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Cohabitation versus marriage as a first union: a developmental approach

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Cohabitation versus marriage as a first union:
A developmental approach

by

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A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Human Development and Family Studies
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Iowa State University
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CHAPTER 1.

PURPOSE AND THEORETICAL MODEL

Purpose

"Any discussion of marriage in American society must address the issue of cohabitation" (Waite, 1995, p. 485). Although it was considered taboo for previous generations, cohabitation has come to be a popular living arrangement in Western societies (Krishnan, 1998). Nearly fifty percent of Americans in their twenties and thirties have cohabited (Brown & Booth, 1996), and fifty-six percent of women who got married in the early 1990's cohabited before marriage (Bachrach, Hindin, & Thomson, 2000). Nearly a fourth of unmarried people between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-four are cohabiting at any given time (Waite, 1995).

The number of cohabiting couples of all ages increased 46% between 1990 and 1997 (Casper & Cohen, 2000). These numbers are expected to continue to rise since young adults are more likely than older adults to believe that it is acceptable for an unmarried couple with no marriage plans to live together (Oropesa, 1996). Recent trends show that each new generation is more likely to make the decision to cohabit than previous generations (Chevan, 1996).

An increasing amount of research illustrates the importance of family of origin and peer experiences on the development of adolescent and adult romantic relationships (Bryant & Conger, in press; Conger, Cui, Bryant, & Elder, 2000; Thornton, 1991).
However, little is known about characteristics of the family of origin that may lead people to select premarital cohabitation rather than marriage as their first union. A variety of structural and demographic characteristics have been examined in relation to the decision to cohabit as a first union, such as the mother’s age at marriage and her experiences with marital disruption and remarriage (Thornton, 1991). Specific behaviors and interactions present in the family of origin have not been addressed.

There are three goals of the present study. The first and primary purpose of this study is to prospectively examine behaviors and beliefs experienced in the family of origin and with peers that may influence the occurrence of cohabitation rather than marriage as a first union. Specifically, the present study will prospectively examine (a) the influence of parental religious beliefs, (b) nurturant and involved parenting, (c) the warmth and hostility present in the parental marital relationship, and (d) association with deviant peers as predictors of the decision of young adults to select cohabitation versus marriage as their first union.

The second purpose of the present study is to examine the influence of these factors on the unconventional relationship beliefs of the youth, and the resulting effect of these beliefs on the occurrence of cohabitation. Although the data used for the present study will not allow us to make definitive conclusions regarding causality, it is possible to make tentative statements
regarding potential mediating effects of unconventional relationship beliefs on the association between family and peer experiences and the decision to select cohabitation as a first union.

Many previous studies have found premarital cohabitation to be detrimental to marriage or to have a negative association with relationship success (Bennett, Blanc, & Bloom, 1988; Booth & Johnson, 1988; Bumpass & Sweet, 1989; DeMaris & Rao, 1992; Thomson & Colella, 1992). However, researchers are debating the causal nature of this phenomenon. It has been suggested that characteristics or experiences that existed for cohabiters before making the decision to cohabit may reduce the association between premarital cohabitation and later marital problems (Bennett et al., 1988; Lillard, Brien, & Waite, 1995). Therefore, the third purpose of this study is to assess the association between selecting premarital cohabitation over marriage as a first union (as an aspect of relationship history) and current relationship success. This is similar to work accomplished in previous studies. For exploratory purposes, this association will also be assessed while controlling for earlier experiences with the family of origin and peers, as well as unconventional relationship beliefs. This has not been done in previous studies.

The goals of this study extend our knowledge of cohabitation by prospectively (a) considering specific behaviors and beliefs experienced with both the family of origin and with peers rather
than exploring demographic characteristics of the family of origin, as have most previous studies; (b) examining characteristics of the family of origin and peers that may lead to unconventional relationship beliefs, which may then lead to cohabitation as a first union; and (c) providing information about the association between relationship success and first union cohabitation, controlling for family of origin and peer influences as well as unconventional beliefs about relationships. The present study will also provide information regarding the usefulness of a developmental approach to the study of cohabitation.

Theoretical Model

The DEARR Model. A developmental approach to the study of romantic relationships proposes that people learn interpersonal behavioral dispositions, attitudes, and beliefs in their families of origin (Bryant & Conger, in press). This information is then carried forward into their romantic relationships as young adults. Cohabitation and marriage are seen as milestones during the full course of a romantic union, a course that begins even before courtship. A developmental approach suggests that relationship outcomes may be linked to experiences in the family of origin.

