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COLLEGE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS
OF THE MYTHS AND REALITIES
OF COHABITATION

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Chapter one focuses on the introduction of the study, the problem statement, the purpose of the study, theoretical framework and how it can be applied to cohabitation, and lastly conceptual hypotheses and conceptual definitions.

Cohabitation has increased to such an extent that it has become not only a common pathway into marriage but also an alternate form of marriage for many couples. Cohabitation refers to an intimate sexual union of two non-married partners living in the same residence for a sustained period of time (Waite, 2000). Over four million couples currently cohabit in the United States (Seltzer, 2000). Half of all marriages and remarriages now begin as cohabiting relationships (Olson & DeFrain, 2000), and most young men and women will cohabit at some point in their lives (Smock, 2000). The median duration of cohabitation is 1.3 years (Seltzer, 2000). The most recent estimates suggest that about 55% of cohabiting couples marry, and 40% will end the relationship within five years of the beginning of cohabitation (Waite, 2000). Over 29% of cohabiting couples are estimated to break up after two years; and if a cohabiting couple ends up marrying, they are estimated to divorce within five years. Increases in cohabitation have occurred in all races and ethnic groups; thus cohabitation has become a normative experience for many households (Smock, 2000).

The meaning of cohabitation depends on expectations and experiences of individuals who form the union as well as on the social context in which it occurs

(Batalova & Cohen, 2002). Accordingly, explanations for increased cohabitation in the United States include: 1) rising individual freedom; 2) self expression; 3) a growing anti-marriage sentiment; 4) economic considerations; 5) the sexual revolution and the availability of birth control; and 6) increased independence for women. Oppenheimer (1988) agrees with the economic approach to cohabitation. He states that cohabitation is a living arrangement for people to cut costs and assess a partner's potential to be a good economic match or egalitarian partner.

Several research articles also have attempted to explain the reasons behind the trend of cohabitation. Bumpass and Sweet (1992) discussed the anti-marriage sentiment; these couples are deliberately seeking an alternative to traditional marriage believing marriage to be "irrelevant." Thornton, Axinn, and Hill (1992) explained the increase in cohabitation as a perceived authority decline characterized by lower confidence in the guidance of religious and social institutions. Bumpass, Sweet, and Cherlin (1991) found the rising trend of cohabitation to be connected to a fear of or disbelief in long-term commitment. Bumpass (1990) found that those who have seen their parents or relatives get divorced feel that living together is a test of their relationship or a trial period allowing them to learn what they can about their partner so that the best choice can be made and divorce can be avoided.

Statement of the Problem

Cohabitation affects many areas of family life. The problem that this study will focus on is college students' perceptions of the myths and realities of cohabitation.

Purpose of the Study

Current college students will be questioned on their knowledge of cohabitation to find out if their thoughts and opinions are consistent with the current research on cohabitation. If the students' answers are not consistent with the literature, then the questionnaire could be a tool to educate college students and others about the realities of cohabitation.

Cohabitation and Exchange Theory

A theoretical perspective that can be applied to the study of cohabitation is the exchange theory. The premise of the exchange theory is that humans avoid costs and seek rewards in all contexts, and seek to maximize profits and minimize losses (Nye, 1979). The three major concepts in exchange theory are resources, rewards and costs. Sabatelli and Shehan (1993) define these concepts. Resources are potentially used in interactions, either to increase or decrease profit. Rewards are anything that is perceived as beneficial to an individual's interest, and costs are perceived as not beneficial to an individual's interest.

According to Sabatelli and Shehan (1993), there are six basic assumptions of the exchange theory within the nature of humans and human relationships. First, humans seek rewards and avoid punishments. Second, when interacting with others, humans seek to maximize profits for themselves, while minimizing costs. Third, humans are rational beings, and within the limitations of information they possess, they calculate rewards, costs, and consider alternatives before acting. Fourth, the standards that humans use to evaluate rewards and costs differ from person to person and can vary over time. Fifth, the importance that humans attach to the behavior in relationships varies from person to

person and over the course of time. Finally, the greater the value of a reward exceeds one's expectations, the less valued the reward will become in the future. A relevant proposition to the exchange theory is that individuals choose the alternatives from which they expect the most profit; rewards being equal, they choose alternatives from which they anticipate the fewest costs (Nye, 1979). The principal of power is also related to exchange theory concerning relationships; the individual with the most resources has greater access to power and control in the relationship (Blau, 1964).

Exchange theory can be applied to describe why people choose to cohabit in many ways. First of all, if a couple chooses not to get married, but to live together because it will save them money by investing less in one residence than two, the reward of living together is greater than the cost of living alone. There could also be many benefits to living together over the cost of marriage. The couple might be in a situation where they are unsure if they are right for each other, and in this sense cohabitation would be a benefit to them to test the water before taking the plunge into marriage. Also, for some marriage entails less freedom and independence than cohabitation. There are numerous reasons why a person might choose to cohabit instead of marrying, or remaining single. In all of these scenarios, the perceived benefits exceed the costs.

According to exchange theory, the individual with more resources has more power and is more likely to risk losing the relationship than the individual with fewer resources (Becker, 1981). In the case of cohabitation, if a woman decides to move in with a man because she does not have enough money to live by herself, and he will let her live with him for free while paying her way, then he would be holding the most power in the relationship. Holding more resources and, therefore, more power, he also will have more

control over her than she has over him. The man has the ability to extract compliance in an exchange relationship by controlling valued rewards and costs. This means that while the man lets the woman live in his house, he may expect her to provide equitable rewards for him, such as cooking, cleaning, and doing the laundry.

Cohabiting constitutes less of an investment in a relationship compared to that of marriage (Demaris, 2001). When investment in a relationship is low, couples experiencing difficulty are expected to be less committed to the relationship and more willing to dissolve their relationship (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). Since research finds that only about half of cohabiting relationships actually end up as marriages, and that most of cohabiting relationships split up after an average of a year, the exchange theory fits with this study on cohabitation by giving a theoretical explanation for why so many cohabiting relationships end. When considering whether or not to cohabit, using the exchange theory, one would consider the benefit of living together in relation to the costs or disadvantages of living together. If the perceived positives are greater than the perceived negatives, then cohabiting could be seen as profitable, resulting in a greater likelihood of cohabitation. However, idealistic perceptions of cohabitation could result in one perceiving greater rewards or fewer costs to cohabitation than may be the case in actuality. Exchange theory suggests that those who choose to cohabit will perceive cohabitation as offering more rewards than costs.

Conceptual Hypotheses

From the description of the rising trends in cohabitation, and the review of the current research pertaining to cohabitation, three hypotheses will be examined.

Hypothesis #1: Students that perceive relationships idealistically are likely to have less of an understanding of the realities of cohabitation than students who perceive relationships as less idealistic.

Hypothesis #2: Cohabiting individuals will have less of an understanding of the realities of cohabitation than non-cohabiting individuals.

Hypothesis #3: Students who have taken a college course that includes information about cohabitation will have a greater understanding of the realities of cohabitation than students that have not taken a course that includes information about cohabitation.

Definition of Terms

Level of perception of relationships as idealistic- the tendency of individuals to answer personal questions in a socially desirable manner (Fournier, Olson, & Druckman, 1983).

Amount of knowledge about cohabiting relationships- extent to which an individual knows and interprets the current findings or facts about cohabitation, or, the percentage of correct answers on the cohabitation questionnaire.

Cohabiting status- when an unmarried couple involved in a romantic relationship live together in one residence (Manning, 2001).

Coursework experience- if a student has earned credit for a college course that includes information about cohabitation.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter extensively covers the literature pertaining to the relationship of cohabitation to mental and physical health, parenting and children, legal issues, religion, marriage and divorce. Demographic factors relating to cohabitation such as education and economics, gender roles, racial factors, and the older population will also be discussed. A section on idealistic distortion will conclude this chapter.

The Relationship between Cohabitation and Mental and Physical Health

Married couples enjoy better mental and physical health than the unmarried (Wu & Hart, 2002). Cohabiting women have rates of depression three times higher than married women do; and cohabiting women are more irritable, anxious, worried and unhappy compared to their married counterparts (Brown, 2000). Cohabiting couples as a whole (men included) report lower levels of happiness, lower levels of sexual exclusivity and sexual satisfaction, and poorer relationships with their parents when compared to marrieds (Nock, 1995). The greater depression characterizing cohabitators is primarily due to their higher relationship instability relative to marrieds; cohabitators' reports of relationship instability are about 25% higher than marrieds' reports (Brown; 2000). High levels of relationship instability are especially detrimental for cohabitators who have been in their union for a long period of time. Compared to cohabiting men, married men report less depression, less anxiety, and lower levels of other types of psychological distress

than do those who are single, divorced or widowed (Mirowsky & Ross, 1989). When comparing cohabiting couples to singles, Kurdek (1991) reports cohabitators have lower levels of depression and higher levels of happiness than singles, but their mental and physical well-being is still inferior to that of marrieds (Brown, 2000).

Cohabitators without plans to marry were found to be more inclined to argue, hit, shout, and have an unfair division of labor than married couples (Brown & Booth, 1996). Women in cohabiting relationships are more likely than married women to suffer physical and sexual abuse; and, compared with unmarried cohabitators, married couples engage in a substantially lower rate of physical aggression (Stets, 1991). These findings suggest the possibility that violent cohabitators are less likely to marry than their nonviolent counterparts. If this is the case, cohabitation does serve to improve marital stability by filtering out some of the worst marriage risks, violent couples (DeMaris, 2001). In other words, Demaris suggests that if people did not cohabit before marriage, the divorce rates would be even higher than what they currently are. DeMaris also found somewhat surprising results concerning violence in cohabiting couples; he found that it was women's violence, and not men's, that retards the rate of entry into marriage.

