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## Examining cohabitation in emerging adulthood

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**Examining Cohabitation in Emerging Adulthood**

**Jenica Dawn Hughes**

**Thesis submitted  
to the College of Education and Human Services  
at West Virginia University**

**in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of**

**Master of Arts in  
Educational Psychology with an emphasis in Child Development and Family Studies**

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**Morgantown, West Virginia  
2014**

**Keywords: Cohabitation, emerging adulthood, relationship quality, commitment  
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## **ABSTRACT**

### **Examining Cohabitation in Emerging Adulthood**

**Jenica Dawn Hughes**

Cohabitation has been repeatedly linked to negative relationship outcomes like low levels of commitment and relationship quality, but much of the current literature has utilized older data sets from the 1980s or age ranges from emerging adulthood, young adulthood, and older adulthood in the same studies. Supported by life course theory, inertia theory, and selection effects theory, the current study examined cohabitation specifically within the years of 18-25 to explore how demographic variables might be linked to the tempo of relationship transitions and the length of relationships. Additionally, the current study explored the associations between tempo of relationship transitions and length of relationships and levels of commitment and relationship quality. Participants ( $n = 116$ ) were mostly white (89.7%), from middle class families (94%), and had at least some college experience (91.4%). Results indicated that educational attainment is especially influential on both the tempo of relationship transitions and length of relationship variables. Additionally, commitment and relationship quality were significantly, positively correlated, meaning that higher levels of commitment were associated with greater relationship quality. Ultimately, the findings support the inertia theory, showing that rapid tempo of relationship transitions is linked to lower relationship quality, suggesting the importance of moving purposefully through relationship transitions for cohabiting couples.

## **Dedication**

To my family and friends, thank you for all of your support.

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## Table of Contents

	Page
Dedication.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Table of Contents.....	v
List of Appendices.....	viii
List of Tables.....	ix
List of Figures.....	x
Chapter One: Introduction.....	1
Overview.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	4
Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework.....	6
Life Course Theory.....	6
Inertia Theory.....	9
Selection Effect Theory.....	12
Summary of Theories.....	14
Chapter Three: Review of Literature.....	16
Emerging Adulthood.....	16
Cohabitation: An Overview.....	18
Cohabitation as Compared to Marriage.....	19
Cohabitation as Compared to Dating.....	20
Commitment: Relationship Confidence, Dedication, and Constraint Commitment...	22
Relationship Quality.....	25

The Association Between Relationship Quality and Commitment.....	26
Demographics: Factors that Could Influence Relationship Outcomes.....	27
Socioeconomic Status.....	27
Educational Attainment.....	29
Race/Ethnicity.....	30
Sex/Gender.....	31
Family History.....	31
Engagement Status.....	32
Summary.....	33
Tempo of Relationship Transitions and the Length of Relationship.....	34
The Current Study.....	37
Chapter Four: Method.....	41
Participants.....	41
Procedures.....	42
Measures.....	43
Data Analysis Plan.....	47
Chapter Five: Results.....	49
Preliminary Analyses.....	49
Hypothesis 1: Demographics Predict Tempo and Length of Relationship..	50
Hypothesis 2a: Tempo of Relationship Transitions Predicts Relationship Quality...	53
Hypothesis 2b:Length of Relationship Predicts Relationship Quality.....	53
Hypothesis 3a: Tempo of Relationship Transitions Predicts Levels of Commitment...	53
Hypothesis 3b: Length of Relationship Predicts Levels of Commitment...	54

Hypothesis 4: Commitment is Associated with Relationship Quality....	54
Chapter Six: Discussion.....	57
Hypothesis One.....	58
Hypothesis Two.....	60
Hypothesis Three.....	61
Hypothesis Four.....	63
Future Directions & Limitations.....	64
Conclusions & Contributions.....	67
References.....	69



## **List of Appendices**

Appendix A: Flyer for Community Recruitment.....	77
Appendix B: Cover Letters.....	78
Appendix C: Screener Questions.....	80
Appendix D: Registration for the Drawing.....	81
Appendix E: Demographics.....	82
Appendix F: Length of Relationship.....	86
Appendix G: Joint Activities Checklist.....	88
Appendix H: The Commitment Inventory: Dedication Subscale.....	90
Appendix I: Confidence Scale.....	93
Appendix J: Dyadic Adjustment Scale.....	94

## List of Tables

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics.....	95
Table 2: Bivariate Correlations.....	97
Table 3: Results of Oneway ANOVA for Participants' Current SES.....	98
Table 4: Results of Oneway ANOVA for Participants' Family SES.....	99
Table 5: Results of Oneway ANOVA for Participants' Educational Attainment...	100
Table 6: Independent T-Tests Between Race and Tempo/Length of Relationship..	101
Table 7: Independent T-Tests Between Sex and Tempo/Length of Relationship...	102
Table 8: Results of Oneway ANOVA for Participant's Family History.....	103
Table 9: Independent T-Test Between Current Engagement Status and Tempo/Length of Relationship .....	104
Table 10: Independent T-Tests Between Prior Engagement Status and Tempo/Length of Relationship.....	105

## List of Figures

Figure 1: A Proposed Model.....	106
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## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

The pathway to adulthood used to revolve around five main accomplishments: completing schooling, leaving home, starting a career, getting married, and beginning a family (Shanahan, 2000). Today, researchers have begun to recognize that the pathway to adulthood is now one with considerable diversity, leading many scholars to recognize the years of 18 through 25 as a distinct time in the life course called emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000; Shanahan, 2000). Emerging adulthood is a time of great exploration, in which individuals are largely free to try on various identities, whether through education, careers, or relationships (Arnett, 2000, 2004; Shanahan, 2000). During adolescence exploration in romantic relationships is typically limited and tentative (i.e., less intimate and committed) as adolescents begin to experiment with dating, whereas in emerging adulthood, romantic relationships tend to become much more intimate, both emotionally and sexually (Arnett, 2000; Montgomery, 2005).

These more intimate relationships may transition into marriage or, more commonly in emerging adulthood, cohabiting relationships. The average age at first marriage is on the rise, hitting a historic high in 2010 (for women, 26.1 years and 28.2 years for men compared to 23.9 years and 26.1 years in 1990), and perhaps in part associated with that rise is the upsurge in rates of cohabitation (United States Census Bureau, 2010). Nearly 50% of women between 2006 and 2010 reported that their first union was cohabitation, up from 35% in 1995 (Copen, Daniels, & Mosher, 2013). Similar statistics are unavailable for men, yet rates of cohabitation, for men, as compared to other union types seems to be increasing as well. Data collected from 2006-2010 indicated overall rates of cohabitation for men as compared to other union types to be 12.2%, up from 9.2% in 2002 (Copen, Daniels, Vespa, & Mosher, 2012). This rise in cohabitation has come

despite an abundance of evidence suggesting that cohabitation negatively impacts relationships in several ways, such as lowering rates of commitment or reducing relationship quality (Manning & Cohen, 2012; Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2009b).

The “cohabitation effect” is a term describing the negative effects cohabitation reportedly has on relationships. The negative effects associated with cohabitation include poor quality relationships, low relationship satisfaction, increased marital instability, and greater likelihood for intimate partner violence, both physical and psychological (Rhoades et al., 2009a). Most cohabiting relationships are short in duration with the majority either transitioning to marriage or dissolving within three years (Copen et al., 2013). Yet the cohabitation effect in combination with the increased prevalence of cohabitation, has resulted in a need to examine factors that may negatively influence relationship problems so practitioners can intervene appropriately (Copen et al., 2013). Both relationship commitment and relationship quality have been widely studied as outcome variables. Most researchers report that marriages that began as cohabiting relationships have lower levels of commitment and relationship quality compared to relationships that did not involve cohabitation (e.g., Manning & Cohen, 2012; Stanley, Whitton, & Markman, 2004), though recent research indicates that there are numerous mediating and moderating factors such as pregnancy and whether or not a cohabiting couple was engaged prior to moving in together (Stanley, Rhoades, & Markman, 2006; Tach & Halpern-Meeken, 2009).

Commitment is one of the most common outcome variables examined in research on cohabitation, though specific definitions of commitment vary. Three types of commitment will be examined in the current study. The first is referred to as relationship confidence, defined as whether someone believes that his or her relationship will last (Surra & Hughes, 1997). A second type, dedication commitment, is associated with couple identity, the expression of a desire to

have a future together, and is linked to showing a willingness to sacrifice for one's partner (Stanley & Markman, 1992). Typically, couples with high dedication to one another are likely to talk in terms of "us" and "we" (Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2012). Finally, constraint commitment is the idea that there are forces acting upon a couple to keep them in a relationship (Stanley & Markman, 1992). Examples of constraints might be shared bills, children, or social pressure to stay together.

Relationship quality is another popular outcome variable studied by relationship researchers. Relationship quality has typically included elements of relationship satisfaction, adjustment, and happiness within the relationship (Heyman, Sayers, & Bellack, 1994; Jose, O'Leary, & Moyer, 2010). Relationship quality has two dimensions. There is a positive dimension, which is associated with happiness and interaction, and a negative dimension, which is associated with conflict and instability (Johnson, White, Edwards, & Booth, 1986).

Relationship quality is important for a variety of reasons. Perhaps one of the most important reasons is that it is a significant predictor of life satisfaction and is positively correlated with better health, longer lifespan, and better parenting skills (Raurer, Karney, Garvan, & Hou, 2008). Yet there is still much to learn about the connections between cohabitation and relationship quality and commitment, especially in the emerging adult population for whom cohabitation has become a step in the relationship process. Current research suggests there may be certain risk and protective factors that influence the level of commitment and relationship quality in couples.

The diversity of the people choosing to cohabit makes understanding the dynamics of the cohabitation effect imperative because without this knowledge, the identification of risk and protective factors could be a complex challenge. Information about specific risk and protective factors the emerging adulthood population may be facing in terms of their cohabiting

relationships is important as cohabitation continues to rise in popularity among this age group. Therefore, the current study aimed to address a gap in the literature by examining three separate types of commitment (e.g., relationship confidence, dedication, and constraint commitment) as well as the relationship quality of individuals who are currently cohabiting. The three types of commitment and relationship quality were examined independently and the associations between these variables were also examined in order to identify potential bidirectional associations between the four variables.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Not all cohabiting relationships result in marriage or dissolution; in fact, some researchers suggest that as cohabitation becomes more normative, cohabiting relationships will transition into marriage less frequently than for previous generations (Lichter, Turner, & Sassler, 2010). The idea that there are dangers implicit to cohabitation for cohabiters (e.g., low relationship satisfaction, low relationship quality, increased violence) suggests that researchers need to look beyond cohabitation merely as a stepping stone for marriage and consider it as a relationship form of its own. Because of the wide reaching impacts of low relationship quality and the dissolution of union formations on both individuals involved in the relationship as well as any children involved (McLanahan, 2004), researchers must expand their understanding of cohabitation as a unique type of relationship. Regardless of whether a cohabiting relationship transitions into marriage, dissolves, or remains stable (i.e., the couple is still cohabiting), there is clear evidence suggesting that there are potential harmful effects, which highlights the importance of developing an understanding of both protective factors as well as risk factors.

Few studies have specifically looked at the timing of moving in together to see if the speed of the transition might influence relationship quality or commitment (for an exception, see

Sassler, Addo, & Hartman, 2010). Studies examining commitment frequently do so without the delineation of demographic markers (e.g., race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, educational attainment, etc.), and may simply measure commitment as whether or not the couple was engaged prior to moving in together, rather than taking a more complex view of commitment and examining constraint and interpersonal commitment (for an exception, see Stanley et al., 2006). Furthermore, much of the research on cohabitation stems from data collected in the 1980s and it is likely that the dynamics and characteristics of cohabiting individuals have changed since that data was collected (Hayford & Morgan, 2008).

The aim of the current study was to assess if and how the cohabitation effect is operating today and what demographic variables specifically may play a role in relational outcomes. Furthermore, it examined the relationship between demographic factors and the tempo of relationship transitions on three types of commitment and relationship quality. These variables were examined in the context of emerging adulthood, as it is a time of great exploration and the formation of many romantic relationships (Arnett, 2000). An illustration of the proposed links suggested above is provided in Figure 1.



## **Chapter Two**

### **Theoretical Framework**

The current study was guided by the life course theory (Elder, 1998), which provides explanations for how individuals' choices will influence their paths throughout life. In this case, the current study utilized life course theory to explain why individuals choose to cohabit and suggest possible outcomes of the choice to do so. In addition to life course theory, two additional theories were used to explain the cohabitation effect, and they each relate back to the life course theory. Specifically, inertia theory suggests that cohabiting relationships that would not have otherwise resulted in marriage do so because of the pressure to continue the forward motion of the relationship, which makes it difficult to exit the relationship (Manning & Cohen, 2012; Stanley et al., 2006). Secondly, selection effects theory proposes that the individuals who choose to cohabit would already be prone to divorce based on personal or relational level characteristics, such as low socioeconomic status (SES) or low religiosity (Manning & Cohen, 2012). Each of these theories are discussed in more detail below, including an explanation of how each cohabitation-specific theory complements life course theory. Additionally, connections between the proposed model presented in Figure 1 and each of the theories are provided when applicable.

#### **Life Course Theory**

Elder (1998) presented life course theory to explain how the pathways individuals take and the choices they make throughout their lives affects every aspect of their lives in the future. Life course theory encompasses four principles: historical time and location, timing of life events, people are interdependent, and human agency (Elder, 1998). Historical time and location emphasizes investigating phenomena within the context of both history and location and suggests that different cohorts may be affected in varying ways based on the societies in which they live

(Elder, 1998). Cohorts are people who are approximately the same age or who have lived through similar experiences (e.g., the Baby Boomers; Elder, 1998). Cohabitation, perhaps because of the influence of religious beliefs, was not an acceptable union form and was associated with lower-class couples only a few decades ago (Cherlin, 2010). Whereas in previous decades cohabitation would not have been considered a normative step in a relationship, today it continues to increase in popularity (Cherlin, 2010; Manning & Cohen, 2012). Currently more than ever before, young adults are endorsing the practice of cohabitation prior to marriage, which could lead to increased social support for individuals who cohabit (Manning & Cohen, 2012).

The second principle of life course theory (i.e., timing of life events) suggests that individuals whose life transitions occur early or late as compared to their peers (i.e., a non-normative transition) could potentially face difficulty in their lives (Elder, 1998). In fact, it is suggested that how an individual makes life transitions can dramatically alter the path an individual takes, which may influence their well-being (Elder, 1998). Emerging adults are prolonging many of the transitions that used to mark the onset of adulthood or achieving the markers of adulthood in varied order. For example, some individuals do not wish to meet any family transitions, such as getting married or having children, while others may choose to take a more ambiguous commitment towards those transitions by cohabitating, and still others may choose to have children without getting married (Amato et al., 2008). Some choices an individual makes, such as having children without marrying, may lead to difficulties such as little social support, less financial stability, or living in an unsafe environment.

Sometimes individuals may time events in their lives in such a way that they experience many negative occurrences or risk factors that may influence them to make certain transitions (e.g., low SES, unplanned pregnancy, and single parenthood, which could lead to cohabitation).

At other times, individuals may experience a series of transitions that may lead to negative outcomes (e.g., low SES, unplanned pregnancy, and single parenthood, which could lead to income disparities, health disparities, living in unsafe neighborhoods, and low-quality relationship and low parental satisfaction; Elder, 1998). Both examples are considered the “cumulation of disadvantages.” Today, there remains structural and institutionalized discrimination that may predispose certain individuals to experience greater risk of accumulating disadvantages based on specific combinations of race, gender, and socioeconomic status (Shanahan, 2000). An example of this might be a young woman who finds herself pregnant prior to marriage, which has the potential to interfere with the completion of her education. This, in turn, could keep her from maintaining a standard of living that is livable and may include the judgment she may experience from some individuals with whom she interacts. In comparison, a young woman who becomes pregnant after she has married is more likely to have two incomes supporting herself and her child and will likely have more social support than single mothers.

