

Adolescent Sexual Behaviors and Likelihood of Serial Cohabitation

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Serial cohabitation, defined as cohabitation with more than one partner (see Cohen and Manning 2010), increased by 40% among women between the 1995 and 2002 NSFG data collections, with the largest increase being among never-married women under the age of 25 (Lichter, Turner, and Sassler, 2010). Forrest and Singh (1990) found that young adults aged 18-19 were more likely to report having multiple sex partners than those at older ages. This presents the need to better understand the relationship between sexual partners during adolescence and serial cohabitation in young adulthood.

A small body of literature has examined the connection between sexual behavior and union formation (Cohen and Manning, 2010). The findings of Raley and colleagues (2007) suggest that young people who engage in sexual relationships with little or no romance during adolescence are more likely to be in casual cohabiting unions that are unlikely to transition into marriages. Given that these cohabitations are less likely to transition into marriages, those having casual, nonromantic sexual relationships in adolescence may be more likely to cohabit multiple times prior to marriage.

As cohabitation becomes more popular among young women, Lichter et al. (2010: 759) suggests it may serve as a “new pattern of intensive co-residential dating among single women.” Further, Schoen, Landale, and Daniels (2007:817) suggested that cohabitation “is an alternative to being single”; and as such, we expect that the association between nonromantic sexual relationships and serial cohabitation to be particularly strong. Indeed, scholars have found that sexual behavior has implications for serial cohabitation. Cohen and Manning (2010) found higher odds of serial cohabitation among women who had had a greater number of premarital sex

partners, as serial cohabitators averaged seven non-cohabiting partners compared to only four for single-instance cohabitators.

Limited literature has examined the role gender plays in cohabiting unions (See Huang, Smock, Manning, and Bergstrom-Lynch 2011; Sassler, 2010). Huang et al (2011) found distinct differences in gender in expectations and concerns about cohabitation; women were more likely to report feeling concerns about the delay in marriage they will face while cohabiting, and men were more likely to report that they were concerned about the commitment. Drawing on this literature we expect to find that these differences in expectations and concerns will translate into differences in the number of sexual relationships in comparison to the number of cohabitations for men and women. The current study will explore factors that may influence this difference.

The current study contributes to the literature in three key ways. First, we utilize the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) to examine how adolescent experiences shape young adult union formation. Prior literature has examined how adolescent relationships shape the formation cohabitation or marital unions (e.g. Raley et al, 2007; Martin, Martin, and Martin, 2001) however; there are no current studies that assess the relationship between adolescent experiences and serial cohabitation. The second contribution to the study is a benefit of using Add Health specifically that of having access to a newer cohort that may be more representative of the current demographic. Though previous studies have examined sexual partnership and serial cohabitation (Cohen and Manning, 2010), most utilize the National Survey of Family Growth data which is comprised of older cohorts, and thus warrants the need for an update using newer cohort data. Finally, this study contributes to the literature by including men. Prior literature on cohabitation has primarily focused on women (See Lichter, 2010; Cohen and Manning, 2010; Lichter and Qian, 2008; Axinn and Thornton, 1992). The inclusion of men will

allow the current study to better examine gender differences in factors associated with cohabitation. As previously mentioned, Huang et al (2011) found gender differences in the concerns and expectations associated with cohabitation.

Methods

Data for this study come from Waves I and III of Add Health. The first wave of data for the Add Health study were collected in 1994-1995, and includes information from a nationally representative school-based sample of students in grades 7 through 12 (Harris, Halpern, Whitsel, Hussey, Tabor, Entzel, and Udry, 2009). The sample consisted of 80 high schools and their feeder middle schools, and was stratified on the basis of school size, school type, census region, level of urbanization, and racial and ethnic composition (Harris et al., 2009). Of 90,118 adolescents that participated in an in-school questionnaire, 20,745 were selected to participate in an in-home interview. Data for Wave III were collected in 2001 and 2002, and included interviews with 15,197 Wave I respondents (Harris et al., 2009).

At Wave III, respondents were between 18 and 26 years old, with a few respondents 27 and 28 years of age. A key benefit of the Add Health data is that it allows us to use adolescent indicators to examine the relationship experiences of young adults. We use Wave III instead of Wave IV because our focus is on union formation in young adulthood, and Wave III covers this period of time. Moreover, analogous questions on marriage-like relationships are not asked in the Wave IV data.

The analytic sample is comprised of never married respondents between the ages of 18 and 26 at Wave III (n = 12,303). The sample was restricted to respondents who had valid data on cohabitation (n = 12,265). Our final analytic sample includes 11,571 respondents, 5,685 men and 5,886 women.

