COLLEGE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF COHABITATION: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

by

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Thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE
in
Sociology

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June, 1976

Blacksburg, Virginia

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to formally thank the supporting members of my thesis committee, Professors Richard Della Fave and James H. Dorsett. Their thoughtful suggestions and helpful comments were invaluable in the preparation of this thesis.

I would especially like to thank Dr. John N. Edwards, Chairman of my thesis committee, for all the time, effort and energy he devoted in helping with the preparation of this thesis. His thoughtful suggestions, patience and encouragement made this project possible.

I would also like to extend my thanks to Orville Cunningham and Randall White for all their help and guidance. Appreciation is also extended to all my fellow graduate students for their support, suggestions and comments.

Finally, to my father and grandfather, I wish to express my thanks and love for their support and patience and for always being there.

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM

Introduction

In recent decades a number of social scientists have called attention to new phenomenon among youth in American society. Specifically, they point out these youth have increasingly added a new dimension to premarital sexual behavior in the form of heterosexual cohabitation.

If there is widespread cohabitation occurring among America's youth, as suggested by Morison and Anderson (1973), Macklin (1972), and Clatworthy (1969), several relevant questions concerning the nature of the cohabitation relationship need to be examined. How those who cohabit view their own relationship is important. Is it perceived to be, (1) an alternative to marriage, (2) a premarital or trial marriage, or (3) is it a new form of courtship behavior? If there are differential perceptions of the nature of cohabitation, what are the factors associated with this differentiation? These questions are addressed in this study.

Although the patterns of common-law marriages and living together are as old as time itself, these patterns of behavior occurred primarily among the lower classes and those of a bohemian way of life. Today, cohabitation is practiced primarily by the young adult (18-25 years), white, middle class American. A large majority of those who cohabit are found to be college educated, and a large proportion of American college students, it has been found, are currently cohabiting

with a member of the opposite sex (Croake, Keller & Catlin, 1974; Macklin, 1972).

A survey of recent cohabitation on college campuses across the nation indicates the rate of cohabitation as ranging from nine percent to forty-five percent of all students sampled (Macklin, 1974). Thus, it appears that increasingly cohabitation is becoming an accepted and not unusual type of relationship among college students (Morrison and Anderson, 1973). The pattern which is currently evolving appears to be primarily concerned with total relationships and only incidentally with the sexual aspects of heterosexual relations (Macklin, 1972). The students currently cohabiting feel it is a healthy trend toward a better understanding of one another and allows them the freedom to experience a personal and intimate relationship with the opposite sex without a formal commitment which they feel they are not yet ready to make (Macklin, 1974).

Studies by Grant (1968), Mead (1968), Karlen (1969), and Berger (1971) report that those who have cohabited are, in reality, experiencing trial marriages, companionate or premarital marriages. This implies a level of commitment similar to engagement in the courtship process. However, the majority of those living together are found to be strongly affectionate and committed to their mate but not in the stage of engagement or of contemplating marriage. Other studies indicate that those who have cohabited are exclusively, emotionally, and seriously committed to their partners whether or not they intend to marry (Croake, Keller & Catlin, 1974; Clatworthy, 1972; Kirkendall, 1961, Morrison and Anderson, 1973).

The Purpose

The purpose of this study is two-fold. First, it is a descriptive study of selected college students and their attitudes toward cohabitation. Secondly, it is designed to examine those students who are currently cohabiting and describe their perceptions of heterosexual cohabitation.

In this study, a descriptive account is made of the attitudes that college students have toward heterosexual cohabitation. Certain background characteristics and variables may have an influence on how these individuals perceive cohabitation as a process. Variables such as sex, religious affiliation, degree of religiosity, and father's occupation all have been found in recent studies to influence attitudes toward cohabitation (Macklin, 1972; Morrison and Anderson, 1973). In this study, these variables are examined to see if students attitudes toward cohabitation differ by them.

Among students currently cohabiting the perceptions of their own relationships are also investigated. As has been suggested by some researchers (Croake, Keller and Catlin, 1974; Clatworthy, 1972; Morrison and Anderson, 1973), those currently engaged in cohabitation often consider themselves as committed to their mate but not in the stage of engagement or of contemplating marriage. This study examines those cohabiting in order to give a descriptive account of how these individuals perceive their own relationship.

Heterosexual cohabitation is defined here, for the purposes of clarity and continuity with other research, as the sharing of a bedroom or residence for at least four or more nights per week for at least

three consecutive months with someone of the opposite sex (Macklin, 1972). This definition obviously does not totally encompass the phenomenon of cohabitation: it is used in this study to give minimum requirements to those defined as living together.

Review of the Literature

Historically, research concerning the phenomenon of cohabitation has been critical of those living together. In 1927, psychologist John Watkins predicted that by 1977, due to heterosexual cohabitation, marriage would no longer exist (Bernard, 1972). He came to these conclusions by projecting the trends of sexual behavior patterns found in his selective sample. In a similar vein, in 1937, Pitirim A. Sorokin predicted the dissolution of the marital dyad and nuclear family because of illicit sexual relations and unions (Bernard, 1972).

According to Sorokin, we have experienced a movement from an ideational to a sensate system. An ideational culture is concerned with the supersensory or spiritual realm, while the sensate is concerned with the individual's immediate wants and needs. As we moved toward a total sensate culture, Sorokin felt we had experienced a dangerous drift towards sexual anarchy which is perilous to the welfare of marriage and the family (Sorokin, 1956). He was extremely critical of premarital or extramarital intercourse as being demoralizing and dangerous. Illicit sexual liasons, in Sorokin's opinion, always lead to periods of anguish, anxiety, fear, remorse, hate and pain. He pointed out that those who engage in premarital or common law "marriages" often experience a high incidence of demoralization, social irrespon-

sibility, mental disorders, crime and do not contribute to the development of the creative potential (Sorokin, 1956). He believed the so-called sex revolution we have experienced affected the lives of millions, deeply disturbed the community, and decisively influenced the future of society. Sorokin used statistics on the divorce rate and those on premarital and extramarital sexual behavior to predict the future decay and reform of society. On this basis, he insisted upon the celibacy of individuals before marriage, for he viewed premarital sex as a debasement of total love which he viewed as necessary for a complete and happy marriage. Premarital sexual relations would morally necessitate the parties to marry before they are mutually suited. In addition to the dangers of a hasty marriage, such relations, he argued, may seriously harm one or both partners (Sorokin, 1956).

Sorokin was adamant about the total commitment and mutual satisfaction between couples before they make the decision to marry. One's youth should be put to a creative purpose, to grow and develop oneself. He stated (1956) that before marriage a man and woman must know well the total personality and behavior of each other in all their hidden aspects, because without such a knowledge neither total love nor a happy marriage is possible. Herein lies a seeming contradiction, however, how can two individuals, contemplating marriage, completely know each other without experiencing a sexual relationship? Sorokin believed premarital sex awakened an abnormal sex appetite that the individual constantly would seek to fulfill, much to his and society's detriment. Those who are committed to one another support traditional

institutions and values by remaining mutually exclusive to one another and tend to seek longer-lasting relationships. The majority of individuals in our society however, believe in sexual permissiveness with affection, and very few of these appear to experience psychological pathologies, aberrant perversions, and criminal tendencies that Sorokin (1956) suggested would follow.

