THE INFLUENCE OF PARENTS' AND CHILDREN'S UNION TRANSITIONS ON ATTITUDES TOWARD COHABITATION

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ABSTRACT

Intergenerational panel data are used to examine inter- and intra-generational influences on adult children's attitudes toward cohabitation. The analyses focus on the influences of parents' marital history and children's experiences with cohabitation, cohabitation dissolution, marriage, and divorce. The findings show that parental divorce during childhood leads young adults to view cohabitation more favorably. Parental divorce influences adult children's attitudes about cohabitation by shaping parents' attitudes about cohabitation, parents' and children's religious participation, and adolescent children's sexual behavior. Cohabitation dissolution and direct entry into marriage among the second generation are associated with decreasingly positive views of cohabitation. Entry into a first cohabitation and divorce after direct entry into marriage lead to increasingly positive attitudes toward cohabitation.

Keywords: attitudes, cohabitation, life course, marital dissolution, marriage

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Among the array of major family changes that have taken place in the United States over the past half century, perhaps none has been as rapid as the increase in rates of extra-marital cohabitation. Although only 10 percent of marriages between 1965 and 1974 were preceded by cohabitation, approximately 50 percent of first marriages between 1990 and 1994 were preceded by cohabitation (Bumpass & Sweet, 1989; Bumpass & Lu, 2000). In addition to recent increases in the incidence of cohabitation, the proportion of people expressing favorable attitudes toward cohabitation has also risen (Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2001). Despite a large body of research on the causes and consequences of cohabitation (see Smock, 2000, for a recent review), we know relatively little about the factors that shape the way individuals think about cohabitation. Understanding the sources of individuals' attitudes about cohabitation is important not only because cohabitation is an increasingly common behavior, but also because cohabitation has been associated with increased levels of marital stability among cohabitors who subsequently marry (Booth & Johnson, 1988; Dush, Cohan, & Amato, 2003). Individuals' attitudes about cohabitation are likely to involve a complex web of issues including views about the appropriate context for sex, the permanence of marriage, and past and present experiences with cohabitation, marriage, and divorce. Therefore, the current investigation considers a wide range of factors that might be associated with attitudes about cohabitation, including individuals' family experiences during childhood, levels of religious involvement, sexual relationships, and union formation and dissolution experiences.

The central goal of the current paper is the identification of inter- and intra-generational influences on attitudes toward cohabitation and the explication of the processes through which

these factors operate. The primary focus of the intergenerational component of the analysis is the influence of parents' marital dissolution on children's attitudes toward cohabitation. We also examine the influences of several intervening factors that may help us understand the relationship between marital dissolution in one generation and attitudes about cohabitation in the next generation. Among the first generation, we consider mediating influences associated with parents' cohabitation-related attitudes, religious affiliation and religious participation. Among the second generation, we examine the extent to which children's religious participation and sexual experiences at the onset of adulthood transmit the influence of parents' characteristics on children's attitudes about cohabitation. Finally, we investigate the extent to which attitudes about cohabitation in the second generation are influenced by their own union formation and dissolution experiences. We specifically consider the influences of entry into cohabitation, cohabitation dissolution, entry into marriage, and divorce.

The data demands for such an investigation have presented a significant barrier to such an investigation to date, requiring prospectively-designed, intergenerational panel data spanning long periods of time. One data set which approximates these demands is the Intergenerational Panel Study of Parents and Children (IPSPC). These panel data, which provide information about parents and their children spanning 31 years, allow us to identify important predictors of cohabitation attitudes among a probability sample of individuals who reached adulthood in 1980.

We begin by discussing potential theoretical mechanisms influencing the formation of attitudes toward cohabitation. After introducing our data and analysis strategy, we then present a set of multivariate models designed to identify the factors associated with attitudes about cohabitation as well as change in these attitudes across the early years of young adulthood. We conclude with a set of observations about the theoretical implications of our findings.

BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

In order to articulate our model of the influence of life course experiences on attitudes toward cohabitation, we begin with a discussion of intergenerational hypotheses including the influence of parents' marital history, religiosity, and attitudes about cohabitation. We then present several intra-generational hypotheses about the influences of the formation and dissolution of sexual, cohabiting, and marital unions on adults' attitudes toward cohabitation.

We expect parents' marital dissolution during childhood to be associated with increases in the extent to which adult children view cohabitation favorably. To the extent that marriage is viewed by a child as either a disagreeable type of relationship or an impermanent one, adult children whose parents divorce may be more likely to view cohabitation as an attractive alternative to formal marriage. Parents' marital dissolution may indirectly shape adult children's attitudes about cohabitation by influencing children's union formation and dissolution patterns (Thornton, 1991), a topic to which we return below. Adults who dissolve a marriage are at an increased risk of engaging in sexual activity, cohabitation, or remarriage with a new partner. The children of divorced parents, then, may become aware of parents' sexual activity with someone other than the child's original parents. If children recognize that their parents are engaging in nonmarital sexual relationships or sexual relationships with a cohabiting partner, this may shape the children's views about the acceptability of a range of sexual and romantic co-residential relationships. Children who observe a parent dating or living together with a new romantic partner may become more likely to view cohabitation as an appropriate living arrangement and therefore adopt more favorable attitudes toward cohabitation, and this might be especially likely if the child lives in the household of the cohabiting parent. Finally, parental remarriage after divorce may shape children's attitudes about cohabitation by suggesting to children not only that

romantic relationships may be impermanent, but also by confirming that the formation of relationships with multiple partners over the life course is an acceptable and feasible approach to union formation. In support of these hypotheses, Axinn and Thornton (1996) found evidence that the eighteen-year-old children of divorced mothers are more tolerant of cohabitation, and this result held true whether or not the mother remarried.