Couples who cohabit have quite different and significantly weaker relationships than married couples (Schoen & Weinick, 1993). Unmarried people in general are not as happy as those who are married; they tend to get sick more often and die younger (Waite, 2000). The unmarried are far more likely to die from all causes, including coronary heart disease, stroke, pneumonia, many kinds of cancer, cirrhosis of the liver, automobile accidents, murder and suicide (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). Both men and women live longer, happier, healthier, and wealthier lives when they are married (U.S. Bureau of

Census, 1998). Overall, marrieds are in better psychological and physical health than their non-married counterparts (Brown, 2000).

The Relationship between Cohabitation, Parenting, and Children

The number of children born to unmarried parents has increased to almost 1/3 of all births in the United States (Seltzer, 2000). Of the four million cohabiting couples in the U.S. today, about 40% have resident children (Brown, 2000). Seltzer found that there has been a 25% increase in the number of children since the early 1980s. Over ¼ of unmarried mothers are cohabiting at the time of their children's birth (Bumpass et al. 1995).

One of the greatest problems of children living with a cohabiting couple is the high risk that the couple will break up (Wu, 1995). Children born into a cohabiting union are already at a disadvantage in terms of parental income and education and are most likely to experience the family form of cohabitation themselves (Smock, 2000). The poorer relationship quality reported by cohabitators has significant consequences for children's well being. Poor parental relationship quality is associated with dating difficulties, lower marital quality, greater odds of dissolution, lower levels of education attainment, and greater psychological distress among offspring (Brown, 2000). Given the high rates of divorce, cohabitation, and non-marital fertility, a substantial proportion of children are at risk of experiencing these adverse outcomes.

Previous research has demonstrated effects of parental behavior, attitudes, and values on children's decisions concerning premarital sex and union formation (Axinn & Thornton, 1992). Children of parents who experienced a divorce are more likely to experience non-marital cohabitation than children of stable married parents (Thornton et

al. 1995). Thornton et al. also concluded that parents who divorce may have more favorable attitudes toward divorce or less favorable attitudes toward marriage, both of which may be transmitted to their children and may lead to higher rates of both cohabitation and divorce. Parents' attitudes toward marriage and divorce may be involved in the process of selecting their children into cohabiting unions; those who experience disruption in parental marriages, especially women, are more likely to cohabit (Axinn & Thornton, 1995). Larson and Holman (1994) found that people who spend part of their childhood in single parent or cohabiting families are more likely to have their own union break up. The higher the quality or cohesion in the parent's relationship, the higher the quality of their children's relationship. Acceptance of premarital cohabitation was higher among adolescents when they were exposed to significant levels of parental conflict and divorce (Heights, Martin, Martin, & Martin, 2001). As non-married parents or previously married parents begin to engage in sexual activity outside the boundaries of marriage, and perhaps initiate a non-marital relationship, the acceptability of these nontraditional behaviors is communicated to their children (Axinn & Barber, 1997).

If one includes cohabitation in the definition of stepfamily, then almost one half of all stepfamilies are cases of a biological parent and cohabiting partner (Bumpass et al., 1995). Cohabitors' depression scores are increased by the presence of biological and stepchildren, whereas marrieds' depression scores are impervious to children (Brown, 2000). Bumpass et al. (1995) found that half of all currently married stepfamilies with children began with cohabitation, and two-thirds of children entering stepfamilies do so in the setting of cohabitation rather than marriage (Seltzer, 2000).

Wu and Balakrishnan (1995) suggest that those who are comfortable with having children outside of marriage represent those who are more ideologically committed to long-term cohabitation as an alternative to marriage. Studies have found that children might actually be a positive influence on cohabitation as they lower the risk of separation in cohabiting unions, yet they also retard the transition to marriage (DeMaris, 2001). Seltzer (2000) has comparative research on cohabiting and children. She states that childbearing apparently promotes union stability; partners were less likely to marry, but they were also less likely to separate. The differences between cohabitators and marrieds with children are considerable; the economic status of cohabiting households with children resembles that of single-mother households (Manning & Lichter, 1996). Cohabiting partners also receive less social recognition as a parent (Seltzer, 2000). Research has shown that, when compared to a cohabiting union, stable, single motherhood may provide advantages to raising children (Thomson, Mosley, Hanson, & McLanahan, 2001).

Cohabitation and Legal Issues

Living together does not provide a legally binding document wherein both partners are protected by law like a marriage license does (Mahoney, 2002). A cohabitation agreement, a formal contract between a cohabiting couple, is a written document that both partners sign. A written agreement can protect cohabitators in terms such as pension plans, inheritance, property ownership rights, health care issues and welfare payments. The contract spells out the terms of the cohabiting couple's union and their possible dissolution as partners; and when necessary, courts interpret and enforce the terms of the contract (Waite, 2000). When a written agreement is signed, the law

presumes that the parties put everything intended into that contract; the instrument speaks for itself, and the courts will not hear testimonies about understandings or discussions from before the agreement was signed (Hughston & Hughston, 1989). Palimony, an allowance for support given to one cohabiting partner from their former live-in partner after the relationship has been terminated, can also be established in a cohabitation agreement (Olson & Defrain, 2000).

Hughston and Hughston (1989) state three areas that a cohabitation agreement should cover: 1) it should resemble a business partner agreement; the unmarried couple should state their intentions, and what it is that is being exchanged (i.e., property, automobiles, money); 2) the agreement must be reasonable; one party can not have all the benefits and the other get nothing in return; 3) the agreement must be comprehensive in that it covers every aspect of the relationship that could possibly be the subject of conflict in the case of a breakup. If a breakup occurs, cohabitators have liability for debts, such as a car payment, credit cards, property or anything else if their names appear together on the debt (Gallen, 1981).

In every state, if a person dies without a will, the state will divide the estate of the deceased among the survivors that are related to the decedent; cohabitators are not included in this distribution (Hughston & Hughston, 1989). Hughston and Hughston also state that if a written agreement has been executed, the descendant's parents, children, or formal legal spouse can challenge it. Unless there is a valid will, children or previous legal family could get the entire estate, not the surviving cohabitor. A will leaving assets to the surviving cohabitor is the only method of assuring that the cohabiting partner will receive the bequest intended by the deceased partner (Mahoney, 2002).

Cohabitation and Religion

Low levels of religious importance/participation are related to higher levels of cohabitation and lower rates of subsequent marriage (Waite, 2000). Those who cohabit are on average more liberal and less religious (Stolzenberg & Waite, 1995). Some evidence suggests that the act of cohabitation actually diminishes religious participation, whereas marriage tends to increase it (Axinn & Thornton, 1992). Thornton et al. (1992) found results consistent with the above study, that commitment to and participation in religious activities is likely to decrease as a result of cohabitation, and that religiosity may also increase the marriage rate because many religious groups place a high value on marriage, procreation and family life. Frequent attendance at religious services and activities probably increases contact with religious messages encouraging marriage and discouraging premarital sex and cohabitation (Axinn & Thornton, 1992).

Parents can influence the courtship and marriage values and behaviors of their children by influencing their children's own religiosity; they can also influence their children's cohabitational and marital behavior through their guidance and supervision (Thornton et al., 1992). Thornton et al. also stated that people without religious affiliations opt more for cohabitation and less for marriage than do people who identify with a religious group.

The Relationship between Cohabitation and Marriage

Popular sentiment holds that cohabitation is useful to determine a couple's suitability for marriage. Some studies have suggested that the increase in cohabitation is a direct result of the increase in individual freedom to initiate and end intimate

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Popular sentiment holds that cohabitation is useful to determine a couple's suitability for marriage. Some studies have suggested that the increase in cohabitation is a direct result of the increase in individual freedom to initiate and end intimate

relationships. One of the reasons for the decline in couples married by age 25 in the past few decades is offset by entry into cohabitation, and the recent decline in rates of entry into remarriage are fully compensated for by increasing rates in cohabitation (Brown, 2000). Cohabitation is now a common entry into marriage, evidence that for many individuals it is an important stage in the courtship process (Bumpass & Sweet, 1995). Cohabital experiences delay the timing of first marriage by 26% for women and 19% for men (Wu, 1999).

Akerlof, Yellen, and Katz (1996) state that the bargaining position of women has improved because of better birth control technology and the availability of abortion. These changes have allowed women to have intimate relationships and live-in partnerships with men without fear of pregnancy. They can, therefore, extend their search process to include trial relationships and partnerships prior to marriage. Men can now demand sex without commitment and find some woman willing to agree; therefore, women who wish to marry are at a disadvantage because they no longer can trade sexual access for marriage. Nor can they convince men to marry them if they become pregnant.

Long-term cohabiting relationships in America are far rarer than successful marriages (Bumpass & Sweet, 1995). More than half of first time cohabitators marry the person with whom they cohabit (Smock, 2000). Seventy six percent report plans to marry their partner, but the percentages that actually do so are lower (Brown & Booth, 1996). Ten to thirty percent of cohabitators intend to never marry (Bumpass & Sweet, 1990). Brown and Booth also found that those who cohabit more than once prior to marriage have much higher rates of later divorce. Spouses who cohabit before marriage also have higher rates of separation, and unions that begin as cohabitations are more

unsatisfactory and unstable than those that follow a more traditional trajectory into marriage (Cohan & Kleinbaum, 2002).