A third principle of the life course theory is that people are interdependent, and the interactions between individuals give meaning to events, such as pregnancy (Elder, 1998). Continuing with the example described above, the interdependence of people plays into this, as a woman usually becomes pregnant with a man. His choices can affect the scenario, perhaps from his decision to assist the woman in raising their child through financial support and/or sharing caretaking responsibilities. In some cases, the couple will marry, but according to Edin, Kefalas, and Reed (2004), low SES couples may be more likely to live together without marrying because despite being parents, they feel very strongly about the importance of marriage and believe they need to first achieve financial security prior to marrying.

Human agency is the last principle of life course theory, which states that individuals

have the freedom of choice and that their life paths are constructed through the interaction of said choices (Elder, 1998). Individuals have the ability to not only choose the paths their lives take, but also to choose the individuals they interact with and the relationships they form with other individuals. For example, in the above scenario the couple would have faced several options that could have potentially led to alternative outcomes. Rather than engaging in unprotected sexual intercourse, the couple could have used contraception or, once pregnant, the couple could have chosen not to carry the pregnancy to term. In comparison to times in the past where couples would have likely married upon finding out the woman was pregnant, now couples have the option of choosing whether or not they wish to marry each other, as well as deciding when they wish to do so, regardless of pregnancy or childbearing.

Life course theory is especially relevant to the current study as it relates to the timing and progression of life events that may lead individuals to choose to cohabit. Life course theory is the overarching theory of this study as it provides a basis for understanding that people construct their own pathways through life and points to the fact that these decisions do not spontaneously happen, but are frequently part of an ongoing trajectory. The interdependent nature of relationships as well as human agency will be examined through questions assessing the timing of relationship transitions and the various relationship commitment and quality outcome variables. In addition to life course theory, inertia theory, and selection effects theory will be used to explain the reduction of the cohabitation effect. Each of these theories could easily operate within the overarching context of life course theory.

### **Inertia Theory**

Inertia theory provides a possible explanation for the cohabitation effect. Explanations based on this theory have suggested that couples agree to cohabit in order to test their

relationship prior to solidifying their commitment to one another, or as a matter of convenience. The couple will then follow the path of least resistance and marry rather than end their relationship as it is simpler than ending their relationships due to the entanglement of their lives, whether financial, personal, or other aspect (Manning & Cohen, 2012). Inertia theory suggests that even if the couple had low levels of commitment to the relationship or low dedication to one another, couples would still make the decision to marry, even when their relationship would have ended if not for the cohabitation (Stanley et al., 2006). Rather than using this period of cohabitation to work through their problems or determine their compatibility, couples are likely to face increased constraints on their relationships as time passes (Kline et al., 2004). Constraints on a relationship could come from a variety of sources, such as the increased societal pressure towards marriage, the presence of children in the relationship, financial entanglements, or even the thought that there are no alternative romantic partners (Stanley et al., 2006).

Research suggests that cohabitation is an ambiguous step in relationships that frequently lacks a clear and defined shared meaning between couples (Stanley et al., 2006). The United States as a whole does not have a clear meaning of cohabitation. Many individuals advocate that cohabitation is a step toward marriage, while others point out that many couples will cohabit for a long period of time without marrying (Brown, 2003; Copen et al., 2013; Rhoades et al., 2012). Stanley and colleagues (2006) suggested that couples who “slide” into cohabitation would have lower quality of relationships than couples that specifically decided to cohabit. Couples who slide into cohabitation may be less likely to discuss the meaning behind the step, which contributes to the ambiguity. The ambiguity of this relational step may prevent the relationship from developing stability and shared dedication that is common in couples who do not live together prior to marriage or making the commitment to marry (Stanley et al., 2006).

Supporting inertia theory is evidence from Kline and colleagues (2004) that greater amounts of psychological aggression and negative interactions were present between couples who lived together prior to engagement as compared to couples who cohabited after engagement or moved in together after marriage. Participants in their study ranged from 18 to 45 years old. They found fewer positive interactions (i.e., couples displayed weak problem solving skills, poor communication skills, less positive affect, and less support) between couples who lived together prior to marriage, regardless of engagement status (Kline et al., 2004). Kline and colleagues (2004) suggested that their findings could be explained by the fact that couples with poor interactions may decide to move in together as a test of their relationship. Cohabitation would propel the otherwise unstable relationship into marriage, with the negative interactions carrying over into the couple's marriage. Further, they suggested that the lower commitment (both dedication and confidence) scores of couples who were not engaged before moving in together supported this explanation and, by extension, the inertia theory.

Partially corroborating the findings by Kline and colleagues (2004), Rhoades and colleagues (2009a) found evidence that couples who were engaged prior to cohabiting experienced rates of marital instability more similar to couples who did not cohabit than couples who cohabited without a prior commitment to marriage. Rhoades and colleagues (2009a) conducted a randomized telephone survey to test inertia theory and found no significant differences in relationship quality between couples who were engaged and cohabited prior to marriage and couples who moved in together after marriage. On the other hand, couples who were not engaged prior to cohabitation tended to have lower marital satisfaction in comparison to the other two groups, which is supportive of the inertia theory. The average age of participants was 30.67 years (range = 18 – 34), and they had all been married for 10 years or less, meaning

that they married between 1996 and 2007. This age group likely contributed to the wider acceptance of cohabitation, but the variance in the age group would suggest that not all of the participants would have experienced the same normality of cohabitation compared to what emerging adults experience today.

Overall, the studies here suggest that inertia theory appears to at least partially explain the cohabitation effect. It is likely that ambiguity in the meaning of cohabitation and a lack of solidified commitment are detrimental to the overall quality of the relationship (Kline et al., 2004). To that end, part of this study aimed to identify whether the couple's commitment to the relationship stems from the relationship itself (i.e., dedication commitment) or the increased amount of constraints resulting from sharing a household (i.e., constraint commitment). To that end, the tempo of relationship transitions (e.g., moving in together, sexual intercourse, getting engaged, etc.) was examined to determine if there was a speedy slide into cohabitation. This was important to consider because if the relationship moves too quickly, according to inertia theory, the couple will continue to slide into marriage without ensuring that the relationship is what they want. If couples report lower levels of confidence and dedication, then their relationship is less likely to result in stable and high quality marriages and the tempo of relationship progression can help determine if couples moved too quickly without simultaneously increasing their commitment to one another in the process (Kline et al., 2004).

### **Selection Effect Theory**

Inertia theory is frequently pitted against selection effect theory (although they are not mutually exclusive), a theory suggesting the factors leading a couple to cohabit are also factors related to marital instability (Manning & Cohen, 2012). These risk factors include low religiosity, having been in previous marriages, low educational achievement, young age, and the

premarital birth of children or the presence of children from previous unions (Kline et al., 2004). Some gender differences operate on those selection effects, such as young age being a heightened risk factor for divorce in women as compared to men (Teachman, 2002). The factors mentioned above are all linked not only to individuals who cohabited prior to marriage, but also to an increased risk of divorce regardless of whether or not the couple lived together prior to marriage (Kline et al., 2004). Selection effect theory suggests that human agency leads individuals to make the choice to cohabit after they were already at an increased risk for relationship problems based on other characteristics. Human agency, as explained by Elder (1998), deals with the idea that individuals have the ability to make their own choices and construct their life pathways. When paired with the selection effect theory, the idea is that individuals who have an increased risk of divorce already, are more likely to make the choice to cohabit, which may work to their detriment.

The selection effects theory has only been partially supported, if supported at all, by recent research. Kline and colleagues (2004) conducted a study that did not show support of this theory. In fact, they found that couples who should have been most at risk because they were not engaged when they started living together, were older and more financially stable than their other two groups, which stands in direct opposition with the selection effect theory. Additionally, they suggested that religiosity of cohabiting couples may not impact the relationship quality of couples, but could influence whether or not a couple will choose to cohabit. Similarly, Rhoades and colleagues (2009a) did not find evidence to support that age, income, education level, or religiosity explained the negative outcomes associated with cohabitation.

On the other hand, Rhoades and colleagues (2012) found that although these risk factors could not explain the cohabitation effect, controlling for those factors somewhat mitigated the



effects on commitment and relationship satisfaction. Further, Tach and Halpern-Meekin (2009) reported that although the majority of risk factors were irrelevant to the explanation of the cohabitation effect, premarital childbearing explains the lower relationship quality of cohabiting couples, providing partial support for selection effects theory. Perhaps this is because couples who experience premarital pregnancies are likely to have greater levels of conflict in their relationship and thus may be more ambivalent about the relationship itself (Stanley et al., 2006).

The mixed support found when testing this theory suggests that cohabiting couples today are too heterogeneous and there no longer exists a particular subgroup of individuals who engage in cohabitation (Jose et al., 2010; Manning & Cohen, 2012; Tach & Halpern-Meekin, 2009). However, for the sake of testing the theory, the demographic variables measured in this study were used in an attempt to identify and assess known risk factors for lower relationship quality and lower commitment.

### **Summary**

Both of the cohabitation specific theories provide alternative explanations for the existence (or lack thereof) of the cohabitation effect. The inertia theory suggests that couples cohabit to test their relationships and through their cohabitation increase constraints on their relationships that keep them together rather than allowing for their relationship to slowly dissolve or strengthen their commitment to one another naturally (Manning & Cohen, 2012; Stanley et al., 2006). The selection effects theory suggests that there are certain factors that lead a couple to cohabit (e.g., low religiosity, low educational attainment, premarital pregnancy), which contributes to the instability of the couple's relationship (Manning & Cohen, 2012). Together the theories suggest that the associations between cohabitation and negative relationship outcomes may not be a simple cause and effect, but rather is nuanced with each

explanation holding a small piece of the puzzle.

By using life course theory as the overarching theory, the two cohabitation specific theories were both tested, while maintaining focus on a specific period of time in the life course when diversity in individuals' pathways becomes more prominent. As discussed previously, the life course perspective has four basic principles: historical time and location, timing of life events, interdependence of people, and human agency (Elder, 1998). Cohabitation in the United States is significantly more common than in prior decades. Timing of life events as applied to the current study is the choice to cohabit during emerging adulthood, a time in life wherein individuals are frequently making many decisions that will shape the future of their lives. Furthermore, incorporating part of the selection effects theory, some individuals during this time frame may become pregnant, which is likely to impact their relational outcomes. Beyond this, the inertia theory suggests that individuals who time relationship transitions too quickly will be likely to have poor relationship quality and lower levels of commitment due to not taking the time to gradually develop the relationship. The interdependency of individuals suggests that cohabitation acts on relational outcomes through the interaction of couples. Human agency suggests that people have the ability to choose cohabitation as a pathway rather than staying single or than marry. The selection effects theory fits well within this principle because it suggests that individuals who choose to cohabit are more likely to be at risk for negative relationship outcomes regardless of their cohabitation status. The aim of the current study is to utilize these three theories to test the model presented in Figure 1.

## Chapter Three

### Review of Literature

#### Emerging Adulthood: An Overview

The transition from adolescence to adulthood is one of considerable diversity and pathways so expansive that researchers have put forth the term “emerging adulthood” to encompass the years of 18 to 25 (Arnett, 2000). Life course theorists have typically found that individuals’ transitions to adulthood were centered on five main achievements: completing schooling, leaving home, starting a career, getting married, and beginning a family (Shanahan, 2000). Emerging adulthood is categorized as a time in which choices and possibilities are nearly limitless as individuals delay those achievements of adulthood or take tentative steps towards them (Arnett, 2000; Shanahan, 2000). Arnett (2004) refers to this period as the age of identity exploration. During this time period, individuals are typically without the constraints of adult responsibilities and have expanded freedom, which allows many young adults to experiment and to explore aspects of their identity beyond their capacity to do so in adolescence, called the age of self-focus (Arnett, 2000; 2004). This is not to suggest that all individuals have equal capacity for exploration and the luxury of unlimited choice as there are social inequalities within emerging adults based on race, gender, and SES (Shanahan, 2000).

Some emerging adults explore their choices by continuing their education; in fact 68% of high school graduates enrolled in either a two or four-year college in 2011, up from 51% in 1975 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013a). Further, more students than ever before are continuing their education beyond their bachelor’s degrees; about 2.9 million students enrolled in post baccalaureate studies in 2011 up from 2.2 million students in 2000 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013b). Perhaps education, more than any other area, reveals that

exploration may be a luxury rather than universally true for all individuals, even in the United States. Just over 80% of individuals who complete high school from high income backgrounds proceeded to enroll directly to a college compared to approximately 56% of individuals from low-income families (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013a). Exploration, though, is not limited to merely education, but also occurs in love and relationships.

During adolescence, the developmental period when individuals typically begin dating, exploration in romantic relationships is fairly tentative and transient and very few high school sweethearts marry (Arnett, 2000). In emerging adulthood, however, romantic relationships tend to involve greater levels of intimacy, both emotional and sexual (Montgomery, 2005). This developmental period is marked by considerable diversity; some individuals delay family transitions (i.e., marriage and parenthood), while others make tentative commitments by cohabiting with a romantic partner, and still others begin families outside the confines of marriage (Amato et al., 2008; Arnett, 2000). The considerable diversity in emerging adults' romantic relationships emphasizes the importance of understanding how these individuals form healthy relationships, as well as understanding what may hinder that development.

People have been postponing marriage for several decades. In 1950, the average age at first marriage was 20.3 years for women and 22.8 years for men, whereas in 1990 the average age had risen to 23.9 years for women and 26.1 years for men (United States Census Bureau, 2004). In 2010 the average age at first marriage hit a historic high, specifically 26.1 years for women and 28.2 years for men (United States Census Bureau, 2010). Perhaps because of the delay in marriage, more individuals are cohabiting than ever before, with 48% of women between 2006 and 2010 reporting cohabitation as their first union compared to 34% of women in 1995 (Copen et al., 2013). Despite the fact that women are delaying marriage, there is evidence

suggesting that some women may delay marriage, but not parenthood. The mean age at first birth in 2011 was 25.6 years compared to 21.4 years in 1970, and 40.7% of all births in 2007 were to unmarried women (60% of those births were to women in their twenties; Matthews & Hamilton, 2009; Ventura, 2009). It is not uncommon for unmarried births to take place in the context of cohabiting relationships. In fact, according to the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, about half of the time parents are living together are because of a non-marital birth, (McLanahan et al., 2003). It is undeniable that cohabitation is becoming an important context for relationship development in emerging adulthood.

### **Cohabitation: An Overview**

As cohabitation has become a more popular relationship path, cohabiting couples have become very diverse. Although many cohabiting couples tend to be younger than 30 years (45% of women and 38% of men), there are many cohabiting couples over the age of 40 years (33% of women and 38% of men; Cherlin, 2010). Historically, only couples with low educational attainment and from lower socioeconomic status backgrounds cohabited (Cherlin, 2010). Today, while individuals with less educational attainment are more likely to cohabit, couples from all educational backgrounds are cohabiting as the practice is more widely accepted (Cherlin, 2010). Other demographic factors that have been associated with cohabitation are religiosity, number of previous marriages, and the presence of children (Kline et al., 2004). Couples who are more traditionally religious and/or hold traditional gender roles are less likely to engage in cohabitation (Stanley et al., 2006). Couples with parents who divorced are more likely to cohabit and face an increased likelihood of divorce in general (Stanley et al., 2006).

Cohabiting relationships tend to be of short duration. A majority of cohabiting relationships end within three years because couples either marry or break up (Copen et al.,

2013). However, women of lower SES backgrounds are more likely to cohabit for longer periods of time and are less likely to transition from their cohabiting relationship to marriage than are women from higher SES backgrounds (Lichter, Qian, & Mellot, 2006). Thus, while many more individuals are choosing to cohabit than ever before, many demographic variables that historically predicted cohabitation remain relevant today (i.e., educational attainment, socioeconomic status). It is important though to understand how cohabitation operates and what factors may contribute to the cohabitation effect, which is why many researchers have compared cohabiting relationships to marriages.