We expect parents' religious involvement to play an important role in transmitting the influence of parents' marital history on the cohabitation-related attitudes of adult children. Many religious organizations historically have taken strong positions regarding the appropriate context for sexuality and the meaning of marriage; in general most religious groups have argued that marriage is permanent and the only appropriate context for sexuality. Therefore, those who are highly religious may be exposed to messages suggesting both that cohabitation is not acceptable and that divorce should be avoided. We expect the children of highly religious parents to hold less favorable views of cohabitation than the children of less religious parents. Empirical evidence suggests that the children of mothers who attend religious services frequently are less likely to cohabit (Thornton, Axinn, & Hill, 1992). Further, to the extent that religious organizations discourage divorce, parents who divorce may become less involved in religious activities. Therefore, it is possible that parents' changing levels of religious involvement mediate the influence of parents' marital dissolution on children's attitudes toward cohabitation. Further, parents' affiliation with particular religious groups may also influence children's attitudes toward cohabitation. Specifically, fundamentalist Protestant groups have taken strong positions against non-marital sexual relationships, so we hypothesize that the children of fundamentalist Protestants will be less supportive of cohabitation than the children of parents associated with other religious groups (Axinn & Thornton, 1996).

Parents' attitudes toward cohabitation are also expected to influence children's attitudes. Children may emulate their parents' attitudes as a result of direct socialization, social control, or status inheritance, leading to an association between parents' attitudes and children's attitudes (Bandura, 1971; 1977; Glass, Bengtson & Dunham, 1986). Further, it is likely that the parents' marital experiences may indirectly influence children's attitudes by shaping parents' attitudes toward cohabitation.

In order to isolate the influences of the parental characteristics identified above, we control for other parental factors that previous research has linked with the likelihood of cohabitation, attitudes toward cohabitation, or both. These control variables include parents' education, whether the family's first child was conceived premaritally, the mother's age at marriage, and the child's sex (Axinn & Thornton, 1993; 1996; McLanahan & Bumpass, 1988).

In addition to these parental influences, we expect characteristics of the children during adolescence and adulthood to be linked to adult children's attitudes toward cohabitation. Further, characteristics of the second generation may transmit the influence of parental factors. Experiences among the second generation with potential implications for cohabitation-related attitudes include the children's religiosity, sexual relationship history, and union formation and dissolution experiences.

Just as we hypothesized that parental religious involvement would be negatively associated with cohabitation tolerance and would transmit the effect of parents' marital history, we also expect that adult children's religious commitment may mediate the influence of parents' characteristics on children's attitudes. We hypothesize that young adults with higher levels of religious commitment will be less tolerant of cohabitation, and that the parental characteristics identified above are likely to affect adult children's attitudes toward cohabitation through their

influence on children's religiosity. For instance, the children of divorced parents may be more tolerant of cohabitation as a result of the children's decreasing religious involvement.

In much the same way we might expect parents' sexual activity with a person other than a child's parent-figure to influence children's attitudes toward cohabitation, the child's own experiences with sex outside of the marriage context may also shape his or her attitudes toward cohabitation. Those who believe that sex is legitimate only within marriage are unlikely to hold favorable views of cohabitation. Conversely, those who engage in sexual activity prior to marriage may be more supportive of cohabitation because they do not believe sexual activity should be confined to marriage. Recent research suggests that sex and cohabitation with *only* the future marital partner have little influence on subsequent marital stability, while sex and cohabitation with additional partners have much larger influences on the likelihood of subsequent divorce (Teachman, 2003). Therefore, in addition to hypothesizing that <u>any</u> pre-marital sexual experience may increase tolerance of cohabitation, we also expect that engaging in sexual activity with multiple partners will increase cohabitation tolerance. It is important to recognize, however, that sexually active adolescents may be selective of those who view cohabitation favorably.

Experiences with union formation and dissolution during adulthood are also likely to be associated with change in attitudes toward cohabitation. We consider the potential implications of entry into marriage, divorce from marriage, entry into cohabitation, and cohabitation dissolution. The most extensive research program to date that examines the influence of union formation and dissolution patterns on attitudes and values has been carried out by Lesthaeghe and colleagues in Europe (Lesthaeghe, 2002; Surkyn & Lesthaeghe, 2002). Using cross-sectional data, these researchers have demonstrated that life course position is strongly associated with

"value orientations," a broad ideational construct that captures a wide range of attitudes regarding families, civic institutions, religion, and other domains. This research suggests that cohabitors and those who dissolved a marriage or cohabitation are among the least "conformist" in their value orientations, while married individuals who never cohabited are among the most "conformist" in their attitudes.

We expect entry into cohabitation to lead to more favorable views of cohabitation. In addition to Lesthaeghe's studies (2002; Surkyn & Lesthaeghe, 2002), research in the United States specifically suggests that those who cohabit become more tolerant of cohabitation (Axinn & Thornton, 1992). Cognitive dissonance theory suggests that individuals who are not highly supportive of a behavior such as cohabitation but subsequently engage in that behavior may become more supportive of the arrangement (Festinger, 1957; 1964).

We know that many cohabitations in the United States are short-lived; some are converted into marriages and others dissolve. Many individuals view cohabitation as a "trial period" for marriage, so those who dissolve a cohabiting union may become more tolerant of cohabitation because it allowed them to assess the viability of a potential marriage partner and, for at least one member of the couple, decide that the match was not a good one. However, research also suggests that the quality of cohabiting relationships is lower than the quality of marital relationships (Nock, 1995; Thomson & Colella, 1991). To the extent that individuals who dissolve a cohabiting union perceive that the choice to cohabit was not a positive one, the dissolution of that union may lead individuals to view cohabitation less favorably. Based on Lesthaeghe's findings, (2002; Surkyn & Lesthaeghe, 2002), we expect the dominant effect of cohabitation dissolution will be to lead individuals to view cohabitation more favorably.

In addition to cohabitation and cohabitation dissolution, we also expect divorce to be

associated with more positive views of cohabitation. Divorce is likely to increase cohabitation tolerance primarily by leading individuals to be more accepting of the idea of relationship impermanence. If divorce signals dissatisfaction with marriage, it is likely that those who divorce would become more accepting of marriage alternatives such as cohabitation. Although no previous studies have linked divorce with cohabitation attitudes, research demonstrates that the experience of divorce increases tolerance of divorce (Amato & Booth, 1991; Thornton, 1991).

In contrast to the positive impact of cohabitation, cohabitation dissolution, and divorce on attitudes toward cohabitation, we hypothesize that entry into marriage will decrease acceptance of cohabitation. The decision to form a union in contemporary society involves a choice between potential alternative union forms. If individuals believe that entry into marriage rather than entry into cohabitation is a more appropriate choice, it is likely that they will become less tolerant of the alternative arrangement. Entry into marriage indicates a symbolic commitment on some level to the institution of marriage, and one of the historical components of marriage is its role as the legitimizing context for sexual relationships. Those who choose to marry are likely to adopt its cultural implications, including the belief that a sexual relationship should occur within the context of marriage and therefore that cohabitation is a less desirable union type.