Carle C. Zimmerman (1947), similarily set forth some rather pessimistic predictions about the family. He concluded (1947: 798-799) that, "there is little left now within the family or the moral code to hold this family together. . . . The United States, as well as the other countries of Western Christendom, will reach the final phases of a great family crisis between now and the last of this century." The institution of marriage and family, he contends, is in transition. Historically, he suggests that families have been of three different types: the trustee, domestic and the atomistic. The trustee family represents an extreme expression of what Zimmerman calls familism, in which the rights and privileges of the individual are subordinate to the family group. The family is immortal; the patriarch has pervasive powers; divorce does not exist as such; and a society is strengthened through kinship control.

The domestic family's authority permits a civilization to flourish. The state restricts the family's right to punish its members and creates the concept of individual rights which must be maintained against family authority. Conceptions of divorce emerge; separation becomes common.

The atomistic family reigns in the final stage of the disintegration of familism. The rights of the individual are supreme, marriage

becomes merely a civil contract and is frequently broken by divorce. Evidence of the effects of the atomistic family is found in rampant feminist movements, tendencies toward childlessness, non-consensual unions (term used in Macklin's study, 1974), and general unrest among youth. As the family loses its power, it can no longer adequately carry out its task of socializing the young, and society begins to disintegrate (Zimmerman, 1947).

According to Zimmerman (1947), the trustee and domestic families are stable functioning units in society, whereas the atomistic family is weak and cannot last. Divorce, adultery, homosexuality, illicit sexual relations and other such aberrations are correlates of the atomistic family and symptoms of the decay which has set into the domestic system. Family change is a decisive force in historical and social change. If the family becomes atomistic, the whole society is eventually doomed to decay (Zimmerman, 1947).

Not all past research has been critical of unmarried sexual permissiveness. Writers from the 1920's and 1930's such as Key, Russell, Calverton and Lindsey questioned the validity of monogamous marriage (Sait, 1938). They proposed a series of trial marriages, temporary alliances, and companionate marriages without children in order for young people to develop themselves fully. These writers, as might be expected, were met with harsh criticism, yet these were the early beginnings of the move towards a more liberal attitude concerning sexual behavior.

The most recent writings on the trend in cohabitation are less critical of it and are based on more empirical data. Jessie Bernard

(1972), for example, predicts that in the future cohabitation will increase but marriage will be as strong as ever. Robert Whitehurst (1969), basing his studies on college students, finds their relationships to be very serious and supportive of marriage. James L. Morrison (1973) states that heterosexual relationships have far-reaching implications for the personal development of college students. He goes on further to suggest that if one of the functions of college is to assist young people to fulfill their future roles adequately, then cohabitation and its effect on personal growth and development is an area that can hardly be ignored. Living in union with a "mate" (experimental though it may be) may play an important part in the life of college students (Morrison and Anderson, 1973). Ira L. Reiss (1966) contends, moreover, there will be an increase in many forms of sexual behavior. He believes that since our attitudes seem to have presently caught up with actual sexual behavior, the stage is thus set for another upward cycle of increasing sexual behavior and sexual acceptance. This may soon be evidenced through the increased incidence and societal acceptance of cohabitation.

The attitudes toward premarital intercourse as well as actual behavior among young adults have changed considerably since the 1920's. What was done by a female in 1925 as a rebel and a deviant was done by a female in 1966 as a conformist (Reiss, 1966). But the most significant changes are not in the increased incidence of premarital intercourse but in the increased acceptance of positive attitudes toward it. Therefore, today's youth engaging in premarital cohabitation are no different than those twenty years ago. They are, however, expressing

their feelings in a different way by openly living together.

The majority of college students who are currently cohabiting today have, in fact, no objection to the traditional institution of marriage and view themselves as eventually getting married, even though it may not be to their current mate (Macklin, 1974; Johnson, 1969; Clatworthy, 1974; Huang, 1974). To many couples, living together seems natural. It is convenient, inexpensive and fun. These couples do not consider themselves as immoral, just more honest and open in their relationships (Bloch, 1969).

In the majority of studies, general attitudes of students toward certain sexual behaviors are shown to have become more permissive. According to many recent studies by Bell and Chaskes (1970), Reiss (1966), and Robinson, King and Balswick (1972), attitudes concerning premarital sexual behavior have become considerably liberalized in the last decade. The contention is that not only are attitudes toward sexual behavior becoming more permissive, actual behavior is actually becoming more permissive. With permissiveness with affection becoming the popular standard, the double standard in certain subcultures (liberal college environment) is beginning to break down and females no longer experience the negative sanctions previously associated with engaging in premarital sexual intercourse. Therefore, according to certain researchers a convergence of attitudes and behaviors seems to be occurring (Bell and Chaskes, 1970; Reiss, 1966).

While the attitudes towards premarital intercourse have become more accepting, it has not resulted in a lessening of moral character. The average coed has shed some inhibitions about premarital sex, but

she has certainly not abandoned a moral outlook (McWhirter, 1968). One way to understand the greater sexual experience of college women is to assume that they have more and stronger sources of support for engaging in premarital coitus, particularly from their peer groups (Kaats and Davis, 1970). The greater willingness of the female has made the male less, rather than more, promiscuous. He tends to seek longer-lasting relationships in which he feels relatively comfortable and secure (McWhirter, 1968). Joseph Katz, of Stanford's Institute for the Study of Human Problems, states, "sexual intimacy takes place in the context of a relationship that is serious rather than casual" (cited in McWhirter, 1968), and in this context, it grows more open.

The cohabiting relationship thus appears to fulfill a number of interpersonal needs of college students as, for example, the need for a positive self-concept vis-a-vis heterosexual encounters, the security of a relatively stable intimate relationship, and convenient interaction with the opposite sex (Morrison and Anderson, 1973). Supporting this, cohabitors have listed the advantages of living together most frequently as: security, companionship, emotional satisfaction, mutual support, and convenience (Clatworthy, 1969). Sexual availability and financial advantages tend to be of secondary importance.

In Macklin's study (1972), the reasons for cohabiting supplied by students were listed as: rejection of the superficial "dating game," loneliness of a large university, youth's search for meaningful relations, the postponement of any permanent commitment, and the opportunity the university environment provides. When asked to list

the most important reasons for living together, seventy percent chose "emotional attachment to each other - i.e., love, the desire to be together" (Macklin, 1972). Security and companionship were listed as secondary, and sex was tertiary.

Still, the commitment of the individuals cohabiting has been found to vary. In Macklin's study (1972), cohabitation was more frequently associated with the "going steady" stage of a relationship. The commitment between these individuals involved planning all they could to develop a lasting relationship as long as it was mutually satisfying, but future marriage was not definite (Macklin, 1972).

A psychiatric counselor on the campus of a large western university feels that the motivation for cohabitation is usually not a trial marriage, or the need to get away from other living conditions, or to prove maturity. Rather, the individuals find each other's company comforting, compatible, and rewarding (Grant, 1968).

Most of the cohabitors in the Macklin study had relationships that were strongly affectionate, with the majority of them being exclusively monogamous relationships. Over fifty eight percent of the cohabitors in this study felt their relationship had strong affectionate ties, and they did not date others. These findings are consistent with those at other institutions. At Penn State (Peterman, Ridley and Anderson, 1973), eighty four percent of the cohabitants indicated their relationship was intimate. At California State University at Northridge (Lautenschlager, 1972), over sixty percent indicated they were deeply in love. At Austin (Shuttlesworth and Thorman, 1973), forty nine percent reported having strong affec-

tionate ties and exclusive, monogamous dating, while sixteen percent indicated strongly affectionate relationships, but open to dating others. It seems clear from these findings that college cohabitants usually, though not always, share deep emotional relationships with one another. But in the majority of cases they have not yet reached the point of making long-term commitments to one another (Macklin, 1974).