Cohan and Kleinbaum (2002) describe the instability between cohabiting couples as the “cohabitation effect.” There are three basic hypotheses to explain the cohabitation effect. First, the association between cohabitation and marital instability may be an artifact of union duration. According to Cohan and Kleinbaum, there is a normative decline in marital satisfaction in the early years of marriage. Cohabitors are farther along that route when they enter the marital union. There are mixed results, however, regarding whether union duration accounts for the greater risk of divorce among cohabitators (Teachman, Thomas, & Paasch, 1991). Secondly, selection effects account for the association between cohabitation and divorce. People who cohabit before marriage are more likely to possess characteristics that are also risk factors for divorce such as parental divorce, less education, lower income, being non-white, younger age, premarital pregnancy, childbirth and a previous divorce. This evidence shows that individuals have become more egalitarian and less traditional in their view of relationships. However, to date, no demographic characteristics examined as possible selection effects have consistently explained the cohabitation effect (Cohan & Kleinbaum). Thirdly, the experience of cohabitation itself causes later relationship instability by altering partners’ values and lowering their threshold for leaving a relationship. Cohabitors who have had a previous relationship dissolve report an increased acceptance of divorce and decreased rates of religious participation (Axinn & Barber, 1997). It is also possible that cohabitation experiences change the ways that people view marriage and divorce (Booth & Johnson, 1988). Particularly important is the possibility that cohabitation weakens

commitment to marriage as an institution. If those who cohabit outside marriage find that this arrangement provides a compatible lifestyle, their preference for marital unions may decline.

Premarital cohabitation experience appears to be a vulnerability spouses bring into marriage that puts them at risk for poorer marital communication. Results involving problem solving behavior suggest premarital cohabitation is associated with more destructive and disruptive communication behaviors during marriage that are less likely to achieve a successful resolution and may contribute to marital deterioration over time (Gottman, 1994). A positive communication style increases the rate of marriage for currently cohabiting couples (DeMaris, 2001). Those who live together prior to marriage also score lower on tests rating satisfaction with their marriage compared to couples that did not cohabit before marriage (DeMaris & Leslie, 1984). Comparisons of cohabiting and marital relationships have revealed that, on average, cohabitators' assessments of their levels of happiness and fairness are lower and their levels of disagreement and conflict are higher compared with those of their married counterparts (Brown & Booth, 1996).

There appear to be differences on a range of characteristics between cohabitators and both married and single people. Rindfull and VandenHeuvel (1990) compared childbearing intentions, schooling, homeownership, employment, and other characteristics among the three groups and found that cohabitators are more similar to single than married people in virtually all of the comparisons. These findings led the authors to conclude that cohabitation is not an alternative to marriage but an alternative to singlehood. Nock (1995) states that cohabitation is an incomplete institution. No matter how widespread the practice, strong consensual norms or formal laws do not yet govern

non-marital unions. Nock argues that the weak institution of cohabitation has several implications: 1) Fewer obstacles exist to ending a cohabiting relationship than a marriage; 2) Cohabitors are less likely to be integrated into important social support networks; and 3) There is much more ambiguity about what it means to be a cohabiting partner than what it means to be a spouse. Nock also finds that cohabitors report lower levels of commitment and lower levels of relationship happiness than do married people, supporting Brown and Booth's (1996) findings about levels of happiness in cohabiting relationships.

Horwitz and White (1998) found that the weaker commitment characterizing cohabiting unions might heighten uncertainty and consequently decrease well-being. However, the lesser commitment involved in cohabitation may allow cohabitors to obtain many of the advantages of a marital union without the obligation of a long-term commitment. Horwitz and White (1996) also found that cohabitors in long-term unions are considerably worse off in terms of relationship quality and commitment than those who have cohabited for shorter periods of time and those who are married. Brown and Booth (1996) have suggested that there are two types of cohabiting couples: those who have plans to marry, and those that do not; it is only cohabiting couples without plans to marry who report significantly lower-quality relationships. Forste and Tanfer (1996) support Nock's thesis by finding positive results for cohabitation being more similar to dating than marriage in terms of sexual commitment. They find that cohabitation, relative to marriage, is selective of less committed individuals. In addition, using currently married women, Forste and Tanfer found that cohabiting individuals tend to be less committed before marriage and more likely to be unfaithful after marriage.

Clarkberg, Stolzenberg, and Waite (1993) further back up the previous research by stating that cohabiting people's attitudes and values towards families differ from those who are married. They found that men and women who reject the constraints and demands of traditional gender roles are more likely to choose an informal union compared to those who accept traditional roles. Their study showed cohabitators to be more egalitarian in their relationship behaviors than married couples. They concluded that individuals who marry and those who cohabit differ in their conceptions of a good relationship. Cohabitators value and are more interested in equality and individual independence within a relationship, whereas people who marry value and rely more on interdependence and the exchange of services. Newcomb (1987) states that compared to a marital union, cohabitation is a relationship with looser bonds and different goals, norms, and behaviors. Newcomb completed a longitudinal study on patterns of cohabitation, marriage and divorce. He found that cohabiting males and females showed more deviance, less religiosity, increased drug use, and poorer relations with parents than did non-cohabitants. Cohabiting people also tended to be more insecure, have poorer self-esteem, poorer relationships with all social contacts, and have less direction than married couples. Females were also more likely to be dependent on others and expressed less satisfaction with their overall quality of life.

The Relationship between Cohabitation and Divorce

Cohabiting experiences significantly increase people's acceptance of divorce (Axinn & Thornton, 1992). People who cohabit have substantially higher divorce rates than those who do not cohabit. What could cause a substantial positive relationship between cohabitation and divorce? On one hand, some scholars suggest that the

correlation is basically spurious and represents no direct causal influence of cohabitation on divorce (Booth & Johnson, 1988). On the other hand, Booth and Johnson suggest that it is possible that cohabitation has a direct negative influence on marital stability by producing relationships, attitudes, or values that increase susceptibility to divorce. Axinn and Thornton found in their research that non-marital cohabiting relationships indeed are selective of those who are less committed to marriage and most accepting of divorce. The risk of divorce after living together is 40 to 85% higher than the risk of divorce after not living together. In other words, those who live together before marriage are almost twice as likely to divorce than those who did not live together (Bumpass & Sweet, 1995).

Since long-term commitment is uncertain in many cohabiting relationships, cohabiting partners may continue to evaluate other potential mates, which may contribute to relationship instability (Cohan & Kleinbaum, 2002). Less confidence in the stability of their relationship among cohabitators may carry over into marriage and undermine commitment and the development of relationship skills. A dissolution of cohabitation could reinforce the view that intimate relationships are fragile and temporary, thereby reducing the expectation that marriage is a lifetime relationship and commitment (Axinn & Thornton, 1992). These factors could lead to a higher divorce rate for cohabitators who went on to marry their cohabiting partner.

Smock (2000) presents two main explanations that explain the association between cohabitation and divorce/separation, and both have received empirical support. First, selection explanation refers to the idea that people who cohabit before marriage differ in important ways from those who do not, and these ways increase the likelihood of marital instability. Second, there is something about cohabitation itself, the experience of

cohabitation, that increases the likelihood of marital disruption above and beyond one's characteristics at the start of the cohabitation; through cohabitation people learn about and come to accept the temporary nature of relationships, and in particular that there are alternatives to marriage. The two explanations are not mutually exclusive, the first focusing on the characteristics that initially select people to cohabit, and the second suggesting that the experience of cohabitation alters these characteristics to make people even more divorce-prone.

Demographic Factors

The Education and Economics of Cohabiting Couples

Cohabitation tends to be selective of people with slightly lower economic status, usually measured in terms of educational achievement or income (Clarkberg, Stolzenberg, & Waite, 1995). Those not completing high school are nearly twice as likely to cohabit as those completing college. Marriage for cohabitators is positively related to higher levels of education and economics (Waite, 2000). The proportion of full-time enrollment in college is lower for cohabitators than non-cohabitators. School enrollment may deter the entry into cohabitation (Thornton, Axinn, & Teachman, 1995). Cohabitators are characterized as having lower levels of education and earnings compared to married couples (Brown & Booth, 1996). Forste and Tanfer (1996) suggest that, among couples who cohabited before marriage, if the woman has more education than her partner, she is more willing to risk the relationship by having an affair than if both members of the couple are equal in terms of education. If the man has more education, the reverse appears to be true.

Cohabiting is most common among women from disadvantaged economic backgrounds (Waite, 2000). Cohabiting couples are generally not certain about their relationship and may shy away from becoming too dependent on a partner; they might also be reluctant to share in joint finances (Kalmign & Bernasco, 2001). Cohabiting couples are more likely to stay together when they have similar incomes, and this is unimportant for married couples (Brines & Joyner, 1999). Cohabitators with higher incomes are more likely to expect to marry; and when the male partner is more economically secure, they are also more likely to marry (Seltzer, 2000). Seltzer also states that married couples are more likely to pool their finances than cohabiting couples. She also found that cohabiting couples are more likely to have similar earnings; when cohabiting couples have similar earnings, they have a more stable relationship than those with dissimilar earnings. Stratton (2002) examined the wage difference for married and cohabiting men and found that the growth of wages increases with marriage, and that married couples make more money. Legally, cohabiting couples are less responsible for supporting one another than are married couples, and cohabitators have less of a stake in their partner's career. Cohen (1999) determined that men in long-term cohabiting relationships appear to experience substantial wage gains; and these gains appear to match those of married men quite closely.

Since marrieds report higher earnings than non-marrieds, these earnings translate into greater peace of mind and fewer health problems (Kessler & Essex, 1982). Wu and Hart (2002) found comparable results in that a rise in a household income increases women's self-reported health status. Economic strain is more depressing for non-marrieds than marrieds; marrieds have higher levels of self-esteem and mastery, which

lessen the depressive effect of economic hardship (Brown, 2000). Brown also concluded that economic stability facilitates marital stability, which is an important component of marrieds' well being. Smock and Manning (1997) found that cohabiting men's economic characteristics were associated with marriage, but those of cohabiting women's were not. Men's high earnings and education levels promoted marriage and men's full-time employment minimized the odds of separation, regardless of whether women's economic circumstances were included. Cohabiting couples tend to be poorer than their married counterparts; this might be because they are more likely to be in the process of building their career (Waite, 2000). Waite also found that career immaturity may inhibit marriage formation, and unstable work patterns may increase uncertainty about long-term socioeconomic status. Oppenheimer (1994) poses the argument that men's deteriorating economic status is partially responsible for the decline in marriage. Brown (2000) supports this thesis by determining that a cohabitor's decision to marry did not appear to be contingent on women's economic characteristics but on the male partner's economic resources.

