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GENDER DIFFERENCES AND FACTORS RELATED TO THE DISPOSITION TOWARD COHABITATION

**Terry Huffman, Karen Chang,
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ABSTRACT

This paper explored factors associated with the disposition toward cohabitation. Analysis of the data revealed that, among the total sample, a willingness to cohabit is related to being older, lower levels of religiosity, more liberal attitudes toward sexual behavior, less traditional views of marriage, and less traditional views of sex roles. However, analysis further indicated a gender difference in the way various factors are associated with the disposition to cohabit. For the female subsample these factors are generally related to the willingness to cohabit. However, this was not the case for the male subsample. Only two factors were significantly related to their willingness to cohabit—lower levels of religiosity and more tolerant views of rape.

Since 1970, the number of couples cohabiting in the United States has increased significantly. In 1970 there were some 500,000 cohabiting couples. By 1990, the U.S. Bureau of the Census (1991) reported 2.9 million such couples. Further, it is estimated that approximately 4 percent of Americans aged 19 and over cohabit, and that nearly 25 percent of all Americans have cohabited at some time in their lives.

Such a proliferation in cohabiting couples has captured the attention of social scientists who have sought to understand the sociological dynamics involved in this phenomenon (Bumpass, 1990). Specifically, researchers have sought to determine the factors associated with the willingness to cohabit (Goldscheider & Waite, 1991).

Past research has been relatively consistent in reporting that cohabitation is primarily attractive to young adults; nonmarital cohabitation is most prevalent among 20- to 30-year olds (Glick & Spanier, 1980; Spanier, 1983; Surra, 1991; Tanfer, 1987; Thornton, 1988). However, as the "baby boom" generation ages, it is expected that the average age of cohabitators will also increase. For instance, Spanier (1983) re-

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ported that one-fourth of the men and nearly two-fifths of the women in his study were under 25 years of age, whereas, by the late 1980s, using a national survey, Bumpass and Sweet (1989) found that cohabitators tend to be older than 25.

This pattern generally is true even for college student cohabitators. For this group, Henze and Hudson (1974) reported that for both sexes, cohabitators tend to be one year older (22 years old for males and 21 years old for females) than noncohabitators. This age difference may be a function of less emotional and economic dependence on parents for those students who have been away from home longer.

Much research has been conducted on the relationship between religiosity and the disposition to cohabit. While the relationship remains unclear, ritualistic religiosity does appear to be a factor in determining one's attitude toward cohabitation; those of lower religiosity tend to be more inclined toward cohabitation; those who are more religiously inclined are less likely to cohabit (Arafat & Yorburg, 1973; Henze & Hudson, 1974; Newcomb & Bentler, 1980; Peterman, Ridley, & Anderson, 1974; Tanfer, 1987).

One common assumption has been that sex role attitudes of cohabitators differ from those of noncohabitators, and there is evidence to support this assumption (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Moeller & Sherlock, 1981; Newcomb, 1983). Cohabitators tend to perceive themselves as more liberated from traditional sex role expectations and are more likely to describe themselves as extroverted, assertive, and independent (Tanfer, 1987). Additionally, Macklin (1978) found that women cohabitators tend to be competitive, aggressive, independent, and managerial, while men tend to be less managerial, less competitive, emotionally warm, and more supportive. Both men and women described themselves as androgynous and liberated from traditional sex role characteristics.

Further, according to Tanfer (1987) women cohabitators exhibit less conventional attitudes toward marriage than do those who have never cohabited. However, while cohabiting women are more likely to question traditional marriage as a way of life, they are also more likely to see cohabitation as a stage in the courtship process leading to marriage (Peterman, Ridley, & Anderson, 1974; Risman, Hill, Rubin, & Peplau, 1981; Tanfer, 1987). It is also interesting to note that cohabiting women are also more likely to desire marriage with their partner than are cohabiting men (Jackson, 1983; Macklin, 1988).

It is not surprising, therefore, that cohabitators are considered to hold more liberal and permissive views on sexual practices (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Risman et al., 1981). Among students at Cornell University, Macklin (1978) found that cohabitators had liberal attitudes

toward premarital sex. A larger proportion of the noncohabitators in his study believed that one should be either married or formally engaged before having intercourse, whereas none of the cohabitators regarded this degree of commitment as necessary.

