off-campus housing, 24-hour visitation, etc. Even on campuses where housing policies are restrictive, there is evidence of students desiring option to cohabit. As social forces peel away the last elements of in loco parentis from the college campus, it is likely that university policies regarding sexual morals, housing, etc., will become more liberal.

Perhaps the conservative elements of society will attempt to inhibit
the liberalization of housing policies on college campuses. It is probable that conservative pockets will continue to exist in those regions of the country where fundamentalist religious groups are the strongest. Knowledge of social change within the U.S. would lead to the belief that the two coastal areas would be innovators and lead the trend while the South and Midwest would lag behind. Tentative evidence on rates of cohabitation on college campuses across the nation suggests such a pattern.

If cohabitation continues to be viewed as primarily a premarital behavior in the context of a new courtship pattern, it will likely have little impact upon the institution of marriage. One of the things that will probably happen, however, is that the age at marriage for 1st marriages will go up. It is also possible that the divorce rate for 1st marriages in the 1st years of marriage will go down as a result of cohabitation serving as a screening device to lower the probability of mismatched mates marrying. Theoretically, the cohabitation period would allow the partners to work through many of the dyadic adaption and adjustment processes that couples who married without having lived together would have to go through. These empirical speculations must be closely examined if we are going to understand the impact of premarital cohabitation upon subsequent marital behavior.

In the event that campus as well as non-campus cohabitation becomes increasingly viewed as an alternative life-style, the marriage rates for 1st marriages would drop. This would have implications for the institution of the family as we know it today. Furthermore, if the family shrank in importance within our society, it would imply changes in other institutions. It would most surely necessitate changes in social policy, which is primarily based upon the assumption that the vast majority of people live in nuclear families. That assumption, although widespread, is already erroneous. The
1970 Census (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1973) reports that only 37% of the American population resides in a nuclear family unit, which is defined as a breadwinner husband/father and a homemaker wife/mother and their dependent children residing in a common dwelling. Another probable change would be a reduction in the birth rate since most cohabiting couples who view their relationship as an alternative life-style report that they desire to remain childless. Childlessness too would have implications for other areas of society. The economy would have to shift more toward marketing adult consumer goods and services since there would be less demand for children's consumer items.

At present, however, it does not appear likely that a large proportion of the cohabiting population will be living life-styles that radically deviate from the institution of marriage as we know it today. I do not anticipate cohabitation replacing marriage as a social institution. It seems to me that cohabitation's greatest impact will be upon the institution of courtship with some, undetermined presently, incidental effect upon the institution of marriage as we know it today.
FOOTNOTES


2 Ibid.

3 "Living Together Without Marriage". *Good Housekeeping* 186 p. 88.

4 "Living together" . . . our readers respond. *Farm Journal* p. 53.


8 Ibid. May 1, 1979.

9 Ibid.

10 N.M. Clatworthy, "Case against Living together" *Seventeen* p. 132.

11 Ibid.


13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.


16 "Living Together without Marriage". *Good Housekeeping*, p. 88.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid, p. 91.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.
Footnotes (continued).

22Ibid.

23"Living Together . . . our readers respond. Farm Journal p. 53.

24Ibid.

25Ibid.

26Ibid, p. 54.

27Ibid.

28Ibid.

29Ibid.

30Ibid.

31Ibid.

32Ibid.

33Ibid.

34Ibid.

35Ibid.


37Ibid.

38Ibid.

39Ibid.

40Ibid.

41Roger W. Libby and Robert N. Whitehurst, Marriage and Alternatives, p. 71.

42Ibid.

43Ibid, p. 72.

44Ibid.

45Ibid.

46Ibid, p. 75.

47Ibid.

48Ibid, p. 75.

49Ibid.
Footnotes (continued).

50 N.M. Clatworthy, "Case against Living together" Seventeen p. 132.

51 Ibid.

52 Roger W. Libby and Robert N. Whitehurst, Marriage and Alternatives p. 75.

53 Ibid., p. 79.


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