**Cohabitation as compared to marriage.** Cohabitation is frequently compared to marriage as a relationship status, perhaps due to the substantial amount of couples who transition from cohabitation to marriage. According to data from the National Survey of Family and Households, first time cohabiting couples between 2006-2010 transitioned into marriage within the first three years of their cohabiting relationships 40% of the time (Copen et al., 2013). Researchers have often assumed that cohabitation is a pathway to marriage and limit their study to samples of married couples who have previously cohabited (e.g., Jose et al., 2010; Kline et al., 2004; Manning & Cohen, 2012; Rhoades et al., 2009b; Tach & Halpern-Meehin, 2009). For example, researchers have compared the marital satisfaction, quality, and stability of individuals who cohabited prior to marriage to those who did not as a way to test whether or not a cohabitation effect exists (Kline et al., 2004, Manning & Cohen, 2012; Rhoades et al., 2009b; Rhoades et al., 2012; Stanley et al., 2006). Though this research is important, it eliminates couples who broke up or remained in cohabiting relationships prior to marriage, which is a significant portion of cohabiters.

There is contradictory evidence found across studies, however, with some finding an

association between cohabitation and poorer relational outcomes (e.g., Jose et al., 2010) and others who do not (e.g., Manning & Cohen, 2012). Manning and Cohen (2012) studied recent marriages (defined as marriages occurring since the mid-1990s) using data from the National Survey of Family Growth and suggested their findings could be a result of the relationship between premarital cohabitation and marital instability being more complex than in past years. This means that there is no longer a direct link between cohabitation and marital instability, but rather other factors are influencing this association. Specifically, they advocated that having a commitment to marriage prior to entering a cohabiting relationship resulted in lower marital instability, a finding that has been reported before (Kline et al., 2004; Manning & Cohen, 2012; Rhoades et al., 2009a; Rhoades et al., 2012; Stanley et al., 2006). Another study found that premarital pregnancy is the factor that leads to lower relationship quality in couples who cohabited prior to marriage (Tach & Halpern-Meehin, 2009). Premarital birth, regardless of whether it is with a future spouse or another individual, is associated with lower marital quality. Considering nearly one out of five cohabiting relationships resulted in a pregnancy within the first year of living together, this seems to be a substantial concern (Copen et al., 2013).

**Cohabitation as compared to dating relationships.** Not all cohabiting couples utilize cohabitation as a stepping stone to marriage. Of first time cohabiting couples between 2006 and 2010, 32% remained in the cohabiting relationship after three years, whereas 27% exited their relationships (Copen et al., 2013). Although 32% of cohabiters may seem like a small portion, that is still a fairly significant group, suggesting that comparing cohabiting couples' relational outcomes to those of dating couples in addition to married couples is an important addition to the cohabitation literature. Rhoades and colleagues (2012) found that cohabiters had lower levels of relationship satisfaction, increased levels of negative communication, and heightened levels of

physical aggression, although they did also report greater levels of commitment as compared to the dating couples in the study. On the other hand, Willoughby and Jones (2012) found no differences in relational outcomes between early cohabiters (defined as together for less than one year) and daters. Willoughby and Jones (2012) suggested this could be because the relationships were too new and therefore the participants were in the honeymoon period of the relationship, which is to say that individuals in a new or early stage of their relationship are likely to report positive feelings and experiences in their relationship or have yet to have time to develop negative appraisals.

Thus, in comparison to both married and dating couples, cohabiting couples appear to be at a disadvantage in terms of their relationship functioning, suggesting that something unique to cohabitation destabilizes and undermines the relational quality of these couples (Stanley et al., 2006). In spite of these negative statistics, young adults tend to consider cohabitation to be an ideal method of testing their relationship based on the assumption that cohabitation will “divorce proof” their marriages (Manning & Cohen, 2012). The fact that 27% of cohabiting relationships ended within three years could support the notion that people do in fact use cohabitation as a test of their relationships (Copen et al., 2013). In contrast, Sassler (2004) and Rhoades, Stanley, and Markman (2009a) found that using cohabitation as a test of a couple’s relationship was not typically mentioned as a primary reason for cohabitation, though it could be an underlying motivating factor.

Regardless of couples’ reasoning behind deciding to live together, couples seem to dismiss information suggesting cohabitation may not be a wise step to take in a relationship considering that cohabitation has become common (Jose et al., 2010; Manning & Cohen, 2012; Tach & Halpern-Meehin, 2009). Individuals of all races and ethnicity, level of education, and



age may choose to live with their significant others. Each of these factors could impact their relationship stability and quality and could influence the underlying mechanisms and decision that led to their choices to cohabit. For example, individuals with less education are more likely to cohabit and they tend to suffer from increased financial difficulties, which are frequently a cause of distress in relationships, but may also influence the desire to cohabit so as to relieve economic distress (Addo & Sassler, 2010; Cherlin, 2010).

The diversity of the people choosing to cohabit makes understanding the dynamics behind the decision imperative, because without this knowledge, the identification of risk and protective factors could be an overwhelming challenge. To that end, the current study explored the effects of various demographic factors on the timing of relationship transitions, levels of commitment (i.e., relationship confidence, dedication, and constraint commitment), and relationship quality. Current evidence suggests that the cohabitation effect may not be as linear as cohabitation leading directly to negative relational outcomes, but may in fact be more nuanced. As such, the exploration of possible nuances is vital to expanding understanding of the true effects of cohabitation on relationships so as to ensure the development of healthy relationships.

### **Commitment: Relationship Confidence, Dedication, and Constraint Commitment**

Commitment is an important contributor to the overall wellbeing of relationships. Commitment is reportedly lower in cohabiting couples, a factor which researchers believe contributes to the increased likelihood of divorce and other negative outcomes associated with cohabitation (Stanley et al., 2006). Yet as Surra and Hughes (1997) point out, researchers have varied definitions of commitment and therefore different ways of measuring commitment. At its most general, commitment measures whether a relationship will last in the long run (Surra &

Hughes, 1997). In the present study, the idea that participants believe their relationship will last is referred to as relationship confidence. Relationship expectations are linked to relationship outcomes, ergo couples who have the expectation that their relationship will dissolve are likely to experience the dissolution of the relationship (Brown, 2000). Some researchers propose that cohabitation itself is linked to more accepting attitudes of divorce and is responsible for lower rates of relationship confidence. They suggested that because people who cohabit tend to have more nontraditional beliefs related to marriage prior to cohabitation, those beliefs are reinforced through the experience (Brown & Booth, 1996; Jose et al., 2010). Thus, it is important to examine relationship confidence in the current study in the absence of the ability to examine instability.

Another way of defining commitment could be to examine a couple's dedication to their relationship. A couple's dedication (or dedication commitment) is associated with a couple identity, the expression of a desire to have a future together, and is linked to a willingness to sacrifice for one's partner (Stanley & Markman, 1992). Couples who have high dedication to one another are likely to use the terms "we" and "us" (Rhoades et al., 2012). Surra and Hughes (1997) developed the concept of relationship driven commitment, which could be linked to this idea of dedication commitment. Relationship-driven commitment results stems from the idea of behavioral interdependence and perceptions (both positive and negative) of the relationship that emphasize couple compatibility. Behavioral interdependence, noted perhaps as a desire to spend time together, may lead some individuals to cohabit because they feel strongly about spending large amounts of time together. The perception of the relationship could include ideas such as how comfortable a couple is together and may encourage moving in together as a way to express that (Surra & Hughes, 1997). Couples who reported greater amounts of relationship-driven

commitment were more satisfied in their relationships, reporting less conflict and negativity than couples who reported more event-driven commitment styles (Surra & Hughes, 1997). Although dedication commitment is a very important aspect to relationships as it incorporates a couple's couple identity, but this is not the only type of commitment that may impact relationship quality.

Event-driven commitment is developed through external sources, such as the couple's joint social network or some interpersonal events, which could include self-disclosure or conflict (Surra & Hughes, 1997). Couples with significant amounts of event-driven commitment had more highs and lows and reported lower satisfaction and greater amounts of conflict within their relationships (Surra & Hughes, 1997). Event-driven commitment could also be related to Stanley and Markman's (1992) description of constraint commitment. Constraints, which take many forms such as sharing bills or a lease, are factors that make it difficult to leave a relationship, even if one is unhappy in the relationship, a construct called constraint commitment (Stanley & Markman, 1992). Some find that cohabiting couples increase their constraint commitment to one another rather than increasing their commitment through relationship-driven decisions (Stanley et al., 2006; Surra & Hughes, 1997). This feeds into inertia theory and suggests that cohabiting relationships, which may not have resulted in marriage otherwise, proceed to marriage because the constraints are too great to exit the relationship. Stanley and Markman's (1992) two conceptualizations of commitment will both be measured in this study.

Each of the three types of commitment were outcome variables in the current study, but they were measured separately because, as noted above, they are different aspects of commitment. In particular, relationship confidence is related to the stability of a relationship through its measurement of whether or not an individual believes that the relationship is likely to last. Dedication commitment seems to have a strong positive relationship to relationship quality

in its measurement of how important the relationship is to a person and the development of the couple identity. Constraint commitment measures the external forces that keep a couple together (e.g., a joint bank account, a child), but does not necessarily indicate a desire to maintain the ties. The proposed model presented in Figure 1 depicts a bidirectional relationship between confidence, dedication, and constraint commitment and relationship quality.

### **Relationship Quality**

Researchers have determined that relationship quality has two distinct dimensions, a positive dimension and a negative dimension (Brown, 2003). The positive dimension deals with happiness and positive interactions between the couple, while the negative dimension looks at conflict and instability (Brown, 2003). Relationship quality is measured in a variety of overlapping ways, including examining individual's relationship satisfaction, psychological adjustment, or happiness within the relationship (Heyman et al., 1994; Jose et al., 2010). Relationship satisfaction is a construct that is frequently used in the literature, but not one that is well defined, with many researchers assuming that it is a commonsense construct (e.g., Heyman et al., 1994). Relationship satisfaction is encompassed by measures testing relationship quality, suggesting an overlap of the two constructs (Heyman et al., 1994).

Relationship quality constructs are important to examine for a variety of reasons. At the macro level, the United States has made supporting healthy families a priority, for example, with the Healthy Marriage Initiative, designed to promote satisfying and fulfilling marriages (Roberts, 2005). In regards to more individualistic reasons, relationship satisfaction is a significant predictor of life satisfaction, even over that of financial security (Rauer et al., 2008). Individuals with high relationship satisfaction also report better health, live longer and are better parents compared to individuals with low relationship satisfaction (Rauer et al., 2008). As previously

mentioned, many, though not all, researchers posit that relationship quality is lower in couples who cohabited prior to marriage as compared to both married samples and dating couples (Jose et al., 2010; Nock, 1995).

Cohabitation is related to lower relationship quality in couples, which is detrimental to both the relationship as a whole, but perhaps also on individual's lives, which is why additional work needs to be done to examine the mechanism through which cohabitation influences relationship quality. Cohabitors report more negative interactions with one another and report less happiness than married couples, though cohabiting couples with clear plans to marry do not significantly differ from the married couples (Brown, 2003). These findings suggest that commitment may play a role in couple's relationship quality, though the mechanisms through which this relationship works is uncertain.

### **The Association Between Relationship Quality and Commitment**

Looking at commitment by itself does not fully explain the cohabitation effect unless it is paired with relationship quality (Thompson & Coella, 1992). In support of this idea, Brown (2004) found that commitment to marriage in cohabiting couples resulted in approximately the same level of relationship quality as married couples. Cohabitation appears to lead to less commitment to marriage or to holding more accepting attitudes toward divorce and these changes in attitudes towards marriage could lead to lower relationship quality (Brown & Booth, 1996; Jose et al., 2010; Kline et al., 2004). Though several studies have suggested that a link exists between relationship quality and commitment, no studies have explored exactly how this relationship operates, nor have they parsed out the three types of commitment. The current study aimed to expand the knowledge base on this subject by investigating the association between relationship quality and each type of commitment (i.e., relationship confidence, dedication, and

constraint commitment).

### **Demographics: Factors that Could Influence Relationship Outcomes**

The considerable expansion of cohabitation rates has resulted in individuals across all demographic variables engaging in premarital cohabitation, but there are connections between certain demographic factors and the tempo of relationship transitions, relationship quality, and commitment levels. Despite the finding that cohabitation is found among all social groups, it still seems that cohabitation is most prevalent in groups from lower SES backgrounds and with lower educational attainment (Bumpass, Sweet, & Cherlin, 1991; Cherlin, 2010; Conger, Conger, & Martin, 2010; Sassler & McNally, 2003). There are differences between race/ethnicity regarding rates of marriage, specifically, that Blacks are less likely than Whites to marry (Cherlin, 2010). Further, women frequently report lower levels of relationship quality than men (Brown, 2000, 2004). Little is known about family structure's effects on cohabiting relationships, but there is evidence to suggest that individuals who witnessed the divorce of their parents are less likely to marry than individuals whose parents are still together (Riggio & Weiser, 2008). Lastly, it is expected that a clear commitment prior to marriage is a protective factor for couples and that they will be less likely to experience low rates of commitment and relationship quality (Kline et al., 2004). Each of these demographic variables is discussed in more detail below.

**Socioeconomic status.** The early part of the new millennium in the United States has been plagued with unemployment and underemployment that has impacted emerging adults in a variety of ways. There was a rise in the poverty rates during the first decade of the new millennium from 12.7% in 2000 to 15.7% in 2008 (Conger et al., 2010). The economic instability of the early 2000s resulted in stress to families because of financial hardship, lacking employment opportunities, and reduced resources for families in need (Conger et al., 2010).

Socioeconomic status (SES) is conceptualizes social position, including economic well-being, and is typically assessed using income, education, and occupation (Conger et al., 2010).

Education is typically considered to be one of the biggest predictors of SES because of its influence on later employment opportunities and associated income levels (Conger et al., 2010).

Regarding the relationship between SES and romantic relationship outcomes, current literature suggests that SES plays a role in predicting relationship quality and commitment (in this case, commitment conceptualized as stability or relationship confidence). Couples with a higher socioeconomic status are likely to have greater amounts of relationship satisfaction and report greater levels of happiness within their relationship thereby translating to greater levels of relationship quality (Conger et al., 2010). Some research has suggested that high income cohabiting couples are also more likely to have plans to marry compared to lower income cohabiting couples (Bumpass et al., 1991; Lichter et al., 2006). However, Sassler and McNally (2003) suggested that men with fairly high economic prospects experienced a greater amount of stability in cohabitation compared to men with low economic prospects, but were not more likely to transition into marriage.

Not only does SES seem to affect the likelihood of transitioning into marriage, it may also impact how quickly an individual or couple will progress through relationship milestones. Sassler and Miller (2011) conducted a qualitative study regarding the tempo of relationship progression in working-class and middle-class cohabiting couples. Their results revealed that working-class couples were likely to transition more quickly into cohabitation than were the middle-class couples. Their reasoning for cohabitation often centered on finances, stating that it was difficult to manage supporting two households, while middle-class respondents felt that cohabitation was merely a step towards marriage and often had clearer plans for the progression

of their relationships. Sassler and colleagues (2010) found that being economically disadvantaged seems to have a heavy influence on women's decision making processes related to relationships. Women who come from an economically disadvantaged situation are more likely to quickly transition into a sexual relationship and cohabitation much more quickly than women from more advantaged backgrounds (Sassler et al., 2010). In the current study, the effects of SES on relationship quality and commitment dynamics will be investigated. Furthermore, an attempt to expand what is known regarding the relationship between SES and the tempo of relationship transitions will be made.

**Educational attainment.** Education is often used as a rough approximate of an individual's SES because it is thought to be easier to assess than asking for participants income and participants are more likely to respond (Walsemann, Cee, & Ro, 2013). Individuals who pursue advanced degrees typically make considerably more money than individuals without advanced degrees (Walsemann et al., 2013). In turn, an individual's family of origin's socioeconomic position is likely to predict their educational attainment, with low SES individuals being less likely to attend college (Walsemann et al., 2013).