When considering the impact of marriage, it is important to recognize that many contemporary marriages are preceded by cohabitation. Therefore, a substantial portion of individuals experience both cohabitation and marriage with the same partner. The preceding hypotheses suggest that entry into cohabitation will increase cohabitation tolerance while entry into marriage will decrease cohabitation tolerance. The question then becomes one of the relative weights of these two activities in combination. Because existing research provides greater evidence that cohabitation influences cohabitation attitudes, we hypothesize that those who

marry a cohabitating partner will be relatively supportive of cohabitation.

In summary, we expect parents' marital dissolution to increase the likelihood that young adults hold favorable views toward cohabitation. In addition, we expect parents' religious characteristics and attitudes toward cohabitation to mediate the influence of parents' marital dissolution. We also posit a set of mediating factors among the young adults, including their religious characteristics and sexual behaviors. Finally, we expect young adults' experiences with cohabitation, cohabitation dissolution, and divorce to lead to more positive views of cohabitation, while we expect entry into marriage to be associated with less favorable attitudes toward cohabitation. Although previous research has documented influences of parents' and children's attitudes toward cohabitation on young adults' union transitions (Bumpass & Musick, 1999; Guzzo, 2000), we limit our investigation to factors associated with attitude change.

DATA

Data for this study are drawn from the Intergenerational Panel Study of Parents and Children (IPSPC), a study of mothers and children spanning the 31 years between 1962 and 1993. The focal children in the study were born in July 1961, and are the offspring of a group of mothers selected from a probability sample of birth records for first-, second-, and fourth-born white children in the Detroit metropolitan area. All of the children from this initial sample were interviewed at age 18 (in 1980), and re-interviewed at age 23 (in 1985) and age 31 (in 1993). Response rates for the initial interview were extremely high (92%), and the 1993 wave included full information for 85% of the original sample of mothers and 83% of the original sample of children. Data on marriage, cohabitation, divorce, cohabitation dissolution, and a range of other life course experiences spanning ages 15 to 31 were obtained from the focal children at ages 23 and 31 using the Life History Calendar (Freedman et al. 1988). These histories are used to construct measures of the adult children's union formation and dissolution experiences.

Information about the parents was obtained in six interviews with the mothers between 1962, just after the children were born, and 1980, when the children were age 18.

It is important to note several characteristics of the sample used in our empirical analyses. The sample is racially homogeneous and it is possible that the processes we are investigating operate differently for non-whites. Respondents are also drawn from a single cohort, making it impossible to discern from our study whether past or future cohorts experience these processes in similar ways. However, limiting our analyses to a single cohort minimizes the variability resulting from age and position in the life course. Finally, the original sample was regionally based in the Detroit metropolitan area, although respondents have been followed in subsequent waves wherever they lived. A substantial fraction moved outside of the Detroit area and the state. Nonetheless, analyses of causal relationships using the IPSPC data show similar effects to those observed in national data when comparisons can be made (Thornton & Axinn, 1996).

Measures

We measure attitudes toward cohabitation with two separate items. We utilize mothers' responses to these items in 1980 and children's responses to the items in 1980, 1985, and 1993. The first item reads "It's alright for a couple to live together without planning to get married." The second item reads "A young couple should not live together unless they are married." Responses range from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree," and the two items are coded so that a high score represents higher levels of support for cohabitation. The two items appear to measure the same underlying construct, with correlations ranging from .71 to .75. Coefficient alphas are .83 for the mothers in 1980 and .83, .85, and .86 for the children in 1980, 1985, and 1993, respectively.

Parents' marital history is measured between 1962 and 1980, from the time of the

children's birth until they reached 18 years of age. Three dichotomous variables measure whether the mother divorced and remarried, divorced and did not remarry, or was widowed during this interval. The omitted category is continuously married. While it is possible that parents' marital transitions continue to influence children in adulthood, limiting the analysis to the pre-adult years allows us to clearly maintain the causal ordering of the variables and to specifically identify the influence of parents' marital history during childhood on the children's divorce attitudes. Mother's religious affiliation just after the child was born is measured with three dummy variables: Catholic; fundamentalist Protestant; and Jewish, other religious affiliation, or no religious affiliation. The omitted category is non-fundamentalist Protestant. Mother's attendance at religious services when the child was age 1 and age 18 is measured with a six-category variable ranging from a low of "Never" to a high of "Several times a week."

Children's first union formation and dissolution experiences are ascertained using the life history calendar, which measures children's experiences on a monthly basis from the time the children were 15-years-old. The set of variables we created was designed to measure seven common first union and union dissolution trajectories. The omitted category includes all those who remained single during the entire period of study. The other union transition variables measure direct entry into a stable first marriage; divorce after direct entry into a first marriage; direct entry into a stable first cohabitation; direct entry into a first cohabitation that dissolves; direct entry into first cohabitation followed by marriage to that partner; and finally divorce after marriage preceded by cohabitation with that partner.

Children's sexual experiences are assessed at age 18 with two dummy variables measuring whether the child had engaged in sexual intercourse with one partner or two or more partners by the time of the 1980 interview. The omitted category consists of those who had not

had sexual intercourse by age 18. Children's religious participation is measured with a six-category variable ascertaining the child's attendance at religious services. Responses range from a low of "Never" to a high of "Several times a week."

We include additional parental characteristics in our models to guard against the alternative hypothesis that there are characteristics of the parents that influence both parental marital dissolution and children's attitudes toward cohabitation. The mother's age at marriage is coded in years. A dichotomous variable assesses whether the mother was pregnant when she married the child's father. Mother's and father's education levels just after the child was born (ascertained in the 1962 interview) are coded separately in years. All analyses also include controls for the child's gender, where daughters are assigned a value of one and sons a value of zero. Finally, in order to maintain the necessary causal ordering of the variables, 69 respondents who formed a first union prior to the age-18 interview are excluded from the analyses and 43 cases in which a mother or child was not interviewed in 1980 were omitted. The final sample consists of 794 mother-child pairs.