Cohabitation and Gender Roles

South and Spitze (1994) found that cohabiting men do as much housework as married men, yet cohabiting women do less hours of housework per week compared to married women. Women perform the majority of the housework in both contexts. Seltzer (2000) stated that cohabiting couples are more egalitarian in the division of housework, and married couples who cohabited before marriage may experience conflict in attempting to maintain egalitarian roles due to social pressures.

Batalova and Cohen (2002) found it important to study housework in the context of cohabitation for two reasons: 1) the dramatic increase in the number of cohabiting couples suggests that marriage no longer represents the only acceptable living arrangement; and 2) housework is an essential part of living regardless of household structure. Batalova and Cohen (2002) found the same results as South and Spitz: cohabiting men are not significantly different in doing housework from their married counterparts; and though cohabiting women do much more housework than men, they still do less housework than married women do. Gupta (1999) found that the transition from cohabitation to marriage produces no effect on the gender division of housework time, and cohabitation experience appears to contribute to greater equality in the sharing of housework. In a comparison of women's housework and men's earnings, it was found that the two were positively associated with union formalization (Brown, 2000). If the woman's gender role attitudes were more egalitarian than were her partner's, the odds of marriage decreased (Sanchez, Manning, & Smock, 1998). Men exchange economic support for women's domestic support (Waite, 2000). Sanchez et al. (1998) also found that cohabiting women were more likely than their male partners to report that the division of household labor is unfair. Couples' disagreement about the fairness of the division of household labor is indicative of a lack of cohesion and is positively associated with separation (Brown, 2000).

Cohabitation and Racial Factors

African American and Caucasian cohabitators differ in their union outcomes; African Americans are only half as likely as are Caucasians to marry their cohabiting partner (Manning & Smock, 1995). Manning and Smock found that among African

Americans, cohabitation often serves as a long-term alternative to marriage; whereas for Caucasians, cohabitation is primarily a short-term alternative leading to marriage, as compared to African Americans. Cohabitation in America is more common among African Americans, Puerto Ricans, and disadvantaged Caucasian women. One reason for this is that male income and employment are lower among minorities and lower classes; male economic status remains an important determinant as to whether or not a man feels ready to marry and a woman wants to marry him (Manning & Smock, 1997).

Manning (2001) found that Hispanic women were 77% more likely than Caucasian women to conceive a child in cohabitation, and African American women were 69% more likely than Caucasian women to do so. Also, among women who become pregnant while cohabiting, Hispanic women were almost twice as likely and African American women were three times as likely as Caucasian women to remain cohabiting with their partner after their child was born. Children born to Hispanic women in cohabiting unions were also 70% more likely to be intended than those born to cohabiting women of other ethnicities. Based on levels of childbearing during cohabitation, relationship status at time of birth, and intention to have children, it appears that cohabitation is a more acceptable arena for family building among Hispanic women than among Caucasians or African Americans (Manning, 2001).

Cohabitation and the Older Population

The older population of cohabitators are likely not to form a marital union at all and are more likely to have been divorced (Waite, 2000). Explanations of cohabitation among the elderly have emphasized the economic penalties and rewards that late life marriage brings to some older people (Chevan, 1996). From an economic perspective,

Chevan states that persons collecting various public assistance benefits contingent on income, including supplemental security income, may find those benefits reduced or eliminated if they marry. Also, if passing an estate, potential heirs may discourage marriage and encourage cohabitation if inheritance of an estate is threatened by a marriage. From a cost-benefit perspective, these economic incentives indicate that the rewards of cohabitation may exceed the rewards of marriage for the older population (Chevan, 1996). Furthermore, the attitude of older unmarried persons toward cohabitation is probably conditioned by how their previous marriage, if any, terminated. The divorced and separated are less likely than the widowed to invoke the memory of their former spouse and thoughts of marriage vows when considering cohabitation (Waite, 2000). The presence of chronic health problems may also promote cohabitation and deter an older cohabiting couple from marrying (Chevan, 1996).

Idealistic Distortion

A factor that may complicate perceptions of the rewards and costs of cohabitation is idealism. There is some debate as to whether idealistic distortion, defined as positive illusions about one's partner (Fowers, Veingrad, & Domincis, 2002), is helpful or harmful to unmarried couples. Murray, Holmes, and Griffin (1996) believe that idealism about a partner is a critical feature of satisfying relationships. Taylor and Brown (1988) support idealism by stating that positive illusions lead to healthy functioning. Such positive illusions include idealized self-perceptions, exaggerated perceptions of control, and unrealistic optimism. These illusions function to help couples to see the best in each other (Murray et al., 1996). Van Lange and Rusbult (1995) also support this perspective

in a positive manner; they suggest that the higher the level of satisfaction in a relationship, the higher the chance of seeing imperfect partners in idealized ways.

Ruvolo and Veroff (1997) have found idealized perceptions to be negatively related to relationship satisfaction, as well as to overall well-being. Many individuals enter a relationship idealizing that all of their needs and expectations will be met (Bonds-Raacke, Bearden, Carriere, Anderson, & Nicks, 2001). Some theories have attempted to account for the high incidence of idealism. First, it is thought that dating in general could have an impact on idealism; the fact that many dating couples take part in leisure activities together leads couples to assume that all time spent together in the future will be as carefree (Crooks & Baur, 1996). Second, Dym and Glenn (1993) have proposed that couples use idealism in their relationships because the media focuses on the myth that couples should live happily ever after. Thirdly, society has a great impact on idealism; people act and answer questions in a socially desired way, which may not actually represent their true feelings or experiences (Fournier, Olson, & Druckman, 1983). If one does not have the realization that he or she is holding high levels of idealism for their partner, then dissatisfaction with the relationship may occur (Bonds-Raack et al., 2001). It appears that more research is needed on the correlation of idealistic distortion and relationship perception (Fowers et al., 2002).

CHAPTER III.

METHODOLOGY

This section will describe the research design, sampling procedures, instruments, data collection procedures, operational hypotheses, and statistical analyses of the study.

Research Design

The research design that was most useful for this study is non-experimental, or correlational. The purpose of this research is exploratory, to explore what college students know about cohabitation. The unit of analysis was college students, so it is the individual level. The unit of observation is also individual: college students. This study was cross-sectional, administered at one time.

Sampling

The target population consisted of college students at a major land grant university, over the age of 18, currently enrolled in college. There was no upper age limit. They must have been enrolled in a course in Human Development and Family Science, or a course in Animal Science during the semester of data collection. Single, married, divorced, currently cohabiting individuals, as well as individuals that have never had a cohabiting experience were surveyed. The knowledge that they hold about the myths and realities of cohabitation was assessed. The sampling frame was the class list of students enrolled in the courses that were presented with the cohabitation assessment.

Since the sample consisted of college students in classrooms, the sampling method was convenience sampling. The first step that occurred for the sampling method was to obtain a non-random sample of classes in the Department of Human Development and Family Science and Department of Animal Science from the course schedule book. Next professors were contacted, in person, to see if they were interested in allowing the administration of a cohabitation assessment to their students.

The sampling design was a multi-stage sampling design. The first stage was to select the classes at OSU and to obtain permission from the instructors to conduct a survey in their classroom. The second stage pertained to the students in the classes, filling out the cohabitation assessment.

The sampling unit was students at OSU-Stillwater, enrolled in a course in either the Human Development and Family Science or Animal Science departments. Generalizability of the study was limited because of only surveying a convenience sample of college students, who might not be representative of all young adults. The generalizability to all college students may be limited to college students in the Mid-West. Since convenience sampling was used, there might be some occurrence of bias.

One hundred forty seven students took part in this study. Sixty (41%) of students were from the HDFS Department, fifty-eight (39%) were from the Animal Science Department, and twenty-nine (20%) were from other departments. The average age of students taking the Cooper Cohabitation questionnaire was 22 ($M = 21.4, sd = 3.8$). One hundred six (72%) of students had not taken a course that had cohabitation as a subject, and thirty-six (25%) of students had taken a course that included cohabitation as a subject, five students (3%) answers were missing. Twelve students (8%) reported that

they were currently cohabiting. When asked if they had ever cohabited, twenty-three (16%) of students reported yes. However, in order to conduct analyses without duplicating responses from subjects, those subjects ($n=10$) who had reported both current and previous cohabitation experiences were counted only once. Thus, the total number of students taking the Cooper Cohabitation Questionnaire that had cohabiting experience was 25.

Instruments

Knowledge of cohabitation

Amount of knowledge about cohabiting relationships was assessed through the Cooper Cohabitation Questionnaire developed specifically for this study. This questionnaire was patterned after Larson's (1988) Marriage Quiz. The Cooper Cohabitation Questionnaire initially consisted of 24 statements indicating myths and realities of cohabitation. The questionnaire is based upon empirical literature and is in a True/False format. The author reviewed literature and identified key points from the preceding literature review. These points have been aggregated to form the Cooper Cohabitation Questionnaire. Each correct answer is worth one point. A high score on the assessment would be considered 15 questions or above answered correctly. This is equal to 78%, which is considered above average (high C) and indicates a high level of knowledge about cohabitation. A low score on the assessment would be considered to be below 78%, or less than 15 questions answered correctly, and indicates a lack of knowledge about cohabitation (See appendix B for initial version of the Cooper Cohabitation Questionnaire). Sample items include: 1. *Couples who cohabited before marriage usually report greater marital satisfaction than those who did not;* and 2.

Individuals who cohabit before marriage are twice as likely to divorce than individuals who did not cohabit before marriage. To assess validity of the Cooper Cohabitation Questionnaire, three professors with Ph.D's in family science examined it to determine whether it contains content and face validity. Reliability was assessed through Cronbach's coefficient alpha of internal consistency reliability.