In Johnson's study (1969), the cohabiting couples had serious relationships and felt at least strong affection for their partner, and sixty six percent believed they would eventually marry. The females (eighty two percent) were more likely than the males (sixty one percent) to indicate that they were in love with their partner, but there was no preponderance of couples in which the female wanted a permanent relationship. Of those who intended to marry, the primary reason for marriage was the possible effect of a cohabiting relationship on children, and the problems of social and parental reaction to such a relationship (Johnson, 1969). Still, overall, the commitment of the individuals was strong.

In Arafat and Yorburg's study (1973), over eighty percent of the male respondents and sixty six percent of the female respondents stated future marriage was not the major reason for entering into a living together relationship, nor did they have definite expectations of marrying their present partners in the future. Marriage among cohabiting couples in Lucy Jen Huang's study (1973) also was not ranked as a high priority item. Cohabitation was characterized as a time for interpersonal exploration and communication as well as personal growth and self knowledge. The majority of couples in this study assumed roles similar to those of a going steady type of relationship.

In research to date, then, those who cohabit have not been found to be living together with the sole purpose of marriage as an immediate goal. Nor is heterosexual cohabitation found to be a mechanism to avoid marriage. Cohabitation seems to facilitate two individuals getting to know one another within an intimate context without the necessity of a legal commitment. This does not say, however, that this relationship is promiscuous and without any form of commitment. On the contrary, those who cohabit have been found to have serious intentions and high levels of affection for their partner.

The difference between premarital or trial marriage and living together with a serious form of commitment should not be confused. Premarital or trial marriage is exactly what it implies: two individuals enter the living arrangement with the preconceived notion that it is a test for compatability before they take the legal step. Cohabitation with a serious commitment involves two individuals living together for the purpose of experiencing a new relationship without any future expectations. The major difference here is that the future in premarital or trial marriage is anticipated, whereas in cohabitation it is not clearly predefined.

The Frameworks

In the literature on cohabitation several different frameworks have been employed: the symbolic interactional (role theory), structural functional, developmental, and the social exchange. Role theory, as a process, deals with the individual and his behavior vis-a-vis others in a particular social setting. In using the concept of role

in studying cohabitation we are better able to understand the processes that occur among those currently cohabiting. Curent literature on cohabiting couples indicates their roles are similar to those of engaged or newly-married couples (Whitehurst, 1974; Stafford, 1975). The traditional division of labor and traditional roles are extremely resistant to change (Stafford, 1975), even among cohabiting couples there is a preponderance of males and females who fall into stereotyped conventional roles. Power, decision-making and household divisions of labor are the most obvious places where conventional roles seem to appear. In using role theory within the symbolic interactionist framework, we may see what type of behaviors occur among those cohabiting. Each individual fulfills the roles and expectations that he/she feels is necessary to maintain a particular relationship.

The structural functionalist perspective looks at the pheonomenon of cohabitation in terms of how it relates to the larger society. The function that cohabitation provides for the individual and the larger society is of primary importance in defining this framework (Hill and Hanson, 1960). Cohabitation, as a stage within the courtship process, is viewed as one component within the complete social system. Cohabitation potentially serves many useful functions within society. First, it is employed as an option individuals may use before marrying, and, therefore, may serve to decrease high divorce rates from too many hasty marriages (Macklin, 1972; Whitehurst, 1974). However, at this time there is no longitudinal data to support this contention. Secondly, it provides a socialization mechanism for the individual in that it allows him (her) the opportunity to experience a complete intimate

interpersonal relationship without the necessity of a legal commitment (Macklin, 1972). It also provides emotional satisfaction, companionship, security, and convenience. Through the use of the structural-functionalist framework, cohabitation may be viewed as serving a particular purpose for both the individual and society.

The developmental approach attempts to account for the societal-institutional, interactional-associational, and individual-personality variables of family phenomena (Hill and Rodgers, 1964). This approach covers a very broad area and tends to be both macro and microanalytic in nature (Eshleman, 1974). Cohabitation is represented here as a developmental process, for it is commonly referred to as a stage. . . though ill-defined. . . in the courtship process. The developmental approach, a prominent framework employed in the sociology of the family, assumes changes through time (Hill and Hansen, 1960). That is, it views the family and related processes, including dating and courtship, in their changing composition and stages over some period of time. Dating in the United States provides socialization for adolescents in the mate selection process. It serves a number of other functions; it meets the human needs for intimate and emotional relationships, and provides entertainment, recreation, and companionship (Delora, 1975).

The developmental approach furnishes an opportunity for the accretion of generalizations about the internal development of courtship patterns from their formation in casual dating to their culmination in engagement and marriage. Using this approach the history of dating has designated stages, beginning with the simple dating pair

and progressing step by step to the engagement period. The stages of dating are commonly referred to as, occasional dating, frequent dating, going steady, informal definite understanding to be married, and formal engagement (Winch, 1952). As a stage within this system, cohabitation, then may be an option young people have taken before entering engagement or marriage. Although it has not been fully demonstrated, cohabitation, it seems, does not serve to prevent marriage or serve as a substitute for it. It may be a viable alternative to individuals in order for them to better explore interpersonal sexual relationships before making a legal commitment. Therefore, cohabitation as a courtship process may generally be categorized as similar to the going steady stage and preceeding the engagement stage. Some current literature indicates that those cohabiting do not, in fact, consider themselves as engaged or in a trial marriage (Clatworthy, 1969; Macklin, 1972; Morrison and Anderson, 1973; Croake, Keller and Catlin, 1974). Therefore, cohabitation should not be classified within the engagement stage of the courtship process.

Through the use of a developmental framework we may better understand cohabitation within the courtship process. However, this framework requires the use of longitudinal research methods and to date, such studies are not yet available. Thus, there is a need for further research in this area for the formation of hypotheses and problems.

The social exchange framework is useful in describing those involved in cohabiting relationships. In dealing with dating and mate selection social exchange is most applicable in describing the trans-

actions that occur among the individuals involved. The social exchange framework neither explains how interaction arises nor describes the larger social environment, but rather seeks to explain why certain behavioral outcomes take place (Edwards, 1969).

In mate selection, individuals are interested in entering and continuing in relationships that are rewarding to them. Each individual makes an investment, and at the same time, incurs a cost. George Homans (1961) uses the term profit to describe the ratio of rewards to costs as experienced by persons in social exchange. Mate selection and courtship is essentially a process of seeking to strike the best bargain possible. The individuals in a cohabiting relationship thus may be seen as seeking to maximize their benefits (i.e., companionship, security and affection), while minimizing their costs (i.e., sexual exploitation and unequal exchange.)

According to Blau (1964), the establishing of exchange relations involves making investments that constitute commitments to the other party. Therefore, the exchange and bargaining that goes on within courtship serves to enhance the commitment levels among the individuals as they progress through the courtship stages. For those involved in cohabiting, exchange relationships become an important aspect of their courtship. Young people today usually are involved with one partner at a time with various degrees of intimacy. There is an increasing emphasis on the total commitment (including sexual) and deep involvement of both partners (Johnson, 1969).

Current literature on courtship patterns stresses the importance of commitment levels in the structuring of interpersonal relationships

(Winch, 1952). The process of mate selection thus may be seen as one where the dating couple move from a casual type of relationship to one of engagement that ultimately culminates in marriage. At the start of the relationship, commitment levels tend to be low as neither party has initially invested anything in the relationship. After additional dates, the relationship is evaluated and will either terminate or increase in commitment. Termination is usually based on lack of interest or non-compatability of the individuals. Continuation is contingent upon the positive aspects of mutual needs and desires of the individuals. For each increase in intimacy, an increase in commitment is made, hence, moving the relationship one step further in the courtship continuum (Nye and Berardo, 1973). As the individual progresses through the dating continuum, commitment and levels of intimacy increase. Of primary importance here is the development of positive affect and a feeling of love the individuals have for each other.