Plan of Analysis

Our research examines the influence of parents' marital history on children's attitudes toward cohabitation in a generational and chronological progression. All models use OLS regression and include the control variables outlined above. We begin our multivariate analyses by examining the influence of parents' marital experiences and mothers' attitudes toward cohabitation on the children's attitudes toward cohabitation. We identify the influence of these parental factors on the children's attitudes at ages 18, 23, and 31. Next, we add measures of the children's sexual behavior and religious participation by age 18 in order to examine the extent to which children's age-18 characteristics mediate the influence of factors. Finally, we investigate

the influence of the children's own union formation and dissolution experiences between ages 18 and 31 on their attitudes toward cohabitation at age 31, holding the children's age-18 attitudes constant. Controlling for the child's attitudes at the start of early adulthood provides a way to measure the influence of children's first union formation and dissolution experiences on change in the children's attitudes toward cohabitation associated with the experience of each type of union trajectory. Further, our modeling strategy allows us to test hypotheses about movement between particular union statuses. We recognize the potential for bias in our parameter estimates due to collinearity between attitude measures from the two time points, but our results are similar when the models are specified with the age-18 cohabitation attitude control.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics for all variables are presented in Table 1, which shows that children viewed cohabitation more favorably than their mothers by age 18. In subsequent years, the children became substantially more tolerant of cohabitation, on average. Approximately twenty-percent of the mothers had experienced a marital dissolution by the time the children were 18 years of age. By comparison, 16 percent of the children experienced the dissolution of a first marriage between the ages of 18 and 31 and an additional 14 percent experienced the dissolution of a first cohabitation between the ages of 18 and 31.

The first step in understanding the factors associated with individuals' attitudes toward cohabitation is the examination of parental influences on children's cohabitation attitudes in adulthood. To this end, Table 2 presents a series of models in which the adult children's attitudes toward cohabitation at ages 18, 23, and 31 are regressed on a set of predictor variables that measure the parental characteristics of interest. For clarity of presentation, the coefficients associated with the control variables are not presented in Table 2, although results from a

regression of the children's age-18 attitudes toward cohabitation on the control variables are presented in the Appendix Table.

The first model in Table 2 is designed to identify the influence of parents' marital history and religious characteristics when the child was young on the cohabitation attitudes of the 18-year-old sons and daughters. Model 1 demonstrates that parental marital dissolution is strongly related to young adults' attitudes toward cohabitation, whether or not the mother remarries after divorce. The results in Model 1 of Table 2 suggest that a mother's divorce during the child's first eighteen years increases a child's predicted tolerance of cohabitation by .38 units. Divorce followed by remarriage increases the child's predicted cohabitation tolerance by .74 units. These effects imply increases in cohabitation tolerance of almost one-third of a standard deviation in the case of divorce alone and more than 60 percent of a standard deviation when divorce is followed by remarriage. The results suggest that parental divorce may lead children to become less supportive of institutionalized marriage, thus enhancing their view of available alternatives such as cohabitation. Maternal divorce and remarriage may exert a greater influence than divorce alone because a greater portion of those mothers who divorce and remarry cohabited and/or had a sexual relationship with the new spouse. However, we do not test this hypothesis directly.

Model 1 of Table 2 also demonstrates that mothers' frequent attendance at religious services shortly after the child was born is negatively associated with children's cohabitation tolerance many years later. The children of fundamentalist Protestant mothers view cohabitation in a less favorable light than the children of non-fundamentalist Protestants. Model 2 of Table 2 is designed to examine the influence of changing levels of mothers' religious involvement on children's cohabitation attitudes by adding a measure of mother's religious attendance in 1980. Inclusion of variables tapping mothers' attendance at religious services in both 1962 and 1980

substantially reduces the influence of parents' marital dissolution on children's cohabitation attitudes. The influence of divorce that is not followed by remarriage is reduced by .14 units, from .38 in Model 1 to .24 in Model 2, and is no longer statistically significant. Maternal religious attendance also attenuates the observed effect of divorce and remarriage by .14 units (from .74 in Model 1 to .60 in Model 2), but in this instance the direct effect of divorce and remarriage remains large and statistically significant. These findings suggest that an important reason that the children of divorced mothers view cohabitation more favorably is that those mothers reduce their religious involvement, which, in turn, leads to more positive attitudes toward cohabitation.

Model 3 of Table 2 adds the mother's attitudes toward cohabitation when the children were 18 years old to the equation predicting the children's cohabitation attitudes, and the model provides tests of two hypotheses. First, it demonstrates that mothers' and children's attitudes toward cohabitation are strongly related. Those mothers who view cohabitation in a relatively favorable light are more likely to have adult children who hold similarly positive views of cohabitation. Second, Model 3 demonstrates that a substantial part of the remaining influence of maternal divorce (with or without remarriage) in Model 2 is transmitted by the mother's cohabitation attitudes. This finding provides evidence of an intervening relationship through which a mother's divorce increases the mother's acceptance of cohabitation, which in turn leads her adult children to view cohabitation more favorably. This conclusion, of course, comes from an analysis without controls for maternal attitudes toward cohabitation in 1962, as those attitudes were not measured. A control for those attitudes might show that some of the effect of parental marital history was spurious, and therefore that the observed indirect effect of divorce operating through 1980 maternal attitudes is less than that estimated in Model 3.

Model 4 of Table 2 introduces measures of the adult child's religious involvement and previous sexual experience. Model 4 suggests that adult children's religious participation at age 18 is strongly linked to their cohabitation attitudes; adult children who are involved in religious organizations are likely to hold negative views of cohabitation relative to those who attend religious services infrequently. An 18-year-old who never attends religious services is predicted to score 1.15 units higher (-.23 x 5 = 1.15) on the cohabitation attitude index than one who attends services more than once a week, and this represents approximately one standard deviation on the index. Further, children's religious involvement mediates the influence of mothers' religious involvement, reducing the influence of mother's 1980 religious attendance nearly to zero.

Model 4 also demonstrates that children's sexual experiences by age 18 are associated with their attitudes toward cohabitation, and the effect is especially strong for those reporting two or more sexual partners. Specifically, a young adult who has had sex with more than one partner is predicted to score .63 units higher on the cohabitation attitude index than an 18-year-old who has never had sex, and this represents more than half of a standard deviation on the attitude index. These results provide strong confirmation that the perceived link between marriage and sexuality is a critical component of individuals' cohabitation-related attitudes. Those who have had sex before marriage are likely to view cohabitation more favorably, and this effect is particularly evident among respondents who had engaged in sexual intercourse with more than one partner by the age of 18.