When the initial reliability was assessed there was an internal consistency reliability of $\alpha = .44$. When five items on the Cooper Cohabitation Questionnaire were deleted the internal consistency reliability was increased to $\alpha = .61$. The five items that were deleted were: 2: *Most individuals will cohabit at least once before getting married*; 4: *One reason why couples are marrying at a later age is because more couples are cohabiting before marriage*; 5: *About half of first-time cohabitators marry the person with whom they cohabit*; 11: *Married men do more housework than cohabiting men*; and 23: *Childbearing in cohabiting relationships promotes union stability in that couples are less likely to marry, or to separate* (see appendix C for current version of the Cooper Cohabitation Questionnaire). These five items tended to be centered on three areas: 1) Cohabitation and the decision to marry or timing of marriage; 2) Cohabitation and gender roles; and 3) Cohabitation and family roles.

Idealism

The independent variable, level of perception of relationships as idealistic, was measured by the idealistic distortion subscale of the PREPARE-ENRICH (Olson, Fournier & Druckman, 2000), (see appendix D). This is a 7-question assessment in the Likert scale format, scored at a range from "highly agree" to "highly disagree". A high score indicates a high level of idealism, and a low score indicates a low level of idealism.

Previous research has indicated that the idealistic distortion subscale has good construct validity, internal consistency reliability of $\alpha = .84$, and a two-week test-retest reliability of .79 (Olson, Fournier & Druckman, 2000). The current sample had an internal consistency reliability of $\alpha = .89$ for the Idealistic Distortion subscale of PREPARE-ENRICH.

Demographic information

A sheet requesting demographic information was included to determine characteristics of the sample (see appendix E). The demographic sheet asked students which department they were in at OSU, their age, if they had ever taken a course in family relations involving cohabitation as a subject, if they currently cohabited, and if they had ever cohabited.

Data Collection Procedures

The survey was administered to college students during the fourth and fifth months of the spring semester in 2003. Before the questionnaire was administered, the researcher read a solicitation script to the students (see appendix A). This script relayed to the students the procedures, that participation was voluntary and confidential and that they could withdraw from the assessment at any time. The assessment took approximately 15 minutes.

Names were not requested; demographic information was collected only for adequate description of the sample and that accurate conclusions about college students' knowledge of the myths and realities of cohabitation could be formed. Answers are locked in a file drawer. All answers are kept anonymous. Respondents were made aware that there should be no risk of harm.

Operational Hypotheses

Hypothesis #1: Students who score higher on the Idealistic Distortion subscale of PREPARE-ENRICH will score lower on the Cooper Cohabitation Questionnaire than students who score lower on the Idealistic Distortion subscale of PREPARE-ENRICH.

Hypothesis #2: Cohabiting individuals will score lower on the Cooper Cohabitation Questionnaire than individuals who have not cohabited.

Hypothesis #3: Students who have taken a relationship course that includes cohabitation as a subject will score higher on the Cooper Cohabitation Questionnaire than students who have not taken a course including cohabitation as a subject.

Statistical Analyses

To test the first hypothesis, a Pearson's Correlation Coefficient was used. The second and third hypotheses were analyzed with t-tests.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This research was designed to study college students' perceptions of the myths and realities of cohabitation. Three professors with Ph.D's assessed the questionnaire for face validity and to check that the questionnaire was consistent with issues related to cohabitation. The Cooper Cohabitation Questionnaire was shown to have an internal consistency reliability of $\alpha = .61$. Three hypotheses were analyzed using data from 147 college students.

Table 2 shows the percentage of college students who answered the questionnaire correctly/incorrectly. It should be noted that the mean number of questions answered correctly was 12.14 from a range of 1-19, with one being "less knowledgeable" and 19 being "very knowledgeable." Although these scores were higher than the researcher anticipated, it is still only a little more than half correct. The average score was 64% correct; thus, more education is needed on cohabitation.

The first hypothesis stated that there would be a negative correlation between scores on the Idealistic Distortion subscale of PREPARE-ENRICH and the Cooper Cohabitation Questionnaire. A Pearson correlation coefficient was used to examine this hypothesis. The correlation showed that this hypothesis was not supported ($r = -.033$, $p = .48$, $df = 136$). Thus, students' levels of idealism about relationships was not necessarily related to their understanding of the myths and realities of cohabitation.

The second hypothesis stated that cohabiting students would score lower on the Cooper Cohabitation Questionnaire than students who did not cohabit. An independent sample t-test was used to examine this hypothesis. The t-test indicated this hypothesis was not supported as stated ($t = -1.6, p = .12, df = 141$). Although the t-test was not significant when using only subjects that were currently cohabiting, a second independent t-test was run incorporating the students who had ever cohabited with those who were currently cohabiting. The results of this test approached significance ($t = 2.04, p = .049, df = 141$). This hypothesis was an interesting finding, but given the limited sample size additional research is needed with future samples to prove further significance.

The third hypothesis stated that students who have taken a relationship course that includes cohabitation as a subject will score higher on the Cooper Cohabitation Questionnaire than students who have not taken a relationship course that includes cohabitation as a subject. An independent sample t-test was used to examine this hypothesis. The t-test was not significant for this hypothesis ($t = .921, p = .36, df = 140$). Thus, Human Development and Family Science students fared no better on the Cooper Cohabitation Questionnaire than Animal Science students or students from other departments that were enrolled in the classes that were surveyed.

In conclusion, the researcher approached support for the hypothesis that students who had cohabited had less of an understanding of cohabitation. The researcher found no support for idealistic students having less knowledge about cohabitation, nor for Human Development and Family Science Students having more knowledge about cohabitation than students in a different major.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Since over half of all people will cohabit at least once in their lives (Smock, 2000) and the mean duration of the cohabiting relationship is one year (Seltzer, 2000), college students need to be informed of the realities of cohabitation and how these realities can have an impact on their lives. Cohabitation can be linked to poorer physical and mental health; higher rates of violence, abuse, disagreement and conflict; lower incomes and education levels; low marital satisfaction after marriage; and a greater likelihood of divorce (Brown & Booth, 1996; Demaris, 2001; Johnson, 1996; Nock, 1995; Seltzer, 2000; Smock, 2000; Smock & Manning, 1997; Waite & Gallagher, 2000; and Wu & Hart, 2002). Cohabiting individuals, or those considering cohabitation, should be aware of these statistics. From an exchange perspective, if individuals are knowledgeable of the myths and realities of cohabitation, then they will be better able to weigh the costs and rewards before deciding whether or not to cohabit. A more realistic understanding of risks and benefits of cohabitation may help couples who are considering living together approach this relationship with greater discretion.

The findings of this study did not support the hypothesis that students who scored higher on the Idealistic Distortion subscale of PREPARE-ENRICH will score lower on the Cooper Cohabitation Questionnaire. Students in all classes surveyed were more idealistic than the researcher anticipated, with the mean being 21.5; the range was 1-35

with one being “less idealistic” and thirty-five being “very idealistic”. Being more idealistic was not related to knowledge about cohabitation. Even though the sample held fairly idealistic views, this was not necessarily linked to perceptions of cohabitation. Regardless of idealism, education is important regarding the understanding of cohabitation and can be beneficial for future cohabiting relationships.

While there is research studying idealism and relationships in general, there is no research that connects idealism to cohabitation. There have been many studies supporting idealism in relationships, but there is some debate as to whether idealism is helpful or harmful to unmarried couples. Murray, Holmes, and Griffin (1996) believe that idealism about a partner is a critical feature of satisfying relationships. Taylor and Brown (1988) support idealism by stating that positive illusions lead to healthy functioning. Such positive illusions include idealized self-perceptions, exaggerated perceptions of control, and unrealistic optimism, these illusions function to help couples see the best in each other (Murray et al., 1996). Ruvolo and Veroff (1997) have found idealized perceptions to be negatively related to relationship satisfaction, as well as to overall well-being. For example, they state that many individuals enter a relationship idealizing that all of their needs and expectations will be met. This idealized perception is usually unobtainable; it is unrealistic to assume that one person can meet all of another person’s needs. Further research is needed on whether idealistic distortion is actually beneficial or harmful to a relationship, including cohabitation.

Through the administration of the Cooper Cohabitation Questionnaire a finding that approached significance was that college students who cohabit or who have cohabited in the past are less knowledgeable about the realistic nature of cohabitation.

Future research is needed with additional samples in a broader population to see if there is a significant difference between the knowledge that cohabiting and non-cohabiting individuals hold about cohabitation.

It was found that Human Development and Family Science students who had taken a course addressing cohabitation as a subject did not fare any better than Animal Science students, or students in other departments enrolled in the sampled classes, who did not have any formal education on cohabitation. It is possible that the students who had studied cohabitation did not retain the information, or that specific current research on cohabitation is not being taught in the classroom to the extent that was covered in the Cooper Cohabitation Questionnaire. More extensive coverage may be needed to help students develop a more realistic understanding of cohabitation.

For an in depth look at subject areas on the Cooper Cohabitation Questionnaire, individual items will be looked at according to subject (see table 2). The items will be grouped into the following subjects: Cohabitation and Mental and Physical Health, Cohabitation and Children, Cohabitation and Legal Issues, Cohabitation and Religion, Cohabitation and Relationship Satisfaction, Cohabitation and Divorce, Cohabitation and Education and Economics, Cohabitation and Gender Roles, and Cohabitation and Racial Factors.