While these factors are generally well understood, recent studies are beginning to reveal a darker side of cohabitation. A growing body of evidence suggests that an alarming number of cohabiting relationships are marked by violence. It is reported that cohabiting couples exhibit higher rates of violence as well as more severe violence than do either dating or married couples (Straus, 1988). It has been suggested that cohabiting violence is related to a lack of investment in the relationship, isolation/alienation from family; and a lack of security in the relationship (Bennett, Blanc, & Bloom, 1988; Straus, 1988; Teachman & Polonko, 1990).

The present study explored the various factors associated with three groups of subjects based on their dispositions toward cohabitation: (1) those who have not and report that they would not cohabit; (2) those who have not but report that they would cohabit; and (3) those who have cohabited. The study also explored these dispositions taking into account differences in age, religiosity, attitudes toward sexual behavior, marriage and sex roles, and their relationship to potential violence and attitudes toward rape. Furthermore, an effort was made to determine whether these factors operate similarly or differently for females and males.

METHOD

The study utilized data collected from a dating, marriage, and sexuality survey administered to students enrolled in courtship and marriage courses at a small midwestern university. The sample consisted of 180 subjects (74 male and 106 female).

The sample was divided into three groups based on their differing dispositions toward cohabitation. The differences were determined by the response to the question: "Have you ever cohabited? (That is, have you ever lived with someone you are/were romantically and/or sexually involved with outside of marriage?)" Possible responses to the question were: (1) No, and I would not under any circumstances; (2) No, but I would under the right circumstances; and (3) Yes, I am/have.

There was concern about possibilities in the responses that might be skewed toward one gender group, but test of chi square demonstrated that the sample is not biased in this way ($\chi^2 = 5.04$). Forty-four of the respondents indicated that they had not and would not cohabit (17

men and 27 women), 76 reported that they had not cohabited but would under certain conditions (38 men and 38 women), and 60 stated that they had cohabited (19 men and 41 women). (See Table 1.)

The researchers were particularly interested in the relationship of six different factors concerning the disposition toward cohabitation: age, religiosity, attitudes toward sexual behavior, marriage, and sex role, as well as attitudes toward rape. With the exception of age, these variables were measured using Likert scales. Additionally, these scales were subjected to tests of reliability using Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha. Generally, the scales performed well under the test of reliability. Only the scale for sex role attitudes yielded on unsatisfactory reliability. (See Table 2.)

Religiosity was measured by asking respondents about the influence of religion on their lives and about the nature of their religious practices. Attitudes on sexual behavior referred to views on premarital sexual practices, such as when and if premarital sexual intercourse is acceptable. Attitudes on marriage referred to traditional versus less traditional views. For instance, subjects were presented with such items as: "When small children are in the home, it is better for the mother not to work" and "I believe that there are household chores specifically suited for women and others for men." Likewise, attitudes on sex roles refers to traditional as opposed to less traditional views of gender role behaviors. As part of this scale, respondents were presented with such items as: "I believe women are entitled to careers equal to

Table 1. Disposition Toward Cohabitation by Gender

| Disposition Toward Cohabitation | No, Would Not Cohabit | | No, But Would Cohabit | | Yes, Have Cohabited | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----|-----------------------------|-----|---------------------------|-----|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Men | 17 | .23 | 38 | .51 | 19 | .26 |
| Women | 27 | .25 | 38 | .36 | 41 | .39 |
| Total Sample | 44 | .25 | 76 | .42 | 60 | .33 |

$\chi^2=5.04$, 3df, N.S.

Table 2. Reliability Coefficients for Scales

| Scale ^a | Total Sample | Male Subsample | Female Subsample |
|--------------------|--------------|----------------|------------------|
| RELIG | .61 | .71 | .52 |
| RAPE | .85 | .86 | .64 |
| SEAT | .72 | .64 | .79 |
| MARR | .65 | .56 | .63 |
| SERO | .39 | .38 | .28 |

^aRELI = Religiosity

RAPE = Attitudes Toward Rape

SEAT = Attitudes Toward Sexual Behavior

MARR = Attitudes Toward Marriage

SERO = Attitudes Toward Sex Roles

those of men," and "If my spouse were offered a job in a different locality, I would move with my spouse."

We were also interested in the potential for violence based on the subjects' dispositions toward cohabitation. Because this is a delicate area, it is difficult to measure. However, the Dating, Marriage, and Sexuality survey did measure attitudes toward rape among the subjects by presenting seven different scenarios and requesting the subjects to indicate whether it was acceptable or unacceptable for a male to force a female to engage in intercourse. Examples of these scenarios included: "It (forced sexual intercourse) is acceptable when: "She is stoned or drunk"; "She is going to have sex with him and changes her mind"; and "He is so turned on that he cannot stop."