The findings suggest one important implication of the link between parents' marital dissolution and adolescents' sexual activity—whether it is the result of reduced supervision, a response to the trauma of the dissolution of the parents' marriage, or other reasons, a parent's

marital dissolution increases adult children's acceptance of cohabitation at least partially because it increases their levels of sexual activity during adolescence. The inclusion of the children's age-18 characteristics reduces the influence of divorce by .11 units for both divorce without remarriage and divorce with remarriage. These controls, thus, reduce the influence of divorce followed by remarriage by one-fourth, from .44 to .33, and eliminate almost all of the remaining influence of maternal divorce without remarriage. When the variables are entered into the equation individually, children's religious involvement transmits a substantially larger portion of the influence of divorce followed by remarriage on children's cohabitation attitudes than does children's sexual history (results not shown). Finally, measures of the children's sexual histories and religiosity reduce the impact of the mother's attitudes on the children's attitudes by one-quarter, from .24 to .18. This finding suggests that the influence of mothers' cohabitation attitudes on children's cohabitation attitudes operates in part by influencing the children's sexual and religious behaviors.

The remaining models in Table 2 examine the predictors of adult children's attitudes toward cohabitation at ages 23 and 31. The first three rows of Models 5-12 present the coefficients for the influence of parent's marital dissolution on children's cohabitation attitudes at ages 23 (Models 5-8) and 31 (Models 9-12). The most notable finding from Models 5-12 is that the magnitude of the influence of parental marital dissolution on adult children's cohabitation attitudes becomes substantially smaller as the children mature. One anomaly in our story occurs as a result of the negative influence of maternal divorce without remarriage on cohabitation tolerance at age 23 (Model 8), a pattern which we are unable to explain given existing theories and the other findings in our analysis. The influences of parents' religious affiliation (and mother's attendance at religious services to a lesser extent) follow a similar

pattern in which the magnitude of the influences is attenuated at later ages. In general, these models suggest that as children are exposed to non-familial influences during adulthood, the influence of parents' divorce or remarriage recedes.

The only factors in Models 5-12 of Table 2 that strongly and consistently predict the children's attitudes toward cohabitation across all three ages are the mothers' cohabitation attitudes and the child's religious involvement at age 18. Model 8 and Model 12 of Table 2 demonstrate the large and enduring influence of the mothers' cohabitation attitudes on children's attitudes toward cohabitation at ages 23 and 31, respectively. Even once children's characteristics are accounted for, parental values about cohabitation are particularly influential in shaping children's cohabitation attitudes. In contrast, existing studies using the same dataset found much lower long-term associations between mothers' and children's attitudes toward divorce, even without accounting for measures of children's characteristics (Cunningham & Thornton, 2003). Models 8 and 12 of Table 2 also show that although sexual activity with a single partner by age 18 exerts a gradually declining influence on children's attitudes, sexual activity with two or more partners by age 18 continues to be associated with children's attitudes toward cohabitation many years in the future.

The models in Table 2 provide us with a good sense of the process through which attitudes about cohabitation are formed. However, the models in Table 2 do not allow us to understand the factors associated with attitude change. Table 3 is designed to identify the influence of adult children's union formation and dissolution patterns between the ages of 18 and 31 on changes in their attitudes toward cohabitation during the same interval. The dependent variable in Table 3 is the children's attitudes toward cohabitation at age 31. The equation in Model 1 includes all of the predictor variables from Table 2, and also includes a measure of age-

18 attitudes. A number of conclusions can be derived from Model 1 of Table 3. First, as we would expect, the children's age-18 attitudes toward cohabitation are strongly associated with their attitudes toward cohabitation thirteen years later. Second, the mother's attitudes toward cohabitation exert a significant influence on changes in the children's attitudes between ages 18 and 31. Third, parental marital dissolution during childhood is not associated with change in attitudes toward cohabitation after age 18. Although mothers' religious participation is not linked to changes in children's attitudes, frequent attendance at religious services among the 18-year-old children is strongly and negatively linked to changes in cohabitation tolerance. However, the impact of children's religious attendance is reduced by one-third (compared to Model 12 of Table 2) once age-18 attitudes are controlled.

[Table 3 about here]

Model 2 of Table 3 provides tests of our hypotheses about the influence of union formation and dissolution patterns on changes in young adults' attitudes toward cohabitation. This analysis is accomplished through the inclusion of a set of six dummy variables that capture some of the most common trajectories. Those who remain single throughout the age 18 to 31 interval make up the omitted category. There are two outcomes that begin with direct entry into a first marriage: the marriage may continue throughout the interval or may dissolve through divorce. There are four outcomes that begin with direct entry into a first cohabitation: the cohabitation may continue throughout the interval, it may be dissolved, it may be converted into a stable marriage, or it may be converted into a stable marriage that ends in divorce. These cross-sectionally captured categories, of course, represent dynamic processes. For example, those who divorced after direct entry into marriage did not enter this state directly from singlehood (the reference category); rather, they first entered a marriage. When such a dynamic interpretation is

attributed to our cross-sectionally measured union formation and dissolution trajectories, we can evaluate the influence of cohabitation, for instance, by comparing those who cohabited and remained cohabiting with those who remained continuously single. We can examine the influence of cohabitation dissolution by comparing those who dissolved a cohabitation with those who cohabited and did not dissolve the union. In addition, because some people cohabit and then go on to marry that partner, the effects of the experience of marriage after cohabitation can be assessed by comparing those who entered a marriage after first cohabiting with those who entered a stable cohabitation but remained cohabiting through the end of the interval. A similar approach can be used to identify the influences of direct entry into marriage, divorce after direct entry into marriage, and divorce after premarital cohabitation.

The most rigorous implementation of this dynamic approach would require information about the attitudes of the study participants at the time of each union status transition. Although such timely information does not exist in our data set nor in any other data set of which we are aware, our data set does have a panel design that includes measures of attitudes at age 18 before most union formation events happen. This permits us to examine the influence of union formation and dissolution while controlling for attitudes at the beginning of the process.