According to Johnson (1969), cohabitation may be treated as part of the courtship system, which is approached as a process of increasing commitment to the maintenance of a dyadic heterosexual love relationship. Those involved in cohabitation are mutually interested in maintaining the dyadic stability in order to achieve maximum rewards. Through this process the cohabitors grow in their relationship, the commitment becoming stronger and strengthening the relationship.

In the majority of studies of cohabitation based on the social exchange framework, the individuals felt their relationships had high levels of commitment (Macklin, 1972; Morrison and Anderson, 1973;

Peterman, Ridley and Anderson, 1974). As their relationships grew so did their levels of commitment, as long as it remained mutually rewarding for both parties. If the costs of the relationship outweighed the rewards gained, then both parties would terminate the relationship and seek more rewarding relationships elsewhere. The social exchange framework, then, is applicable in explaining an individual's behavior in a cohabiting relationship, by explaining what factor or factors motivate the individual to enter such a relationship, and whether or not to continue it.

Hypotheses to be Tested

Within the empirical literature on the phenomenon of cohabitation, the general consensus suggests that those who cohabit are experiencing a new form of courtship. In recent studies researchers have sampled large numbers of college students on their general attitudes toward cohabitation. The majority of these studies found students to rate cohabitation as a new stage in the courtship process (Macklin, 1972; Grant, 1968; Morrison and Anderson, 1973; Johnson, 1969; Arafat and Yorburg, 1973; Huang, 1974; Croake, Keller and Catlin, 1974; Clatworthy, 1969; Peterman, Ridley and Anderson, 1974). Therefore, it lends credence to the hypothesis:

> College students perceive cohabitation to be a new stage in the courtship process rather than as a substitute for marriage or a trial marriage.

Along with the liberalization of student's sexual attitudes and behavior, we may note an increase in numbers of those cohabiting across the nation's campuses. As mentioned previously, the literature points

out that the increasing numbers of those who are cohabiting do not feel they are experiencing a premarital or trial marriage or a substitute for marriage. These students are strongly committed to one another in a monogamous type of relationship and see themselves as eventually getting married but not in the near future, and not necessarily to their present mate. Therefore, their cohabiting relationship is one of companionship, an intimate experience, convenience, economics and fun. One should be cautioned, however, about thinking these are frivolous and promiscuous affairs (Macklin, 1972). On the contrary, the individuals involved are seriously committed to one another and the relationship is one of exchange and not exploitive in nature. These individuals are just employing a viable option for allowing them to experience a total intimate type of relationship without all the superficialities of the dating game (term used in Macklin's 1974 study on cohabitors at New York State College), or without jumping into a premature legal commitment. Therefore, it seems that cohabitation has emerged as a new stage in the courtship process somewhere between the dating and the engagement period, thus the hypothesis:

> Those involved in a cohabiting relationship are more likely to perceive it as a new stage in the courtship process, than are those who are not cohabiting.

The literature has suggested that those currently cohabiting are more likely to rate their own relationship as one similar to the "going steady" stage of courtship (Macklin, 1972), hence, it seems plausible that:

> Those involved in a cohabiting relationship are likely to perceive their own relationship as strongly affectionate, closed to other dating relationships (i.e., going steady).

Within the literature on cohabitation certain variables have been found to have some influence on students' perceptions of cohabitation. The most widely used variables have been sex, age, religious affiliation, degree of religiosity, father's occupation, major in college, and parent's marital status (Macklin, 1972; Clatworthy, 1973; Croake, Keller and Catlin, 1974; Huang, 1974; Johnson, 1969). For the purposes of this study sex, religious affiliation, degree of religiosity and father's occupation were used to explore how they relate to perceptions of cohabitation in this particular sample.

CHAPTER II

METHODS OF STUDY

Exploration, an initial step in the continuous research process, is one of the three basic objectives of survey research (Babbie, 1973). Survey methods of data collection were used to provide the means for obtaining the data for this study. A closed-ended questionnaire was used to ascertain the attitudes of the respondents toward cohabitation.

The major purpose of exploratory studies is to gain familiarity with a phenomenon or to achieve new insights into it, often in order to formulate a more precise research problem or to develop hypotheses (Selltiz, Wrightsman & Cook, 1976). An exploratory study may, however, have other functions: increasing investigators familiarity with the phenomenon they wish to investigate in a subsequent, more highly structured study, clarifying concepts; establishing priorities for further research; gathering information about practical possibilities for carrying out research in real-life settings; or providing a census of problems regarded as urgent by people working in a given field of social relations (Selltiz, Wrightsman & Cook, 1976).

Specifically, the purpose of this thesis was to gain an understanding of the perceived attitudes of students toward cohabitation. Secondly, it examined those who are currently cohabiting and described their perceptions of their own relationship.

Through the use of survey methods, exploration can gain new insights

into the problem and the researcher may ultimately utilize the results to develop hypotheses or to reformulate the research problem.

The Variables

The perception of college students toward cohabitation (defined previously as the sharing of a bedroom or residence for at least four or more nights per week for at least three consecutive months with someone of the opposite sex) is the dependent variable in this study. Data on attitudes toward cohabitation were obtained by responses to certain items in the questionnaire (see items Number 29 and 54 in the appendix). These items included the personal rating (positive or negative) by each individual on their perceptions of cohabitation. Certain questions concerning the respondents own personal attitude toward cohabitation in general were also included.

The respondent was asked how he/she viewed cohabitation on college campuses. The respondent was given four choices, (1) a substitute for marriage, (2) a "pre" or "trial" marriage, (3) a new stage in the courtship process, that enable the individual to get to know each other completely, or (4) a promiscuous situation that exploits the individual. From these choices the respondent picked what he/she thought best represented what cohabitation is.

Including both cohabiting and non-cohabiting students, as done here, gives us a better description of what all students perceive cohabitation to be. By using those who are not cohabiting we reduce the change of bias we might incur by only using those currently engaged in cohabitation.

As previously indicated, the four independent variables used in this thesis were sex of the respondent, religious affiliation, degree of religiosity, and father's occupation.

Religious affiliation was indicated by respondents as being either: Protestant, Catholic, Jewish or other. Literature dealing with religion as a variable affecting cohabitation mainly uses these broad classifications of religion (Macklin, 1972; Arafat and Yorburg, 1973; Huang, 1974). In this study the religious affiliation variable was dichotomized into two categories, Protestant and all others. Degree of religiosity was classified as very devout, devout, moderately devout and inactive. Degree of religiosity was dichotimized as high and low, the first three items (very devout, devout, and moderately devout) were collapsed into the high category. The low category consisted of all those who were inactive.

Father's occupation was measured by the Hollingshead Occupational Index (1959). This index utilizes father's occupation and income and assigns a weight to each factor. From this scale eleven categories were made: (1) professionals, (2) business managers, (3) small business owners, (4) clerical and sales, (5) skilled manual, (6) semi-skilled, (7) unskilled, (8) unemployed, (9) deceased, (10) retired, (11) students. Father's occupation was dichotomized into professionals and non-professionals. The professional category consisted of the first item of professional occupations. The non-professional category included all other occupations.

Sex of the respondent was indicated as (1) male, or (2) female.