Cohabitation and Mental and Physical Health

The following items concerned mental and physical health: Item 3: *Married people tend to become ill and die younger than individuals who cohabit*; Item 4: *Individuals who cohabit have a higher rate of violence and physical abuse than those who marry*; Item 5: *Individuals who cohabit have better mental and physical health than*

those who marry; and Item 7: Married couples have higher levels of disagreement and conflict than cohabiting couples. The reason that married people live longer and happier lives than cohabiting couples is because married couples enjoy better mental and physical health than the unmarried (Wu & Hart, 2002). Cohabiting women are more often depressed, irritable, anxious, worried, and unhappy compared to their married counterparts, leading to an earlier death for unmarried people (Brown, 2000). Compared with unmarried cohabitators, married couples engage in a substantially lower rate of physical aggression (Stets, 1991). Cohabitators were found to be more inclined to argue, hit, shout, and have an unfair division of labor than married couples (Brown & Booth, 1996). Individuals should be educated about violence and physical abuse in cohabiting relationships. Being aware of the risks of possible violence in their own cohabiting relationship could be another cost when weighing the costs/benefits of whether or not to cohabit. The greater depression characterizing cohabitators is primarily due to their higher relationship instability compared to married couples (Brown, 2000). Married people are less depressed than cohabiting couples, and they also have a better mental well-being (Wu & Hart, 2002). Cohabiting people are more likely to die from coronary heart disease, stroke, pneumonia, many kinds of cancer, and cirrhosis of the liver, thus relating to physical health (Waite & Gallagher, 2000).

Cohabitation and Children

Item 11 stated that: *Children born to a cohabiting couple are more likely to cohabit than children born to a married couple.* Children born into a cohabiting union are already at a disadvantage in terms of parental income and education and are more likely to select themselves into cohabitation than children born to married couples

(Smock, 2000). Previous research has demonstrated effects of parental behavior, attitudes, and values on children's decisions concerning cohabitation (Axinn & Thornton, 1992). When weighing the decision of whether or not to cohabit, looking at their own upbringing should be a serious consideration.

Cohabitation and Legal Issues

Item 13: *Ending a marriage is less complicated than ending a cohabiting relationship*, and Item 19: *If a cohabiting partner dies without a will or written agreement, the surviving cohabiting partner is included in the distribution of the estate*, both deal with legal issues. Living together does not provide a legally binding document in which both partners are protected by law like a marriage license does (Stratton, 2002). A will leaving assets to the surviving cohabitor is the only way of assuring that the cohabiting partner will receive what the deceased partner intended them to have (Mahoney, 2002). Since the rights of cohabitators are not protected by law, having a will or a written agreement drawn up should be a factor of consideration for all cohabitators.

Cohabitation and Religion

Item 12 stated that: *Cohabiting individuals tend to be less religious than married individuals*. In their research findings, Stolzenberg and Waite (1995) found that low levels of religious importance/participation are related to higher levels of cohabitation and lower rates of subsequent marriage. Some evidence suggests that the act of cohabitation actually diminishes religious participation, whereas marriage tends to increase it (Axinn & Thornton, 1992). Thornton et al., (1992) state that people without religious affiliations opt more for cohabitation and less for marriage than do people who identify with a religious group; frequent attendance at religious services and activities

probably increases contact with religious messages encouraging marriage and discouraging premarital sex and cohabitation. The sample was fairly knowledgeable about this question, and religious beliefs are a very strong factor to weigh when considering whether or not to cohabit.

Cohabitation and Relationship Satisfaction

The following items are related to relationship satisfaction: Item 1: *Individuals who cohabited before marriage usually report greater marital satisfaction than those who did not cohabit before marriage*; Item 2: *Cohabiting relationships last an average of one year*; Item 6: *Cohabiting couples have a more satisfying sex life than married couples*; Item 14: *Cohabiting couples without plans to marry report significantly lower quality relationships than cohabiting couples with plans to marry*; and Item 15: *In terms of sexual commitment cohabitation is more similar to marriage than dating*. There are numerous reasons why cohabiting individuals are not as satisfied as married couples. Newcomb (1987) states that cohabiting individuals tend to be more insecure and have poorer self-esteem than married individuals. Nock (1995) found that cohabitation is selective of less committed individuals, and this can be carried over into a marriage. There are many factors associated with the breakup of a cohabiting relationship such as commitment, age, religion, socio-economic status, and education (Brown, 2000). Brown and Booth (1996) suggest that there are two types of cohabiting couples: those that have plans to marry, and those that do not. They found that it is only cohabiting couples without plans to marry that report significantly lower-quality relationships. This question should be the most important to an individual weighing the costs/benefits of a cohabiting relationship. Waite (2000) stated that married couples have a more satisfying

sex life possibly because they are secure in their commitment to each other. Many other family scientists have also found this statistic to be correct, that indeed married people do have a more satisfying sex life than cohabiting couples or single individuals (Smock, 2000), (Teachman et al., 2000). All of the previous questions are important for realizing and understanding the dynamics of cohabitation.

Cohabitation and Divorce

Item 10 stated: *Individuals who cohabit before marriage are twice as likely to divorce than individuals who did not cohabit before marriage.* Booth and Johnson (1988) suggest that it is possible that cohabitation has a direct negative influence on marital stability by producing relationships, attitudes, or values that increase susceptibility to divorce. Axinn and Thornton (1992) found that non-marital cohabiting relationships indeed are more selective of those who are less committed to marriage and most accepting of divorce. The consequences of cohabiting relating to divorce were not well known by the sample population. Individuals need to be aware that those who live together before marriage are twice as likely to divorce than those who did not live together (Bumpass & Sweet, 1995), when they are weighing the costs/benefits of cohabitation.

Cohabitation and Education and Economics

Item 8: *High-income cohabitators are more likely to expect to marry than low-income cohabitators;* and Item 9: *less educated individuals are more likely to cohabit than higher educated individuals* were known by less than half of the sample population.

Cohabitation tends to be selective of people with slightly lower economic status, usually measured in terms of educational attainment or income (Clarkberg et al., 1995). Those

not completing high school are nearly twice as likely to cohabit than those completing college; marriage for cohabitators is positively related to higher levels of education and economics (Waite, 2000). Cohabitators are characterized as having lower levels of education and earnings compared to married couples (Brown & Booth, 1996). These factors should be detrimental for some couples that decide to cohabit. From the results of the Cooper Cohabitation Questionnaire, many college students are not aware of these factors.

Cohabitation and Gender Roles

Item 16 states: *Married men and women who accept traditional gender roles are more likely to cohabit than men and women who reject traditional gender roles.* The sample was seemingly knowledgeable about gender roles, or the roles that partners tend to take in their relationships. If a couple is deciding whether or not to cohabit, gender roles should be discussed openly so that each individual is aware of their partner's expectations.

Cohabitation and Racial Factors

Less than half of the sample correctly answered the following items: Item 17: *Among African Americans, cohabitation tends to serve as a long-term alternative to marriage;* and Item 18: *Children born to Hispanic women in cohabiting relationships are more likely to be intended than children born to cohabiting women of other ethnicities.* When weighing the costs/benefits of whether or not to cohabit it would be helpful to understand the nature of cohabiting relationships within various ethnic groups, specifically those that enhance or detract from their experience or satisfaction from cohabitation.

With only true and false answers being offered, the Cooper Cohabitation Questionnaire can easily measure the knowledge an individual holds about cohabitation. After individuals take the questionnaire, it would be helpful to go over all of the answers, explaining the rationale for the answers that were incorrect. This is an example of how the Cooper Cohabitation Questionnaire could be used as an important tool for educating students, as well as the general public, of the myths and realities of cohabitation.

Implications for Research

More research is needed to explore whether or not the hypothesized link between idealism and knowledge of cohabitation would hold true for other samples. Future research might also explore whether idealism has an impact on cohabitation satisfaction, as well as whether cohabitators in general are more idealistic.

For this study, specific numbers are not known for whether the individual ended the previous cohabiting relationship or eventually married the cohabiting partner. When previous and current cohabitators were combined, there was a difference that approached significance in knowledge of the myths and realities of cohabitation. This finding suggests that those who cohabit are less knowledgeable about cohabitation than individuals who choose not to cohabit. Future studies might explore cohabitation knowledge for those who remain with a cohabiting partner versus those who end a cohabiting relationship. Brown (2000) found that there was a significant difference between cohabiting couples that had intentions to marry, versus those who had no intentions to marry, in that the potential risk factors of cohabitation did not apply as extremely to them as they did to couples living together with no plans to marry. Also, one might want to further explore whether there is a difference in idealism between

couples that stayed with their cohabiting partner versus those that ended a cohabiting relationship.

Future research is needed on cohabitation. The results of this study found that many individuals aren't aware of the myths and realities of cohabitation. More research is needed to understand the reasons why couples are choosing to cohabit before marriage. For example, what are the costs/benefits of cohabitation to individuals? Future research might explore the actual factors that are weighed in order of importance when deciding whether or not to cohabit. Another area for additional research is on the unique aspects of cohabitation for different ethnic groups. The reliability of the Cooper Cohabitation Questionnaire with this sample was $\alpha = .61$. Future studies could further assess reliability of the instrument and knowledge of the myths and realities of cohabitation with different samples. Future research with other samples might improve upon the reliability of the Cooper Cohabitation Questionnaire.

Implications for Practice

For use as practice, the Cooper Cohabitation Questionnaire could be used as an educational tool, to increase group discussion in classes, and to clarify misconceptions about cohabitation in the classroom or in family life education/enrichment programs. Another way to apply the Cooper Cohabitation Questionnaire in a classroom setting would be to take the assessment before a lecture, then to take it again after being educated on the subject, so as to assess the knowledge learned about cohabitation. The Cooper Cohabitation Questionnaire could also be used in clinical practice, for example working with engaged couples that are considering or are living together. The questionnaire could be an excellent tool to inform these couples of what research says

about cohabitation; hopefully it would help a couple to weigh the costs/benefits of living together versus marriage. The Cooper Cohabitation Questionnaire could also be used with couples who are planning to be engaged and are contemplating cohabitation to increase their understanding of the myths and realities of cohabitation.