Row A in Model 2 of Table 3 provides evidence that direct entry into a stable marriage between the ages of 18 and 31 reduces tolerance for cohabitation compared to those who remain single. The influences of this and other union transitions are summarized in Table 4, which shows that those who enter a stable marriage directly from singlehood reduce their tolerance of cohabitation by .29 units. This effect is statistically significant and constitutes just over one quarter of a standard deviation on the age-31 cohabitation attitude index. Over the thirteen year interval between the ages of 18 and 31, the choice to enter a first marriage directly rather than to

form a cohabiting union produces a shift in individuals' attitudes toward cohabitation, making them view cohabitation less favorably. In the process of choosing marriage over the alternative of cohabitation, individuals symbolically affirm their decision by adopting less favorable views of cohabitation.

[Table 4 about here]

The coefficient in Row C of Table 3 (replicated in Row 2 of Table 4) demonstrates that those who enter a stable first cohabitation during the interval become much more tolerant of cohabitation relative to those who remain single. Specifically, Model 2 of Table 3 predicts that a person who enters a stable cohabitation will score .50 units, or one-half of a standard deviation, higher on the cohabitation tolerance index than someone who remains continuously single. This finding suggests that direct entry into cohabitation increases cohabitation tolerance, thus symbolically affirming the choice to cohabit rather than marry. Interestingly, those who enter a stable cohabitation are .79 units higher on the cohabitation index than those who enter a stable marriage (.50 – (-.29)). In an era when multiple union formation options are available, the choice to form a marriage or a cohabitation signifies an orientation toward family life that results in substantially different attitudes toward cohabitation.

We know that a large proportion of those who enter cohabitation later marry their cohabiting partners. The influence of the combination of cohabitation followed by a stable marriage can be observed in Table 3, Model 2, Row E. The statistically significant coefficient of .30 suggests that those who cohabit and then enter a stable marriage between the ages of 18 and 31 hold substantially more positive views toward cohabitation than those who remain single. Row 5 of Table 4 demonstrates that when those who cohabit and enter a stable marriage are compared with those who enter cohabitation directly and remain cohabiting, the conversion of a

cohabiting union into a stable marriage reduces cohabitation tolerance by .20 units. However, this decrease is not statistically significant. We derive this number by noting that the influence of entry into a stable cohabitation is .50 (compared to remaining single), and the influence of stable marriage after cohabitation is .30. Subtracting .30 from .50, we can estimate an implied effect of marriage after cohabitation of .20 units, assuming, of course, that those who marry a cohabiting partner were similar to those who continued cohabiting prior to the formation of the marriage.

Although entry into marriage reduces cohabitation tolerance whether or not it is preceded by cohabitation, it is important to note that stably married individuals who never cohabited view cohabitation much less favorably than stably married individuals who first cohabited. Specifically, the predicted score on the cohabitation index for those who entered a stable marriage after first cohabiting is .30 units higher than those who remained single. In contrast, those who did not cohabit prior to marriage have a predicted cohabitation index score that is .29 units lower than those who remained single. This represents a difference of .59 units on the attitude index between those who cohabit before marriage and those who do not cohabit before marriage. Thus, although we find a consistently negative influence of entry into marriage on cohabitation tolerance, our results suggest that the positive influence of cohabitation on cohabitation tolerance substantially overrides the negative influence of marriage on cohabitation tolerance. Once individuals make the choice to cohabit, their views of cohabitation remain positive relative to the continuously single and the stably married who do not cohabit, and this is true even if those who first cohabit eventually marry.

The findings presented to this point ignore the influence of union dissolution on cohabitation attitudes. Rows B, D, and F of Model 2 in Table 3 provide information about the influence of union dissolution on cohabitation attitudes. Row B suggests that those who divorce

after direct entry into marriage are .15 units more tolerant of cohabitation than those who remain single, but the effect is not statistically significant. However, if we compare those who divorce after direct entry into marriage with the more appropriate reference group—those who enter marriage directly and remain married—the results suggest that divorce increases cohabitation tolerance by .44 units, and this effect is statistically significant (see Row 3 of Table 4). These findings provide evidence that entry into a first cohabitation and divorce after direct entry into marriage have similar liberalizing influences on cohabitation attitudes.

Row F of Table 3 suggests that those who cohabit, marry, and divorce between the ages of 18 and 31 are more tolerant of cohabitation than those who remain single during the interval. However, if we treat those who entered a stable marriage after cohabiting as the reference group, the findings suggest that the influence of divorce after cohabitation is negligible (Row 6 of Table 4). This suggests that divorce has little effect on cohabitation attitudes for those who had previously cohabited, whereas divorce without previous cohabitation had a substantial effect. Apparently divorce has no further impact on cohabitation attitudes if the person had already cohabited. It is important to recognize, further, that those who divorced either after direct entry into marriage or after a first marriage preceded by cohabitation may have formed subsequent cohabiting unions that are not captured by this analysis, and it is possible that our findings for the influence of divorce after direct entry into marriage reflect the influence of the formation of subsequent unions.

Earlier we hypothesized that cohabitation dissolution would be associated with an increase in cohabitation tolerance. Row D of Table 3 suggests that those who dissolve a first cohabitation view cohabitation more positively than those who remain single. However, if we compare those who dissolved a cohabitation with those who entered a stable first cohabitation,

the coefficients in Model 2 of Table 3 suggest that those who dissolve a cohabitation reduce their tolerance of cohabitation relative to those who remain in a stable cohabitation by .24 units (Row 4 of Table 4). Although this effect is not statistically significant, it is in the opposite direction of our hypothesis. This finding, then, provides suggestive evidence that the experience of cohabitation dissolution causes individuals to adopt less favorable attitudes toward cohabitation.

CONCLUSION

The current investigation provides a number of original contributions to our understanding of the process through which attitudes about cohabitation are formed and transformed. First, data from two generations allowed us to demonstrate how parents' marital dissolution, and especially maternal remarriage after divorce, cause young adults to adopt favorable views of cohabitation. Second, our analysis showed that the influence of parents' marital dissolution on children's attitudes toward cohabitation operates in part by shaping parents' attitudes about cohabitation, parents' and children's religious participation, and children's sexual behaviors during adolescence. Third, our study examined the influences of young adults' union formation and dissolution experiences on their attitudes toward cohabitation. The results demonstrated that those who enter a stable first marriage directly adopt less positive views of cohabitation. In contrast, those who enter a stable first cohabitation directly and those who divorce after direct entry into marriage adopt more favorable attitudes toward cohabitation.