Data Collection and Sample

A closed-ended questionnaire was administered to certain sociology and MHFD (management, housing and family development) classes taught at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University during the fall and winter of 1975 - 1976. These classes were chosen because it was felt the numbers of cohabitors would be higher in upper level sociology and MHFD courses. The particular courses were chosen non-randomly as a convenient sample. The nature of the courses led the researcher to believe that the study would be more readily acceptable to those enrolled. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. First, it asked the general student population for information concerning their accepted levels of sexual permissiveness and attitudes toward cohabitation. The second half concerned only those currently cohabiting and included items asking for a descriptive account of their relationship and attitudes toward it. A total of three hundred and fifty questionnaires were administered with three hundred and thirty nine returned. Of these, seventeen were excluded from the analysis for lack of information, leaving a total of three hundred and twenty two (ninety four percent of those administered).

The sample is composed of three hundred and twenty two undergraduate and graduate students currently enrolled at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, in Blacksburg, Virginia. The sample was restricted to upper level college students, for whom cohabitation was more likely to be salient. Due to the fact that the majority of upper level students live off-campus, it was hoped the numbers of

those currently cohabiting would increase. However, out of the total sample, only ninety four students were currently cohabiting, or had previously cohabited at the time of the survey. Of these ninety four, four were excluded from the analysis due to incomplete information being given. This left only a total of ninety students cohabiting (twenty seven percent). Of these ninety cohabiting and previously cohabiting students, only seventy six (twenty two percent of the total sample) continued the second half of the questionnaire.

With respect to sex of the respondents, females were overrepresented and males underrepresented. Due to the nature of the courses (Sociology of the Family, Sex in Society, and Human Sexual Development) in which the questionnaires were administered, females were more likely to be enrolled. Of the total sample two hundred and five were female and one hundred and twenty eight were male (see Table I).

As expected, the majority of students were either juniors or seniors. There were six freshmen, sixty seven sophmores and one hundred and twenty four juniors and one hundred and twenty four seniors. There were eleven graduate students. The range in age was seventeen to forty-one years, with the mean age twenty. The distribution of age was bimodally split between twenty and twenty one, each represented with one hundred and eleven. The age of twenty-two ranked third with twenty nine students, with the rest being equally distributed. Marital status of the students was broken down into four categories; single, married, divorced and separated. Three hundred seven respondents were single, seventeen married, four divorced and three separated, and fifteen widowed.

The religious affiliation of most respondents (two hundred and three) was Protestant. There were sixty one Catholics, eight Jews, and fifty nine who indicated some other affiliation. On degree of religiosity, fourteen classified themselves as very devout, forty five devout, one hundred and five moderately devout, one hundred inactive.

Father's occupation was categorized by the Hollingshead Occupational Index into eleven categories. The first category included a wide range of occupations from top governmental executives to doctors, lawyers, Ph.D.'s, etc. The professionals were represented with one hundred seventeen, business managers seventy two, small business owners forty two, clerical and sales thirty eight, skilled manual seventeen, semi-skilled nine, unskilled four, unemployed two, deceased thirteen, retired ten, and the student category had one. On the basis of father's occupation, the majority of students were from middle to upper middle class white collar backgrounds.

Research Design

Descriptive statistics prove to be the most useful in an exploratory study of this nature. Descriptive statistics are used as the medium for describing survey data in a manageable form. Single variables can be summarized by descriptive statistics and so can the associations among variables (Babbie, 1973).

In this study, the dependent variable, perceptions toward cohabitation, was dichotomized. All independent variables (i.e., sex, religious affiliation, degree of religiosity, father's occupation) were

TABLE I

A FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS
ON SEX, AGE, COLLEGE CLASS YEAR, AND MARITAL STATUS

Sex of Respondent		College Class Year[a]				
Male	Female	Fresh.	Soph.	Jr.	Sr.	Grad.
38.4%	61.6%	1.8%	20.2%	37.3%	37.3%	3.3%
(n=128)	(n=205)	(n=6)	(n=67)	(n-124)	(n=124)	(n=11)

Age of Respondent[b]				
Under 20	20	21	22	23+
18.3%	33.3%	33.3%	8.7%	6.3%
(n=61)	(n=111)	(n=111)	(n=29)	(n=21)

Marital Status				
Single	Married	Divorced	Separated	Widowed
88.7%	4.9%	1.1%	1.0%	4.3%
(n=307)	(n=17)	(n=4)	(n=3)	(n=15)

a Due to rounding percentages total to 99.9.

b Due to rounding percentages total to 99.9.

TABLE II

A FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS
ON FATHER'S OCCUPATION, RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION,
AND DEGREE OF RELIGIOSITY

Father's Occupation				
Professionals	Business Managers	Sm. Business Owners	Clerical and Sales	Skilled Manual
36.0%	22.2%	12.9%	11.7%	5.2%
(n=117)	(n=72)	(n=42)	(n=38)	(n=17)

Father's Occupation					
Semi-skilled	Unskilled	Unemployed	Dead	Retired	Student
2.8%	1.2%	.6%	4.0%	3.1%	.3%
(n=9)	(n=4)	(n=2)	(n=13	(n=10)	(n=1)

Religious Affiliation			
Catholic	Protestant	Jewish	Other
18.4%	61.3%	2.4%	17.8%
(n=61)	(n=203)	(n=8)	(n=59)

Degree of Religiosity			
Very Devout	Devout	Moderately Devout	Inactive
5.3%	17.0%	39.8%	37.9%
(n=14)	(n=45)	(n=105)	(n=100)

also dichotomized based upon the most even numerical split. This bifurcation of the dependent and independent variables rendered all data nominal.

Although the data collected are of a non-probability nature (i.e., every person in the universe from which the sample was drawn did not have an equal chance of being selected) it is, nevertheless, useful to present a test of statistical significance. Blalock (1972), while warning against the use of tests of significance in nonprobability samples, notes that in cases where one is attempting simply to make generalizations about the population sampled especially in exploratory studies, a test of significance may in fact provide useful information for future studies. Hence, in this study tests of significance are only used to make generalizations about the particular population sampled and only serve as a guide for further research.

Chi-square then, served as the measure of statistical significance. Chi-square enables the researcher to interelate nominal variables with any number of categories and, therefore, is useful in the present research design. The chi-square test is most applicable in the case of contingency problems, in which two nominal scale variables have been cross-tabulated (Blalock, 1972). The traditionally accepted level of .05 served as the level of statistical significance. However, the smallest level obtained is shown in each table.

Yule's Q (a special case of Gamma) is used to measure the degree of association between variables. Yule's Q is a common measure for nominal scales, but can only be used with 2 x 2 tables. For the purposes of this study, it is an adequate measure.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

In view of the exploratory nature of the study, contingency tables are utilized, and descriptive statistics are employed to present the data. This chapter consists of two sections. First, the distribution of responses on the dependent and independent variables are presented. Secondly, each of the three hypotheses, as presented in Chapter II, is tested.

The Distribution of Responses

The Dependent Variable

Table III presents the results of the percentage of respondents who perceive cohabitation as either a new stage in the courtship process, a trial marriage, a promiscuous situation which exploits the individual, or as a substitute for marriage. A large proportion of all respondents tested (sixty three percent) perceive that cohabitation is a new stage in the courtship process. Only thirty seven percent felt cohabitation was other than a courtship process, twenty eight percent indicating it was a premarital or trial marriage, five percent seeing it as a promiscuous situation, and four percent perceiving it as a substitute for marriage.