The Cooper Cohabitation Questionnaire could be used in relationship enrichment workshops to increase couples' knowledge about cohabitation. High schools would be an excellent place to administer the questionnaire, since it would be beneficial for the younger population to be aware of the myths and realities of cohabitation before they consider cohabitation. From the results of this study, areas that need to be emphasized when teaching about cohabitation are: average length of cohabiting relationships; mental health of cohabitators; relationship satisfaction; socioeconomic status; education; religious attitudes; children; commitment issues; racial factors; and legal issues. The Cooper Cohabitation Questionnaire could be administered to the general public as well, to get their views on cohabitation and to update their knowledge on what research and statistics state about cohabitation. Putting the Cooper Cohabitation Questionnaire to use with the general public, as well as educational settings could be extremely useful for education and awareness about cohabitation.

Limitations

The major limitation to this study was the lack of cohabiting individuals included in the sample. Only 25 individuals out of 147 reported they had ever cohabited. If this study were to be replicated with a higher number of cohabitators, different results for the previous hypotheses might be found. Another limitation to this study is how long the statistics on cohabitation used in the Cooper Cohabitation Questionnaire will remain

current; thus, the questionnaire may need periodic revision. This study was limited to one college, in the mid-west, so it may not be generalizable to other regions of the United States. Future research is needed using the Cooper Cohabitation Questionnaire to assess reliability, as well as re-testing these hypotheses with additional samples.

Summary

In summation, this study contributed to the existing knowledge of cohabitation by providing data that approached significance for the hypothesis that those who cohabit have less of an understanding of the myths and realities of cohabitation. This assessment could be very important to college students as well as individuals that currently cohabit or are considering cohabitation. In addition, other researchers conducting future research to gain an even greater insight of individuals' perceptions of the myths and realities of cohabitation could use the Cooper Cohabitation Questionnaire.

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TABLE 1
TABLE OF FREQUENCIES

Variable	Theoretical Range	Actual Range	Mean	Standard Deviation
Knowledge of Cohabitation	(1-19)	(5-19)	12.14	3.01
Idealistic Distortion	(1-35)	(7-35)	21.5	6.16

TABLE 2
Responses to the Cooper Cohabitation Questionnaire

Item	Correct Answer	n = 147		n = 25		n = 118	
		Total Sample	Correct/Incorrect	Cohabitors Only	Correct/Incorrect	non-	cohabitors
1. Individuals who cohabited before marriage usually report greater marital satisfaction than those who did not cohabit before marriage.	F	112(76%)	35(24%)	17(68%)	8(32%)	93(79%)	25(21%)
2. Cohabiting relationships last an average of one year.	T	76(52%)	71(48%)	14(56%)	11(44%)	59(50%)	59(50%)
3. Married people tend to become ill and die younger than individuals who cohabit.	F	134(91%)	13(9%)	23(92%)	2(8%)	108(91%)	10(9%)
4. Individuals who cohabit have a higher rate of violence and physical abuse than those who marry.	T	74(50.3%)	73(49.7%)	11(44%)	14(56%)	61(52%)	57(58%)
5. Individuals who cohabit have better mental and physical health than those who marry.	F	125(85%)	22(15%)	21(84%)	4(16%)	100(85%)	18(15%)
6. Cohabiting couples have a more satisfying sex life than married couples.	F	99(67%)	48(33%)	14(56%)	11(44%)	82(69%)	36(31%)
7. Married couples have higher levels of disagreement and conflict than cohabiting couples.	F	112(76%)	35(24%)	19(76%)	6(24%)	91(77%)	27(23%)
8. High-income cohabitors are more likely to expect to marry than low-income cohabitors.	T	56(38%)	91(62%)	7(28%)	18(72%)	47(40%)	71(60%)
9. Less educated individuals are more likely to cohabit than higher educated individuals.	T	76(52%)	70(48%)	10(40%)	15(60%)	65(55%)	52(44%) (missing 1)
10. Individuals who cohabit before marriage are twice as likely to divorce than individuals who did not cohabit before marriage.	T	99(67%)	48(33%)	13(52%)	12(48%)	84(71%)	34(29%)
11. Children born to a cohabiting couple are more likely to cohabit than children born to a married couple.	T	101(69%)	46(31%)	17(68%)	8(32%)	83(70%)	35(30%)
12. Cohabiting individuals tend to be less religious than married individuals.	T	110(75%)	37(25%)	18(72%)	7(28%)	90(76%)	28(24%)
13. Ending a marriage is less complicated than ending a cohabiting relationship.	F	120(82%)	27(18%)	19(76%)	6(24%)	98(83%)	20(17%)
14. Cohabiting couples without plans to marry report significantly lower quality relationships than cohabiting couples with plans to marry.	T	93(63%)	54(37%)	15(60%)	10(40%)	76(64%)	42(36%)

Table 2 (continued)
Responses to the Cooper Cohabitation Questionnaire

Item	Correct Answer	Total Sample Correct/Incorrect	Cohabitors Only Correct/Incorrect	non- cohabitators
15. In terms of sexual commitment, cohabitation is more similar to marriage than to dating	F	29(20%) 118(80%)	2(8%) 23(92%)	25(21%) 93(79%)
16. Married men and women who accept traditional gender roles are more likely to cohabit than men and women who reject traditional gender roles.	F	107(73%) 40(27%)	16(64%) 9(36%)	88(75%) 30(25%)
17. Among African Americans, cohabitation tends to serve as a long-term alternative to marriage.	T	82(56%) 65(44%)	12(48%) 13(52%)	69(58%) 49(42%)
18. Children born to Hispanic women in cohabiting relationships are more likely to be intended than children born to cohabiting women of other ethnicities.	T	69(47%) 78(53%)	12(48%) 13(52%)	55(47%) 63(53%)
19. If a cohabiting partner dies without a will or written agreement, the surviving cohabiting partner is included in the distribution of the deceased's estate.	F	112(76%) 35(24%)	16(72%) 7(28%)	92(78%) 26(22%)

APPENDIX A
Solicitation Script

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This survey is designed to be an educational assessment to better understand student's awareness of the myths and realities of cohabitation. By completing this assessment you will be helping me to gather data on college student's perceptions of the myths and realities of cohabitation.

There are three parts to this assessment, it should take no longer than 25 minutes to complete. First I will hand out a demographic sheet so that I will have information to test my hypotheses with, please do not put your name on this sheet. Next, I will hand out a 7-question item called the idealistic distortion scale, this scale will also be used to test hypotheses with. Finally, I will hand out the cohabitation assessment, a survey that I developed to test college student's perceptions about the myths and realities of cohabitation.

Participation in this assessment is strictly voluntary. All information will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous. Answers will be locked in a file drawer. You may withdraw from the assessment at any time. I ask that if you are under the age of 18, please do not complete this assessment, as my target population is aimed at young adults. As a participant nothing else will be asked of you. The results of this study may be published, or used in future research, thank you.

If you need to contact the researchers for any reason, names and contact information are below:

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APPENDIX B

Initial Version of the Cooper Cohabitation Questionnaire

Cooper Cohabitation Questionnaire

Instructions: Please circle either T for True, or F for False.

1. Individuals who cohabited before marriage usually report greater marital satisfaction than those who did not cohabit before marriage.
T or F
2. Most individuals will cohabit at least once before getting married.
T or F
3. Cohabiting relationships last an average of one year.
T or F
4. One reason why couples are marrying at a later age is because more couples are cohabiting before marriage.
T or F
5. About half of first-time cohabitators marry the person with whom they cohabit.
T or F
6. Married people tend to become ill and die younger than individuals who cohabit.
T or F
7. Individuals who cohabit have a higher rate of violence and physical abuse than those who marry.
T or F
8. Individuals who cohabit have better mental and physical health than those who marry.
T or F
9. Cohabiting couples have a more satisfying sex life than married couples.
T or F
10. Married couples have higher levels of disagreement and conflict than cohabiting couples.
T or F
11. Married men do more housework than cohabiting men.
T or F
12. High-income cohabitators are more likely to expect to marry than low-income cohabitators.
T or F

13. Less educated individuals are more likely to cohabit than higher educated individuals.
T or F
14. Individuals who cohabit before marriage are twice as likely to divorce than individuals who did not cohabit before marriage.
T or F
15. Children born to a cohabiting couple are more likely to cohabit than children born to a married couple.
T or F
16. Cohabiting individuals tend to be less religious than married individuals.
T or F
17. Ending a marriage is less complicated than ending a cohabiting relationship.
T or F
18. Cohabiting couples without plans to marry report significantly lower quality relationships than cohabiting couples with plans to marry.
T or F
19. In terms of sexual commitment, cohabitation is more similar to marriage than to dating.
T or F
20. Men and women who accept traditional gender roles are more likely to cohabit than men and women who reject traditional gender roles.
T or F
21. Among African Americans, cohabitation tends to serve as a long-term alternative to marriage.
T or F
22. Children born to Hispanic women in cohabiting relationships are more likely to be intended than children born to cohabiting women of other ethnicities.
T or F
23. Childbearing in cohabiting relationships promotes union stability in that couples are less likely to marry, or to separate.
T or F
24. If a cohabiting person dies without a will or written agreement, the surviving cohabiting partner is included in the distribution of the deceased's estate.
T or F

References for the Cohabitation Quiz:

