

Sociological Reasons Not to Live Together

from All About Cohabiting Before Marriage

"'Till death us do part' has been replaced by 'as long as I am happy.'" 9/09

Those who live together before marriage are the least likely to marry each other.

A Columbia University study cited in *New Woman* magazine found that "only 26% of women surveyed and a scant 19% of the men married the person with whom they were cohabiting." A more comprehensive National Survey of Families and Households, based on interviews with 13,000 people, concluded, "About 40% of cohabiting unions in the U.S. break up without the couple getting married." One of the reasons may be that those who cohabit drift from one partner to another in search of the 'right' person. The average cohabitant has several partners in a lifetime.

Those who live together before marriage have higher separation and divorce rates.

Psychology Today reported the findings of Yale University sociologist Neil Bennett that cohabiting women were 80% more likely to separate or divorce than were women who had not lived with their spouses before marriage. The National Survey of Families and Households indicates that "unions begun by cohabitation are almost twice as likely to dissolve within 10 years compared to all first marriages: 57% to 30%." Another five-year study by William Axinn of the University of Chicago of 800 couples reported in the *Journal of Demography* that those who cohabit are the most accepting of divorce. In a Canadian study at the University of Western Ontario, sociologists found a direct relationship between cohabitation and divorce when investigating over 8,000 ever-married men and women (Hall and Zhou 1995:421-427). It was determined that living in a non-marital union "has a direct negative impact on subsequent marital stability," perhaps because living in such a union "undermines the legitimacy of formal marriage" and so "reduces commitment of marriage."

Those who live together before marriage have unhappier marriages.

A study by the National Council on Family Relations of 309 newlyweds found that those who cohabited first were less happy in marriage. Women complained about the quality of communication after the wedding. A physical relationship is an inadequate foundation upon which to build a lasting lifelong relationship. A study by researchers Alfred DeMars and Gerald Leslie (1984) found that those who live together prior to marriage scored lower on tests rating satisfaction with their marriages than couples who did not cohabit. A study by Dr. Joyce Brothers showed that cohabitation has a negative affect on the quality of a subsequent marriage (Scott 1994). Cohabitors without plans to marry were found to be more inclined to argue, hit, shout and have an unfair division of labor than married couples (Brown and Booth 1997).

Those who are sexually active before marriage are much more likely to divorce.

A study of 2,746 women in the National Survey of Family Growth performed by Dr. Kahn of the University of Maryland and Dr. London of the National Center for Health Statistics found that nonvirgin brides increase their odds of divorce by about 60%. Some would argue that cohabitation does not automatically mean that sex is taking place. However, cohabitation and sexual relations are related or that there is a strong correlation between them. Sex usually does accompany cohabitation (de Neui n.d.); Webster's Dictionary, in fact, defines cohabitation as "living together as or as if husband and wife." If cohabitants live together like "husband and wife," having sex is a very reasonable expectation. Therefore, the assumption is made throughout this writing (granting some occasional exceptions) that cohabitants do have sexual relations.

Those who have had premarital sex are more likely to have extramarital affairs as well.

Premarital sexual attitudes and behavior do not change after one marries; if a woman lives with a man before marriage, she is more likely to cheat on him after marriage. Research indicates that if one is willing to experience sex before marriage, a higher level of probability exists that one will do the same afterwards. This is especially true for women; those who engaged in sex before marriage are more than twice as likely to have extramarital affairs as those who did not have premarital sex. When it comes to staying faithful, married partners have higher rates of loyalty every time. One study, done over a five-year period, reported in *Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles* indicates 90% of married women were monogamous, compared to 60% of cohabiting women. Statistics were even more dramatic with male faithfulness: 90% of married men remained true to their brides, while only 43% of cohabiting men stayed true to their partner (Ciavola 1997). In another study published in the *Journal of Marriage and the Family* researchers analyzed the relationships of 1,235 women, ages 20 to 37, and found that women that had cohabited before marriage were 3.3 times more likely to have a secondary sex partner after marriage (Forste and Tanfer 1996:33-47). It was also found that married women were "5 times less likely to have a secondary sex partner than cohabiting women" and that "cohabiting relationships appeared to be more similar to dating relationships than to marriage."

Those who live together are likely to have a fleeting romance rather than a lasting relationship.

