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The State of Things
Figure MS–2
Median age at first marriage: 1890 to present

The Big Delay

The Big Delay

• Most people have a goal to settle down—eventually, with a mate.

• Benefits:
  • More careful choice in mate
  • Self-insuring

• Consequences:
  • Maybe too much relationship experience
  • Children by other partners
Large Shift in How People Meet:
Rosenfeld: “Disintermediating your friends”

Key Thoughts about Commitment
(for this talk)
Commitment can be thought of in two dimensions: 
  • Dedication 
  • Constraint 

When a person makes a commitment, they are *making a choice to give up other choices*.

Commitment secures attachment 
  • To do that, it needs to be clearly signaled.
• “Is this a date?  
• Soft break-ups  
• Hook-ups  
• “Just talking” relationships (D. Scott Sibley)  
• Ghosting  
• Cohabitation (Lindsay, 2000)
Scripts

Steps & Stages
Ambiguity is linked to asymmetry

- Asymmetrical commitment
- Asymmetrical information
Layers of complexity in the same market

• Stayers
  • Seekers of the one, or open to that happening

• Players
  • Seeking, but not seeking what stayers are looking for

• Delayers
  • Eventual stayers but currently determined delayers
  • Some are temporary players
Often not recognized in discussions about cohabitation vs marriage . . .

• Lower commitment is a feature, not a bug of cohabitation.

• Ambiguity (and commitment uncertainty) is often the point.

• So many flavors: heterogeneity among cohabiters
  • Long-term committed couples
  • Those who will marry in a short time horizon
  • Cohabiters
  • Cohabiters for convenience or need
Before we go further, recognize . . .

• Patterns, risks—and what is modifiable or not—differ by economic resources, family backgrounds, education, and individual vulnerabilities.

• Patterns and pathways people take are hugely governed by selection.
  • What’s already bake in the cake.

• People over-interpret selection to mean that nothing is changeable or that only context and resource changes matter.
Timing and Sequence

Sliding vs. Deciding®
Interested in cohabitation research? Some folks to follow:

- Wendy Manning
- Pamela Smock
- Susan Brown
- Sharon Sassler
- Daniel Lichter
- Karen Benjamin Guzzo
- Arielle Kuperberg
- Michael Rosenfeld & Katharina Roesler
The “Cohabitation Effect”

• Historically, premarital cohabitation has been associated with:

  • Greater odds of divorce
  • Lower marital satisfaction
  • More conflict and poorer communication

Cohan & Kleinbaum, 2002; Phillips & Sweeney, 2005; Stafford et al., 2004; Stanley et al., 2004; Teachman, 2003; Stanley, Rhoades, & Markman, 2006
How many people will live together before marriage? 70 to 75%

Hemez & Manning, 2017, NCFMR FP-17-05
Recent Research, and Headlines

• There have been many reports that this effect has weakened or gone away for couples marrying in the past 10 to 15 years.
  e.g., Manning & Cohen, 2012, Kuperberg, 2014

• Sociologists have expected that this risk would go away as cohabitation became normative.

• But in 2018, two sociologists from Stanford shook things up, claiming the effect remains.
  • They found living together before marriage is associated with greater risk for divorce (except in the first year of marriage).
Evidence of no-risk, only for those who ...

• Only cohabited after mutual plans for marriage
  Rhoades et al. 2009; Stanley et al., 2010

• Only ever cohabited with the person married
  Jose et al., 2010; Teachman, 2003; Lichter et al., 2010; Rhoades & Stanley, 2014

• Did not cohabit with anyone before age 23
  Kuperberg, 2014

• Did not have a child before marrying
  Tach & Halpern-Meekin, 2009
Regardless

• There is (almost) no evidence that cohabitation before marriage improves one’s odds of success in marriage.

• Why?
How Could Cohabitation be Associated with Higher Risk in Marriage?

• Selection effects

• Changes in attitudes and beliefs
  (Axinn & Barber, 1997)

• Inertia

see Stanley, Rhoades, & Markman, 2006
Inertia is related to how much an object will resist changes to its present state of rest or motion.
Quiz: What has more inertia?

☐ Dating

☑ Living together
Testing the Theory of Inertia

• Inertia should be a non-factor for couples who have *mutual* plans to marry (i.e., are engaged) or are already married before moving in together.

• Hypothesis supported in 7 studies/6 samples
  • Kline et al., 2004
  • Rhoades et al., 2009
  • Stanley et al., 2010
  • Goodwin et al., 2010
  • Manning & Cohen, 2012
  • Rhoades & Stanley, 2014
  • Rhoades et al., 2016
Further Support for the Theory of Inertia

• Constraints predict staying together net of dedication.
  Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2010

• As people move in, dedication levels off and constraints jump up and take off.
  Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2012
As people move in, dedication levels off and constraints jump up and take off.

Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2012
If cohabitation is associated with increased constraints, people would be careful about that, right?
Um, no.

Sliding rules, not Deciding

• Qualitative Data: Over 50% of couples slid into cohabitation.
  Manning & Smock, 2005; see also Lindsay, 2000

• Quantitative Data: 2/3rds slid into cohabiting
  Stanley, Rhoades, & Fincham, 2011
A Transition and Risk Model

Stanley & Rhoades, 2009
A Lower Risk Sequence
(A Theoretical Model: Stanley & Rhoades, 2009)

- **Information**
  - Risks Is this safe?
  - Compatibility Is there a fit?
  - Commitment Mutual?

- **Decision**
  - Choose
  - Give up other options
  - Intend to follow-through

- **Transition**
  - Sexual contact
  - Cohabitation
  - Pregnancy and childbearing
  - Marriage

- **Inertia & Constraint**
  - Structural
  - Relational
  - Moral
  - Biological & Health
A Higher Risk Sequence
(A Theoretical Model: Stanley & Rhoades, 2009)
Speed of transitions adds to risk

• Stunted relationship development
  (Busby, Carroll, & Willoughby, 2010)

• Fast “tempo” contributes to lower quality marriages
  (Sassler, Addo, & Lichter, 2012)
• Sliding is not always bad.

• But, in many cases . . .

People are giving up options before they make a choice.
In Contrast to Sliding . . .

Commitments are Decisions

“Commitment is making a choice to give up other choices.”

(Stanley, 1998)
Implications

www.slidingvsdeciding.com
www.PREPinc.com