Beyond merely leading to a more advantageous socioeconomic position, college-educated individuals are also reportedly more likely to marry and to postpone parenthood until after marriage, perhaps due to their increased likelihood of obtaining stable employment (Cherlin, 2010; McLanahan, 2004). Upon marrying, these individuals are less likely to divorce and are more likely to hold healthier expectations for relationships leading to marriages with high relationship quality and levels of commitment (Hamamci, 2005; Heaton, 2002; Woszidlo & Segrin, 2013). In contrast, individuals with lower educational attainment are more likely to marry in their late teens and early 20s, but then become significantly less likely to marry than their



more educated peers in later years (Amato et al., 2008). These individuals are more likely to engage in early sexual activity and to become pregnant than are individuals with greater educational attainment (Kerckhoff, 1976). Research suggests that individuals with higher educational attainment are more likely to work to solve problems in their relationships and to have more open communication, which leads to better marital outcomes (Woszidlo & Segrin, 2013). This could be because formal education assists individuals in learning problem-solving and communication skills that are key to maintaining a healthy and positive relationship (Faust & McKibben, 1999).

It is important to note that despite being a popular step in a relationship across the majority of demographic variables, less educated individuals are more likely to cohabit than other groups (Conger et al., 2010). Thus, the cohabitation effect could be lingering due to the prominence of relationships in low-educated couples that may lack the communication skills learned through formal education.

**Race/ethnicity.** There are racial and ethnic differences in the United States related to both union formation and SES. As for SES related factors, African Americans and Hispanics disproportionately experience unemployment and poverty, though members of all races saw declines in family income of some degree in the early 2000s (Conger et al., 2010). Regarding union formation, Black women are less likely than White women to marry in general, but are also less likely to transition a cohabiting relationship into a marriage (Cherlin, 2010). Sassler and McNally (2003) reported that cohabiting unions with one minority member are less likely to transition into marriage or break up, choosing instead to stay in a long-term cohabiting union. The current study aimed to further the study of race/ethnicity in relationship to commitment variables and relationship quality to expand the limited information known about the specific

racial and ethnic interplays in relationship dynamics.

**Sex/gender.** There may be sex differences in what cohabitation means to individuals as well as levels of commitment and relationship quality. In one study, women were more likely to compare cohabitation to marriage and indicate that it was a status characterized by less commitment and legitimacy than that of marriage, while men were more likely to compare cohabitation to dating and lament the lack of freedom in comparison to singlehood (Huang, Smock, Manning, & Bergstrom-Lynch, 2011). Furthermore, women were more likely to report cohabitation as a transition into marriage, while men were more likely to espouse cohabitation as a step in the relationship without the ultimate goal of marriage (Huang et al., 2011). This may suggest that women are likely to be more committed to their relationship than are men.

In addition, some researchers have suggested that women are more sensitive to relationship quality than men and are perhaps more expressive of their feelings about their relationships (Brown, 2004). Women's negative perceptions of the cohabiting relationship are more likely to predict relationship dissolution than a man's negative perceptions of the relationship (Brown, 2000). Additionally, men's expectations for marriage are more likely to be realized than are women's expectations for marriage (Brown, 2000). An aim of the current study was to expand on the limited knowledge related to cohabitation and gender.

**Family history.** Very little research exists exploring the relationship between family of origin structure and the effects that may have on cohabiting relationships in the future. Some of what is known is that individuals who experienced their parents' divorce are likely to hold more negative views toward marriage (Riggio & Weiser, 2008). In a rare study exploring the relationship between family of origin experiences and cohabitation, Willoughby and Jones (2012) suggested that negative experiences in the family of origin (e.g., experiences that would

have undermined the development of a secure attachment with the primary caregiver or otherwise made individuals less trusting and confident in relationships) may cause individuals to be more likely to cohabit. They found that negative relationships with the participants' own mothers led to poorer relationship quality in their cohabiting relationships. The current study assessed family history variables (e.g., family form transitions, such as divorce and remarriage) in hopes of shedding light on the processes through which family structure may impact relationship quality and commitment variables in cohabiting relationships.

**Engagement status.** Several studies have shown that being engaged prior to cohabiting is a protective factor against lower levels of interpersonal commitment and confidence in the future of the relationship (Kline et al., 2004; Manning & Cohen, 2012; Rhoades et al., 2009a; Stanley et al., 2006). In fact, a meta-analysis that included 16 studies analyzing marital stability found that individuals who had ever cohabited with any partner prior to marriage reported less actual and perceived levels of commitment to their relationship (Jose et al., 2010). However, couples that cohabited only with their future spouse had less negative relational outcomes, and researchers suggest that their level of dedication and commitment would have been higher at the outset of the marriage.

Although a couple's initial level of commitment during cohabitation may directly translate to their level of commitment post-marriage, whether or not a couple is engaged prior to cohabitation also has an impact on other areas of relationship functioning. For example, Kline and colleagues (2004) found that living together prior to engagement resulted in lower scores on numerous aspects of relationship functioning after marriage. The researchers suggested that their findings showed that couples cohabiting without being engaged had a greater level of relationship distress even before marriage and that marriage did not cause that distress to abate.

Researchers speculate that the negative interactions between the couple may be part of what prompts the cohabitation as part of a test of the relationship, but once in a cohabiting relationship, the couple is propelled through the subsequent step of marriage more so out of obligation than passing a test of the relationship (Kline et al., 2004; Rhoades et al., 2009a).

Even in Sweden and Norway, two countries where cohabitation is reportedly indistinguishable from marriage in terms of public policy, cohabiters are less serious and less satisfied in their cohabiting relationships in comparison to married couples (Wiik, Bernhardt, & Noack, 2009). However, similar to the American samples discussed above, couples with the intention to marry within two years were more similar to the married couples to which they were compared (Wiik et al., 2009). The evidence is clear that being engaged, or having a clear commitment to marriage prior to cohabiting is a noteworthy protective factor against the cohabitation effect.

**Summary.** Each of the above demographic variables may effect on relationship quality and commitment. Low socioeconomic status seems to be related to low relationship quality and less relationship stability in couples (Bumpass et al., 1991; Conger et al., 2010; Lichter et al., 2006). Educational attainment has a similar effect, meaning that higher levels of education are related to greater relationship quality and relationship stability (Hamamci, 2005; Heaton, 2002; Woszidlo & Segrin, 2013). Little is known about how race/ethnicity interacts with cohabitation, beyond the fact that Black women are less likely than White women to transition from cohabitation to marriage or to end their cohabiting relationship (Cherlin, 2010; Sassler & McNally, 2003). Women are likely to express greater amounts of commitment in their cohabiting relationships than are men, but may also be likely to report lower amounts of relationship quality than are men (Brown, 2004; Huang et al., 2011). Very little research has been done to examine

how family history variables might affect relationship quality and commitment in cohabiting couples, though it appears that individuals with less positive experiences may be more inclined to cohabit than individuals with more positive family experiences (Willoughby & Jones, 2012). Whether a couple is engaged or not prior to moving in together seems to impact a couple's relationship quality and commitment levels. Being engaged prior to moving in together is related to reporting higher relationship quality and greater levels of reported commitment (Kline et al., 2004; Manning & Cohen, 2012). The current study aimed to further explore the relationship between these demographic factors and relationship outcomes (i.e. relationship quality, commitment, tempo of relationship transitions).

### **Tempo of Relationship Transitions and the Length of Relationship: Effects on Commitment and Relationship Quality**

Although demographics impact relationship quality and commitment, there are many mediating and moderating variables impacting those relationships. One such variable is the tempo of relationship transitions, which to date has not received extensive study. What is known, suggests that the tempo of relationship transitions influences a couple's level of commitment to one another and their relationship and relationship quality (Sassler et al., 2010). Specifically, research has shown that the length of a couple's relationship prior to engaging in sexual intercourse is linked to lower commitment in men, though this finding has not been replicated for women (Metts, 2004). In essence, current research suggests that couples who make rapid transitions in their relationships are likely to experience lower commitment and worse relationship quality consistent with the inertia theory (Rhoades et al., 2009a; Sassler et al., 2010; Stanley et al., 2006). Additional evidence suggests that the length of cohabitation prior to marriage may also influence the likelihood of divorce. The current study will focus more heavily

on the progression of relationship transitions, but will also consider how long a couple has been in a cohabiting union.

Much of the concern regarding rapid transitions through steps in a relationship arises from the concern that these rapid transitions reduce the likelihood that couples have discussed the meaning of the steps they are taking and may entangle themselves prematurely, resulting in the continuation of relationships that would have otherwise dissolved (Glenn, 2002; Sassler, 2004; Stanley et al., 2006). Using data from the Marital and Relationship Survey, Sassler and colleagues (2010) studied relationship transitions and their timing on the relationship quality of married and cohabiting couples. The data was collected from low-to-moderate income cohabiting and married couples who had a minor child, making it imperfect in its ability to generalize to the entire population of cohabiters, but nevertheless it is invaluable in explaining a piece of the cohabitation puzzle. Sassler and colleagues (2010) found that couples engaging in sexual intercourse early in the relationship were more likely to move quickly into cohabitation than couples who delayed engagement in sexual intercourse. Nearly one third of the couples surveyed reported transitioning into cohabitation within six months of relationship initiation. Researchers suggested that the rapid movement through relationship transitions could explain the lower relationship quality of cohabiting couples because they may not be taking the time to develop the levels of love and commitment or learn enough about their partner as couples who take a longer amount of time to progress through relationship transitions.

Events such as pregnancy may significantly influence the progression of relationship events, especially depending on when and with whom the pregnancy occurred (Goldscheider, Kaufman, & Sassler, 2009; Goldscheider & Sassler, 2006; Lichter et al., 2010). Specifically, if an individual already has a child, he or she is likely to take a new relationship more slowly than

an individual without a child (Goldscheider et al., 2009; Goldscheider & Sassler, 2006; Lichter et al., 2010). However, if the current couple gets pregnant, it may prompt the couple to move in together in order to provide a more stable home for their infant (Edin et al., 2004).

Of course, the tempo of the relationship may not be the only aspect of the relationship that impacts commitment and relationship quality. Other research suggests that the length of the cohabiting relationship itself influences relationship stability, specifically that couples who cohabited longer before marrying are more prone to divorce than couples who cohabited more briefly prior to marriage (Kline et al., 2004; Murrow & Shi, 2010; Thompson & Coella, 1992). It is important to note that many studies testing this phenomenon did not distinguish between couples that were engaged or not prior to cohabitation (Kline et al., 2004). Perhaps this decrease in relationship satisfaction over time in cohabiting couples is related to increased constraint commitment, which could contribute to feelings of being trapped (Rhoades et al., 2012).

Furthermore, some of the early research that suggested cohabitation results in lower relationship quality because of the length of the cohabitation period (Brown & Booth, 1996). Thompson and Coella's (1992) research indicated that social and economic characteristics linked to cohabitation (e.g., low SES, low educational attainment) could explain the increased probability for divorce in cohabiting couples if the couple had cohabited for less than one year, but could not explain the phenomenon in couples who had cohabited for longer periods of time. In addition, some researchers have suggested that the longer a couple cohabits, the less likely the couple is to have plans to marry, although some have suggested that plans for marriage do not have a direct impact on relationship quality (Brown, 2004; Bumpass et al., 1991). Brown's (2004) research found that the transition into marriage resulted in higher levels of relationship quality for those previously cohabiting couples than for couples who remained in cohabiting

relationships, which suggests that while plans for marriage may not have an impact on relationship quality, the actual marital status may.

Relationship transitions that are too speedy may result in increased ambiguity in relationships, which may serve to weaken the bonds of dedication commitment, but may also lead to a rapid development of constraints keeping individuals in a relationship (Rhoades et al., 2009a; Sassler et al., 2010). Furthermore, the research suggests that the longer a couple cohabits prior to marriage may influence a couple's likelihood for divorce (Kline et al., 2004). The current study aimed to expand on prior research by connecting the tempo of relationship transitions and length of relationship to relationship outcomes (i.e. commitment and relationship quality).

### **The Current Study**

Although there is a substantial amount of research on cohabitation, it is clear from the above review of literature that there is still much to learn. Emerging adulthood is a distinct period of the life course and has special relevance to the formation of romantic attachments and educational pursuits (Arnett, 2000). Examining cohabitation in emerging adulthood will allow for a more developed idea of how and why individuals choose to cohabit, what factors may affect such a decision, and how all of those factors impact commitment and relationship quality, which could assist practitioners, cohabiting couples, and policymakers in building stronger and healthier relationships. The proposed model presented in Figure 1 illustrates the main goal of the study.

### **Hypotheses**

It is important to consider cohabitation in emerging adulthood for the numerous reasons as presented in the previous sections. The aim of the current study was to do so by testing associations between demographic factors that have been previously identified as potential risk



or protective factors, the tempo of relationship transitions, the length of relationship, three types of commitment, and relationship quality. The four hypotheses presented below were designed to explore the suggested associations between the variables as represented in Figure 1.

**Hypothesis 1: Demographics predict tempo of relationship transitions and the length of relationship.** Demographic variables (i.e., SES, educational attainment, race/ethnicity, gender/sex, family history, and engaged or not) are expected to be associated with the tempo of relationship transitions and the length of relationship. Cohabiting individuals of lower SES are expected to move quickly through relationship transitions, including cohabitation, and will likely be involved in shorter relationships than individuals of higher SES (Sassler et al., 2010). Individuals who have greater levels of educational attainment are expected to move more slowly through relationship transitions than individuals with lower educational attainment. Similarly, individuals with higher levels of educational attainment will likely have longer relationships prior to cohabitation than individuals with lower levels of educational attainment. Little is known regarding the interaction between race/ethnicity and the tempo of relationship transitions, so this is something that will be explored in the current study. Prior research suggests that Blacks are less likely than Whites to transition their cohabiting relationships to marriage, so it is expected that Black participants will have longer cohabiting relationships than White participants (Sassler & McNally, 2003). It is not expected that gender/sex will impact the tempo of relationship transitions or the length of relationship, but little is known about the subject so it will be explored. Family structure is similarly unstudied and therefore will be explored through the current study, though it is hypothesized that individuals who experienced more family transitions may be more likely to make quick relationship transitions. The engagement status of the participant is not expected to make a difference on the timing of relationship transitions, nor on

the length of the cohabiting relationship.

**Hypothesis 2a: Tempo of relationship transitions predicts relationship quality.** A quick tempo through relationship transitions is likely to lead to lower relationship quality, whereas a slower progression through relationship transitions is likely to lead to higher relationship quality.

**Hypothesis 2b: Length of relationship predicts relationship quality.** It is expected that couples who have been together longer will report lower relationship quality than couples who have not been together long.

**Hypothesis 3a: Tempo of relationship transitions predicts level of commitment.** Individuals with quick relationship transitions are likely to report low levels of dedication and relationship confidence in comparison to individuals with more gradual relationship transitions, who are likely to report greater amounts of dedication and relationship confidence. Individuals with quick relationship transitions are likely to report higher levels of constraint commitment than individuals with more gradual relationship transitions.

**Hypothesis 3b: Length of relationship predicts level of commitment.** Individuals reporting a brief relationship prior to moving in together are likely to have lower levels of dedication, confidence, and constraint commitment. Individuals reporting a longer relationship prior to moving in together are likely to have higher levels of dedication, confidence, and constraint commitment.

**Hypothesis 4: Commitment is associated with relationship quality.** Levels of constraint commitment will be negatively correlated with relationship quality, meaning that greater amounts of constraint commitment will be associated with lower levels of relationship quality. The relationship between relationship quality, dedication, and relationship confidence

will be strongly correlated with one another. Dedication commitment and relationship confidence will be positively correlated with relationship quality, meaning that greater amounts of dedication and confidence will be associated with greater relationship quality.