With such a large percentage of respondents expressing similar attitudes toward cohabitation, this indicates there must be some factor or factors held in common to account for this. Therefore,

TABLE III

A FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF COLLEGE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF COHABITATION

(N=312)

Cohabitation is:	N	Percent
A new stage in the courtship process	197	63.1%
A trial marriage	88	28.2%
A promiscuous situation which exploits the individual	14	4.5%
A substitute for marriage	13	4.2%
	TOTAL	100.%

the following analysis examines the relationship between several independent variables (i.e., sex, religious affiliation, degree of religiosity, father's occupation), and their relationship to respondents' attitudes toward cohabitation.

The Independent Variable

Table IV presents the percentage of respondents falling within certain categories on each of the independent variables. Upon examination, it is clear that the distribution of all of the variables approximates a sixty - forty split. This distribution of responses is felt to be adequate to test whether or not these factors are related to the perception of cohabitation as a new stage in the courtship process.

Testing of Hypotheses

On the basis of the previous literature it is expected that college students' perceptions of cohabitation are changing. The major hypothesis explored in this investigation states:

> College students perceive cohabitation to be a new stage in the courtship process, rather than as a substitute for marriage, or a trial marriage.

From the data presented in Table III, it is shown that the majority (sixty three percent) of the respondents perceive cohabitation to be a new stage in the courtship process, whereas only thirty seven percent view it as other than a courtship process. From these findings we fail to reject the hypothesis.[1]

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[1]From the presentation of data in Table I we cannot tell the significance of the relationships through a univariate distribution, but on the basis of the percentage distribution it appears to be supported.

TABLE IV

A FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS SEX, OCCUPATION OF FATHER, RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION AND DEGREE OF RELIGIOSITY

Sex		Father's Occupation	
Male	Female	Professionals	All Others
38.4%	61.6%	35.5%	64.5%
(n=128)	(n=205)	(n-117)	(n=184)

Religious Affiliation		Degree of Religiosity	
Protestant	All Other	High	Low
61.3%	38.3%	61.4%	38.6%
(n=203)	(n=128)	(n=204)	(n=128)

Social Background and Perceptions of Cohabitation

The relationships between the respondents' perceptions of cohabitation by their sex, religious affiliation, degree of religiosity, and father's occupation are presented in Tables V through VIII.

Table V presents the relationship between the respondents' perception of cohabitation and sex. Chi square was used to test significance of difference, and Gamma (Yule's Q for 2 x 2 tables) was used as a measure of association throughout this analysis. As can be observed from Table V, cohabitation is not significantly related to sex. Although the difference between the way males and females view cohabitation is not significant at the .05 level, the Q value seems to indicate that females (sixty five percent) are somewhat more likely to view cohabitation as a new stage in the courtship process than are males (sixty percent).

Table VI shows the relationship between the respondents' perception of cohabitation and his/her religious affiliation. From Table VI it can be observed that there is a negative relationship (-.17). An examination of the percentages indicates there is a higher proportion of Protestants (sixty percent) than other religious groups (forty percent) who perceive cohabitation as a new stage in the courtship process. However, since the chi square is not significant, we may assume religious affiliation bears no significant relationship to the respondents' perceptions of cohabitation.

An examination of Table VII shows that seventy three percent of the respondents who scored low on the religiosity variable also perceived

TABLE V

A COMPARISON OF THE RESPONDENTS PERCEPTIONS OF COHABITATION BY SEX

Cohabitation Trend	Sex		Total
	Male	Female	
New Stage	59.8%	65.3%	63.1%
	(n=73)	(n=124)	(n=197)
All Others	40.2%	34.7%	36.9%
	(n=49)	(n=66)	(n=115)
	100.%	100.%	100.%
	(n=122)	(n=190)	(n=312)

Chi square = .721 p>.05 N.S.

Yule's Q = -.115

D.F. = 1

TABLE VI

A COMPARISON OF THE RESPONDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF COHABITATION BY RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION

Cohabitation Trend	Religious Affiliation		Total
	Protestant	All Others	
New Stage	59.8% (n=113)	68.1% (n=83)	63% (n=196)
All Others	40.2% (n=76)	31.9% (n=39)	37% (n=115)
	100% (n=189)	100% (n=122)	100% (n=312)

Chi square = 1.823 N.S.

Yule's Q = -.117

D. F. = 1

TABLE VII

A COMPARISON OF THE RESPONDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF COHABITATION BY DEGREE OF RELIGIOSITY

Cohabitation Trend	Degree of Religiosity		Total
	High	Low	
New Stage	57.5% (n=111)	72.9% (n=86)	63.3% (n=197)
All Others	42.5% (n=82	27.1% (n=32)	36.7% (n=114)
	100% (n=193)	100% (n=118)	100% (n=311)

Chi square = 6.80 significant $p < .001$

Yule's Q = -.33

D. F. = 1

cohabitation to be a new stage in the courtship process. Among those who scored high on the religiosity variable, fifty eight percent viewed cohabitation as a courtship process. Further, the data presented in Table VII indicate that the relationship between religiosity of the respondents and their perception of the trend in cohabitation is significant. The chi square value of 6.80 is statistically significant at the alpha level of .001, the Q value of -.33 indicates that as the religiosity of the respondents increases, there is a corresponding decrease in their perception of cohabitation as being toward something other than a new stage in the courtship process. Thus, the more devout, the less likely the respondents see cohabitation as a new stage in the courtship process.

The relationship between the respondents' perceptions of cohabitation and father's occupation is presented in Table VIII. By examining the individual cells in this table, it may be seen that of those respondents whose fathers are professionals, sixty three percent perceive cohabitation as a new stage in the courtship process as compared to sixty four percent of those from non-professional backgrounds. Those who perceive cohabitation as other than a courtship process, thirty seven percent of their fathers are professionals as compared to thirty six percent who are non-professionals. Given the chi-square value of .002 suggests there is virtually no difference in the perceptions of the two groups.

Cohabitors and Their Perceptions of Cohabitation

Previous research indicates that those currently engaged in cohab-

TABLE VIII

A COMPARISON OF THE RESPONDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF COHABITATION BY FATHER'S OCCUPATION

Cohabitation Trend	Father's Occupation		Total
	Professional	Non-Professional	
New Stage	63.1% (n=70)	63.5% (n=108)	63.3% (n=178)
All Others	36.9% (n=41)	36.5% (n=62)	36.7% (n=103)
	100% (n=111)	100% (n=170)	100% (n=281)

Chi square = .002 p .05 N.S.

Yule's Q = -.010

D. F. = 1

itation are more likely to view it as a courtship process (Macklin, 1972; Huang, 1973; Morrison and Anderson, 1973). This prompted the hypothesis which states:

> Those currently involved in a cohabiting relationship are more likely to perceive cohabitation as a new stage in the courtship process than those who are not cohabiting.

Table IX summarizes the results of calculating Yule's Q and Chi square for the relationship between those currently engaged in a cohabiting relationship and their perceptions of cohabitation. Of those respondents currently cohabiting, eighty percent view cohabitation as a new stage in the courtship process, while twenty percent felt it was other than a courtship process. As observed from Table IX, there is a strong degree of association (.49) between those engaged in a cohabiting relationship and their perceptions of cohabitation. There also exists a statistically significant relationship ($p < .0001$), suggesting that the hypothesis may not be rejected.

Also found in the literature, those currently cohabiting view their own relationships as a courtship process similar to going steady (Macklin, 1972; Peterman, et. al., 1973; Johnson, 1969; Huang, 1973; Shuttlesworth and Thorman, 1973). This leads to the hypothesis which states:

> Those involved in a cohabiting relationship are likely to perceive their own relationship as strongly affectionate, closed to other dating relationships (i.e., going steady).

