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Making It Legal: A Comparison of Previously Cohabiting and Engaged Newlyweds

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ABSTRACT 

In view of the recent emergence of cohabitation as an alternative form of courtship, it is important to determine its possible effects on the subsequent marital union. Are the premarital experiences, marital goals, patterns of marital power and levels of conflict discernably different for those who have lived together before marriage? Comparing cohabiters with noncohabiters, we attempted to pursue this question in a sample of 139 recently married, nonparental, college matriculating, young adults using a lengthy focused interview.

Largely due to parental pressures "to make it legal", both cohabiters and noncohabiters moved towards matrimony with equal speed, marrying at approximately the same age. In the first years of marriage, cohabiters were highly concerned with the educational and career goals of both spouses and were much more likely to espouse postponed parenthood or voluntary childlessness. Cohabiters were judged to have a higher proportion of egalitarian unions in comparison to the more husband-dominated unions of the noncohabiters. With respect to marital conflict, however, no significant differences in levels of conflict between the two groups were found; although different areas of disagreement and modes of conflict resolution seemed to occur.

INTRODUCTION 

It has been more than half a century since the British philosopher, Bertrand Russell, made the prescient observation that: "Contraceptives have altered the whole aspect of sex and marriage and have made distinctions necessary which could formerly have been ignored. People may come together for sex alone, as occurs in prostitution, or for companionship involving a sexual element, as in Judge Lindsey's companionate marriage or finally for the purpose of rearing a family. These are all different and no morality can be adequate to modern circumstances which confounds them in one indiscriminate total." (Russell 1929:167)

As this statement attests, cohabitation has not lacked advocates for the past fifty years. Lindsey (1927), Russell (1929), Mead (1970) and Satir (1967) are among those
who have propounded a rationale in support of it. Yet it was not until the nineteen seventies, that its increasing prevalence among university students attracted research interest in the United States: Arafat and Yorburg (1973), Henze and Hudson (1974), Peterman, Ridley and Anderson (1974), Macklin (1972), Bower and Christopherson (1977) and Danziger (1978). Henze and Hudson may indeed be correct in asserting that "...cohabitation patterns on college campuses are in the 1970's what dating patterns were in the 1920's, an expanding dimension of the courtship process." (1974:726)

Clayton and Voss (1977) have provided a basis for estimating the prevalence of cohabitation among young men, aged 20 to 30. Based upon a random sample of selective service records, they found that 18 percent of their respondents had at some time cohabited for six months or more. In view of recent census data, Westhoff states:

"In the U.S., in 1976, one million couples (about 2% of all couples living together) were unmarried. It appears certain that cohabitation will become more popular in the near future." (Westhoff 1979:54)

Undoubtedly cohabitation is increasing in other advanced industrial societies, especially Western Europe. Trost (1975) reports that 12 percent of Swedish couples were unmarried cohabiters, and suggests that cohabitation has led to a reduction in the Swedish divorce rate.

The rapid rise in cohabitation as an alternative courtship, as a preliminary to marriage, has become associated with a controversy over its relative merits. The question seems to be whether or not and to what extent the marriages of cohabiters are more satisfactory or more enduring compared to those who enter matrimony through the traditional portal of engagement. Since most studies were conducted with samples of university students who were cohabiting and had not married; Lyness, Lipetz and Davis (1972), Arafat and Yorburg (1973), Macklin (1974), Standford (1977) and Danziger (1978), little is known about the consequences of cohabitation on later marriage. In the absence of sufficient evidence, the views of social scientists vary considerably. One group takes a skeptical view:

"It is no doubt true that most living-together people believe that they will have better marriages for having engaged in this behavior. There is not so much as one shred of evidence to support this claim." (Whitehurst 1973:11)

Others believe that premarital cohabitation may hold important benefits for the couple:

"In addition to the fact that the two individuals have been able to acquire greater knowledge about each other, it is broadly accepted by sociologists that the older the people are at first marriage, the greater their chances are for success; and cohabitation is apparently correlated with delaying of marriage. This delaying of marriage will probably lead to depressed birth rates, an increase in sexual equality, an
increase in the autonomy of the adult members of the family, and increased freedom from traditional marital restraints." (Danziger 1978:80-81)

Similarly, Trost states: "...the situation will arise that many marriages between two partners not fitting together will never be formed, those marriages being formed will be 'happier' and thus the divorce rate, ceteris paribus, will be lower." (Trost 1975:682)

The present paper hopes to provide information relevant to this controversy. In the light of the previous research, two questions seem to be worth pursuing: 1) What is the nature of cohabitation as an alternative path to matrimony? 2) After marriage, what differences exist between previously cohabiting and previously engaged couples with respect to the formation of marital goals and modes of marital adjustment?

THE NEWLYWED STUDY: PURPOSES AND METHODS

Since 1971, we have conducted a study of young married adults in the preparental state of their family life-cycle, focusing on the first two years of marriage to determine changes in marital and personal goals and modes of adjustment to marriage (Sherlock and Moeller, 1979). Briefly speaking, the method utilized was to obtain a lengthy focused-interview from recently married young adults as well as follow-up questionnaires after five years of marriage. We obtained a purposive sample of 139 caucasian respondents, 82 women and 57 men, on which the present report is based.

In this paper we will present a comparison of newlyweds who lived with their spouse before marriage (N=33) with those that did not (N=106). These two groups which we designate as cohabitators and noncohabitators will be compared in terms of differences in marital goals, marital power and marital conflict in an effort to see if cohabitation has any discernible effects upon the early years of marriage. Since previous research has largely focused upon the personal and social characteristics of cohabiting college students, it is important to investigate the question of the "value" of cohabitation as an alternative path to marriage.

Names and addresses of recently married individuals were solicited from students majoring in sociology at a California State University. From this pool of referrals, respondents were selected if they met the following criteria: first marriage, no longer than two years duration, residents of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Area, had attended college and had no children nor were they expecting one. Individuals who met these criteria were interviewed if they gave written assurance that they were willing to grant the two or three interviews required. A voluntary or purposive sample of one hundred and thirty-nine respondents, eighty-two newlywed women and fifty-seven newlywed men were interviewed. Although not selected on a
random basis, a comparison with 1970 census data indicates that the sample is representative of college attending, young married adults. The interviews were conducted by sociology students who had received a two-quarter practicum in research methods, including approximately thirty to forty hours of supervised interviewing training. The interviews were conducted in the respondent's home and required two or three sessions to complete. They were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interviewer schedule was a modification of an instrument previously developed by Lowenthal and her associates for their Adult Transitions Study (Lowenthal et al., 1975). Additional sections dealing with courtship experiences and reproductive goals were included.

The interviews were content analyzed by the investigators and a group of graduate students in sociology trained to a 90 percent level of intercoder agreement. Quantitative analysis involved the pretesting of a code book, coding of the interviews item-by-item, and globally, and statistical analysis utilizing the S.P.S.S. Computer Program. Qualitative analysis involved repeated readings of the protocols to extract important themes. The combination of both modes of analysis permitted us to combine their advantages and achieve a better integration of the findings. (Filstead, 1970)

Before describing the courtship and marital relationships of the two groups, a comparison of their social characteristics will be of value. No significant differences on a variety of social characteristics such as educational achievement, occupational status and age at marriage were found. With respect to religious preference and church attendance, cohabitators considered themselves less religious and were less frequent attenders. On the other hand, the educational status of cohabitators' fathers was significantly higher, $\chi^2=45.12, p<.03$ and their father's occupational status was also significantly higher, $\chi^2=46. p<.09$, than the fathers of noncohabitators. Thirty-three percent of cohabitators' fathers held professional level occupations. More cohabitators came from 'broken homes' than noncohabitators, 27 percent of their parents were either divorced or separated, compared to 17 percent of noncohabitators, and they tended not to see their family as "tight" and "warm" as the engaged respondents. On the basis of these statistical comparisons, it appears that cohabitators came from somewhat higher social class origins and a looser family structure.