Measures

Dependent Variable. In Wave III of Add Health, respondents were asked a series of questions about their experiences with and attitudes regarding marriage and cohabitation. A three-level categorical variable (no cohabitation, single instance cohabitation, or serial cohabitation) was created to reflect the cohabitation status of each respondent from those who reported how many marriage-like relationships

they have been in for one month or more. After weighting is employed, 7.92% of the never married respondents between 18 and 26 years old had serially cohabited.¹

Adolescent Indicators. Following Raley et al. (2007), nonromantic sexual relationships were coded from a self-report on sexual behavior outside of romantic relationships. Respondent attractiveness was coded using the interviewer's report of attractiveness. Same-sex attraction was constructed using adolescent self-reports. In line with Manning et al. (2005), self-esteem consists of a six-item scale. To construct the scale, we took the mean of the items and multiplied the value by six, with scores ranging from 6 to 30. Using items employed by Bearman and Bruckner (2001) a closeness to parents scale was created. Scores were generated for each parent by taking the mean of the three responses. For those with values for both parents, the two scores were averaged to determine the final scale score, and for all others the value for their parent was used (Gault-Sherman, 2012).

Control Variables. Several control variables from Wave I were included in the analyses that previous research has found to be associated with cohabitation. Dummy variables were created for race and family structure. Family SES was constructed following Bearman and Moody (2004). Religiosity was measured using the self-reported importance of religion. With the sample ranging from the ages of 18 and 26, the younger participants have not had the opportunity to complete their academic training. The number of years of education at Wave III was included.

Analyses

With a three-level nominal dependent variable, multinomial logistic regression is preferable because it allows for multiple comparisons between groups at the same time, as opposed to estimating several sets of logistic regression models (Hosmer, Lemeshow, and Sturdivant, 2013). A t-test was utilized to examine gender differences in nonromantic sexual partners and was found to be significant ($p < .000$). A suest test comparing the coefficients for involvement in a nonromantic sexual relationships

¹ We compared our percentage of serial cohabitation with the NSFG, and found similar estimates. In the NSFG, 7.61% of the never married between 18 and 26 years old had serially cohabited.

by gender was analyzed and found to be significant ($p < .0031$) suggesting that separate models could be estimated. This will be further explored in future analysis.

Preliminary Results

A t-test showed significant differences between single-instance and serial cohabitators for involvement in a nonromantic sexual relationship, with more serial cohabitators reporting involvement on average ($p < .000$), prompting further analysis by multinomial logistic regression. The contrast group for our analyses is single-instance cohabitators. In zero-order models, having been involved in a nonromantic sexual relationship is associated with greater odds of cohabitation. Once controls for demographic characteristics and adolescent indicators are added to the full model, involvement in a nonromantic sexual relationship increases the odds of serial cohabitation by approximately 39%. This result is in line with the work of Raley et al. (2007), who found that being involved in a nonromantic sexual relationship was associated with cohabitation that does not lead to marriage. See Table 2 for the multivariate results.

Discussion and Future Direction

We found that sexual experiences influences likelihood of entering multiple cohabiting unions in young adulthood net of other characteristics typically used to explain entrance into cohabitation (e.g. SES, family structure, race). Suggesting that the context in which an adolescent has their sexual partnership may influence their later formation of unions.

In order to further this paper, we plan to examine other factors that reflect adolescent sexual behaviors like number of sex partners, contraceptive use, and attitudes about sex. Scales on parental attitudes about sex to have a better grasp of how parents may provide a normative influence on their children's behaviors and attitudes will be included. Additionally, we plan to explore some factors that may explain the difference in gender for serial cohabitation and sexual relationships.

Table 1. Distribution of Independent Variables

Nonromantic Sexual Partner	0.18
Attractiveness	3.54
Same-Sex Attraction	0.06
Self Esteem Scale	24.08
Parent Closeness	4.19
Age	21.59
Importance of Religion	3.27
Family SES	5.64
<i>Education</i>	
< 12 years	0.48
> 12 years	0.52
Female	0.47
<i>Race</i>	
White	0.64
Black	0.17
Hispanic	0.1
Asian	0.04
Other	0.04
<i>Family Type</i>	
Biological or Adoptive Parents	0.58
Stepparent	0.15
Single Parent	0.22
Other Family Form	0.05

*Weighted

Table 2. Multinomial Logistic Regression on Serial Cohabitation (unweighted)

	Coefficient	Standard Error	P-value	
Nonromantic Sexual Partner	0.3285	0.0866	0.0000	***
Attractiveness	0.0797	0.0461	0.0840	
Same-Sex Attraction	0.0359	0.1465	0.8060	
Self Esteem Scale	-0.0030	0.0121	0.8050	
Parent Closeness	-0.0838	0.0531	0.1150	
Age*	0.1358	0.0243	0.0000	***
Education*	-0.5652	0.0889	0.0000	***
Female	-0.0894	0.0813	0.2710	
Black	-0.2511	0.1047	0.0160	
Hispanic	-0.6365	0.1306	0.0000	***
Asian	-0.4107	0.1810	0.0230	*
Other	-0.2961	0.1782	0.0970	
Stepparent	0.2948	0.1041	0.0050	**
Single Parent	0.2647	0.0983	0.0070	**
Other Family Form	0.4016	0.1615	0.0130	*
Importance of Religion	0.0075	0.0535	0.8890	
Family SES	-0.0111	0.0162	0.4930	
Constant	-4.0231	0.6675	0.0000	

Base is Single-Instance Cohabitation

*Measured at Wave 3

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