The results of tabulating the percentage of respondents who are currently cohabiting and how they perceive their own relationship are summarized in Table X. A large proportion of those cohabiting (forty four percent) rate their own relationship as strongly affectionate

TABLE IX

COHABITING RESPONDENTS AND THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF COHABITATION

Cohabitation Trend	Cohabiting Respondents		Total
	Yes	No	
New Stage	79.6% (n=70)	56.5% (n=126)	68% (n=196)
All Others	20.4% (n=18)	43.5% (n=97)	32% (n=115)
	100% (n=88)	100% (n=223)	100% (n=311)

Chi square = 13.40 significant $p < .0001$

Yule's Q = .49

D. F. = 1

TABLE X

PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF COHABITING RESPONDENTS PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR RELATIONSHIP

Perception of Relationship	Number	Percent
Casual, open to other dating relationships	12	19.4%
Casual, closed to other dating relationships	10	16.2%
Strongly affectionate relationship (i.e., going steady)	27	43.5%
Engaged	13	20.9%
	N = 62	100%

Missing cases = 27

type of relationship (i.e., going steady). Twenty one percent indicated their relationship was one of formal engagement. Nineteen percent reported their relationship was casual, open to other dating relationships and sixteen percent said theirs was casual, but closed to other dating relationships. Even though the percentage distribution here is not significant enough to be conclusive, the fact that forty four percent view it as a going steady type of relationship lends some support to the hypothesis. In this investigation, only those who indicated their relationship as one of a going steady type were considered to be supportive of the hypothesis.

The findings of this study provide additional information on what variables influence college students' perceptions of cohabitation. The findings indicate that college students in this sample in general do perceive cohabitation to be a new stage in the courtship process. However, neither sex, religious preference nor father's occupation bears a significant relationship to how college students perceive cohabitation. However, degree of religiosity was found to be significantly related to students' perceptions. As the degree of devoutness decreased, there was an increase in the numbers of those who viewed cohabitation as a courtship process. It is a general tendency that the lower the degree of religious devoutness, the more liberal and permissive the attitudes and behavior among individuals (Reiss, 1967).

With regard to those individuals currently cohabiting, they are more likely to view cohabitation as a new stage in the courtship process, thus lending support to previous studies (Huang, 1973; Arafat and Yorburg, 1973). Even though not statistically significant, the

general consensus among cohabitors is to rate their own relationship as strongly affectionate, closed to other dating relationships. This lends support to the contention that cohabitation is indeed becoming a courtship pattern, and is perceived as such by those currently cohabiting.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The phenomenon of heterosexual cohabitation is by no means a new one. However, the recent occurrence of cohabitation among college students in the United States is. Current research has suggested that cohabitation is either a substitute for marriage (Lautenschlager, 1969), a trial marriage (Mead, 1968; Karlen, 1969; Grant, 1986), or a new stage in the courtship process (Macklin, 1972).

This study has examined college students and, among them, those who are currently cohabiting and inquired into their perceptions of cohabitation. The most important finding of this study suggests that college students in general do perceive cohabitation to be a new stage in the courtship process rather than as a trial union or as a substitute for marriage. Among those currently cohabiting, there is a tendency to rate their own relationship as one of a strongly affectionate nature (i.e., going steady).

Three background variables (sex, religious affiliation, and father's occupation) were not significantly related to how college students view cohabitation in general.

Sex as an independent variable was used to test for differences in the perceptions of cohabitation between males and females. Though not statistically significant, females (sixty five percent) were somewhat more likely than males (sixty percent) to view cohabitation as a new stage in the courtship process. Religious affiliation was not found to

be significantly related to the dependent variable. However, there was a higher proportion in the "other" category (sixty eight percent) who felt cohabitation was a new stage in the courtship process. Included in this category was a large number of respondents who were religiously inactive. It has been found that those who are inactive and less devout tend to be more liberal and permissive in their attitudes and behavior (Reiss, 1967). Due to a lack of specification of particular religious denominations, no conclusive evidence can be drawn from this research on the religious affiliation variable. Further research should test for differences between specific religious denominations (i.e., fundamentalistic versus more liberal ones).

Father's occupation, though not significantly related to the dependent variable, is a potentially important background variable in influencing students' perceptions of cohabitation. On the basis of father's occupation, we can determine what type of class background and income level the respondent comes from. In the sample there was a preponderance of professionals. If the distribution was more representative of the population as a whole, the results might indicate a decrease in the perception of cohabitation as a new stage with a decrease in father's occupational level. Because of the large numbers of respondents whose father's occupations are in the professional category, it is presumed that these students come largely from middle and upper-middle class backgrounds. Traditionally those from upper level backgrounds are more educated and more liberal in their attitudes and behavior, while those who come from lower class backgrounds tend to be more conservative in their attitudes and behaviors (Reiss, 1967).

Degree of religiosity was found to be related to college students' perceptions of cohabitation. As religiosity of the respondents increased, there was a corresponding decrease in their perception of cohabitation as being something other than a courtship process (i.e., a substitute for marriage, a promiscuous situation, etc.).

The relationships found in this study are similar to the findings from other studies on cohabitation. Similar to Arafat and Yorburg's (1974) study, degree of religiosity was found to be significantly related to cohabitation. The higher the religious value, the less likely they were to view it as a courtship process.

With regard to the sex of the respondents as having an influence on students' perceptions, findings in this study are similar to those of Macklin (1974). Females more often than males are more likely to be more favorable toward cohabitation.

The findings on religious affiliation were similar to those of other studies, in that there were a large proportion of Protestants in the samples (Macklin, 1974; Huang, 1974; Croake, Keller, and Catlin, 1974). However, the majority of findings have indicated that religious affiliation was an accurate predictor in studying student perceptions toward cohabitation (Macklin, 1974; Huang, 1974).

Similar to the findings in Johnson's study (1969), a large proportion of the respondents father's occupation fell in the professional category. Father's occupation was not found to be related to students' attitudes toward cohabitation.

Implications

In keeping with the exploratory nature of this study, further suggestions for research in this area are called for.

As already noted, three of the independent variables were not related to cohabitation attitudes or behavior. The fourth variable (religiosity) was found to be statistically significant for the college students in this study and how they viewed cohabitation, namely as a new stage in the courtship process. The distinction between cohabitors and non-cohabitors is important in achieving a cross-comparison of both groups' attitudes and behavior. Very little research dealing with both groups has been undertaken, thus leaving a need for more investigation and hypothesis testing in this area.

Ideally longitudinal research is indicated here to test for differences in students' perceptions of cohabitation over a period of time. The selection and comparison of representative samples of both cohabitors and non-cohabitors is necessary for future research in this area.

Students' perceptions of cohabitation as a new stage in the courtship process suggests the use of the developmental approach in understanding its sociological significance. In looking at cohabitation within a developmental framework, we can see how it fits into the dating continuum. As a new stage, it permits those involved in cohabiting to employ a new option within the courtship system. Whether or not cohabitation is a passing fad or is becoming an established

stage within the dating and mate selection cycle has important implications for marriage in our society. Further longitudinal research is necessary to determine the impact it will have and its permanence within our courtship system.

Research to date has been hampered by many problems, among them, the lack of any standard operational definitions of cohabitation, the difficulty in obtaining adequate samples, and a lack of agreement regarding the criteria to be used in evaluating the cohabitation experience (Macklin, 1974).

Problems arose in this study because of confusion over terminology and the definitions of certain concepts. Certain key words and phrases concerning courtship have already become dated and are not accurate in describing certain situation. Terms such as "going steady" are not readily applicable to cohabiting situations, but it seemed to be the one that best fit. There was a noticeable resistance among respondents to some of the conventional descriptive courtship terminology (i.e., pinned, going steady, etc.). Future investigation of cohabitation should make an effort to coin new, and more accurate terms that describe cohabiting relationships. Scholars, like Robert Whitehurst (1970), have coined new terms such as "unmalias" (unmarried liasons) in an effort to find a concept that fits the phenomenon of cohabitation.