COHABITATION AS A PATH TO MATRIMONY

Engagement, the traditional path to matrimony, prescribes a sequence of prenuptial activities by which the couple and their parents share a cooperative venture in staging a wedding and its attendant festivities. The temporal structure of the engagement process is most clearly revealed by the fact that once the nuptial date is selected, a schedule of activities is planned which will fill the time from the announcement of the wedding to its actual celebration. Once the couple publicly discloses their intent to wed, they are expected to proceed towards that destination along a timetable, unless the engagement is broken.

Similarly, we found that cohabitation also had a timetable, a set of
sequentially-tied events, which moved the cohabiting couple towards a legally
sanctioned relationship. After an initial period of covert living together, the
cohabitation was usually disclosed to one or both sets of parents. The disclosure
predictably introduced considerable pressure to marry. In the majority of cases,
these pressures indeed contributed strongly to the couple's decision to "make it
legal". Thus, cohabitation although certainly not as a formal a path to marriage
as engagement, nonetheless creates a prenuptial timetable. In this regard it is
very revealing that both cohabitators and noncohabitators in our sample were married at
approximately the same age i.e. 21½ years for women and 24 years for men, even
though cohabitators had moved out of their parents' home much earlier. Hence, we
speculate that cohabitation is not a radical departure from middle class norms
bearing on "courtship", but rather a modification of the conditions under which it
is carried out. This speculation will now be examined in the light of our data.

In our sample, both female and male cohabitors had moved out of their parental
home earlier than the noncohabitators. They had usually lived in apartments or dorm-
itories with same-sex roommates while they attended college. A small number were
working while living away from home. Freedom from parental supervision and a wish
to be independent were usually given as reasons for living away. After a period of
casual dating, they began an exclusive relationship. The average time of dating
before cohabitation was six months. The predominant pattern was that there was no
distinct decision to live together, but that it happened rather gradually. Typi-
cally the young woman stayed at her boy-friend's place on weekends, then also one
or two nights during the week, until finally after a few months they were spending
every night together. Often she kept her apartment for some time in order to avoid
conflict with her parents or to have a place to retreat to "...if things do not
work out". She went back occasionally to pick up mail, clothes, or personal be-
longings, but spent most of the time with her partner. After a period of living
together, the woman gave up her apartment, because they "...were spending so much
time together anyway" or "...it was so much more economical". Usually, the woman
moved in with the man who, sometimes, was living with male roommates. Less fre-
quently they moved together to a different place, in only two of thirty-three cases
did the man move in with the woman.

During this time, usually of a few months length, the situation was disclosed
to parents. Since the relationship was seen as an ongoing one, continued secrecy
was becoming less tolerable. While almost all of the men's parents were informed,
only sixty percent of the women's parents knew about their daughter's cohabitation.
Most of these women were then confronted with the disapproval of parents, who ap-
plied moderate to very strong pressure to either break the relationship or legalize
it. Even if their parents were not aware of the cohabitational relationship, the
woman usually felt uneasy, guilty and feared discovery. When strong disapproval
occurred, the couples often tried to reconcile with their parents. Frequently, the
woman put some pressure on her partner to legalize their relationship.

The typical length of the cohabitation period was between six months to a year;
however, ten respondents lived with their future spouse for two years or longer. As
was stated previously, most received varying amounts of influence to legalize their
relationship, only six did not report any parental pressure. Reasons for marriage were predominantly to legalize the relationship and to avoid family conflict. "Companionship" and "love", which were the main reasons given by engaged couples, were mentioned less frequently. While these were also motives to live together, the desire for legalization was probably influenced more by outside forces. Reading the interviews, one notes some regret, that they yielded to family pressures rather than continuing to live together on a "free-choice-basis".