## Chapter Four

### Method

#### Participants

Based on a power analysis, the target sample size was 250-300 emerging adults (defined as between the ages of 18 and 25 years) who were cohabiting with a significant other of the opposite gender. Participants for the current study were recruited through two possible locations, specifically online and in the surrounding community. The study advertisements were posted on Mechanical Turk through Amazon.com, where participants were offered a small incentive to participate (i.e., \$1.00 for completion of the study). Mechanical Turk is a service designed to obtain feedback in the form of a Human Intelligence Task (HIT), and after completion participants receive a small incentive. In addition, participants were recruited via postings in the community containing a link to the survey and notice that participation can enter them into a drawing for one of three \$25 gift cards in various community areas (see Appendix A). The participants were informed that the survey would take about 45 minutes to complete and would not lead to significant distress or disruption of their daily lives. Participation was anonymous.

A total of 116 participants were recruited. Participants' ages ranged from 18-25 years ( $M = 22.60$ ,  $SD = 1.80$ ) and their partner's ages ranged from 19-40 years ( $M = 24.01$ ,  $SD = 3.52$ ). The majority of participants were female (75.86%), not currently engaged to their partner (81.03%), and White (89.65%). Seven participants (6.00%) reported low family of origin incomes (defined as less than \$24,999), 45 (38.80%) reported middle family incomes (defined as ranging from \$25,000 - \$74,999), and 53 (45.70%) participants reported high family incomes (defined as more than \$75,000). In contrast, 36 (31.00%) participants reported low current household incomes, 47 (40.50%) reported middle family incomes, and 14 (12.10%) reported

high family incomes. For a full breakdown of descriptive statistics of all study variables, please refer to Table 1.

A total of 35 participants were recruited from Mechanical Turk and their ages ranged from 18-25 ( $M = 22.97$ ,  $SD = 1.58$ ) and were more evenly split between males (51.4%) and females than the overall sample. The majority of participants were White (74.3%) and most came from middle income families (48.6%). They were also most likely to currently have middle income (48.5%) as compared to a low income (25.7%) or high income (17.1%). In comparison, 81 participants were recruited through the community and their ages ranged from 18-25 ( $M = 21.92$ ,  $SD = 1.76$ ). Participants were mostly female (88.4%) and White (96.5%) from families with high incomes (55.4%). Participants were most likely to currently report an income in the middle income bracket (45.4%) as compared to the low income bracket (42.5%) or the high bracket (12.1%).

## **Procedures**

Upon receiving approval from West Virginia University's Institutional Review Board the survey was posted online using Qualtrics with advertisements in Amazon's Mechanical Turk and around the community. The links were active for approximately two weeks.

Once participants navigated to the link to start the survey, they were taken to the cover letter. The cover letter contained a brief description of the study as well as assurance that their participation was voluntarily and that they could choose to stop participating at any time without penalty. Participants could answer "yes," indicating their consent, or "no," which took them to the end of the survey (see Appendix B). They were then screened to determine if they qualified for the study (i.e., they were between the ages of 18 and 25 years and currently lived with a significant romantic partner to whom they were not married); those who qualified continued to

the survey (Appendix C). Participants answered demographic information for themselves and their significant others. Participants provided additional information about their relationship history and responded to questions about their reasons for cohabitation, three commitment questionnaires, and relationship quality questionnaires. At the end of the community sample only, participants were directed to a separate anonymous survey where they could input their email address and name for the gift card drawing. These participants were reassured that this information would be kept completely separate from their responses (Appendix D).

## **Measures**

**Demographics.** Participants provided information regarding their sex, race/ethnicity, age, region of residence (e.g., urban, suburban, or rural), family of origin's SES, and current individual level SES. Because the majority of participants were white, all other races were collapsed into one non-white category. Participants education attainment was assessed through a question asking for their highest level of completed education (e.g., some high school; HS diploma or equivalent; associates or trade school; some college; bachelor's; post-graduate degree). Work experience was measured through questions asking if participants were currently working (e.g., not employed outside of the home; unemployed; employed part-time; employed full-time; employed in multiple jobs). Participants also answered these questions for their significant others (see Appendix E).

**Family history.** Information regarding the structure of participants' family of origin and whether or not they experienced any changes in the family structure was assessed. If participants' reported changes to their family of origins' structure, additional information regarding their age when the changes occurred was assessed. Example questions include, "Are your biological parents still married or in a relationship?", "If no, how old were you when your

biological parents divorced/separated/broke up?”, “Are either of your biological parents remarried?”, “If yes, mom, dad, or both?”, and “If yes, how old were you when they remarried?” This information was recoded into a family history scale wherein participants received a point for each transition they experienced, with a possible range of 0 (*no changes to the family structure*) to 3 (*three changes to the family structure*). Thus, if their parents were still together or if one parent had passed away, participants received zero points. If the parents had separated, participants received one point. If either the mother or father of the participant had remarried, the participants received an additional point and if both remarried, the participant received two points. Furthermore, participants also reported on their own cohabitation experience (e.g., whether or not this is their first cohabiting union) and that of their partner (see Appendix E).

**Tempo/length of relationship.** Participants were asked about the length of their relationship, the tempo of their relationship progression, their engagement status, and if they were engaged prior to cohabitation or not (see Appendix F). Example questions regarding the length of the relationship are, “When did you and your current partner start dating (i.e., spending time with one another in a romantic context)?” and “When did you and your current partner start living together?” which was answered in month/year format. These two questions were used to determine how long couples dated prior to cohabiting as described by Sassler and colleagues (2010). These results were recoded so that the total number of months participants were dating became the total length of relationship variable. The length of the cohabiting relationship variable was developed by subtracting the present month/year (04/14) from the participant’s answer. The relationship length prior to cohabitation variable was then developed from subtracting the length of the cohabiting relationship from the total length of relationship variable.

One example question regarding the tempo of relationship progression is “How long did

you and your partner date prior to having sexual intercourse (i.e. penile/vaginal intercourse) for the first time?” with answers ranging from 1 (*less than a week*) to 6 (*1 year or more*) based on the Marital and Relationship Survey (MARS; see Lichter & Carmalt, 2009). Participants were also asked two questions about how quickly they engaged in oral and anal sex respectively. For analyses, the question regarding anal sex was not included in the scale due to the fact that 74 participants reported having never engaged in anal sex, which reduced the internal consistency of the score (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .68$ ). Thus, the final tempo scale included the questions about penile/vaginal intercourse and oral sex and showed high internal consistency (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .87$ ).

The participant was also asked to indicate whether he or she was engaged to be married, and if the answer was yes, the participant was asked when the engagement occurred in the relationship in month/year format.

**Commitment: Constraint commitment.** Constraint commitment was measured using the Joint Activities Checklist (JAC) developed by Rhoades and colleagues (2012; see Appendix G). The measure was developed to provide objective information about factors that might keep a couple together rather than asking individuals about their perceptions. The checklist includes 25 items that measure external constraints, such as having a joint bank account, signing a lease, sharing car payments, or having a pet together. Participants were asked to check what applied to them, 1 (*yes*) and 2 (*no*). The sum total of the activities was added together with higher numbers indicating more constraints. It is measured as a sum total of scores (ranging from 0 to 25) with example items such as “Our names are on a lease together” and “We bought a car together.” In the current study, the JAC showed high internal consistency (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .82$ ).

**Dedication commitment.** The Commitment Inventory was developed by Stanley and



Markman (1992) and includes a 36-item dedication subscale. The dedication subscale is widely utilized and has demonstrated validity and internal consistency across a variety of samples ( $\alpha = .86$ ; Rhoades et al., 2012; Stanley & Markman, 1992; see Appendix H). Example items include “My relationship with my partner is more important to me than almost anything else in my life” and “I like to think of my partner and me more in terms of ‘us’ and ‘we’ than ‘me’ and ‘him/her.’” The items were designed to broadly measure dedication using a Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The subscale was scored by averaging the responses, with some responses needing to be reverse coded. Higher scores indicate greater levels of dedication commitment. In the current study, the dedication subscale showed high reliability (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .91$ ).

**Relationship confidence.** Relationship confidence was measured using the Confidence Scale developed by Stanley, Hoyer, and Trathen (1994; see Appendix I). The measure includes ten items that participants rated their level of agreement with using a seven point Likert-type scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Example items include “I feel good about our prospects to make this relationship work for a lifetime,” and “We can handle just about anything that comes our way.” In other samples, the measure has been shown to have high internal consistency and construct validity over time ( $\alpha$ ’s = .72 to .85; Kline et al., 2004; Whitton et al., 2007). Scores are summed and can range from 10 to 70, with higher scores indicating greater levels of confidence in the relationship. In the current study, the confidence scale showed very high reliability (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .94$ ).

**Relationship quality.** The shortened, seven item Dyadic Adjustment Scale was used to measure relationship quality and has been shown to have high reliability and validity ( $\alpha = .82$ ; Hunsley, Pinsent, Lefebvre, James-Tanner, & Vito, 1995; Sharpley & Rogers, 1984; Spanier,

1976; see Appendix J). The measure assesses the level of agreement of a couple on “philosophy of life”, “amount of time spent together”, and “aims, goals, and things believed important.” The level of agreement is assessed using a 6-point Likert-type scale for three of the items with 0 (*always disagree*) to 5 (*always agree*). An additional three items utilize a 6-point Likert scale to assess from 0 (*never*) to 5 (*more often*) regarding how often something occurs between the couple, such as “have a stimulating exchange of ideas”. One item is rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale with 0 (*extremely unhappy*) to 6 (*perfect*), which assesses participants’ degrees of happiness in their relationships. Scores were summed with answers ranging from 7 to 43, with higher scores indicating greater relationship satisfaction. In the current study, the DAS showed moderate reliability (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .66$ ).

### **Data Analysis Plan**

Data were downloaded from Qualtrics from each of the two surveys and then merged into one file in SPSS. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach’s alphas for the three commitment measures and the relationship quality measure.

**Hypothesis 1: Demographics predict tempo of relationship transitions and the length of relationship.** In order to examine associations between the demographic factors (i.e., SES, educational attainment, race/ethnicity, gender, family structure, and engaged or not) and the tempo of relationship transitions and the length of relationship, t-tests, ANOVAs, and correlations were conducted.

**Hypothesis 2: Tempo of relationship transitions and the length of relationship predict relationship quality.** Bivariate correlations were conducted to examine the associations between the tempo of relationship transitions and the length of relationship on relationship quality.

**Hypothesis 3: Tempo of relationship transitions and the length of relationship predicts level of commitment.** Bivariate correlations were conducted to test the associations between the tempo of relationship transitions and the length of relationship on commitment levels (i.e., dedication, confidence, and constraint). It was expected that quick tempo of relationship transitions will be associated with lower levels of relationship confidence and dedication and higher levels of constraint commitment. A slower tempo of relationship transitions was expected to be associated with higher levels of relationship confidence and dedication and lower levels of constraint commitment. Additionally, it was anticipated that longer relationships will be linked to higher levels of relationship confidence, dedication, and constraint commitment while shorter relationships will be linked to lower levels of relationship confidence, dedication, and constraint commitment.

**Hypothesis 4: Commitment is associated with relationship quality.** Hypothesis 4 was tested utilizing bivariate correlations to determine the association between the three types of commitment and relationship quality. It was expected that constraint commitment would be associated with lower levels of relationship quality, while dedication and relationship confidence would be associated with higher levels of relationship quality.

## Chapter 5

### Results

#### Preliminary Analyses

Bivariate correlations were conducted to explore the associations between demographic variables (i.e., family SES, current SES, educational attainment, and family history) and the tempo and length of relationship variables (see Table 2 for the full correlation matrix). The expectation was that individuals reporting a low SES background would move more quickly through relationship transitions and have shorter relationships than individuals from high SES backgrounds. Results indicated a positive significant association between family SES and the length of relationship before moving in together,  $r(100) = .20, p = .04$ . In other words, as family SES increased so did the amount of time a couple was together prior to moving in with one another. No other significant associations were revealed between family SES and tempo or length of relationship variables. Furthermore, current SES was not significantly correlated with any tempo or length of relationship variable, indicating no significant difference in means.

It was expected that as education level increased, so to would the amount of time before making relationship transitions and the length of the relationship. There was a significant positive association between educational attainment and overall relationship length,  $r(113) = .23, p = .02$ , meaning that as participants' levels of education increased so did the amount of time that participants had been in their relationships. Additionally, there was a significant positive association between educational attainment and the length of relationship prior to cohabiting,  $r(108) = .24, p = .01$ . There was not a significant association revealed between educational attainment and tempo or length of cohabitation. Finally, no significant association was revealed between family history and relationship tempo or relationship length variables, meaning that

there is not a significant link between the variables.

**Hypothesis 1: Demographics predict tempo of relationship transitions and the length of relationship.**

The first aim of the current study was to examine the relationship between demographic variables (i.e., SES, educational attainment, race/ethnicity, gender/sex, family history, and engagement status) and the tempo of relationship transitions and the length of the relationship.

**SES.** It was expected that individuals from a lower SES background would move more quickly through relationship transitions and were likely to be involved in shorter relationships than individuals from higher SES backgrounds. The association between SES and tempo of relationship progression was tested using bivariate correlations (discussed above; for the full correlation matrix see Table 2) and two ANOVAs (see Table 3 for means for current SES and Table 4 for means for family SES). No significant associations existed between the current or family SES of the participant and the tempo of relationship progression. Furthermore, no significant associations existed between either the current or family SES of the participant and the length of relationship variables. This indicates that there were no significant differences between average tempo of relationship transitions or average length of relationship variables based on either current or family level SES.

**Educational attainment.** It was expected that higher levels of educational attainment would result in a slower pace of the relationship and longer relationships overall. The associations between educational attainment, tempo of relationship progression, and length of relationship variables were tested using four ANOVAs (see Table 5 for means) and a bivariate correlation (discussed above; for the full correlation matrix see Table 2). The ANOVAs revealed significant differences across groups regarding the tempo of relationship transitions,  $F(4, 108) =$

2.69,  $p = .035$ . In a follow up LSD post hoc test (see Table 5 for means and standard deviations) significant differences between groups were revealed. Participants with a high school degree generally transitioned more slowly through relationships than did participants with some college experience and individuals who possessed a bachelors degree or graduate/professional degree. There was not a significant link between the length of relationship variables and educational attainment revealed through the ANOVAs.

**Race/ethnicity.** There were no prior assumptions regarding the association between race and the tempo of relationship progressions or length of relationship variables. These relationships were tested using independent samples t-tests (see Table 6 for means). Results indicated no significant differences between white and non-white participants' mean scores for either tempo of relationship transitions or the length of the relationship.

**Gender/sex.** It was expected that males and females would be similar in their reported tempo of relationship progression and their reported length of the relationship. Independent samples t-tests were conducted to test the link between sex, the tempo of relationship progression, and the length of the relationship (see Table 7 for means). As expected, there were no significant results revealed to suggest an association between sex and the tempo of relationship progression or the length of the relationship.

**Family history.** It was hypothesized that individuals who experienced a greater number of family transitions would be more likely to make quick relationship transitions, but no specific hypothesis was in place regarding the link between family transitions and the length of relationship. ANOVAs (see Table 8 for means) were conducted to explore the associations between family history, the tempo of relationship progression, and the length of relationship. No significant results were found in the ANOVAs, meaning that the average scores across differing

amounts of family transitions were not significantly different.

**Engagement status.** No difference between the average tempo of relationship transitions or in the length of relationships participants reported was expected based on either their current engagement status or if they were engaged prior to cohabitation. The association between current engagement status and the tempo of relationship progression and the length of relationship variables were tested using independent samples t-tests (see Table 9 for means). Being currently engaged to one's partner did not have an impact on the tempo of relationship in the independent t-test. Results from the independent t-test did indicate a significant relationship between being currently engaged and the overall length of the relationship,  $t(111) = 3.50, p = .001$ , meaning that participants who were currently engaged reported longer dating relationships than participants who were not currently engaged. Results also indicated a significant relationship between being currently engaged and the amount of time a couple dated prior to cohabiting,  $t(106) = 2.56, p = .012$ , meaning that participants who were currently engaged reported significantly longer relationships prior to cohabiting than couples who were not currently engaged.