However, to date no such terms or concepts have become readily acceptable as useful descriptions of cohabitation. For further research a larger sample size, and the testing of more background variables might lead to more conclusive findings on cohabitation.

The implications that cohabitation may have for the larger society, (i.e., legal, cultural or institutional) can only be investigated through the use of longitudinal or cross-cultural research.

Conclusions

This thesis has been an attempt to explore how college students view cohabitation, whether as a courtship process, a trial marriage, or as a substitute for marriage. The value of this study lies in the confirmation that students do perceive cohabitation to be a new stage in the courtship process. The religiosity variable was found to be significantly related to the dependent variable (perceptions of cohabitation). Additional findings have indicated that other family background variables (sex, religious affiliation, and father's occupation) were not related to students' perceptions of cohabitation. Cohabitation, it would appear, is generally viewed as acceptable and as a viable courtship pattern.

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APPENDIX

This questionnaire is an attempt to understand the phenomena of heterosexual cohabitation on today's college campuses. With your cooperation we may achieve this goal. This questionnaire is completely anonymous. Please fill it out carefully and completely, do not leave any blanks. Check the answer that best fits. Please return promptly when completed. Thank you.

Circle the most appropriate response:

1. Sex a) male
   b) female

2. Class in school _____

3. Age at last birthday _____

4. Marital status a) single
   b) married
   c) divorced
   d) separated
   e) widowed

5. Marital status of parents a) married
   b) divorced
   c) separated
   d) widowed

6. Has either of your parents ever been: a) separated
   b) divorced
   c) widowed
   d) none of the above

7. Religion a) Catholic
   b) Protestant
   c) Jewish
   d) other (please specify) _____

8. Religiously, do you consider yourself?
   a) very devout
   b) devout
   c) moderately devout
   d) inactive

9. Church attendance:
   a) very frequently (one or more times a week)
   b) frequently (once every two weeks)
   c) moderately (once a month)
   d) occasionally (a few times a year)
   e) never

10. Father's occupation (please be specific): _____

11. Major in college: _____

12. How many people have you dated since you began dating?_____

13. Have you ever engaged in sexual intercourse?
    a) yes
    b) no

14. Age at first intercourse_____

15. Do you believe premarital intercourse is acceptable among those who are not affectionate for one another?
    a) agree
    b) disagree
    c) other (please specify) _____

16. Do you believe premarital intercourse is acceptable among those who are casually dating?
    a) agree
    b) disagree
    c) other (please specify) _____

17. Do you believe premarital intercourse is acceptable among those who are going steady?
    a) agree
    b) disagree
    c) other (please specify) _____

18. Do you believe premarital intercourse is acceptable among those who are engaged?
    a) agree
    b) disagree
    c) other (please specify) _____

19. Are you currently:
    a) not dating
    b) casually dating
    c) dating one person more than others
    d) going steady
    e) engaged
    f) married

20. Have you ever spent a whole night with a member of the opposite sex?
    a) yes
    b) no

21. Have you ever spent the weekend with a member of the opposite sex?
    a) yes
    b) no

22. Have you ever spent four or more nights a week with a member of the opposite sex?
    a) yes
    b) no

23. In reference to the above question; would you if you had the opportunity?
    a) yes
    b) no
    c) maybe
    d) other (please specify) _____

24. Do you know of, or have any friends currently cohabiting (four or more nights a week) with a member of the opposite sex?
    a) yes
    b) no

25. If so, how many? _____

26. Do you approve or disapprove of those currently engaged in cohabitating? Please specify _____

27. Would you like to cohabitate with a member of the opposite sex?
    a) yes
    b) no
    c) maybe
    d) other (please specify) _____

28. Are you currently cohabitating with a member of the opposite sex?
    a) yes
    b) no
    c) no but I have before

29. Do you feel the trend in cohabitation is:
    a) a substitute for marriage
    b) a "pre" or "trial" marriage
    c) a new stage in the courtship process, that enables individuals to get to know each other completely.
    d) a promiscuous situation that exploits the individual

STOP: If your answer to number 28 was no,please go no further, except if you are currently married and have cohabitated before. If your answer was yes, please continue with the questionnaire.

30. Have you ever cohabitated before this?
    a) yes
    b) no

31. If so, how many times? _____

32. How long have you been cohabitating with your current partner? _____

33. Do your parents know you are cohabitating?
    a) yes
    b) no

34. Do they approve or disapprove?
    a) yes
    b) no
    c) mixed feelings
    d) they don't know about it

35. Are most of your friends and acquaintances aware of your relationship?
    a) yes
    b) no

36. Do you and your mate live openly together and maintain one place as your legal residence?
    a) yes
    b) no

37. Do you plan to get married in the near future to your present mate?
    a) yes
    b) no
    c) maybe
    d) other (please specify) _____

38. If so, when approximately?
    a) in a few months
    b) after graduation
    c) within a year or two
    d) not planning to get married
    e) other (please specify) _____

39. How long did you date your mate before you decided to live together? _____

40. Who made the decision?
    a) male
    b) female
    c) mutual

41. Whose residence did you move into?
    a) male's
    b) female's
    c) a new residence

42. Are your outside social contacts mostly:
    a) male's friends
    b) female's friends
    c) mutual

43. Do you use a contraceptive?
    a) yes
    b) no

44. If yes, what type?
    a) pills
    b) IUD
    c) condom
    d) all others (foams, diaphragms, etc.)
    e) none

45. In case of pregnancy what alternatives would you consider?
    a) abortion
    b) marriage
    c) giving child up for adoption and staying together
    d) keeping the child and staying tegether unmarried
    e) other (please specify) _____

46. Do you work:
    a) yes
    b) no

47. How are financial matters handled?
    a) jointly
    b) separately
    c) other (please specify) _____

48. Who pays the utility bills?
    a) male
    b) female
    c) shared
    d) included in the rent

49. Who pays the rent?
    a) male
    b) female
    c) shared

50. Who does the majority of household chores?
    a) male
    b) female
    c) equal

51. Who prepares the meals?
    a) male
    b) female
    c) shared
    d) other (please specify) _____

52. Who pays for your books and tuition?
    a) male
    b) female
    c) shared
    d) parents
    e) other (please specify) _____

53. Do you maintain a separate bank account?
    a) yes
    b) no

54. How would you rate your current relationship with your mate?
    a) casual, open to other dating relationships
    b) casual, closed to other dating relationships
    c) strongly affectionate type of relationship (going steady)
    d) engaged
    e) married

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COLLEGE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF COHABITATION: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

by

Margaret E. Preble

(ABSTRACT)

The data gathered for this exploratory study on college students' perceptions of hererosexual cohabitation support the thesis that college students do tend to view cohabitation as a courtship process. Of those who are currently cohabiting, females more than males tend to rate their own relationships as similar to the going steady phase of courtship.

Background variables, such as sex, religious affiliation, and father's occupation were not found to be significantly related to how students perceive cohabitation. Degree of religiosity was found to be an indicator of how students view cohabitation.

Overall, the basic perceptions of college students on this campus toward cohabitation agree with the major studies done on other college campuses across the country (Macklin, 1972; Croake, Keller and Catlin, 1974; Morrison and Anderson, 1973). That is, it is indeed a new stage in the courtship process, similar to going steady. It is not perceived as a substitute for marriage, a premarital or trial marriage, as was previously thought.