A romance is not the same as having an ongoing relationship. Relationships take time and work to develop and maintain; romance is a positive feeling toward another person. Romance without relationship is a brief encounter at best. Romance, in today's disposable society, is hastily devised and easily discarded at the first sign of conflict or disillusionment. There is no lasting commitment when times get tough. Good relationships are built upon knowing and enjoying each other on social, recreational, spiritual, intellectual, and communicative levels, not only the sexual level.

Those who have "trial" marriages do not have better marriages.

Trial runs or half steps, to test whether the relationship "works" are not successful, in fact quite the opposite is true. Research indicates that couples who live together before

marriage have significantly lower marital satisfaction than those who do not cohabit and they have weaker marriages, not stronger ones. Conventional wisdom says it is acceptable to have a "trial period" to "try the shoe on first to see if it fits" or to "test drive a car before you buy it." For marriage, however, just the opposite is true! "All a man's ways seem right to him..." (Proverbs 21:2). A newly married couple makes a deliberate effort to accommodate each other because they know their relationship will be for life. They want to build compatibility, not test it. (Harley 1996). Walter Trobisch said that, "sex is no test of love, for it is precisely the very thing that one wants to test that is destroyed by the testing." Laura Schlessinger, host of the nationally syndicated "Dr. Laura" radio show, scolds people nearly every day for "shacking up with your honey." It's the "ultimate female self-delusion," Mrs. Schlessinger says, listing cohabiting as one of the "Ten Stupid Things Women Do to Mess Up Their Lives" in her book of the same name. "Dating -- not living in -- is supposed to be about learning and discerning" about a prospective mate, she says.

Those who live together have no lasting commitments or responsibilities.

Cohabitation involves "no public commitment, no pledge for the future, no official pronouncement of love and responsibility. Theirs is essentially a private arrangement based on an emotional bond. The 'commitment' of living together is simply a month-to-month rental agreement. "As long as you behave yourself and keep me happy, I'll stick around."

Marriage, on the other hand, is much more than a love partnership. It is a public event that involves legal and societal responsibilities. It brings together not just two people but also two families and two communities. It is not just for the here and now; it is, most newlyweds hope, 'till death do us part.' Getting married changes what you expect from your mate and yourself. Some would argue that "the marriage license is only a piece of paper" and that "if God knows the heart, then He knows the truth of the marriage" and therefore being "married" by the church or state is an imposition and irrelevant. We are, however, admonished to obey the laws of our government in Scriptures (c. Mt. 22:21; Mk. 12:17; Lk. 20:25), which requires us to have legal marriages. (Common law marriages are recognized, in varying forms, in only 16 states - see the "Legal Reasons").

Jessie Bernard in "The Future Of Marriage" states: "One fundamental fact underlies the conception of marriage itself. Some kind of commitment must be involved...Merely fly-by-night, touch and go relationships do not qualify. "People who marry "til death do us part" have a quite different level of commitment, therefore a quite different level of security, thus a quite different level of freedom, and as a result a quite different level of happiness than those who marry "so long as love doth last." The "love doth last" folks are always anticipating the moment when they or their mate wakes up one morning and finds the good feeling that holds them afloat has dissolved beneath them."

Those who live together miss something in the maturing process.

In this "alternative lifestyle," the aim is to have all the benefits and privileges of a mature, married person without accepting the responsibilities which maturity demands. Crudely stated, "why would you buy the cow when you can get the milk for free?" Our society

encourages people to focus on the present and live for today -- "if it feels good, do it." But the act of formal marriage implies an emphasis on the future. Cohabitation also points to a missing ingredient in the process of becoming mature: the willingness to make commitments and live up to them. A willingness to defer immediate pleasures in pursuit of a worthwhile goal is a mark of maturity. People who make a commitment and accept total responsibility for their choices are more likely to develop self-respect, personal pride, and integrity. Persons who go from one relationship to another develop patterns opting out of a stressful situation rather than hanging in there and dealing with it; these patterns can carry over into a marriage (Anonymous n.d.). See the resource on [relationship maturity](#).

Those living-together avoid dealing with some of the joint decisions that married couples have to make.

For example, money and property tend to be either 'his' or 'hers', not 'ours.' Consequently, it isn't all that important how he or she spends his or her money. In-laws are rarely a factor; they often disapprove and stay aloof from the couple. Nor do most in-live arrangements have to adapt to children (Dunagan 1993).