Following a developmental approach to studying romantic relationships, it is necessary to examine premarital circumstances as well as experiences in the family of origin. Bryant and Conger (in press) suggested in their discussion of the DEARR (Development of Early Adult Romantic Relationships) model that the individual
competencies that lead to the development of high quality young adult romantic relationships can be linked to family of origin experiences in childhood and adolescence.

The model suggests that specific behavioral, cognitive, and emotional characteristics experienced in the family of origin may influence young adults to behave in particular ways in their romantic relationships. The model also suggests that the behaviors exhibited in the romantic relationships will be associated with the later success of the relationships.

It is proposed by the DEARR model that characteristics of the family of origin will influence the development of early adult romantic relationships through their influence on the adolescents' social and economic circumstances and individual characteristics. A direct association between family of origin experiences and attributes of young adult couple relationships is also proposed. The attributes of the young adult couple relationship are then linked to the couples' relationship success.

Family of origin experiences include, for example, attributions, cognitions, behavioral interactions, parenting behaviors, problem-solving behaviors, and the emotional stability of the family. Characteristics of the young adult include attributions, cognitions, behavioral interactions, problem-solving skills, and emotional stability. Social and economic advantage versus disadvantage of the young adult includes stress, social support, social conflict, and instrumental success and failure.
Attributes of the young adult couple relationship include attributions, cognitions, behavioral interactions, problem-solving behaviors, love, and trust, as well as relationship status (such as cohabiting or married). Given the complexity of the model, it is not possible to test every possible application of the DEARR model within a single study.

Very few studies have examined the connection between family of origin and the later characteristics of young adult romantic relationships (Bryant & Conger, in press). Conger et al. (2000) applied portions of the DEARR model to prospectively assess the influence of the family of origin on the observed warmth and hostility exhibited by young adults in their romantic relationships. Results indicated that nurturant and involved parenting in the family of origin was associated with high warmth and low hostility in the young adult romantic relationship years later. The observed affective behaviors of the young adult to his or her partner were associated with relationship quality and mediated the association between parenting and relationship quality. Although not studying cohabitation directly, the authors did note that cohabiters experienced poorer quality interactional processes in their family of origin than dating and married respondents, and suggested that interpersonal processes may account for demographic effects. The present study will explore this suggestion.
The DEARR Model as Applied to the Present Study. The DEARR model provides a useful framework for studying family of origin influences on the choice of cohabitation as a first union. The model predicts that cognitive and behavioral experiences in the family of origin could lead young adults to behave in certain ways in their romantic relationships, such as selecting cohabitation or marriage as a first union. The model proposes that characteristics of the family of origin will either directly influence characteristics of the young adult romantic relationship, or will have an indirect influence through mechanisms such as individual characteristics of the youth.

The theoretical model for the present study is shown in Figure 1. As applied to the current study, the DEARR model predicts that cognitions and behaviors in the family of origin (such as religious beliefs and values, nurturant and involved parenting and parents' warmth and hostility toward each other) will directly influence the occurrence of cohabitation versus marriage as a first union. It is also expected that these family of origin characteristics will influence individual characteristics of the youth, specifically unconventional beliefs about marriage, divorce, and sexual permissiveness, which will then influence the occurrence of cohabitation as a first union.

The DEARR model suggests that social and economic advantage and disadvantage of the young adult may serve as a mediator between family of origin experiences and attributes of the young adult
couple relationship. Family of origin experiences are expected to influence the social and economic advantage and disadvantage of the young adult which, in turn, is expected to influence the attributes of the young adult couple relationship. However, only the direct influence of social advantage versus disadvantage will be examined in the present study. This is because association with deviant peers was obtained in the same year as the measures of family of origin characteristics, making it impossible to assess temporal
ordering for a mediating effect. Ideally, it would be useful to have measures of association with deviant peers and measures of family of origin characteristics in alternating years over a four-year time span. Such information is not available in the current data set. If it were available, a cross-lagged model could then be applied to determine directionality, as described later in this document in relation to unconventional relationship beliefs.