The association between being engaged prior to cohabitation, the tempo of relationship progression, and length of relationship variables were also tested using independent t-tests (see Table 10 for means). Being engaged prior to cohabitation was not significantly related to the tempo of relationship transitions meaning that the mean scores for tempo of relationship transitions was not significantly different between groups. Results from the independent t-tests comparing couples who were engaged prior to the start of the cohabitation period to couples who were not engaged prior to cohabitation in terms of length of the relationship revealed significant differences. Results suggested that engagement status prior to cohabitation was significant for how long a couples dated prior to moving in together,  $t(106) = -2.42, p = .017$ . This suggested

that couples who were engaged prior to cohabitation were together for a longer amount of time before cohabiting than couples who were together for a shorter period of time.

### **Hypothesis 2a: Tempo of Relationship Transitions Predicts Relationship Quality**

It was expected that a quick progression through relationship transitions would lead to lower quality relationships. A bivariate correlation was used to test this hypothesis (for the full correlation matrix see Table 2). There was a significant positive correlation between the tempo of relationship transitions and relationship quality,  $r(113) = .24, p = .01$ . Consistent with the hypothesis, slower paced relationships were linked to greater relationship satisfaction.

### **Hypothesis 2b: Length of Relationship Predicts Relationship Quality**

Hypothesis 2b stated that couples who have longer relationships would report lower relationship quality than couples with shorter relationships. This association was tested through bivariate correlations (for the full correlation matrix see Table 2). There were a significant positive association between the overall length of the relationship and relationship quality,  $r(113) = .19, p = .05$ , suggesting that the longer participants reported being in their current relationship, the greater their reported relationship quality. There were no significant associations between participants' length of relationship prior to cohabiting or the length of the cohabiting relationship and relationship quality.

### **Hypothesis 3a: Tempo of Relationship Transitions Predicts Levels of Commitment**

It was expected that individuals with quick relationship transitions would report lower amounts of dedication and confidence and that individuals with more moderate or slower transitions would report greater amounts of dedication and relationship confidence. This hypothesis was tested using bivariate correlations (for the full correlation matrix see Table 2). There were no significant associations between the tempo of relationship transitions and



dedication or constraint commitment. However, there was a significant positive association between the tempo of relationship transitions and relationship confidence,  $r(113) = .20, p = .03$ . This suggests that slower relationship transitions are linked to greater confidence in relationships, while moving quickly through relationship transitions is linked to lower confidence in relationships.

### **Hypothesis 3b: Length of Relationship Predicts Level of Commitment**

It was hypothesized that participants reporting moving in together fairly quickly would be likely to have greater levels of constraint commitment and lower levels of dedication and confidence. To test this hypothesis a bivariate correlation was ran to test length of relationship variables against levels of commitment (for the full correlation matrix see Table 2). There were no significant associations between the total length of the relationship and levels of dedication commitment or relationship confidence. However, there was a significant, positive association between the total length of a relationship and constraint commitment,  $r(113) = .45, p > .001$ , suggesting that the longer a couple is together, the greater amount of constraints on their relationship. There were no significant associations between the length of the relationship prior to cohabitation and any of the commitment variables. There were also no significant associations between the length of the cohabiting relationship and either dedication commitment or relationship confidence. However, there was a significant, positive correlation between the length of the cohabiting relationship and constraint commitment,  $r(109) = .57, p > .001$ . This suggests that the longer the couple had been cohabiting the more constraints there were on their relationship.

### **Hypothesis 4: Commitment is Associated with Relationship Quality**

It was hypothesized that levels of constraint commitment would be negatively correlated

with relationship quality, in other words that greater constraints would result in lower relationship quality. This was tested using a bivariate correlation between constraint commitment and relationship quality (for the full correlation matrix see Table 2) where the opposite was found. There was a strong positive significant relationship between constraint commitment and relationship quality,  $r(114) = .26, p = .01$ , suggesting that couples with greater constraints actually have greater relationship quality. It was also hypothesized that constraint commitment would be negatively correlated with dedication and confidence, but in fact, it was found to be positively associated with both dedication,  $r(114) = .27, p > .01$  and confidence,  $r(114) = .24, p = .01$ . These results suggest that as levels of constraint commitment increase, so do levels of dedication and confidence in the relationship. Furthermore, it was hypothesized that dedication, relationship confidence, and relationship quality would all be highly correlated, which was supported. The association between dedication and relationship quality was significant,  $r(114) = .458, p > .001$ , as was the association between relationship confidence and relationship quality,  $r(114) = .581, p > .001$ . These results indicate that as levels of dedication and confidence increase, so do levels of relationship quality.

### **Summary**

The four hypotheses explored in the current study were not fully supported. Many of the demographic factors examined in the first hypothesis were not significantly related to tempo of relationship transitions or the length of relationship variables. The exceptions to this were for the negative correlation between educational attainment and tempo of relationship transitions, the positive correlation between educational attainment and family level SES and the length of relationship, and current engagement status with the length of relationship. Results from hypothesis two indicated a positive association between tempo of relationship transitions and

relationship quality and a positive correlation between overall length of relationship and relationship quality. Hypothesis three indicated a positive correlation between tempo of relationship transitions and relationship confidence and length of relationship variables and constraint commitment. Lastly, hypothesis four indicated strong, positive correlations between all four variables, the three dimensions of commitment and relationship quality. The following section explains the results of the study and provides possible explanations for why the support of the hypotheses was mixed.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Discussion**

The current study made some initial strides toward understanding how cohabitation operates in emerging adulthood, an age group that has not been specifically examined despite research indicating that it is a unique stage of life with characteristics that are very different from adulthood (Arnett, 2004). Furthermore, unlike much of the research that has been conducted on cohabitation, the current study looked at cohabiters specifically, rather than comparing them to married or even dating couples. It is important to understand cohabitation as a unique relationship form because of its growing prevalence in the United States (Cherlin, 2010). Previous literature has indicated that cohabitation, regardless of age, is linked to lower quality relationships and lower commitment to those relationships (Jose et al., 2010, Kline et al., 2004; Manning & Cohen, 2012; Rhoades et al., 2009b; Tach & Halpern-Meehin, 2009). However, little research has been conducted on cohabitation in emerging adulthood specifically, but this study made considerable strides toward providing a basic understanding of some dynamics of cohabiting in emerging adulthood.

One of the main goals of the study was to expand upon contemporary research about cohabitation in emerging adulthood and to explore associations between demographic characteristics, the tempo of relationship transitions, length of relationship, relationship quality, and levels of commitment. Overall, results did not indicate many links between demographic factors and the tempo of relationship transitions or length of relationships. There were significant associations between tempo of relationship transitions and educational attainment and family level SES, educational attainment, and engagement status and length of relationship variables. Furthermore, tempo and length of relationship were somewhat associated with relationship

quality and constraint commitment, but not with dedication commitment or relationship confidence. Additionally, results indicated strong associations between relationship quality and levels of commitment. Presented below are the hypotheses with interpretations and possible explanations to account for both the significant and nonsignificant findings.

### **Hypothesis 1: Demographic Characteristics Predict the Tempo of Relationship Transitions and the Length of the Relationship**

**Tempo of relationship transitions.** Educational attainment was the only demographic variable found to be significantly associated with the tempo of relationship transitions, despite expectations that participants from lower SES families and participants who experienced more changes to their family structure would report quicker relationship transitions than participants from higher SES families and participants with fewer changes to their family structure. Furthermore, no significant associations existed between race/ethnicity, gender/sex, or engagement status. It is possible that the sample size was simply too low to detect significant results for many of the demographic variables, but it might also suggest that the measure for tempo of relationship transitions did not adequately identify important relationship milestones that these demographic variables may influence. However, prior research has linked the tempo of sexual transitions to poor relationship outcomes, suggesting that this tempo of relationship transitions variable is still an important one to consider (Sassler, 2010; Stanley et al., 2006).

In regards to educational attainment, results indicated that the higher the individual's level of educational attainment, the quicker they engaged in sexual intercourse, though individuals with associate's degrees were not significantly different in their tempo of transitions than high school graduates. It is possible that individuals with associate's degrees are more similar to individuals with high school diplomas based on other demographic characteristics or in

their values. Alternatively, it could be that the uneven group sizes led to the nonsignificant finding between associate degree holders and the other levels of educational attainment. These findings contradict what prior literature has suggested, that individuals with low levels educational attainment are more likely to engage in early sexual activity than are individuals reporting higher levels of educational attainment (Amato et al., 2008; Kerckhoff, 1976). Perhaps a possible explanation for this might be the influence of the college hookup culture and the prevalence of sexual messages in the media, which have resulted in more casual attitudes toward sexual activity in emerging adults (Garcia, Reiber, Massey, & Merriwether, 2012). However, given the disagreement between expectations and the results of the current study, future research should continue to examine the tempo of sexual transitions in relationships based on educational attainment.

**Length of relationship.** It was anticipated that individuals from lower SES backgrounds and with lower educational attainment would move in together more quickly than individuals from higher SES backgrounds and with higher educational attainment (Sassler & Miller, 2010). This expectation was supported for both demographic variables, with results indicating that individuals from families of higher SES and who themselves had greater educational attainment were more likely to date for a longer period of time prior to cohabitation than individuals from families of lower SES and individuals with lower educational attainment. Considering the correlation between educational attainment and family level SES, the fact that both of these variables were associated with how long a couple dates before moving in together is not surprising and is in line with previous literature (Sassler et al., 2010; Sassler & McNally, 2003; Sassler & Miller, 2011).

Educational attainment was also linked to the overall length of the relationship. Perhaps

this is due to the fact that individuals with low educational attainment may have married or ended their cohabiting relationships, which would disqualify them from participation in this study. Copen and colleagues (2013) reported that most cohabiting relationships either transition to marriage or dissolve within three years. Individuals striving to earn bachelor's degrees or graduate/professional degrees are typically likely to postpone marriage for longer periods of time than individuals with lower educational attainment (Cherlin, 2010). Thus, individuals with a higher educational attainment may date or cohabit for longer periods of time until they have earned their degrees or established their careers rather than marry or break up. Educational attainment was not the only significant variable found in the current study; rather engagement status was also a significant variable.

Currently engaged couples were more likely to have longer relationships overall and longer cohabiting relationships. Being engaged prior to cohabiting was associated with a longer relationship prior to moving in together. No prior literature suggested a link between engagement status and length of relationship or tempo of relationship transitions, so these results were unexpected and novel. Only six couples reported being engaged prior to cohabitation out of the twenty couples in all who reported being currently engaged. Perhaps the 14 additional couples who became engaged after cohabiting did so because of they had increased amounts of constraint commitment, which may have encouraged them to slide into marriage following the path of least resistance (Stanley et al., 2006). This explanation would support the inertia theory, but perhaps qualitative research delving into the process of becoming engaged would be beneficial to help explain how constraints are perceived to fit into the process of becoming engaged.

### **Hypothesis 2: Tempo and Length of Relationship Associated with Relationship Quality**

Previous literature suggested that moving quickly through relationship transitions was

likely to be associated with lower relationship quality (Sassler et al., 2010). Results from the current study support these assertions, with results indicating a significant correlation between relationship tempo and relationship quality. These results are consistent with the inertia theory (Rhoades et al., 2009b; Sassler et al., 2010; Stanley et al., 2006) and also suggest that, in emerging adulthood where attitudes toward sexual activity may be more liberal, dating for longer periods of time prior to engaging in sexual activity is still associated with better relationship quality (Garcia et al., 2012). Perhaps future research could focus on qualitative research to determine whether communication about these transitions would provide an explanation for this association (Rhoades et al., 2009b; Stanley et al., 2006). Additional quantitative research could also be conducted to further explore this association between variables. Regardless, it seems clear that advocating for a slower pace of sexual transitions would be advantageous due to the association with higher relationship quality.

Only the overall length of relationship was significantly correlated with relationship quality, an association suggesting that the longer a relationship, the higher the level of reported relationship quality. This is in contrast to literature suggesting that individuals in longer relationships tend to report lower levels of relationship quality (Brown & Booth, 1996). Perhaps this contrast is a result of participants in this study having an average relationship length of 2.64 years, which may not be long enough to see relationship quality decrease or perhaps today longer relationships truly are related to greater relationship quality. More research should be conducted to see if these results are replicated.

### **Hypothesis 3: Tempo and Length of Relationship Associated with Commitment**

Tempo and length of relationship variables were differentially associated with levels of commitment. Prior literature suggested that couples who quickly engage in sex may be at risk for



lower levels of dedication commitment and relationship confidence and increased levels of constraint commitment (Sassler et al., 2010; Stanley et al., 2006). This hypothesis was partially supported, in that participants reporting slower relationship transitions also reported greater relationship confidence, but no such association was evident for dedication or constraint commitment. It is interesting that the tempo of relationship progression would be linked to only relationship confidence and not dedication commitment. Perhaps couples who move slowly through relationship markers take more time to consider the ultimate goal of their relationships, which could lead to greater confidence in the future of the relationships. Furthermore, it is possible that relationship confidence may be linked to the tempo of sexual relationship transitions because couples are more likely to engage in sexual activity when they feel more committed and confident in their relationship, though the specific direction of this relationship has yet to be explored (Kaestle & Halpern, 2007). Dedication may not be impacted by how quickly a couple makes sexual relationship transitions, but rather may be more heavily impacted by other relationship markers such as saying “I love you” or establishing exclusivity (Metts, 2004). The lack of a link between constraint commitment and the tempo of relationship transitions is perhaps due to the lack of participants in the study reporting having children with their current partner, one of the most common constraints to emerge specifically from how quickly a couple engages in sexual intercourse (Sassler et al., 2010; Stanley et al., 2006).

Prior literature suggested that individuals who were together for a brief period of time prior to moving in together would have greater levels of constraint commitment and would have lower levels of dedication and confidence than individuals who were together longer (Stanley et al., 2006). The total length of the participants’ relationships was significantly correlated with constraint commitment, suggesting that couples who have been together for longer periods of

time may entwine their lives and take on more constraints than couples who have not been together as long. This is understandable considering that over time, couples are more likely to begin to tie together their finances and to make purchases that will benefit both partners (Stanley et al., 2006). The lack of a correlation between the length of relationship prior to cohabitation and constraint commitment is surprising, but perhaps participants had reasons for cohabiting unrelated to constraints (i.e., no pregnancy or financial difficulties). The fact that slower tempo of relationship transitions are associated with greater levels of commitment does indicate support for the inertia theory, which is further supported by the association between the length of relationship variables and constraint commitment.

#### **Hypothesis 4: Commitment is Associated with Relationship Quality**

Hypothesis four was designed to examine the association between relationship quality and commitment to build upon hypotheses two and three. Prior literature suggested that looking at relationship quality while ignoring commitment leads to an inaccurate depiction of the cohabitation effect (Thompson & Coella, 1992). Thus, one of the aims of the current study was to tease out the associations between the three types of commitment (i.e., dedication, confidence, and constraint) to see which aspects of commitment are associated with relationship quality. It was expected that dedication commitment and relationship confidence would be positively correlated with relationship quality and that constraint commitment would be negatively correlated with relationship quality (Jose et al., 2010). Results revealed a significant positive association between all three types of commitment, as well as with all three types of commitment and relationship quality. The strong significant association between dedication and relationship confidence suggests that couples who have strong dedication to their relationships are very confident in the future of their relationships. Perhaps future research could look to examine how

these different types of commitment develop to see if one type of commitment develops first and the others build upon that or if they all develop concurrently. A longitudinal study examining this question would be hugely beneficial considering these results suggest that each type of commitment impacts relationship quality. Again though, further research should be conducted to determine if they are differentially associated with relationship quality or if they all act in the same manner. There was also a strong positive association between constraint commitment and relationship confidence and dedication, meaning that as any one type of commitment increases, so do the other two types. This goes against the expectation that constraint commitment would be negatively associated with relationship confidence and dedication (Stanley & Markman, 1992), but perhaps instead of constraints leading to resentment, they instead encourage the couple to develop a couple identity and look to the future of their relationship. Perhaps the entanglement of finances leads a couple to be more secure in their relationship because they trust that their partner will be there to support them in the future.