Wedding ceremonies of cohabitators were usually smaller and less traditional than those of the engaged respondents. There was a higher degree of involvement by the couples themselves. They wrote their own vows, dressed in less traditional garb and in general asserted themselves as nonconformist persons. More than noncohabitators, they did have a honeymoon, and if they did, they tended to go on longer trips.

Varieties of Cohabitation

Three different types of cohabitation could be distinguished:

1. **The live-in-engagement.** The partners dated for some time, frequently not longer than six months, got seriously involved and the question of marriage was raised. One or both partners requested that they live together for a premarital trial-period. In a few cases, the couple became engaged and set a date for the wedding before cohabiting; in the other cases no exact dates were set, but cohabitation was undertaken on the condition that they would marry. The cohabitation period was rather brief, about six months, and the couple was then married. Ten respondents reported this type of cohabitation which resembles somewhat a traditional engagement. The prevailing attitude among these respondents was that they considered marriage to be a very serious step which should be taken on the basis of a compatible relationship:

   "I mean you wouldn't buy a car without driving it around the block. You wouldn't make any decision without trying it out first. Marriage is the most important decision you ever make in your life. Yet all these people propose that you go through this meaningless, little courtship where nobody really is themselves, and dive into it without knowledge."

   This group felt little pressure from their parents. Although not in active agreement with the situation, their parents accepted the cohabitation because it gave every indication of leading to a marriage.

2. **Open-ended Cohabitation With Parental Pressure.** The partners gradually moved into a cohabitational relationship. Marriage was not an explicit goal, sharing one's life on a more intimate basis was the overriding motif. The majority of these respondents received a considerable degree of pressure when their parents became aware of the situation. As a result, some of them became formally engaged and decided to marry as soon as possible. A number of weddings were performed in the wedding chapels of Reno with a brief ceremony and only a few relatives in attendance.
The cohabitation usually lasted between six months to one year. Seventeen respondents followed this path.

3. **Open-ended Cohabitation Without Parental Pressure.** Six respondents did not receive any pressure from parents, although their relationship was not necessarily intended to lead to marriage. These couples lived together until they felt ready to get married. Cohabitation lasted the longest here, usually between one to three years. Unlike those who experienced strong parental disapproval, expressed in myriad forms, these cohabitators felt that their parents either approved or were benignly indifferent. In a few cases, the parents were themselves cohabiting after a divorce. Some parents seemed to believe that cohabitation insured against a premature marriage. These latter wished their sons and daughters to finish college or gain more maturity before marrying. Whatever their motives; they simply did not exert pressures towards matrimony.

The majority of cohabitators evaluated their experience of living together very positively. Few regrets were mentioned, although there had been traumatic conflicts with their families in some cases. They emphasized that they would do it again, recommend it to other couples and to their future children. The possibility to test their compatibility and to grow in a dyadic relationship were mentioned as important advantages:

"I would advise my own kids to do it. I think when we got married... the chances of obtaining that same thing without living together were very minuscule."

Less security, less commitment and pressures from parents and society were cited as disadvantages. These were more frequently stated by women than men. Overall, men evaluated the period of cohabitation more positively than women; they had initiated it more often and were not as exposed to parental pressures. Their fears of being trapped in a premature marriage were allayed. Men often had a deep mistrust of marriage. As one man said: "The idea of marriage still doesn't appeal to me, living with my wife does." Women often felt less secure in the cohabitational relationship. They were exposed to more parental pressure and the double-standard, and thus tried to transform cohabitation into marriage in order to avoid family conflict and achieve the status of "wife".

We now turn our attention to the major question of this paper: In what ways are the marital relationships of previously cohabiting newlyweds discernibly different from their noncohabiting peers? We will make comparisons in three crucial areas: marital goals, marital power and marital conflict.