The DEARR model also proposes that attributes of the young adult couple relationship will be directly associated with relationship success. Previous studies have examined the association between cohabitation and relationship success and have found that cohabitators tend to report lower levels of relationship success (Bennett et al., 1988; Booth & Johnson, 1988; Bumpass & Sweet, 1989; DeMaris & Rao, 1992; Thomson & Colella, 1992). It is expected that this link will exist in the present study as well. The DEARR model does not propose direct links between family, peer, or individual characteristics and relationship success. For purely exploratory purposes, family of origin, individual, and social characteristics will be included as control variables to learn whether the link between cohabitation and relationship success holds when we account for these developmental experiences.
CHAPTER 2.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Characteristics of Cohabitation and Cohabitors

General Characteristics. Before attempting to predict the occurrence of cohabitation, it is important to understand what has been learned about cohabitation and cohabitors from previous research. As this study will focus on cohabitation in the United States, the focus of this literature review is narrowed to studies involving cohabitors in the United States. Cohabitation in other countries may be surrounded by different norms and values. For example, cohabitation is the norm before marriage and is often considered equivalent to marriage by people in Sweden (Duvander, 1999).

In the United States, cohabitation is considered by some to be a step in the courtship process between dating and marriage (Krishnan, 1998). Others view it as an alternative to marriage that requires a lower level of commitment or certainty about the relationship (Bachrach et al., 2000; Bumpass, Sweet, & Cherlin 1991; Teachman & Polonko, 1990; Waite & Gallagher, 2000). It may be the lower level of commitment that leads cohabitation to be treated differently than marriage under the law. Very few courts have awarded legal rights, such as inheritance and property rights, to cohabiting partners (Rindfus & VanderHeuvel, 1990). Many cohabitors indicate a hesitation to marry because marriages are complicated to dissolve (Kravdal, 1999).
Remarriage has been described by Cherlin (1978) as an incomplete institution because it is not surrounded by any agreed upon social standards or norms. Nock (1995) explained how cohabitation is an incomplete institution as well. For example, what does a person call his or her cohabiting partner? That person is not a husband or wife, yet is more than just a boyfriend or girlfriend. "We lack consensus over what it means to be a cohabiting partner" (Nock, 1995, p. 56).

Cohabitors tend to be white, Protestant, and lower or lower-middle class. Cohabiting women tend to come from single-parent families, start having sexual relationships at an earlier age, have sexual intercourse more frequently, and are likely to be single parents (Tanfer, 1987). About 35% of never-married cohabitors have children in their household (Bumpass et al., 1991).

Low levels of religiosity increase the odds of cohabitation (Bumpass & Sweet, 1989; Tanfer, 1987). Similarly, women who attend church services more frequently tend to have a more negative view of cohabitation and a more positive view of marriage (Wu & Balakrishman, 1992). Being enrolled in college decreases the likelihood of cohabitation as students tend to live in dorms or Greek organizations during college (Tafner, 1987).

Young adults with positive attitudes toward cohabitation are nearly three times more likely to cohabit than are young adults who believe that cohabitation is wrong (Axinn & Thornton, 1993). Axinn and Thornton (1993) also found that mothers who believe that
cohabitation is acceptable are more likely to have cohabiting daughters than are mothers who disagree that it is alright to cohabit outside of marriage. This association was not found for sons.

Cohabiting couples are more likely to keep separate finances (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983). Economic instability has been associated with increased probability of cohabitation rather than marriage (Clarkberg, 1999). Those who cohabit have more unstable job histories (measured as the number of previous employers and amount of time spent in the current position) than their married or single counterparts. This finding indicates that cohabitation may be attractive to people who are not at the economic or occupational level implied to be necessary for marriage.

However, cohabiting women have higher incomes than do married or single women (Clarkberg, 1999). Women and men in cohabiting relationships are more likely to share an equal division of household labor and are more likely to bring home similar earnings than are men and women in marital relationships (Brines & Joyner, 1999). Compared with wives, women in cohabiting relationships do more hours of paid work and fewer hours of housework (Seltzer, 2000). The time spent on housework by men does not seem to differ by cohabitation or marital status (South & Spitze, 1994).