Our analyses of parental influences on adult children's cohabitation attitudes at age 18 closely replicated the findings of Axinn and Thornton (1996) analyzing the same data. However, we uncovered several additional findings of note. First, we showed that the influence of parental marital dissolution wanes as the children age beyond adolescence. We found only slight evidence that parents' marital history influenced children's cohabitation attitudes after age 18. In sharp

contrast to the gradually fading impact of parental marital history, mothers' attitudes toward cohabitation continue to influence adult children's attitude change. Not only do maternal attitudes have an enduring influence on children's attitudes toward cohabitation, they mediate a substantial portion of parents' marital dissolution, especially among mothers who remarried.

Second, our analyses point attention to the crucial role of parents' religious involvement for children's cohabitation attitudes. Not only did mothers' religious involvement at the time of the child's birth exert a lasting influence on the attitudes of the children 18 years later, inclusion of the measure of mothers' 1980 religious involvement nearly doubled the proportion of explained variance in the model of children's age-18 attitudes. Most importantly, our results demonstrated the how maternal religious participation mediates the influence of marital dissolution (especially divorce without remarriage) on children's attitudes. Specifically, mothers who divorce but do not remarry reduce the frequency with which they attend religious services, and this in turn leads their children to hold more accepting attitudes toward cohabitation. Axinn and Thornton (1996) highlighted the influence of fundamentalist Protestantism on cohabitation attitudes, but ignored the influence of religious participation. Our results suggest that although a mother's Fundamentalist affiliation does influence cohabitation attitudes, the influence of mothers' religious attendance is substantial regardless of religious affiliation.

A final insight arising from the current analysis that was not provided by Axinn and Thornton (1996) is the role of adolescents' behavior in transmitting the influence of parental characteristics. We found that adult children's sexual behavior and religious involvement were highly associated with the cohabitation attitudes of the 18-year-old children. Further, these two factors partially mediated the influence of parental marital dissolution, maternal religious involvement, and maternal attitudes toward cohabitation. Once each of the mediating variables

among the parents and children was included in the model of age-18 attitudes, the influence of maternal divorce without remarriage was reduced from a statistically significant .38 units to nearly zero (.05 units). Our modeling of intervening variables reduced the impact of maternal divorce and remarriage from .74 to .33, but that effect remained statistically significant. We hypothesized that one potential source of the remaining influence of remarriage after divorce was the increased likelihood that the mother cohabited. Future research could fruitfully investigate the mediating influence of parents' cohabitation on children's cohabitation attitudes, and it might also be important to consider parents' marital experiences after the children reached adulthood.

In addition to investigating attitude formation, we examined models of attitude change in order to identify the effects of intra-generational union formation and dissolution experiences. Although we relied on assumptions about the comparability of different marital status groups in our discussion of the impact of particular union transitions, the approach we used is the best possible given existing available data. Our analyses confirmed existing research over a shorter time frame suggesting that entry into cohabitation increases tolerance of cohabitation (Axinn & Thornton, 1992). However, the current analysis provided original evidence about the influences of cohabitation dissolution, marriage, and divorce on attitudes toward cohabitation. We found suggestive evidence that the dissolution of a first cohabitation caused individuals to view cohabitation less favorably. However, we were not able to ascertain the influence of subsequent union transitions among this group of respondents, and sample size limitations prevented us from examining the influences of cohabitation length and marital intentions as well. Given the high proportion of first cohabitations that dissolve, investigation of the attitudes, union trajectories, and marital intentions of those who dissolve a premarital cohabitation is highly warranted.

In contrast to the liberalizing influence of cohabitation on attitudes toward cohabitation,

entry into marriage leads individuals to view cohabitation less favorably. Although this pattern is true whether or not the marriage is preceded by cohabitation, the effect is larger when there is a direct transition from singlehood to marriage. In addition, those who marry directly ended the interval with substantially different attitudes toward cohabitation than those who cohabited prior to marriage—the former group became less tolerant of cohabitation relative to the continuously single, while the latter group become more tolerant of cohabitation. The percentage of individuals engaging in cohabitation continues to increase, suggesting that a smaller proportion of individuals will experience direct entry into marriage. If marriage rates remain relatively high and cohabitation becomes a step in the process through which most marriages are entered, it will be important for future research to discern whether the choice of marriage versus cohabitation continues to produce attitude change in different directions among more recent cohorts. In addition, cohabitation is less common among Whites than Blacks, so research among a more broadly representative sample may be likely to identify different patterns than those we report.

Our research has also highlighted the interrelationships between marriage, marital dissolution, and sexuality. We demonstrated that parents' and children's marital dissolution increases cohabitation tolerance. We also found that adolescents' sexual behaviors are not only associated with their attitudes toward cohabitation, they also transmit a portion of the influence of maternal divorce without remarriage. Issues such as the permanence of marriage, the appropriate context for sexual activity, and the likelihood of multiple romantic partnerships (whether residential or not) across the life course are intricately combined in the formation of attitudes about cohabitation. Perhaps one reason for the strong influence of religious involvement is that religious groups have provided a relatively consistent message that links these complex and rapidly changing topics into a coherent whole. In contrast, popular media may be likely to

provide a more diverse set of ideas about these topics individually and as a group. However, despite the strong influence of religious involvement on attitudes toward this emerging family form, trends in family patterns (and perhaps in patterns of religious participation) suggest that cohabitation is likely to be viewed in an increasingly favorable light over the coming decades.