### **Future Directions & Limitations**

Like all research studies, the current study has its own set of limitations despite contributing to the literature on this subject. Perhaps the most significant limitation was that not enough participants were recruited to be confident that data analyses found all associations between variables that might exist. Future research should endeavor to recruit a larger amount of participants to reveal some of the more subtle differences in associations between demographic variables and the tempo and length of relationship variables. The power analysis conducted for this study suggested that recruiting approximately 300 participants would be advisable. Additionally, the breakdown of both SES and educational attainment were largely skewed towards a middle class upbringing and college education or higher, which limits generalizability

to middle class individuals with a college education who are cohabiting in emerging adulthood. Future research should therefore focus on recruiting more participants from a wider range of backgrounds, including racial and ethnic backgrounds to expand generalizability to a wider population. However, there is currently no research that indicates that racial and ethnic diversity would significantly impact the results of this study.

Results indicated that educational attainment seemed to be associated with the tempo of relationship transitions and the length of relationship variables. Perhaps educational attainment could be the main demographic variable that influences relational outcomes, especially in emerging adulthood. This hypothesis should be explored in future research to determine if the dynamics of cohabitation vary based on educational attainment (Cherlin, 2010). Given that there is research to suggest that the marriage market is already split based on educational level (Cherlin, 2010), this hypothesis would follow logically.

However, the current study provided valuable information that should be expanded upon, perhaps by incorporating reasons for cohabitation to determine what influence, if any, individuals' reasons for cohabitation may have on their relationship quality or levels of commitment. Furthermore, individuals' reasons for cohabitation could be linked to the tempo of relationship progression, which would be important to understand considering the significant association between tempo of relationship transitions and relationship quality. Along those lines, it would be beneficial to consider an expansion of the tempo of relationship progression into other important relationship milestones, perhaps along the lines of when a couple established exclusivity or said "I love you," (Metts, 2004). There is not much research along those lines, but it would provide important information to help establish how cohabiting relationships are likely to emerge.

Additionally, the Joint Activities Checklist (JAC; Rhoades et al., 2012) measured only external constraints. It is possible that in emerging adulthood, some of these external constraints may be unlikely to apply to participants. Perhaps a scale that also incorporated more internal constraints, such as perceived pressure to marry or stay in the relationship from friends or family or a lack of potential alternate partners, might be beneficial in future research.

Lastly, the family history scale used in this study is a good beginning to including this demographic variable into research regarding cohabitation, especially since parental divorce has been linked to the cohabitation effect as a part of the selection effect theory (Kline et al., 2004). However, it could be expanded to possibly incorporate the age of the child when these transitions occurred to determine if the age of the child impacts their later functioning. There is evidence to suggest the age of the child when the parents divorce heavily impacts the child's response to the divorce, which may in turn influence later cohabiting relationships (Willoughby & Jones, 2012). Additionally, participants in this study were only asked if their biological parents separated (through either a divorce or break up) from one another and then married another individual. It is possible that participants who experienced the remarriage of their parent(s) may have witnessed a divorce in the remarriage as well. Furthermore, it is possible that parents may have become involved in new relationships that were very influential, but did not marry these new partners, which would not have resulted in participants receiving a point for a family transition even though it would have been one for them. This was not tested in the current study, but it would make sense that this would increase their likelihood of devaluing marriage based on literature on the subject (Kline et al., 2004; Willoughby & Jones, 2012).

Despite the limitations on the study and the fact that much more research needs to be done, the current study provides valuable information regarding cohabiting relationships in

emerging adulthood. Participants from a wider range of backgrounds should be recruited in the future, as results from the current study are unlikely to generalize beyond white, middle class, college educated individuals. The current study does provide much more information on background demographic characteristics than prior literature, which should be continued in future research so as to further identify groups to whom this information is applicable and to become more confident in generalizing information regarding cohabitation.

### **Conclusions & Contributions**

The life course theory (Elder, 1998) was the framework that the current study was built upon, providing support for the notion that emerging adults provided a unique cohort to examine cohabitation within. Results from the study suggested that the examination of cohabitation in emerging adulthood is an important step in the literature because there are differences that appear between demographic factors and the tempo and length of relationship variables. Overall, the results do not appear to indicate any immediate significant disadvantages of cohabiting in emerging adulthood as the participants involved in the study generally reported high levels of dedication and relationship confidence and moderate levels of relationship quality.

Overall, the current study seems to support for the inertia theory, in that couples who moved quickly through sexual relationship transitions reported lower relationship quality. Although many of the participants in the current study did not report many constraints on their relationship, which suggests that cohabiting relationships in emerging adulthood may not be as likely to take on the full entwinement of lives as cohabiters in adulthood, the longer participants were involved in a relationship the more constraints they had on their relationship providing further support for the inertia theory. Furthermore, the longer couples were in a relationship, the more likely they were to be currently engaged following the idea that as constraints increase,

couples become more likely to slide into marriage (Stanley et al., 2006). On the other hand, the expectation that those constraints would be linked to lower relationship quality as expected based on the inertia theory was not supported. In contrast, the greater the levels of constraints participants reported, the higher their level of reported relationship quality.

In general, the selection effects theory received only partial support at best. There is a general expectation in the literature that individuals from lower SES and with lower educational attainment are more likely to be involved in unstable relationships, but there were no associations revealed between any demographic variables and relationship outcomes (i.e. relationship quality or levels of commitment). There were, however, associations between educational attainment and the tempo of relationship transitions, which is associated with relationship quality and relationship confidence.

More generally, the current study also advances the literature by showing an association between all types of commitment and relationship quality, suggesting the importance of separating out types of commitment as various factors interacted with them differently despite their strong associations. The fact that the three types of commitment and relationship quality are heavily correlated with one another is an interesting finding, considering that constraints are generally considered to be less positive than dedication commitment and relationship confidence. It is important that research continue to build upon the current study in order to better understand the dynamics of cohabitation in emerging adulthood.

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## Appendix A

### Flyer for Community Recruitment

**Are you currently living with a romantic partner?**

**Are you between the ages of 18 and 25?**

**If so... Please fill out the survey listed below!**

This research study is interested in relationship quality in romantic relationships. The study will take approximately 45 minutes to complete and you may enter to win one of three \$25 gift cards. Approval from WVU's IRB is on file. If there are any questions or concerns, please contact Jenica Hughes from the Department of Learning Sciences and Human Development at [jhughe17@mix.wvu.edu](mailto:jhughe17@mix.wvu.edu) or in 701 Allen Hall.

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## Appendix B

### Cover Letters

#### Community Cover Letter



Dear Participant,

This letter is a request for you to take part in a research project about the quality of romantic relationships. This project is being conducted by Jenica Hughes, a Masters student, in the Department of Technology, Learning and Culture, at West Virginia University, under supervision of Jessica Troilo and Kristin Moilanen.

Your participation in this project is greatly appreciated. In order to participate, you must be between 18 and 25 years of age and a resident of the United States, and currently involved in a romantic relationship. Your participation is completely voluntary, and it will take approximately 30 minutes to fill out web-based questionnaires regarding some personal information (i.e. your gender, education level, etc.) and information about your romantic relationship. Your involvement in this project will be entirely anonymous, and all data will be reported in the aggregate. You may skip any question that you do not wish to answer and you may discontinue at any time. Your relationship with the researchers and West Virginia University will not be adversely affected if you decide either not to participate or to withdraw. Upon completion of the survey, you will have the option of submitting your personal information for a chance to win one of three \$25 gift cards. Your personal information will be contained in a separate place from your answers with no way for the researchers to determine which answers are associated with the participant. West Virginia's University's Institutional Review Board acknowledgement of this project is on file.

I hope that you will participate in this research project, as it could be beneficial in understanding the quality of romantic relationships. Thank you very much for your time. Should you have any questions about this letter or the research project, please feel free to contact Jenica Hughes at (304) 767-1742 or by email at [jhughe17@mix.wvu.edu](mailto:jhughe17@mix.wvu.edu).

Thank you for your time and help with this project.

Sincerely,

Jenica D. Hughes

Kristin Moilanen

Jessica Troilo

## Mechanical Turk Cover Letter



Dear Participant,

This letter is a request for you to take part in a research project about the quality of romantic relationships. This project is being conducted by Jenica Hughes, a Masters student, in the Department of Technology, Learning and Culture, at West Virginia University, under supervision of Jessica Troilo and Kristin Moilanen.

Your participation in this project is greatly appreciated. In order to participate, you must be at least 18 years of age and a resident of the United States. Your participation is completely voluntary, and it will take approximately 30 minutes to fill out web-based questionnaires regarding some personal information (i.e. your gender, education level, etc.) and information about your romantic relationship. Your involvement in this project will be entirely anonymous, and all data will be reported in the aggregate. You may skip any question that you do not wish to answer and you may discontinue at any time. Your relationship with the researchers and West Virginia University will not be adversely affected if you decide either not to participate or to withdraw. You can earn \$0.05 credit on Amazon's Mechanical Turk for answering a participating in the study. An additional \$0.95 bonus is available if you qualify for the survey and answer at least 80% of the questions. Your relationship with the researchers and West Virginia University will not be adversely affected if you decide either not to participate or to withdraw. West Virginia's University's Institutional Review Board acknowledgement of this project is on file.

I hope that you will participate in this research project, as it could be beneficial in understanding the quality of romantic relationships. Thank you very much for your time. Should you have any questions about this letter or the research project, please feel free to contact Jenica Hughes at (304) 767-1742 or by email at [jhughe17@mix.wvu.edu](mailto:jhughe17@mix.wvu.edu).

Thank you for your time and help with this project.

Sincerely,

Jenica D. Hughes

Kristin Moilanen

Jessica Troilo

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Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Institution

## Appendix C

### Screener Questions

**1. What is your sex?**

- a. Male
- b. Female

**2. What is your age?**

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**3. What is your current relationship status?**

- a. Single, never married, not currently living with a romantic partner
- b. Single, never married, currently living with a romantic partner
- c. Married
- d. Separated
- e. Widowed
- f. Divorced

**4. What is your race? Check all that apply.**

- a. American Indian or Alaskan Native
  - b. Asian
  - c. Black or African American
  - d. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - e. White
  - f. Other, Please specify
- 

**5. Are you Hispanic/Latino?**

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Do not wish to answer

## Appendix D

### Registration for the Drawing

Thank you for completing this survey! If you would like to be entered to win one of three \$25.00 gift cards, please provide your email address and full name in the space provided. Please note that this information will be kept separate from your answers and your responses cannot be linked back to you. Winners will be contacted within a month of the survey closing. Thank you again for your participation.

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Full Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E

### Demographics

**1. What is the highest level of education you have completed?**

- a. Some high school
- b. High school diploma
- c. GED
- d. Associates or trade school degree
- e. Some college
- f. Bachelor's degree
- g. Graduate or Professional Degree

**2. What is your current marital status?**

- a. Single, never married
- b. Married
- c. Separated
- d. Divorced
- e. Widowed/Widowed
- f. Do not wish to answer

**3. What is your employment status? Are you...**

- a. Currently employed- full time
- b. Currently employed- part time
- c. Unemployed – looking for work
- d. Unemployed- not looking for work
- e. Not in labor force- retired or disabled
- f. In active military forces
- g. Other (please explain): \_\_\_\_\_
- h. Do not wish to answer

**4. Are you currently enrolled in college or university? If you are on “summer vacation” and will be in college/university this fall, please check “yes.”**

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Do not wish to answer

**5. You indicated that you are currently enrolled in college or university or will be enrolled this fall. What is your current year in school (or will be your current year in school, as of this fall)?**

- a. First year (“freshman”)
- b. Second year (“sophomore”)
- c. Third year (“junior”)
- d. Fourth year (“senior”)
- e. Other (please specify)

\_\_\_\_\_

f. Do not wish to answer

**6. Are you a full-time or part-time student?**

- a. Full-time
- b. Part-time

c. Another type of student (please explain):

\_\_\_\_\_

d. Do not wish to answer

**7. Are you a first-generation college student?**

- a. Yes – Neither of my parents went to college/university
- b. No – One or both of my parents went to college/university
- c. Do not wish to answer

**8. What type of college or university do you attend?**

- a. Technical or vocational training college
- b. Two-year college, junior college, or community college
- c. Four-year public university or college
- d. Four-year private university or college
- e. Other type of college or university (please explain)

\_\_\_\_\_

f. Do not wish to answer

**9. What is the highest grade or year of REGULAR school that you would LIKE to complete?**

- a. Less than high school
- b. High school diploma/GED
- c. Some college
- d. 2-year college degree
- e. 4-year college degree
- f. Masters degree
- g. Doctoral degree
- h. Professional degree (JD, MD)

**10. What area are you from?**

- a. Urban
- b. Suburban
- c. Rural

**11. What is your zip code?**

\_\_\_\_\_

**12. What is your current individual income?**

- a. Less than \$11,999
- b. \$12,000 to \$15,999
- c. \$16,000 to \$24,999
- d. \$25,000 to \$34,999
- e. \$35,000 to \$49,999
- f. \$50,000 to \$74,999
- g. \$75,000 to \$99,999
- h. \$100,000 or more
- i. Don't know

**13. Growing up, what was your parents' household income?**

- a. Less than \$11,999
- b. \$12,000 to \$15,999
- c. \$16,000 to \$24,999
- d. \$25,000 to \$34,999

- e. \$35,000 to \$49,999
- f. \$50,000 to \$74,999
- g. \$75,000 to \$99,999
- h. \$100,000 or more
- i. Don't know

**14. What is your partner's sex?**

- a. Male
- b. Female

**15. What is your partner's age? Leave this space blank if you do not know or do not wish to respond.**

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**16. Is your partner a Hispanic/Latino?**

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Don't know/Do not wish to respond

**17. What is your partner's race? Check all that apply.**

- a. American Indian or Alaskan Native
- b. Asian
- c. Black or African American
- d. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- e. White
- f. Other, Please specify

- 
- g. Do not know/Do not wish to respond

**18. What is the highest level of education your partner has completed?**

- a. Some high school
- b. High school diploma or equivalent
- c. Associates or trade school degree
- d. Some college
- e. Bachelor's degree
- f. Post-graduate degree
- g. Do not know/Do not wish to respond

**19. What is your partner's employment status?**

- a. Not employed outside of the home
- b. Unemployed
- c. Employed part-time
- d. Employed full-time
- e. Employed in multiple jobs

**20. Are your biological parents still married or in a relationship?**

- a. Yes (If yes, skip to question 25)
- b. No
- c. No, due to the death of one parent (Skip to question 22)

**21. If no, how old were you (in years) when they divorced/separated/broke up?**

---

**22. Are either of your biological parents remarried?**

- a. Yes

b. No (If no, skip to question 25)

**23. If yes, your mother, father, or both?**

- a. Mother
- b. Father
- c. Both

**24. If you answered yes to question 19, how old were you (in years) when your parent(s) remarried?**

\_\_\_\_\_

**25. What is your current partner's marital status?**

- a. Single, never married
- b. Married
- c. Separated
- d. Divorced
- e. Widowed/Widowed
- f. Do not wish to answer

**26. Is this your first cohabiting relationship (i.e. the first time you have lived with a romantic partner)?**

- a. Yes
- b. No

**27. Is this your current partner's first cohabiting relationship (i.e. the first time they have lived with a romantic partner)?**

- a. Yes
- b. No

**28. What do you think is the best age, if any, for you to get married?**

\_\_\_\_\_ years

**29. What is the youngest age you can imagine yourself getting married?**

\_\_\_\_\_ years



## Appendix F

### Length of Relationship

1. When did you and your current partner start dating (i.e. spending time with one another in a romantic context)? Please answer in month/year format. If you do not remember the exact month, estimate to the best of your ability.

\_\_\_\_\_

2. When did you and your current partner start living together? Please answer in month/year format. If you do not remember the exact month, estimate to the best of your ability.