Cohabiting couples are more likely to spend free time separately and are less likely to agree on the future of their relationship (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983). Schoen and Weinick
(1993) studied patterns of partner choice among married and cohabiting couples. They found that, compared to recently married respondents, cohabiters are more likely to select a partner with the same level of education and are less likely to select a partner of the same age or religious affiliation. Horowitz and White (1998) discovered that levels of depression were no different between cohabiters and married or single individuals. However, cohabiting men reported more problems with alcohol than did married or single men, and cohabiting women reported more problems with alcohol than did their married counterparts. Cohabiting and single women did not differ significantly in their alcohol problems.

Unconventionality of Cohabitors. Cohabitors tend to be more unconventional in their attitudes and behaviors than noncohabiters (Axinn & Thornton, 1992; Booth & Johnson, 1988; Tanfer, 1987; Thomson & Colella, 1992; Treas & Giesen, 2000). In their description of unconventional individuals, DeMaris and MacDonald (1993) included traits such as approving of premarital sex, divorce, and single parenthood. Unconventional people are not likely to see marriage as necessary for life fulfillment.

It has been proposed that people who choose to live with their partner before marriage are more accepting of divorce and less committed to marriage (or more unconventional in their beliefs) even before the cohabitation occurs. This is known as the selection effect (Bennett et al., 1988). "Those with the least commitment to the institution of marriage are not only the most
likely to cohabit at the start of a relationship, but they are also most likely to dissolve a marriage that occurs later" (Lillard et al., 1995, p. 455). Axinn & Thornton (1992) found that the attitudes that increase the rate of cohabitation are the same attitudes that decrease the rate of marriage.

Using data from telephone interviews with a nationally representative sample of people under the age of fifty-five, Booth and Johnson (1988) found some support for the notion that cohabitors are poor marriage risks even before they marry. Those who cohabited before marriage were less likely to be committed to the institution of marriage and were more likely to lead an unconventional lifestyle. They concluded that cohabiters who eventually marry have poorer marital quality than individuals who did not live together before marriage because cohabiters are more unconventional or less traditional at the onset. However, these findings were based upon cross-sectional rather than longitudinal data.

Given the aforementioned findings, we know that individuals who hold more unconventional beliefs are more likely to select cohabitation rather than marriage as a first union. However, we do not know much about how these beliefs are influenced by experiences in the family of origin or how these beliefs serve as a link between family of origin influences and the decision to cohabit as a first union. These issues will be addressed in the present study.
The Family of Origin, Peers, and Cohabitation

The first research question in this study involves the association between both family of origin and peer experiences on young adults' decisions to cohabit or marry as a first union. The portion of the theoretical model pertaining to the first research question is presented in Figure 2. Previous research related to these associations will now be reviewed.

Figure 2. The first research question.
The direct link from parental religious beliefs and values to the occurrence of cohabitation as a first union for their young adult children has been established by previous research (Tanfer, 1987; Thornton, Axinn, & Hill, 1992). Young adults who have religious parents may decide not to cohabit before marriage even if they do not oppose cohabitation or do not hold conventional beliefs themselves. The young adult children of religious parents may not want to cause embarrassment for their parents, create interpersonal conflict, or receive negative sanctions for their behavior from their parents (Thornton et al., 1992).

Therefore, based upon previous research and the DEARR model, it is expected that young adults will be more likely to select cohabitation rather than marriage as a first union if their parents reported weaker religious beliefs and values years earlier. This is represented in Figure 1 by the path from Parents' Religious Beliefs and Values in 1992 to Cohabitation versus Marriage as a First Union from 1995-1999. What has not been established by previous research is the influence of religious beliefs and values on cohabitation as a first union when nurturant and involved parenting and parents' high warmth and low hostility toward each other are included in the equation.

Thornton (1991) studied the influence of demographic characteristics surrounding parental marital history (including parental divorce) on the experiences of young adults in terms of marriage and cohabitation. It was found that parental divorce
increases the occurrence of children's nonmarital cohabitation. Intervening theoretical mechanisms were suggested, but were not directly examined. Suggested intervening factors included the status attainment of children, the quality of the parental home environment, the pace of children's maturation, and children's attitudes toward marriage and nonmarital sex. These concepts were not directly measured or included in the models tested, but were theoretically inferred based upon tested relationships between family demographic characteristics and adult children's cohabitational and marital experiences. Indirect theoretical analyses suggested that attitudes toward marriage, nonmarital sex, and cohabitation may account for the relationship between family demographic characteristics and cohabitation as a first union. The current study will go beyond the demographic characteristics of the family of origin as presented by Thornton (1991) by including specific prospectively assessed behaviors and beliefs. In addition, the intervening mechanism of unconventional beliefs will be directly assessed.