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Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Variables used in Analysis of Attitudes about Cohabitation, IPSPC, 1962-1993

Variable	Age of Child when Measured	Mean	Standard Deviation	Proportion
Parent characteristics				
Mother divorced and remarried	1-18	--	--	.08
Mother divorced and not remarried	1-18	--	--	.10
Mother widowed	1-18	--	--	.04
Mother's attitude toward cohabitation index	18	2.26	0.96	--
Mother's age at marriage (years)	0	20.63	3.05	--
Mother had premarital pregnancy	0	--	--	.18
Mother's educational attainment (years)	0	12.28	1.80	--
Father's educational attainment (years)	0	12.59	2.44	--
Mother Catholic	0	--	--	.54
Mother fundamentalist Protestant	0	--	--	.11
Mother Jewish, other religious affiliation, or no religious affiliation	0	--	--	.05
Mother non-fundamentalist Protestant	0	--	--	.30
Mother's attendance at religious services	18	3.77	1.57	--
Child characteristics				
Attitude toward cohabitation index	18	3.12	1.21	--
Attitude toward cohabitation index	23	3.38	1.11	--
Attitude toward cohabitation index	31	3.46	1.05	--
Child had sex with no partners	18	--	--	.44
Child had sex with one partner	18	--	--	.20
Child had sex with two or more partners	18	--	--	.36
Child's attendance at religious services	18	3.30	1.50	--
Married First without Divorcing	18-31	--	--	.33
Married First, then Divorced	18-31	--	--	.10
Cohabited First, without Marrying or Dissolving Cohabitation	18-31	--	--	.04
Cohabited First, then Dissolved Cohabitation	18-31	--	--	.14
Cohabited First, then Married same partner without Divorcing	18-31	--	--	.18
Cohabited First, then Married same partner, then Divorced	18-31	--	--	.06
Continuously single	18-31	--	--	.15
Female	18	--	--	.50

Note: n = 794

Table 2. Unstandardized Coefficients from Regression of Children's Attitudes toward Cohabitation on Parents' Marital Experience, Mother's Religiosity, Mothers' Cohabitation Attitudes, and Child Characteristics, IPSPC, 1962-1993

	Child Age 18				Child Age 23				Child Age 31			
Independent Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Parent's Marital Experience												
Mother Divorced, Not Remarried	.38**	.24	.16	.05	-.01	-.15	-.21	-.32**	.06	-.02	-.09	-.16
Mother Divorced, Remarried	.74***	.60***	.44**	.33*	.25	.11	-.01	-.10	.33*	.24	.11	.01
Mother Widowed	.25	.28	.22	-.06	.15	.17	.11	-.07	.16	.17	.12	-.03
Mother's Religiosity												
Mother Catholic	.05	.02	.00	.05	.20*	.18	.16	.20*	.01	-.01	-.03	.00
Mother Fundamentalist Protestant	-.47***	-.37*	-.32*	-.19	-.30*	-.19	-.15	-.05	-.49***	-.43**	-.39**	-.32*
Mother Other Religious Affiliation	.22	.12	.11	.20	.00	-.10	-.11	-.05	.13	.07	.06	.06
Mother Religious Attendance: 1962	-.11***	-.03	-.03	.00	-.13***	-.05	-.05	-.03	-.05	.00	.00	.03
Mother Religious Attendance: 1980		-.22***	-.16***	-.05		-.21***	-.17***	-.07*		-.13***	-.09**	.00
Mother's Attitudes												
Cohabitation Attitude Index			.24***	.18***			.19***	.14***			.20***	.17***
Child Characteristics: Age 18												
Child Religious Attendance				-.23***				-.21***				-.21***
Child Had Sex with One Partner				.26*				.25**				.04
Child Had Sex with Two or More Partners				.63***				.43***				.19*
n	794	794	794	794	782	782	782	782	794	794	794	794
Adjusted R2	.06	.12	.15	.28	.04	.10	.12	.22	.03	.06	.09	.16

Note: Each model includes variables measuring mother's age at marriage, whether mother was premaritally pregnant, mother's education, husband's education, and child's gender.

* p < .05 ** p < .01 *** p < .001 (two-tailed tests)

Table 3. Unstandardized Coefficients from Regression of Age-31 Children's Attitudes toward Cohabitation on Parents' Marital Experience, Mothers' Cohabitation Attitudes, Children's Age-18 Cohabitation Attitudes, and Children's Union Formation and Dissolution Experiences, IPSPC, 1962-1993

Independent Variable	1	2
Parent's Marital Experience		
Mother Divorced, Not Remarried	-.17	-.19
Mother Divorced, Remarried	-.08	-.13
Mother Widowed	-.01	-.06
Mother's Religiosity		
Mother Catholic	-.01	-.04
Mother Fundamentalist Protestant	-.26*	-.29*
Mother Other Religious Affiliation	.00	.00
Mother Religious Attendance: 1962	.03	.03
Mother Religious Attendance: 1980	.02	.02
Mother's Attitudes		
Attitude toward Cohabitation Index	.12**	.09*
Child's Age-18 Characteristics		
Child Had Sex with One Partner	-.04	-.03
Child Had Sex with Two or More Partners	.00	-.07
Child Religious Attendance	-.14***	-.11***
Attitude toward Cohabitation Index	.30***	.27***
Children's Experiences with Union Formation and Dissolution: Ages 18-31[a]		
(A) Married First without Divorcing		-.29**
(B) Married First, then Divorced		.15
(C) Cohabited First, without Marrying or Dissolving Cohabitation		.50**
(D) Cohabited First, then Dissolved Cohabitation		.26*
(E) Cohabited First, then Married same partner without Divorcing		.30**
(F) Cohabited First, then Married same partner, then Divorced		.31*
Adjusted R2	.24	.29
n	794	794

[a] Omitted category is continuously single.

Note: Each model includes variables measuring mother's age at marriage, whether mother was premaritally pregnant, mother's education, husband's education, and child's gender.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed tests)

Table 4. Influence of Union Transitions on Cohabitation Attitudes between Ages 18 and 31, Based on Model 2 of Table 3, IPSPC, 1962-1993

	Originating Status	Transition	Cohabitation Attitude Index
1)	Single	Direct Stable Marriage	-.29***
2)	Single	Direct Stable Cohabitation	.50**
3)	Direct Stable Marriage	Divorce	.44***
4)	Direct Stable Cohabitation	Cohabitation Dissolution	-.24
5)	Direct Stable Cohabitation	Stable Marriage after Cohabitation	-.20
6)	Stable Marriage after Cohabitation	Divorce after Pre-marital Cohabitation	.01

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed tests)

Appendix Table. Unstandardized Coefficients from Regression of Children's Age-18 Attitudes toward Cohabitation Index on Control Variables, IPSPC, 1962-1993

Independent Variable	
Mother's Age at First Marriage	-.01
Mother Premaritally Pregnant	.10
Mother's Education: 1962	.03
Father's Education: 1962	.01
Child Female	-.42***
Adjusted R2	.03
n	794

* p < .05 ** p < .01 *** p < .001 (two-tailed tests)