**MARITAL GOALS**

The topic of marital goals was extensively explored in our newlywed interviews using questions about their global and specific goals, the development of their goals, perceived sources of support or hindrance, and the steps they had taken to achieve various goals. We wished to determine if cohabitators had different goal
orientations than the other newlyweds. Indeed, we found this to be the case with respect to both career and family planning goals. Cohabitors, male and female, tended to be more seriously involved in higher education and preparing for professional or managerial positions. As a group, they held higher educational and career aspirations and were more likely to plan in terms of a dual-career marriage. A high proportion of the cohabitors, 71 percent of the husbands and 63 percent of the wives, sought professional or semi-professional careers as a major life goal, compared to only 60 percent of husbands and 51 percent of wives in the noncohabitors' group. "Individual achievement", "self-fulfillment" and "growth" were very frequently expressed as global goals, compared to "contentment", "happiness" and "family satisfaction" which were more frequently mentioned by the noncohabitors. The differences between cohabitors and noncohabitors were most clearly revealed in their family planning goals. Based upon the description of their goals, we were able to classify the newlyweds as Early Parental (those planning a family within the first five years of marriage), Postponers (those deferring a family until after five or more years) and Voluntarily Childless (those who had already decided not to have children).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cohabitors</th>
<th>Noncohabitors</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early Parental</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postponed Parental</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntarily Childless</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N=33)</td>
<td>(N=106)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

\[ \chi^2 = 6.7, \ df = 2, \ p < .05 \]

As Table 1 indicates, only 12 percent of the cohabitors desired to begin their family within the first five years of their marriage, whereas 38 percent of the noncohabitors did. Clearly, the majority of cohabitors, 70 percent, could be accurately designated as long-term postponers. They were generally affirmative on the question of parenthood, albeit vaguely so in many cases; but wished to wait until their educational and career goals had been achieved. Some expressed the wish to enjoy couplehood before undertaking the responsibilities of parenthood. Whereas cohabitors could be characterized as holding the view: "Kids? Maybe later!", a large proportion of noncohabitors, especially wives, were rather enthusiastic about beginning a family as soon as it was feasible. Extensive questioning on reproductive attitudes and plans often revealed an ardent wish to become parents. Noncohabitors tended to express negative views in their attitudes towards abortion or childlessness. They would utilize abortion only in the direst circumstances and generally felt a mixture of pity and contempt for voluntarily childless couples, seeing them as "self-centered" or "materialistic." Cohabitors, on the other hand, did not view abortion or voluntary childlessness as deviant behavior. They were more likely to espouse abortion in the event of an unplanned pregnancy.

In sum, it seems that the noncohabitors expressed a more traditional conception
of their marital goals compared to the previously cohabiting newlyweds. The cohabit-
itors aimed at establishing both husband and wife in a professional career before
parenthood. Although there may be some convergence of goal orientations with the
passage of time, our data indicate that cohabitators will tend to delay parenthood
and will have a higher proportion of voluntary childlessness.

MARITAL POWER

Based upon the respondent's answer to an item: "Who, would you say, is the
boss in your marriage?" as well as the coder's assessment, we attempted to classify
the distribution of marital power. Information on the way in which important de-
cisions were made was obtained. We queried, for example, how they allocated their
money and decided on major purchases such as automobiles, furniture and appliances.
The relative influence of each spouse on career plans, family, planning goals and
even choice of leisure activities was weighed. Keeping in mind the caution that
some marriages do not readily fit into a typology of "power" and that "marital in-
fluence" may sometimes be a more accurate designation, let us examine Table 2.