Statistical procedures consisted of Pearson correlations and one-way analysis of variance. Since Pearson correlations provide a device for exploring the various relationships between variables, they give the researchers a "feel" for the data. The one-way analysis of variance represents the primary analytical procedure; it provides a way to test for differences among the three groups and for the subsamples of males and females.

FINDINGS

The zero-order correlations are presented in Table 3. To perform this analysis, disposition toward cohabitation was treated as a dummy variable (1=No, would not cohabit, 2=No, but would cohabit, and 3=Yes, have cohabited). Treated in this way, disposition toward cohabitation is significantly inversely related to religiosity ($-.403$, $p<.01$) and positively related to more accepting attitudes toward rape ($.155$, $p<.05$), more liberal attitudes on sexual behavior ($.273$, $p<.01$),

Table 3. Zero-Order Correlation Coefficients

| Variable ^a | GEND | AGE | DISP | RELI | RAPE | SEAT | MARR | SERO |
|-----------------------|---------|--------|---------|---------|---------|-------|--------|------|
| GEND | 1.00 | | | | | | | |
| AGE | .058 | 1.00 | | | | | | |
| DISP | .083 | .194** | 1.00 | | | | | |
| RELI | -.121 | -.028 | -.403** | 1.00 | | | | |
| RAPE | -.277** | -.009 | .155* | -.032 | 1.00 | | | |
| SEAT | -.112 | -.110 | .273** | -.322** | .170* | 1.00 | | |
| MARR | .376** | .062 | .205** | -.204** | -.194** | .047 | 1.00 | |
| SERO | .352** | -.036 | .175* | -.120 | -.162* | -.002 | .359** | 1.00 |

^aGEND = Gender (male=1, female=2)

AGE = Age (18 or younger=1, 19-20=2, 21-24=3, 25-30=4, 31 or older=5)

DISP = Disposition Toward Cohabitation (No, Would Not=1, No, But Would=2, Yes, Have Cohabited=3)

RELI = Religiosity (lower scores=low religiosity, higher scores=higher religiosity)

RAPE = Attitudes Toward Rape (lower scores=nonaccepting attitudes toward rape, higher scores=accepting attitudes toward rape)

SEAT = Attitudes Toward Sexual Behavior (lower scores=conservative sexual behavior attitudes, higher scores=liberal sexual behavior attitudes)

MARR = Attitudes Toward Marriage (lower scores=traditional marriage attitudes, higher scores=less traditional marriage attitudes)

SERO = Attitudes Toward Sex Roles (lower scores=traditional sex role attitudes, higher scores=less traditional sex role attitudes)

* $p<.05$.

** $p<.01$.

greater egalitarian views on marriage (.205, $p < .01$), and less traditional views on sex roles (.175, $p < .05$).

The one-way analysis of variance was performed in three ways: on the total sample, for the female subsample, and for the male subsample. Tables 4, 6, and 7 present the one-way analysis of variance for these different treatments.

Total Sample

In the total sample there appears to be differences among the dispositions toward cohabitation on age ($F = 6.30$, $p < .01$), religiosity ($F = 17.62$, $p < .001$), attitudes toward sexual behavior ($F = 9.56$, $p < .001$), attitudes toward marriage (5.15, $p < .01$), and attitudes toward sex roles ($F = 3.09$, $p < .05$). (See Table 4.)

Table 5 presents the independent variables' mean scores. From this table it appears that those who have cohabited tend to be older than those who have not cohabited but state that they might under the right conditions. Further, those who report that they have not and would not cohabit are similar in age to those who have cohabited and also are older than those who have not but would cohabit. It seems that these two extreme dispositions are more salient with age, while those who have not engaged in this practice but are keeping their options open, tend to be younger. This finding supports the contention of Henze and Hudson (1974) that younger adults often have accepting attitudes toward the practice, while the actual participation in cohabitation does not come until later in adulthood.

It is not surprising, given the consistency of the findings reported in the literature, that the tendency to view cohabitation as an unacceptable option is related to higher levels of religiosity. Those who report that they have not and would not cohabit have the highest mean scores on religiosity, while those reporting that they have cohabited have the lower mean scores on religiosity (Table 5).

