

The socialization effects of parental union behaviors on young adult first union formation:
gender differences in cohabitation and marriage

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As is the case with most other industrialized nations, the average age of first marriage in the United States has been increasing since the mid-20th century. At the same time, the timing of forming a coresidential union with a romantic partner has not changed greatly. This is due to an increase in cohabitation across all education levels and racial groups. While some researchers see the increase in cohabitation as an outcome of gender equality in which personal autonomy and individualism are emphasized (e.g., Thonton and Young-DeMarco 2001), past studies question the costs and benefits of cohabitation. Previous research reveals that cohabitation is not a stable, protective, and beneficial union as marriage is for a couple and their children's (Amato 1996; Axinn and Thornton 1992; Cohan and Kleinbaum 2002; Dush, Cohan, and Amato 2000; Treas and Giesen 2000).

Such findings lead us to the question: what makes some people more likely to cohabit? One theory that explains people's choice of cohabitation is socialization theory. This theory argues that children learn attitudes, values, and behaviors from their parents, and therefore families of origin work as templates for children's families of procreation. Today's young-adult cohort includes many individuals who experienced parental separation, remarriage, and/or cohabitation in their childhood and adolescence. Researchers who have compared parents' and children's union behaviors found similarity between them in terms of type of union and timing of union formation (e.g., Goldscheider and Goldshceider 1998; Sassler, Cunningham, and Lichter

2009; Wolfinger 2001). In other words, children from nonintact families are more likely to form a nontraditional union, and children whose parents cohabited after divorce are more likely to cohabit than children whose parents remarried after divorce.

While most past studies support intergenerational socialization effects even after controlling for other factors, several aspects of socialization theory have yet to develop considerable evidential support. My research addresses some of these aspects by asking two questions. First, does a longer exposure to an alternative family form in family of origin intensify its impact on union formation in the next generation? Second, does parental family structure have different effects on children's union formation for males and females? I hypothesize that young adults who have lived in alternative families for longer periods of time are more likely to cohabit, and that females are more likely than males to be affected by parental union behaviors.

To test these hypotheses, I use data from Wave 1 and Wave 3 of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health). The Add Health data were collected as a school-based, longitudinal study of the health-related behaviors of adolescents and their outcomes in young adulthood. The Wave 1 survey was conducted with a nationally representative sample of adolescents in grades 7 through 12 in 1994 and 1995, and the respondents were re-interviewed in the Wave 3 survey in 2001-2002. In Wave 1, a family member of the respondents (generally the mother) was also interviewed for information such as family socioeconomic status and family history. My analysis sample therefore includes all respondents present in the Wave 1 and Wave 3 interviews who have parent data and who did not marry or cohabit before the Wave 1 interview. With these restrictions and the removal of missing data, the sample size used in my analyses is 13,227. The strength of the Add Health data lies in

the fact that original respondents are re-interviewed, and therefore it is possible to measure directly the influence of experiences at an earlier point in the life course (childhood and adolescence) on subsequent behavior in young adulthood.

I will use a competing-risk hazard model to conduct event history analysis of the age at first union formation by type of union. The two competing events under analysis are first marriage and first cohabitation. My event history analysis will fit three models to test the explanatory power of parental union variables and other control variables on the risk of first union formation. Model 1 includes three parental union variables (structure of family of origin, parental cohabitation, and mother's age at first marriage). Next, reproductive history is added to parental union variables in Model 2, because they are expected to have strong and independent effects from family and sociocultural background variables. Finally, all other control variables, including family socioeconomic status (family income, parental education attainment, race-ethnicity, and family size) and sociocultural status (religion and religiosity) are added to variables in Model 2 in Model 3. I run male and female models separately, because women enter a union earlier than men on average and therefore the risk of union formation differs by gender. This modeling strategy also allows me to test whether the association between parental union history and children's union formation varies by gender.

Preliminary results based on a multinomial Cox hazard analysis indicate that living in an alternative family is associated with a higher probability of cohabitation among children but not significantly associated with a higher probability of marriage except that women who lived in stepfamilies were more likely to get married. Preliminary results indicate some support for the duration-effect hypothesis showing that the odds of cohabitation increases from 2 to 4 percent with every additional 10 percent of lifetime in alternative families from birth to Wave 1.

Parental cohabitation was associated with a higher likelihood of children's cohabitation. The odds of cohabitation for children who had lived with a cohabiting parent were 17 percent higher for men and 15 percent for women than those who had not. Meanwhile, parental cohabitation was associated with a very low likelihood of marriage among men. A younger mother's age at her first marriage was associated with a higher chance of marriage and cohabitation for both genders, and this association was more important for marriage for males: while every additional year in a mother's age at first marriage decreased the chance of cohabitation by 3 to 4 percent, it decreased the chance of marriage by 10 percent for men and 7 percent for women.

Overall, these results support socialization theory in young adult children's first union type. Individuals who experienced alternative families and parental cohabitation in childhood and adolescence were more likely to cohabit as their first union in their early adulthood. The results also support the duration effect of socialization higher chances of cohabitation for those who have experienced alternative families for longer periods of time. Preliminary results also suggest important gender differences in union formation. First, living in stepfamilies is associated with higher chances of marriage for females whereas it is not associated with males' chances of marriage. Second, parental cohabitation reduces males' chances of marriage to almost half whereas it does not significantly lower women's chances of marriage.

For presentation at the PAA meeting I will refine my analysis using a competing risk model and incorporate additional control variables in an attempt to tease apart socialization mechanisms from social structure. I will also present descriptive results graphically on the probability (e.g., survival analysis) and the hazard of union type for marriage and cohabitation by sex.

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