Table 2. Marital Power Distribution of Previously Cohabit-
ing and Noncohabiting Newlyweds.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cohabitators</th>
<th>Noncohabitators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Egalitarian</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband Dominant</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wife Dominant</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(N=22) (N=72)

\( \chi^2 = 3.04 \) df=2 p < .15

Table 2 presents a comparison of cohabitators and noncohabitators in terms of mari-
tal power, i.e. who exerts the most influence in decision making. We have utilized
a simple classification of "egalitarian", "husband dominant" and "wife dominant." Some cases were excluded from analysis, however, because we could not make a defi-
nite assessment. As Table 2 indicates, it appears that more cohabitators developed
"egalitarian" marriages, while noncohabitators had a higher proportion of "husband
dominant" unions in the first two years of marriage. More than one half of the co-
habitators were classified as "egalitarian," whereas more than half of the noncohabi-
tors were classified as "husband dominant." A classification by gender revealed
that 51 percent of the wives and 69 percent of the husbands in the noncohabitor
group had a "husband dominant" situation. These young husbands saw themselves, and
were perceived by their wives, as more competent in financial matters. In contrast,
the previously cohabiting husbands and to a slightly lesser extent the wives, were
more likely to report an egalitarian mode of decision making. A careful reading of
the interviews confirms their view that they were indeed seriously attempting to
divide household labor, and share responsibility and decision making, equally. This
was often an arduous enterprise, since they too had been socialized in traditional
families where the father was the major income provider and ostensibly the head of the household.

One underlying reason for this strong effort to create an egalitarian relationship appears to derive from their more intense career interests. As previously discussed, they wished to postpone children and pursue educational, career and recreational interests. Since both will work and earn incomes, both partners claimed an equal voice in financial expenditures. Also sharing of household functions such as shopping, cooking, cleaning and paying bills became more important when both husband and wife were engaged full time in their jobs and studies. Unlike those who lived at home until marriage, the cohabitators attempted to continue a pattern of equality and mutual participation in household affairs which they developed earlier. Thus, they did not move as readily into segregated marital-roles as those who enter marriage directly from their parental home. They avowedly sought a different type of man-woman relationship. As one husband, a teacher, whose wife was in dental school stated:

"We are closer than most any other couple we know. Neither one of us is really the boss; we just do what each person does best. We don't try to pull any power plays on each other."

MARITAL CONFLICT

Like marital power, marital conflict was an elusive phenomenon to observe and measure. It was even more problematic to assess its significance in a given marriage; couples vary in their toleration of disagreements and dissatisfactions. The assessment of conflict by coders was based upon not only "what was fought about," but also the way in which disagreements were expressed, conflicts managed and the overall balance of marital satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Expenditure of money, disagreements over goals, relations with in-laws, and differences in taste and leisure preferences were common areas of conflict. Some couples disagreed over the frequency of sexual intercourse, but unless one party drastically reduced their involvement, it was not usually a major problem. Specific areas of disagreement, styles of expressing anger, and even frequency of disagreements did not seem to be as important as the respondents' interpretation that the marriage was satisfactory and hence reasonably durable. Thus conflict, dissatisfaction and estimates of marital durability were viewed by our newlyweds as interrelated phenomena. We judged a marriage as "severely conflicted" if the respondent believed that it was becoming intolerable and might not last very long, and conversely we judged it "low" in conflict if he or she felt it was durable and satisfactory. In other words, frequency of conflict, overall sense of dissatisfaction and estimates of marital duration were all weighed to arrive at an assessment of marital conflict.

We originally expected cohabitators to have considerably less conflict. We thought that their prior living-together would have provided ample time to address and partly resolve many of their differences. Many internal problems of marital adjustment, we believed, would have been adequately handled before they married.
Table 3. Level of Marital Conflict of Previously Cohabiting and Noncohabiting Newlyweds.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cohabitors</th>
<th>Noncohabiters</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minimal Conflict</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate Conflict</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe Conflict</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(N=28) (N=84)

As Table 3 shows, this does not seem to be the case. The proportion of cohabiters and noncohabiters at each level of conflict do not differ significantly. Although we found some suggestion that husbands who had cohabited were more satisfied with their marital relationship than the engaged husbands, the small number of cases does not warrant a generalization. Contrary to our original expectations, the process of cohabitation does not seem to be associated with a reduction in conflict during the first years of marriage.