1. Myth, False- People who cohabit before marriage don't report as high of marital satisfaction as though who do not cohabit before marriage (Brown & Booth, 1996), (Demaris & Leslie, 1984 (Horwitz & White, 1996), (Nock, 1995).
2. Reality, True, (Brown, 2000), (Bumpass & Sweet, 1995), (Smock, 2000).
3. Reality, True, (Bumpass & Sweet, 1989), (Seltzer, 2000), (Smock, 2000), (Stranton, 2002). (Seltzer, 2000).
4. Reality, True, (Brown, 2000), (Bumpass & Lu, 1999). (Teachman et al., 2000).
5. Reality, True, (Brown & Booth, 1996), (Smock, 2000).
6. Myth, False- Cohabiting people tend to get sick and die younger than married people do (Stanton, 1995), (Wu & Hart, 2002).
7. Reality, True, (Demaris, 2001), (Johnson, 1996), (Stets, 1991).
8. Myth, False- Married couples have better mental and physical health than cohabiting couples (Nock, 1995), (Smock, 2000), (Wu & Hart, 2002).
9. Myth, False- Married couples have a more satisfying sex life than cohabiting couples (Brown & Booth, 1996), (Waite, 2000), (Waite & Gallagher, 2000), (Wu & Hart, 2002).
10. Myth, False- Cohabiting couples have higher levels of disagreement and conflict than married couples (Axinn & Thornton, 1992), (Brown & Booth, 1996), (Schoen, 1992), (Teachman et al., 2000).
11. Myth, False- Married men and cohabiting men do the same amount of housework (Batalova & Cohen, 2002), (Gupta, 1999), (Smock, 2000), (South & Spitz, 1994).
12. Reality, True, (Manning & Lichter, 1996), (Seltzer, 2000), (Smock & Manning, 1997).
13. Reality, True, (Brown & Booth, 1996), (Clarkberg et al., 1995), (Nock, 1995), Thornton et al., 1995).
14. Reality, True, (Axinn & Thornton, 1992), Booth & Johnson, 1988), Bumpass & Sweet, 1995), (Smock, 2000).
15. Reality, True, (Axinn & Thornton, 1993), (Smock, 2000), (Thornton et al., 1992).
16. Reality, True, (Axinn & Thornton, 1992), (Clarkberg et al., 1995), (Markey, 1999).
17. Myth, False- Ending a marriage is more complicated because of legal issues than ending a cohabiting relationship (Axinn & Thornton, 1992), (Bumpass & Sweet, 1989), Nock, 1995), (Stratton, 2002).
18. Reality, True, (Brown & Booth, 1996), Sanchez et al., 1998), (Smock, 2000).
19. Myth, False- In terms of sexual commitment, cohabiting is more similar to dating than to marriage (Forste & Tanfer, 1996), (Newcomb, 1986), (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993).
20. Myth, False- Men and woman who reject traditional gender roles are more likely to cohabit (Batalova & Cohen, 2002), (Clarkberg et al., 1993).
21. Reality, True, (Lichter, et al., 1992). (Manning & Smock, 1995), (Raley, 1996).
22. Reality, True, (Manning, 2001).
23. Reality, True, (Bumpass & Lu, 1999), (Demaris, 2001), (Seltzer, 2000), (Smock, 2000).

24. Myth, False- If a cohabiting person dies, the surviving partner is not entitled to any of the deceased's estate if a will or written agreement is not present (Hughston & Hughston, 1989), (Mahoney, 2001).

APPENDIX C

Current Version of the Cooper Cohabitation Questionnaire

Cooper Cohabitation Questionnaire

Instructions: Please circle either T for True, or F for False.

1. Individuals who cohabited before marriage usually report greater marital satisfaction than those who did not cohabit before marriage.
T or F
2. Cohabiting relationships last an average of one year.
T or F
3. Married people tend to become ill and die younger than individuals who cohabit.
T or F
4. Individuals who cohabit have a higher rate of violence and physical abuse than those who marry.
T or F
5. Individuals who cohabit have better mental and physical health than those who marry.
T or F
6. Cohabiting couples have a more satisfying sex life than married couples.
T or F
7. Married couples have higher levels of disagreement and conflict than cohabiting couples.
T or F
8. High-income cohabitators are more likely to expect to marry than low-income cohabitators.
T or F
9. Less educated individuals are more likely to cohabit than higher educated individuals.
T or F
10. Individuals who cohabit before marriage are twice as likely to divorce than individuals who did not cohabit before marriage.
T or F
11. Children born to a cohabiting couple are more likely to cohabit than children born to a married couple.
T or F
12. Cohabiting individuals tend to be less religious than married individuals.
T or F

13. Ending a marriage is less complicated than ending a cohabiting relationship.
T or F
14. Cohabiting couples without plans to marry report significantly lower quality relationships than cohabiting couples with plans to marry.
T or F
15. In terms of sexual commitment, cohabitation is more similar to marriage than to dating.
T or F
16. Men and women who accept traditional gender roles are more likely to cohabit than men and women who reject traditional gender roles.
T or F
17. Among African Americans, cohabitation tends to serve as a long-term alternative to marriage.
T or F
18. Children born to Hispanic women in cohabiting relationships are more likely to be intended than children born to cohabiting women of other ethnicities.
T or F
19. If a cohabiting person dies without a will or written agreement, the surviving cohabiting partner is included in the distribution of the deceased's estate.
T or F

References for the Cohabitation Quiz:

1. Myth, False- People who cohabit before marriage don't report as high of marital satisfaction as though who do not cohabit before marriage (Brown & Booth, 1996), (Demaris & Leslie, 1984 (Horwitz & White, 1996), (Nock, 1995).
2. Reality, True, (Bumpass & Sweet, 1989), (Seltzer, 2000), (Smock, 2000), (Stranton, 2002). (Seltzer, 2000).
3. Myth, False- Cohabiting people tend to get sick and die younger than married people do (Stanton, 1995), (Wu & Hart, 2002).
4. Reality, True, (Demaris, 2001), (Johnson, 1996), (Stets, 1991).
5. Myth, False- Married couples have better mental and physical health than cohabiting couples (Nock, 1995), (Smock, 2000), (Wu & Hart, 2002).
6. Myth, False- Married couples have a more satisfying sex life than cohabiting couples (Brown & Booth, 1996), (Waite, 2000), (Waite & Gallagher, 2000), (Wu & Hart, 2002).
7. Myth, False- Cohabiting couples have higher levels of disagreement and conflict than married couples (Axinn & Thornton, 1992), (Brown & Booth, 1996), (Schoen, 1992), (Teachman et al., 2000).
8. Reality, True, (Manning & Lichter, 1996), (Seltzer, 2000), (Smock & Manning, 1997).
9. Reality, True, (Brown & Booth, 1996), (Clarkberg et al., 1995), (Nock, 1995), Thornton et al., 1995).
10. Reality, True, (Axinn & Thornton, 1992), Booth & Johnson, 1988), Bumpass & Sweet, 1995), (Smock, 2000).
11. Reality, True, (Axinn & Thornton, 1993), (Smock, 2000), (Thornton et al., 1992).
12. Reality, True, (Axinn & Thornton, 1992), (Clarkberg et al., 1995), (Markey, 1999).
13. Myth, False- Ending a marriage is more complicated because of legal issues than ending a cohabiting relationship (Axinn & Thornton, 1992), (Bumpass & Sweet, 1989), Nock, 1995), (Stratton, 2002).
14. Reality, True, (Brown & Booth, 1996), Sanchez et al., 1998), (Smock, 2000).
15. Myth, False- In terms of sexual commitment, cohabiting is more similar to dating than to marriage (Forste & Tanfer, 1996), (Newcomb, 1986), (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993).
16. Myth, False- Men and woman who reject traditional gender roles are more likely to cohabit (Batalova & Cohen, 2002), (Clarkberg et al., 1993).
17. Reality, True, (Lichter, et al., 1992). (Manning & Smock, 1995), (Raley, 1996).
18. Reality, True, (Manning, 2001).
19. Myth, False- If a cohabiting person dies, the surviving partner is not entitled to any of the deceased's estate if a will or written agreement is not present (Hughston & Hughston, 1989), (Mahoney, 2001).

APPENDIX D
PREPARE-ENRICH
Idealistic Distortion

Idealistic Distortion

PREPARE 2000

25. My partner and I understand each other completely.
26. My partner completely understands and sympathizes with my every mood.
27. Every new thing I have learned about my partner has pleased me.
28. I have never regretted my relationship with my partner.*
29. My partner has all the qualities I've always wanted in a mate.
30. We are as happy as any couple could possibly be.*
31. My partner always gives me the love and affection I need.

Response Options:

- A. Strongly Disagree
- B. Disagree
- C. Undecided
- D. Agree
- E. Strongly Agree

* New Item

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APPENDIX E
Demographic Sheet

Demographic Sheet for use with the Cohabitation Assessment

1. What department are you in at OSU-Stillwater?
 - a. Human Development and Family Science
 - b. Animal Science
2. What is your age? _____.
3. Have you ever taken a course in family relations? (Human Development is NOT included) (Ex: marriage, fatherhood, adolescence) If you are not sure, please ASK!
4. Do you currently cohabit?
5. Have you ever cohabited?

APPENDIX F

Institutional Review Board Approval

Oklahoma State University
Institutional Review Board

Protocol Expires: 4/22/2004

Date: Wednesday, April 23, 2003

IRB Application No HE0368

Proposal Title: COLLEGE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE MYTHS AND REALITIES OF
COHABITATION

Principal
Investigator(s):

Lara Rose Cooper
10515 N. New Haven
Sperry, OK 74073

Linda Robinson
333F HES
Stillwater, OK 74078

Reviewed and
Processed as: Expedited

Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

Dear PI :

Your IRB application referenced above has been approved for one calendar year. Please make note of the expiration date indicated above. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved projects are subject to monitoring by the IRB. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Sharon Bacher, the Executive Secretary to the IRB, in 415 Whitehurst (phone: 405-744-5700, sbacher@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,



Carol Olson, Chair
Institutional Review Board



VITA

Lara Rose Cooper

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: COLLEGE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE MYTHS AND REALITIES
OF COHABITATION

Major Field: Family Relations and Child Development

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Los Angeles, California on July 24, 1978, the daughter of Jason and Brenda Cooper.

Education: Graduate from Valley High School, Las Vegas, Nevada, in May 1996; received Bachelor of Science degree in Family Relations and Child Development from Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, in December 2000. Completed the requirements for the Master of Science degree with a major in Human Development and Family Science at Oklahoma State University in August 2003.

Experience: Graduate assistant for Dr. Lona Robertson, Assistant Dean of Human Environmental Sciences, Oklahoma State University. Graduate research assistant for Dr. Ellen Martin, OSU-Tulsa.