Divorce is related to the quality of the partners' interactions, including the levels of displayed warmth and hostility in the relationship (Gottman, 1994; Matthews, Wickrama, & Conger, 1996). Since children with divorced parents are more likely to select cohabitation as a first union, it is expected that children who experience lower levels of warmth and higher levels of hostility between their parents will be more likely to select
cohabitation rather than marriage as a first union when they are young adults. This is represented in Figure 1 and Figure 2 by the direct path from Parents' Warmth and Hostility Toward Each Other in 1992 to Cohabitation versus Marriage as a First Union in 1995-1999.

Cohabitors report poorer relationships with both their mothers and fathers than do married people. Nock (1995) found that the lower levels of romantic relationship satisfaction reported by cohabitors were partly due to different levels of commitment to the romantic relationships and differences in the quality of relationships with parents. In other words, cohabitors reported lower relationship quality which was predicted by poorer relationships with their parents and lower levels of commitment to their romantic partners, both of which bring about less favorable assessments of the current romantic relationship. Wanting to live close to parents slows the initiation of a first union of either type, although people who want to live close to their parents are less likely to cohabit than to marry (Clarkberg, Stolzenberg, & Waite, 1995).

The use of puntative parenting styles tends to have adverse consequences for relationships between parents and children (Peterson, Smirles, & Wentworth, 1997). The association between receiving nurturant and involved parenting and the occurrence of cohabitation as a first union for young adults has not been examined in previous studies. However, since cohabitors report lower relationship quality with their parents, it is expected in
the present study that children who experienced lower levels of nurturant and involved parenting will be more likely to select cohabitation as a first union as young adults. This is represented in Figure 1 and Figure 2 by the direct path from Nurturant and Involved Parenting in 1992 to Cohabitation versus Marriage as a First Union in 1995-1999.

The present study proposes a direct relationship between youths’ association with deviant peers and their decisions to select cohabitation or marriage as a first union years later. Although parents have been noted as the reference group most likely to influence a young adult’s decision to cohabit, peers also constitute an influential reference group (Jacques & Chason, 1978; Robinson, 1995). People who decide to live with their partner in an unmarried relationship are more likely to have a drug or alcohol problem, spend money foolishly, and get into trouble with the law (Booth & Johnson, 1988). These characteristics are representative of an unconventional or deviant lifestyle.

According to Sutherland’s (1940) notion of differential association, a person’s tendency toward deviance or conformity depends upon the extent of that person’s association with other people who encourage norm violation or conventional behavior. Based upon this notion, it is reasonable to expect that people who associate with deviant peers at a younger age will be more likely to use drugs and alcohol, spend money foolishly, get in trouble with the law, and, as relevant to the present study, select
cohabitation rather than marriage as a first union. This is represented by the direct path from Targets' Association with Deviant Peers 1992 to Cohabitation versus Marriage as a First Union in 1995-1999.

Magdol, Moffitt, Caspi, and Silva (1998) found in their cross-sectional study of cohabitation and partner abuse that cohabiters were more likely to associate with deviant peers than were daters. The present study differs by assessing association with deviant peers and the occurrence of cohabitation longitudinally. In addition, the focus of the present study is on first union decisions. That is, the focus on whether young adults will choose cohabitation or marriage as a first union. This differs from the Magdol et al. (1998) study in which cohabiters were compared with daters.

In sum, it is expected that (a) the weaker the religious beliefs of the parents, (b) the less nurturant and involved parenting, (c) the less warm and more hostile the parents' behaviors toward each other, and (d) the greater the association with deviant peers, the more likely the young adult will be to select cohabitation over marriage as a first union years later. This comprises the first research hypothesis in the present study.

It is also expected, as predicted by the DEARR model (Bryant & Conger, in press), that youths with these family of origin and peer experiences will be more likely to hold unconventional beliefs, which will in turn lead to greater likelihood of cohabitation as a
first union. Therefore, literature will now be reviewed in relation to the association between family of origin and peer experiences on young adults' unconventional beliefs about relationships.