Consistent with the zero-order correlations, the one-way analysis of variance demonstrates that a more liberal and accepting disposition toward cohabitation is related to less traditional views on sexual behavior, marriage, and sex roles. For these scales, those who reported that they have cohabited had the highest mean scores (indicating a less traditional view), while those who reported that they had not nor would they cohabit had the lowest mean scores (indicating a more traditional view), while those stating they had not but might cohabit had intermediate mean scores.

Female Subsample

The factors found to be associated with the disposition toward cohabitation for the female subjects in this study are similar to the findings

Table 4. One-Way Analysis of Variance of Disposition Toward Cohabitation as a Function of Independent Variables for the Total Sample

| Source of Variation | Sum of Squares | Degrees of Freedom | Mean Square | F | Probability |
|---------------------|----------------|--------------------|-------------|-------|-------------|
| GEND | | | | | |
| Between Groups | 1.16 | 2 | .58 | 2.43 | N.S. |
| Within Groups | 42.42 | 177 | .24 | | |
| Total | 43.58 | 179 | | | |
| AGE | | | | | |
| Between Groups | 9.52 | 2 | 4.76 | 6.30 | p<.01 |
| Within Groups | 131.39 | 174 | .76 | | |
| Total | 140.92 | 176 | | | |
| RELIG | | | | | |
| Between Groups | 55.28 | 2 | 27.64 | 17.62 | p<.001 |
| Within Groups | 277.71 | 177 | 1.57 | | |
| Total | 322.99 | 179 | | | |
| RAPE | | | | | |
| Between Groups | 9.05 | 2 | 4.53 | 2.65 | N.S. |
| Within Groups | 333.95 | 176 | 1.71 | | |
| Total | 310.01 | 178 | | | |
| SEAT | | | | | |
| Between Groups | 26.16 | 2 | 13.08 | 9.56 | p<.001 |
| Within Groups | 240.81 | 176 | 1.37 | | |
| Total | 266.97 | 178 | | | |
| MARR | | | | | |
| Between Groups | 65.56 | 2 | 32.78 | 5.15 | p<.01 |
| Within Groups | 1126.24 | 177 | 6.36 | | |
| Total | 1191.80 | 179 | | | |
| SERO | | | | | |
| Between Groups | 5.08 | 2 | 2.54 | 3.09 | p<.05 |
| Within Groups | 145.50 | 177 | .82 | | |
| Total | 150.58 | 179 | | | |

for the total sample (Table 6). Once again there were significant differences in the disposition toward cohabitation as it relates to age ($F=5.64$, $p<.01$), religiosity ($F=9.50$, $p<.001$), and attitudes toward sexual behavior ($F=17.23$, $p<.001$).

Further, the mean score averages demonstrate the same patterns of relationship as for the total sample (Table 5). Female subjects who are older are more likely to report that either they have not and would not cohabit or that they have cohabited, while the younger females reported that they have not but might cohabit. Also, the highest levels