\_\_\_\_\_

3. How long did you and your partner date prior to having penile/vaginal sex for the first time?

- a. less than a week
- b. more than a week but less than a month
- c. 1 or 2 months
- d. 3-6 months
- e. more than 6 months but less than 1 year
- f. 1 year or more

4. How long did you and your partner date prior to having oral sex for the first time?

- a. less than a week
- b. more than a week but less than a month
- c. 1 or 2 months
- d. 3-6 months
- e. more than 6 months but less than 1 year
- f. 1 year or more

5. How long did you and your partner date prior to having anal sex for the first time?

- a. less than a week
- b. more than a week but less than a month
- c. 1 or 2 months
- d. 3-6 months
- e. more than 6 months but less than 1 year
- f. 1 year or more

6. Are you currently engaged to your current partner?

- a. Yes
- b. No

7. If yes, when did you and your current partner get engaged? Please answer in month/year format. If you do not remember the exact month, please estimate to the best of your ability.

\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix G

### Joint Activities Checklist

**For the following items, please fill in all activities that you and your partner have shared.**

- Our names are listed on a lease together
- We have credit cards that are in both of our names
- We have a joint bank account
- We have a joint cell phone account (for example, a “family plan”)
- We got a pet together
- We bough a residence together (for example, house, condominium)
- We bought a car together
- We share car payments
- I have listed my partner as a beneficiary (for example, for investments or insurance policies)
- We have joint membership accounts (for exampke, to a gym, to Costco, to Sam’s Club, Blockbuster)
- We have made major renovations to our residence
- We have made minor home improvements to our residence
- My partner pays some or all of my student loan bills
- We have bought tickets for a vacation together in the future
- I pay some or all of my partner’s student loan bills
- We work for the same company
- I pay some or all of my partner’s credit card bills
- My partner pays some or all of my credit card bills

- My partner and I have made financial investments together (for example, savings accounts, mutual funds)
- We share rent/mortgage expenses
- One or more of the utilities bills is in both of our names
- We own other property together (for example, business or vacation property)
- We bought household furniture together
- We bought major appliances together (for example, refrigerator, washer and dryer)
- We bought major electronics together (for example, T.V., stereo)
- Other (please describe): \_\_\_\_\_
- None

## Appendix H

### The Commitment Inventory: Dedication Subscale (Stanley & Markman, 1992)

#### *Relationship agenda*

I may decide that I want to end this relationship at some point in the future (-).

I want this relationship to stay strong no matter what rough times we may encounter (+).

I want to grow old with my partner (+).

My relationship with my partner is clearly part of my future life plans (+).

I may not want to be with my partner a few years from now (-).

I do not have life-long plans for this relationship (-).

#### *Meta-commitment*

I don't make commitments unless I believe I will keep them (+).

I do not feel compelled to keep all of the commitments that I make (-).

I have trouble making commitments because I do not want to close off alternatives (-).

I try hard to follow through on all of my commitments (+).

Fairly often I make commitments to people or things that I do not follow through on (-).

Following through on commitments is an essential part of who I am (+).

#### *Couple Identity*

I want to keep the plans for my life somewhat separate from my partner's plans for life (-).

I am willing to have or develop a strong sense of an identity as a couple with my partner (+).

I tend to think about how things affect "us" as a couple more than how things affect "me" as an individual (+).

I like to think of my partner and me more in terms of "us" and "we" than "me" and "him/her" (+).

I am more comfortable thinking in terms of “my” things than “our” things (-).

I do not want to have a strong identity as a couple with my partner (-)

*Primacy of relationship*

My relationship with my partner comes before my relationships with my friends (+).

My career (or job, studies, homemaking, child-rearing, etc.) is more important to me than my relationship with my partner (-).

When push comes to shove, my relationship with my partner often must take a backseat to other interest of mine (-).

When the pressure is really on and I must choose, my partner’s happiness is not as important to me as are other things in my life (-).

My relationship with my partner is more important to me than almost anything else in my life (+).

When push comes to shove, my relationship with my partner comes first (+).

*Satisfaction with sacrifice*

It can be personally fulfilling to give up something for my partner (+).

I do not get much fulfillment out of sacrificing for my partner (-).

I get satisfaction out of doing things for my partner, even if it means I miss out on something I want for myself (+).

I am not the kind of person that finds satisfaction in putting aside my interests for the sake of my relationship with my partner (-).

It makes me feel good to sacrifice for my partner (+).

Giving something up for my partner is frequently not worth the trouble (-).

*Alternative monitoring*

I know people of the opposite sex whom I desire more than my partner (-).

I am not seriously attracted to people of the opposite sex other than my partner (+).

I am not seriously attracted to anyone other than my partner (+).

Though I would not want to end the relationship with my partner, I would like to have a romantic/sexual relationship with someone other than my partner (-).

I do not often find myself thinking about what it would be like to be in a relationship with someone else (+).

I think a lot about what it would be like to be married to (or dating) someone other than my partner (-).

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Note: All items above are answered on seven-point Likert-scale with “1” anchored “strongly disagree,” “4” anchored, “Neither agree nor disagree,” and “7” anchored “strongly agree.” Items with a minus sign are reverse scores, i.e., 7 = 1, 6 = 2, 5 = 3, 3 = 5, 2 = 6, and 1 = 7. All items are scaled so that higher scores reflect higher degree of commitment according to theory. Not all subscales need to be used together, but all the items for subscales that are used should be mixed together in a random order rather than giving all items of one subscale in sequence.

## Appendix I

### Confidence Scale

Please answer each question below by indicating how strongly you agree or disagree with the idea expressed related to your cohabiting relationship. You can check any number from 1 to 7 to indicate various levels of agreement with the idea expressed.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<i>Strongly</i>			<i>Neither</i>			<i>Strongly</i>
<i>Disagree</i>			<i>agree nor</i>			<i>Agree</i>
			<i>Disagree</i>			

1. I believe we can handle whatever conflicts will arise in the future.
2. I don't have much confidence in the future of my relationship.\*
3. I am not at all sure that we can make this relationship work for the long haul.\*
4. I feel good about our prospects to make this relationship work for a lifetime.
5. We may not have what it takes to keep this relationship going.\*
6. We can handle just about anything that comes our way.
7. I am not sure that we can avoid divorce or breaking up in the future. \*
8. I am very confident when I think about our future together.
9. We have the skills a couple needs to make a marriage last.
10. Our risk for divorce or break up is probably greater than average.\*

*Note:* Asterisks indicate reverse-scored items.



## Appendix J

### Dyadic Adjustment Scale

Most persons have disagreements in their relationships. Please indicate below the approximate extent of agreement or disagreement between you and your partner for each item on the following list.

1. Philosophy of life
2. Aims, goals, and things believed important
3. Amount of time spent together

5	4	3	2	1	0
Always Agree	Almost Always Agree	Occasionally Disagree	Frequently Disagree	Almost Always Disagree	Always Disagree

How often would you say the following events occur between you and your mate?

4. Have a stimulating exchange of ideas
5. Calmly discuss something together
6. Work together on a project

0	1	2	3	4	5
Never	Less than once a month	Once or twice a month	Once or twice a week	Once a day	More Often

7. The dots on the following line represent different degrees of happiness in your relationship. The middle point, "happy," represents the degree of happiness of most relationships. Please circle the dot which best describes the degree of happiness, all things considered, of your relationship.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Extremely Unhappy	Fairly Unhappy	A Little Unhappy	Happy	Very Happy	Extremely Happy	Perfect

Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics*

Variable	<i>n</i>	<i>Mean (SD)/%</i>	Observed Range
<b>Socioeconomic Status Variables</b>			
Family SES - Low	7	6%	
Family SES - Middle	45	38.8%	
Family SES - High	53	45.7%	
Current SES - Low	36	31%	
Current SES- Middle	47	40.5%	
Current SES - High	14	12.1%	
<b>Educational Attainment</b>			
High School	10	8.6%	
Some College	33	28.4%	
Associate's Degree	4	3.4%	
Bachelor's Degree	48	41.4%	
Graduate Degree	19	16.4%	
Family History (# of Transitions)	114	.75 (1.02)	0-3
<b>Engagement Status</b>			
Currently Engaged	20	17.2%	
Engaged Prior to Cohabitation	6	5.2%	
First Cohabiting Relationship	100	86.2%	
Partner's First Cohabiting Relationship	90	77.6%	
Tempo of Relationship Transitions	113	2.91 (1.3)	1-7

---

Length of Relationship Variables			
Overall Length of Relationship	113	31.68 (21.00)	1-98mos
Length of Relationship Pre-Cohabitation	108	17.52 (16.20)	0-88mos
Length of Cohabiting Relationship	109	14.40 (14.16)	0-62mos
Relationship Quality	114	30.18 (3.81)	19-40
Dedication Commitment	114	5.85 (.69)	3.74-7.00
Relationship Confidence	114	61.71 (9.07)	23-70
Constraint Commitment	116	6.78 (4.29)	0 - 21

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Table 2

*Bivariate Correlations (N = 116)*

Variable	<i>n</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1 Family SES	105											
2 Current SES	97	.30**										
3 Educational Attainment	114	.23*	.24*									
4 Family History	114	-.15	-.13	-.15								
5 Tempo	113	-.10	-.08	-.15	-.04							
6 Relationship Length	113	.11	-.07	.23*	.12	.19*						
7 Relationship Length Pre-Cohabitation	108	.20*	.03	.24*	.08	.36**	.75**					
8 Cohabitation Length	109	-.04	-.12	.02	.10	-.04	.65**	-.02				
9 Relationship Quality	114	-.20*	-.15	.08	-.02	.22*	.03	-.10	.05			
10 Dedication	114	-.05	.08	-.06	.03	.21*	.03	.00	.03	-.08		
11 Confidence	114	.08	-.02	.07	-.05	.20*	.16	.18	.03	.08	.73**	
12 Constraint	116	-.07	-.04	.12	.04	.01	.45 <sup>b</sup>	.09	.57**	.14	.27**	.24

*Note.* \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 3

*Results of One-way ANOVAs for Participants' Current SES*

	Participant's Current SES						<i>F</i>	$\eta^2$	<i>df</i>
	<\$24.9K		\$25K-74.9K		>\$75K				
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Tempo	2.89	1.27	2.90	1.41	2.50	.92	.56	.01	93
Relationship Length	33.17	22.39	33.35	21.79	27.43	17.40	.44	.01	93
Relationship Length Pre-Cohabitation	15.83	15.21	18.58	18.56	16.14	10.52	.31	.01	90
Cohabitation Length	17.06	15.02	15.35	15.23	11.29	12.53	.76	.02	89

*Note.* \* =  $p < .05$ , \*\* =  $p < .01$ .

Table 4

*Results of Oneway ANOVAs for Participants' Family SES*

	Participant's Family SES						<i>F</i>	$\eta^2$	<i>df</i>
	<\$24.9K		\$25K-74.9K		>\$75K				
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Tempo	3.64	1.46	2.90	1.29	2.87	1.45	.10	.02	101
Relationship Length	21.00	14.92	32.27	20.62	33.52	22.84	1.05	.02	101
Relationship Length Pre-Cohabitation	8.29	8.81	15.83	13.14	20.39	19.13	2.13	.04	98
Cohabitation Length	12.71	12.69	16.09	16.31	13.75	12.84	.38	.01	97

*Note.* \* =  $p < .05$ , \*\* =  $p < .01$ .

Table 5

*Results of Oneway ANOVAs for Participants' Educational Attainment*

	Participant's Educational Attainment										<i>F</i>	$\eta^2$	<i>df</i>
	High School		Some College		Associates		Bachelors		Graduate				
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Tempo	4.10 <sup>a</sup>	1.49	2.70 <sup>b</sup>	1.62	3.13	1.75	2.96 <sup>b</sup>	1.24	2.47 <sup>b</sup>	.81	2.69 <sup>a</sup>	.09	108
Relationship Length	27.30	23.30	23.52	17.22	42.25	27.73	35.98	21.00	35.28	21.82	2.35	.08	108
Relationship Length Pre-Cohabitation	15.78	13.34	10.83	13.32	12.00	8.83	21.21	18.25	21.06	14.19	2.38	.08	103
Cohabitation Length	13.78	19.76	12.80	12.35	30.25	29.85	14.62	12.22	13.58	13.53	1.40	.05	104

*Note.* <sup>a</sup>  $p < .05$ , <sup>b</sup>  $p < .01$ . Superscripts indicate that means of the groups differ at the  $p < .05$  or  $p < .01$  level.

Table 6

*Independent T-Tests Between Race and Tempo/Length of Relationship*

	Participant's Race							<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
	White			Non-White					
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>			
Tempo	2.93	1.39	103	2.70	1.38	10	.49	111	
Relationship Length	32.51	21.28	103	23.10	16.58	10	1.36	111	
Relationship Length Pre Cohabitation	17.98	16.43	100	11.63	11.21	8	1.07	106	
Cohabitation Length	14.59	14.31	101	12.50	11.77	8	.40	107	

*Note.* \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ .



Table 7

*Independent T-Tests Between Sex and Tempo/Length of Relationship*

	Participant's Sex						<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
	Male			Female				
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>		
Tempo	2.67	1.47	26	2.95	1.35	86	-.91	110
Relationship Length	31.35	23.13	26	31.67	20.58	86	-.07	110
Relationship Length Pre Cohabitation	19.88	17.93	25	16.84	15.71	82	.82	105
Cohabitation Length	11.84	14.41	25	15.06	14.02	83	-1.00	106

*Note.* \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 8

*Results of Oneway ANOVA for Participant's Family History*

	Participant's Family History												<i>F</i>	$\eta^2$
	No Transitions			One Transition			Two Transitions			Three Transitions				
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>		
Tempo	2.98	1.42	66	2.55	1.37	19	3.25	1.46	18	2.50	.97	10	1.13	.03
Relationship Length	31.27	19.44	67	26.26	19.36	19	31.29	24.87	17	45.40	24.60	10	1.90	.05
Relationship Length Pre Cohabitation	17.62	15.94	63	13.84	10.30	19	15.69	16.44	16	26.70	23.66	10	1.50	.04
Cohabitation Length	13.89	12.47	63	12.42	15.91	19	16.24	17.08	17	18.70	15.94	10	.55	.02

*Note.* \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 9

*Independent T-Tests Between Current Engagement Status and Tempo/Length of Relationship*

	Participant's Current Engagement Status							
	Yes			No			<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>		
Tempo	3.28	1.42	20	2.83	1.38	93	1.31	111
Relationship Length	45.90	15.36	20	28.62	20.87	93	3.50**	111
Relationship Length Pre Cohabitation	25.89	11.75	19	15.72	16.44	90	2.56	106
Cohabitation Length	20.16	14.79	19	13.23	13.73	89	1.97*	107

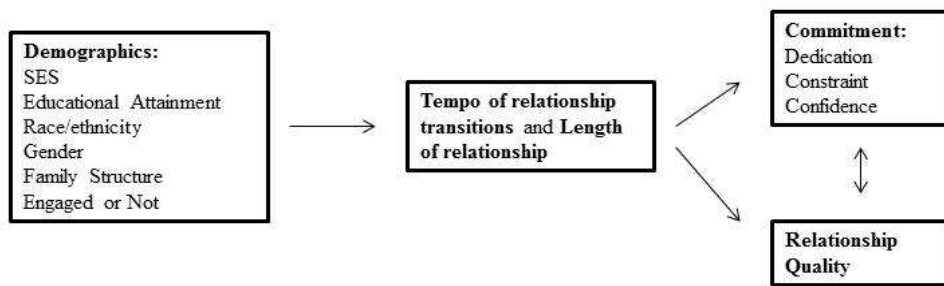
*Note.* \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 10

*Independent T-Tests Between Prior Engagement Status and Tempo/Length of Relationship*

	Participant Engaged Prior to Cohabitation							<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
	Yes			No					
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>			
Tempo	2.83	1.51	6	2.91	1.39	107	.13	111	
Relationship Length	40.50	13.65	6	31.19	21.29	107	-1.41	107	
Relationship Length Pre Cohabitation	34.20	12.22	5	16.70	15.92	104	-2.42*	106	
Cohabitation Length	5.80	3.35	5	14.86	14.29	103	1.41	107	

*Note.* \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ .



*Figure 1.* A proposed model to help explain the pathways that may influence the three domains of commitment and relationship quality.