Those who live together often have a "marriage of convenience" or a "marriage of compatibility" rather than a marriage of commitment.

"Marriages of convenience" are disposable; marriages of commitment are lifelong and not to be dissolved. Commitment means being determined that the two of you will stick it out no matter what ("whether in sickness or in health...so long as you both shall live"). When there is an agreement without commitment it is easy to give up. When there is a commitment ahead of time, you hang-tough through good times and the bad and don't bail out at the first sign of trouble. As one pastor put it: "Imagine building a wonderful house, but without nails. In the first stiff wind, it will collapse" (McManus n.d.). Commitments are said and kept "before God" and with His help, and "in the company of people"; an agreement is made between two people and kept only as long as it continues to be convenient for either party. A lifetime commitment, provided by marriage, is needed in order for a relationship to be pleasing to God. When Jesus spoke to the woman at the well, he pointed out her lack of commitment (Jn. 4:16-18). The Bible says men are to love their wives like Christ loved the Church. Christ was so committed, that he died for the Church (Eph. 5:25). The Bible also says that a husband must not divorce his wife (1 Cor. 7:11). That's commitment to stay and continually work on the relationship (de Neui n.d.).

Those having premarital sex may be fooled into marrying a person who is not right for them.

Sex can emotionally blind. Real love can stand the test of time without the support of physical intimacy. "If you establish a mutually satisfying sexual relationship, you lose objectivity and actually cheat on the test of time. The only way to rationally decide whether your love is for keeps is to remove any preoccupation with eros, sexual love. Otherwise you may marry a mirage, not a person you really know."

Those living together have superficial and significantly weaker relationships.

Researchers have found that couples who live together before marriage have weaker marriages (DeMars and Leslie 1984). Anyone can make love, but not everyone can carry on a meaningful conversation. A good relationship is much more than physical intimacy. Beauty is more than skin deep; there is a deeper intimacy of the mind and spirit that takes the time and commitment of a marriage to develop to the fullest. Physical attraction is insufficient glue with which to build or maintain a lasting relationship. A more recent study at Johns Hopkins University, again confirmed that couples who cohabit have quite different and significantly weaker relationships than married couples (Schoen and Weinick 1993:408-414). They determined that men and women looking for someone with whom they could cohabit search for "characteristics such as education which can reflect a short-term ability to contribute to the relationship." The researchers found, "While cohabitators anticipate time together, married persons anticipate a lifetime." They also discovered that most cohabitations end within two years and that "cohabitations are not informal marriages, but relationships formed by looser bonds."

Those who live together have more difficulty resolving conflicts.

Attempts are made to resolve conflicts with a hug, kiss, or more--rather than developing the ability to talk through them. The qualities that hold a relationship together - trust, honesty, openness, deep friendship, spiritual intimacy - take time and effort to develop. When you focus on the physical aspect, you short-circuit that process. Physical intimacy is a mistaken attempt to quickly build emotional bridges, but relationships built on such an inadequate foundation eventually collapse. A recent study at Penn State University (Brown & Booth 1997) comparing the relationship qualities of 682 cohabitators and 6,881 marrieds, (both White and Black, aged 19 to 48 years of age), found that cohabitators argue, shout and hit more than married couples.

Those who live together before marriage can kill the romance.

A woman most often see living together as romantic, while the man views the arrangement a "practical" solution that will help them iron out differences and strengthen their love (Scott 1994:80). In fact, live-in couples may find it harder to build lasting love precisely because they have lost their starry-eyed, romantic "illusions."

Those who live together before marriage often lay a foundation of distrust and lack of respect.

Mature love is built on the security of knowing that your love is exclusive. There is no one else. Premarital intimacy causes you to wonder: "If he or she has this little control with me now, have there been others before me and will there be others in the future too?" As suspicion and distrust increase, you slowly lose respect for the other person. The trust factor is an important ingredient in a healthy marriage--the knowledge that each partner can relax and be him/herself at the most intimate level without the fear of doing something that will drive the other away -- is missing from the living-together arrangement (Anonymous n.d.). Premarital sex lays the groundwork for comparisons, suspicions, and mistrust. Real trust grows in the context of the life-long commitment within a monogamous relationship of marriage.

Those who live together do not experience the best sex.