Table 5. Independent Variable Mean Scores by Disposition toward Cohabitation

| Independent Variable | Males | | Females | | Total | |
|-----------------------|-------|-------|---------|-------|-------|-------|
| | N | Mean | N | Mean | N | Mean |
| GEND | | | | | | |
| No, would not cohabit | 17 | - | 27 | - | 44 | 1.61 |
| No, but would cohabit | 38 | - | 38 | - | 76 | 1.50 |
| Yes, have cohabited | 19 | - | 41 | - | 60 | 1.68 |
| Total | 74 | - | 106 | - | 180 | 1.59 |
| AGE | | | | | | |
| No, would not cohabit | 17 | 3.00 | 26 | 3.08 | 43 | 3.05 |
| No, but would cohabit | 38 | 3.05 | 38 | 2.92 | 76 | 2.99 |
| Yes, have cohabited | 19 | 3.32 | 39 | 3.59 | 58 | 3.50 |
| Total | 74 | 3.11 | 103 | 3.21 | 177 | 3.17 |
| RELIG | | | | | | |
| No, would not cohabit | 17 | 6.29 | 27 | 5.70 | 44 | 5.93 |
| No, but would cohabit | 38 | 4.95 | 38 | 4.82 | 76 | 4.88 |
| Yes, have cohabited | 19 | 4.74 | 41 | 4.37 | 60 | 4.48 |
| Total | 74 | 5.20 | 106 | 4.87 | 180 | 5.01 |
| RAPE | | | | | | |
| No, would not cohabit | 17 | 8.00 | 27 | 7.04 | 44 | 7.41 |
| No, but would cohabit | 38 | 7.29 | 37 | 7.14 | 75 | 7.21 |
| Yes, have cohabited | 19 | 9.05 | 41 | 7.12 | 60 | 7.73 |
| Total | 74 | 7.91 | 105 | 7.10 | 179 | 7.44 |
| SEAT | | | | | | |
| No, would not cohabit | 17 | 7.18 | 27 | 6.07 | 44 | 6.50 |
| No, but would cohabit | 38 | 7.32 | 38 | 7.39 | 76 | 7.36 |
| Yes, have cohabited | 19 | 7.53 | 40 | 7.38 | 59 | 7.42 |
| Total | 74 | 7.34 | 105 | 7.05 | 179 | 7.17 |
| MARR | | | | | | |
| No, would not cohabit | 17 | 9.06 | 27 | 11.44 | 44 | 10.52 |
| No, but would cohabit | 38 | 10.39 | 38 | 11.87 | 76 | 11.13 |
| Yes, have cohabited | 19 | 10.63 | 41 | 12.76 | 60 | 12.08 |
| Total | 74 | 10.15 | 106 | 12.10 | 180 | 11.30 |
| SERO | | | | | | |
| No, would not cohabit | 17 | 6.12 | 27 | 7.07 | 44 | 6.70 |
| No, but would cohabit | 38 | 6.58 | 38 | 7.13 | 76 | 6.86 |
| Yes, have cohabited | 19 | 6.74 | 41 | 7.32 | 60 | 7.13 |
| Total | 74 | 6.51 | 106 | 7.19 | 180 | 6.91 |

of religiosity were reported among those females who stated that they have not and would not cohabit, while those who reported that they have cohabited exhibited the lowest mean scores. On the other hand, with regard to their sexual behavior attitudes, those who reported that they had cohabited or expressed a willingness to do so, have the highest mean scores (indicating less traditional views), and those who maintained that they had not and would not cohabit, had the lowest mean scores (indicating more traditional views).

Male Subsample

The factors associated with the disposition toward cohabitation for the male subjects in this study are very different from those found for

Table 6. One-Way Analysis of Variance of Disposition Toward Cohabitation as a Function of Independent Variables for Female Subsample

| Source of Variation | Sum of Squares | Degrees of Freedom | Mean Square | F | Probability |
|---------------------|----------------|--------------------|-------------|-------|-------------|
| AGE | | | | | |
| Between Groups | 9.26 | 2 | 4.63 | 5.64 | p<.01 |
| Within Groups | 82.05 | 100 | .82 | | |
| Total | 91.30 | 102 | | | |
| RELIG | | | | | |
| Between Groups | 29.30 | 2 | 14.65 | 9.50 | p<.001 |
| Within Groups | 158.85 | 103 | 1.54 | | |
| Total | 188.15 | 105 | | | |
| RAPE | | | | | |
| Between Groups | .17 | 2 | .09 | .40 | N.S. |
| Within Groups | 21.68 | 102 | .21 | | |
| Total | 21.85 | 104 | | | |
| SEAT | | | | | |
| Between Groups | 34.46 | 2 | 17.23 | 15.37 | p<.001 |
| Within Groups | 114.31 | 102 | 1.12 | | |
| Total | 148.76 | 104 | | | |
| MARR | | | | | |
| Between Groups | 31.29 | 2 | 15.64 | 2.75 | N.S. |
| Within Groups | 586.57 | 103 | 5.69 | | |
| Total | 617.86 | 105 | | | |
| SERO | | | | | |
| Between Groups | 1.15 | 2 | .58 | .94 | N.S. |
| Within Groups | 63.07 | 103 | .61 | | |
| Total | 64.23 | 105 | | | |

the female subsample (Table 7). For the male subjects, the factors of age, attitudes on sexual behavior, views of marriage, and sex role expectations are not significantly different among the three dispositions toward cohabitation; only two factors significantly varied among the three groups of males. These are religiosity ($F = 8.43, p < .001$) and attitudes toward rape ($F = 6.36, p < .01$).

From the mean scores on the religiosity scale, it can be ascertained that men who indicated the preference that they would not cohabit also had the highest levels of religiosity. Conversely, those who stated that they had not but would cohabit, and those who had cohabited, yielded almost identical mean scores on religiosity (Table 5).