In retrospect, perhaps we should not be surprised that this was the case. Although they have had more experience in living together, perhaps they have come to regard conflict as an inevitable part of an intimate relation. It had become integrated into their relationship and was not viewed as threatening or potentially disruptive. We found that the previously engaged tended to suppress conflict in the interest of rapidly achieving a state of putative harmony. Since they favored a segregated division of labor and male leadership, they were able to avoid many opportunities for disagreement. Related to this we found that noncohabiters tended to disagree over different matters than cohabiters. Relations with parents and in-laws, family planning and financial matters were more often sources of conflict for the noncohabiters. Cohabiters had more arguments about values and beliefs and marital communication. In their struggle for an egalitarian relationship they tried to "talk things over," "argue" and "discuss," to remain autonomous and have a relationship at the same time. More arguments and more communication were the result, as expressed by this woman:

"We have a lot of communication. We have a lot of conflicts too, but that is expected as far as I'm concerned. Some people would probably get a divorce if some of these came up, but as far as I'm concerned they are normal things that have to be ironed out eventually, or at least mellowed down, one of the two."

Another wife stated:

"I feel I have an exceptional marriage, and the single most important reason is that we can talk things out. We also both feel that the year we lived together before we were married was instrumental in achieving this ability."
SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Summarizing our results, we can say that there were indeed, important differences in the courtship experiences and marital outcomes of the two types of newly-weds. While both experienced some form of parental influence to legalize their relationship, the cohabitors were much freer of parental surveillance and able to conduct their courtships in a more autonomous manner. We speculate that their higher social class backgrounds and somewhat less close, looser family ties and more permissive parents may have been predisposing influences.

During the first two years of marriage, we found that most cohabitors wished to postpone parenthood in order to pursue educational and career goals. They seemed to be evolving towards a marriage in which both spouses aspired towards managerial or professional careers. Self development was underlying theme in their goals; "personhood before parenthood" could be said to be their motto. Associated with these goals, was the finding of more equality in their marital relationship. Decisions were made on the basis of a consensus. In contrast, noncohabitors were more frequently oriented towards early parenthood and a more traditional male-dominated, i.e. husband-as-leader-and-provider marriage. The level of marital conflict was about the same for both cohabitors and noncohabitors, however, although it seemed to center around different issues.

Can we conclude that cohabitation has a positive effect upon the subsequent marriage? Perhaps all that we can safely say is that their marriages seem to be different, possibly more satisfactory at this stage. The question of durability may not be as important as the participants' perception of fulfillment. It appears that cohabitational unions are more open to contemporary trends towards greater communication, sexual equality and occupational achievement. We agree with Trost's (1976) and Danziger's (1979) contention that marriages undertaken on the basis of a rather romanticized courtship, undiluted by daily realities, may not be as readily formed by cohabitors; thus reducing the proportion of matrimonial misalliances.

The conclusions of the present study would, of course, be less tentatively phrased if they were based upon a larger, longitudinally-studied sample. Furthermore, it was not possible to disentangle the effects of cohabitation per se from those possibly stemming from the family backgrounds, social class and personality characteristics of cohabitors since an experiment of factorial design would be required. It could be argued, for instance, that cohabitors had different value orientations which were expressed in their marital goals and relationships, even if they had not cohabited.

As the United States and other industrial societies move comparatively rapidly towards a population equilibrium, the emerging trends towards premarital cohabitation, postponed parenthood and married women in the labor force will gather momentum. A more symmetrical relationship between spouses, with less attachment to their families of origin, and greater involvement in the occupational structure will characterize the family of the foreseeable future. We predict that cohabitation far from being considered a deviant or illicit arrangement, will be seen as a sound
preparation for a satisfactory marriage. From our present perspective, it strongly appears to be a harbinger of changes in the family, which will accompany our entry into the next millennium.

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