The best sex is found in the marriage relationship. It is reported that if a couple abstains from sex before marriage, they are 29 to 47 percent more likely to enjoy sex afterward. In a study by Dr. Evelyn Duvall and Dr. Judson Landis, evidence was found that premarital sex was not as satisfying.

A study by Linda Waite, Ph.D., a sociologist at the University of Chicago and reported in "Psychology Today," found the frequency of satisfaction rose considerably after couples adapted during marriage. Married people lead more active sex lives. While cohabiting couples have similarly high levels of sex, married men and women have more satisfaction in the bedroom. That's because married people know the tastes of their partner better and can safely cater to them, while the emotional investment in the relationship boosts the thrill.

A recent Michigan study, found that individuals who have never cohabited outside of marriage were more likely to rate their relationships stronger than those who have cohabited (49% of non-cohabitators rated their relationship a "10," compared to 36% of those who have cohabited) (Michigan Family Forum 1998).

In another recent study by the Family Research Council titled "What's Marriage Got to Do With It?" found "72 percent of all married 'traditionalists' (those who strongly believe out of wedlock sex is wrong) report high sexual satisfaction. This is roughly 31 percentage points higher than the level registered by unmarried 'nontraditionalists.'"

Sexual happiness grows only through years of intimate relationship. The height of sexual pleasure, usually comes after ten to twenty years of marriage (Fryling 1995). Good sex, Fryling says, begins in the head. It depends on intimate knowledge of your partner. The Bible uses the words "to know" to describe sexual intercourse (e.g., Adam "knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore" a son (Gen. 4:1). Real love described in scripture elevates human sexuality from mere animal sex to intimate expressions of love and commitment. Psychiatrist and medical researcher David Larson, after researching the subject with Mary Ann Mayo, says that "The most religious women are most satisfied with the frequency of intercourse...and were more orgasmic than are the nonreligious" (Larson and Mayo 1994:14).

Those who live together often face parental disapproval.

It is difficult to keep the secret quiet. Lies have to be told over and over again to cover up the truth. There are issues of monetary support from parents, what to do with the partner's possessions when they visit, and guilt about going against their wishes and lying to them (Jackson 1996). The fear of loss of parental support is substantial (Johnson 1996).

Those who live together hurt their children.

Penn State sociologists Wendy Maning and Daniel Lichter estimate that 2.2 million children in America live with one parent and an unmarried partner (Stalcup 1996). Children need the love and care of real parents. Unstable and broken relationships traumatize children for life. Children of cohabiting couples who come from previously

broken marriages get mixed messages and view their parents as having a double standard. For example, the cohabiting parents have great difficulty establishing moral guidelines for their children, especially when they reach the dating age.

Those who live together before marriage often lack a common purpose.

Many couples drift together. They date, have sex, sleep together, spend a weekend together, eventually begin to bring clothes, toothbrush, etc. for the convenience and one day look up and realize they have migrated into a shared living arrangement. The lack of common purpose is a problem then, Johnson (1996) says, because now they are deep into the relationship and haven't begun to talk about the important things, like "are we going to work it out? What is going to be our future? What is going to be down the road?" They have not thought about "being obligated to the other person." "They don't want to be committed. They want it where they can get out pretty easy if they want to. Easy to walk out the door." Realistically, marriage carries with it a lot more expectations -- a house, a car, all the matching silverware, and the couch. Cohabitation is a way of getting out of all those expectations

Those who live together before marriage do not have an egalitarian relationship.

Even though most young people claim to want an egalitarian marriage, studies have found that invariably living arrangements for cohabitants follow the more traditional role format. According to Johnson (1996), men tend to go to school, go play, come home and they want their meals cooked, the house clean, their clothes ready to go. Women find themselves on the short end of the stick performing all those very roles that are contrary to egalitarian marriage.

Those who live together before marriage do not have specialization of responsibilities.

The evidence clearly shows that "living together" is qualitatively different from marriage. The commitment of marriage makes specialization in chores and responsibilities sensible; spouses count on their partners to fill in for them where they are weak. By contrast, cohabitation is unstable, easy to get out of, and makes specialization less rational.

Those who live together before marriage have less support and benefits.

Marriage is far superior to cohabitation at connecting people to others - work acquaintances, in-laws - who are a source of support and benefits. It links people to a world larger than themselves.

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