One of the most interesting findings of this study is that those males who had cohabited, displayed the most accepting views of rape (mean

Table 7. One-Way Analysis of Variance of Disposition Toward Cohabitation as a Function of Independent Variables for Male Subsample

| Source of Variation | Sum of Squares | Degrees of Freedom | Mean Square | F | Probability |
|---------------------|----------------|--------------------|-------------|------|-------------|
| AGE | | | | | |
| Between Groups | 1.14 | 2 | .57 | .84 | N.S. |
| Within Groups | 48.00 | 71 | .68 | | |
| Total | 49.14 | 73 | | | |
| RELIG | | | | | |
| Between Groups | 26.85 | 2 | 13.43 | 8.43 | p<.001 |
| Within Groups | 113.11 | 71 | 1.59 | | |
| Total | 139.96 | 73 | | | |
| RAPE | | | | | |
| Between Groups | 39.57 | 2 | 19.79 | 6.36 | p<.01 |
| Within Groups | 220.76 | 71 | 3.11 | | |
| Total | 260.34 | 73 | | | |
| SEAT | | | | | |
| Between Groups | 1.14 | 2 | .57 | .36 | N.S. |
| Within Groups | 113.42 | 71 | 1.60 | | |
| Total | 114.55 | 73 | | | |
| MARR | | | | | |
| Between Groups | 26.92 | 2 | 13.46 | 2.51 | N.S. |
| Within Groups | 380.44 | 71 | 5.38 | | |
| Total | 407.36 | 73 | | | |
| SERO | | | | | |
| Between Groups | 3.77 | 2 | 1.89 | 2.14 | N.S. |
| Within Groups | 62.71 | 71 | .88 | | |
| Total | 66.49 | 73 | | | |

score = 9.05). Those who reported that they have not but might cohabit, demonstrated the least accepting views of rape (mean score = 7.29), while those who stated they have not and would not cohabit, had the intermediate scores (mean score = 8.00). (See Table 5.) As noted, this represents a significant difference in attitude on the acceptability of rape situations among the three different dispositions toward cohabitation.

CONCLUSION

Analysis of the data demonstrates that, in general, the disposition to cohabit is related to being older, lower levels of religiosity, more liberal attitudes toward sexual behavior, less traditional views of mar-

riage, as well as less traditional views of sex roles. However, there also appears to be a gender difference in the way these factors are related to the disposition to cohabit.

For the female subsample, these relationships are more or less consistent, and are probably the product of greater changes that have occurred in the status and roles of women. As part of these changes, women have more independent and accepting attitudes toward cohabitation and related matters.

For the male subsample, little variance was found in the mean scores on the independent variables among the different dispositions toward cohabitation; only for religiosity and attitudes toward rape were there significant differences in the responses among the three groups.

A puzzling and important question is: Why did those in the male subsample who had cohabited report the most accepting views on rape? It is generally understood that rape is an act of violence and control rather than merely a sexual behavior. Groth and Birnbaum (1980) reported that the majority of rapists in their study were "power-oriented" in their actions. Further, these researchers argue that rape represents male dominance over females and, therefore, it is reasonable to assume that a more tolerant attitude toward rape might also indicate a more tolerant view of violence and control.

Thus, the essential question becomes: Does this more tolerant view of rape indicate that cohabiting males are more accepting of violence and control? Certainly the literature supports such an assumption. Clearly there is a gender difference in the motivation to cohabit. Jackson (1983) found that the major motivation for men to cohabit is the convenience (particularly the availability of sex). On the other hand, the main motivator of women is the expectation that cohabitation will lead to marriage. Macklin (1983) also suggests gender differences in the motivation for cohabiting, but adds that both men and women who cohabit display significantly less commitment to their relationship than do other types of couples.

These findings suggest that the cohabiting relationship holds great potential for an imbalance of power. More to the point, if men see the relationship as a matter of personal convenience while women regard it as a step toward marriage, men obviously will hold a position of greater power.

Given these findings, it is not surprising that cohabiting couples report greater tension in their relationship than do couples in other types of relationships (Kurdek & Schmitt, 1986). It is becoming more apparent that often this tension may express itself in violence. Lane and Gwartney-Gibbs (1985) found that cohabitators are more likely to

experience violence than are singles or marrieds. Further, Yllo and Straus (1981) found that cohabiting women suffer severe violence at four times the rate of married women.

Replication of this study is crucial. Future research needs to explore abuse in cohabiting relationships more fully. It is apparent that cohabiting women are at risk of physical violence.

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