**Family of Origin and Peer Influences on Young Adults' Unconventional Beliefs about Relationships**

Based upon the DEARR model, it is proposed that characteristics of the family of origin are associated with individual characteristics of young adults. This proposed association comprises the second research question in the present study. Specifically, it is expected that association with deviant peers, low parental religious beliefs and behaviors, low levels of observed nurturant and involved parenting, and low levels of parental warmth and high levels of hostility toward each other will lead young adults to hold unconventional beliefs about relationships. In turn, it is expected that unconventional beliefs will predict the occurrence of premarital cohabitation versus marriage, as discovered in previous research (Axinn & Thornton, 1992; Booth & Johnson, 1988; Tanfer, 1987; Thomson & Colella, 1992). The portion of the theoretical model related to the second research question is displayed in Figure 3.

People who hold strong religious beliefs and values are less likely to hold liberal beliefs about divorce and marriage and are less likely to be sexually permissive (Thornton et al., 1992). In other words, people with more unconventional beliefs tend to be
less religious. In a prospective, longitudinal study, Myers (1996) found that the parents' religiosity was positively associated with the religiosity of their adult offspring. This association was found even when adult experiences such as attending college, getting married, and having children were included in the equation. This provides evidence for the intergenerational transmission of religious beliefs and values. Therefore, it is expected that youths with more religious parents will hold fewer unconventional
beliefs about relationships. This is noted in Figure 1 and Figure 3 by the path from *Parental Religious Beliefs and Values in 1992* to *Targets' Unconventional Beliefs about Relationships in 1995*.

Studies suggest that the quality of the parents’ relationships and the amount of conflict present, whether married or divorced, are more relevant to the relationships of young adults than merely the occurrence of a divorce. “Simply assessing whether college students’ parents are married or divorced may not provide enough information on the relationship between parents and/or aspects of the divorce to adequately assess differences across students’ relationship beliefs” (Gabardi & Rosen, 1992, p 46-47). It is reasonable to expect that this statement can also be applied to young adults who are not attending college.

Students from divorced families were found to have more sexual partners and experience more sexual behaviors than students from two-parent families (Gabardi & Rosen, 1992). As noted earlier, those who hold unconventional beliefs are more accepting of premarital sexual behavior (DeMaris & MacDonald, 1993). It was found that young adults with unhappily married parents hold beliefs about love that are similar to young adults with divorced parents, but dissimilar to young adults with happily married parents (Sprecher, Cate, & Levin, 1998). Adult children of divorce tend to hold more favorable divorce-related beliefs and evaluate marriage more negatively than do adult children of two-parent families (Dostal & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 1997). It is expected that
higher levels of warmth and lower levels of hostility in the parental relationship will lead young adults to hold fewer unconventional beliefs about relationships. This is represented in Figure 1 and Figure 3 by the path from Parents' High Warmth and Low Hostility Toward Each Other in 1992 to Targets' Unconventional Relationship Beliefs in 1995.

Adult offspring are likely to hold stronger religious beliefs and values if they experienced moderate levels of strictness from their parents and high levels of parental support as children (Myers, 1996). The construct nurturant and involved parenting involves measures of discipline and reinforcement that include observations of strictness and support. As previously noted, it is expected that people with fewer religious beliefs tend to hold more unconventional beliefs about relationships (Thornton et al., 1992). Therefore, it is expected in the present study that having or experiencing nurturant and involved parents while growing up will lead young adults to hold fewer unconventional beliefs about relationships. This is represented in Figure 1 and Figure 3 by the path from Nurturant and Involved Parenting in 1992 to Targets' Unconventional Beliefs about Relationships in 1995.

The family and peer groups are both primary agents of socialization. Adolescents are particularly attuned to the opinions and standards of their peers when it comes to social life. Peers influence a wide range of social beliefs and events, including attitudes and behaviors related to drinking, dating, and
joining clubs (Sebald, 1986). In their study of cohabitation and partner abuse, Magdol et al. (1998) conceptualized association with deviant peers as a form of unconventional behavior. In the present study, it is expected that associating with deviant peers as an adolescent is likely to be related to unconventional beliefs about relationships as a young adult. This is represented by the path from Association with Deviant Peers in 1992 to Targets' Unconventional Beliefs about Relationships in 1995.

In summary, it is expected that (a) the greater the youth's association with deviant peers, (b) the lower the levels of nurturant and involved parenting, (c) the lower the levels of parents' religious beliefs and values, and (d) the lower the levels of parents' warmth and hostility toward each other, then the greater will be the unconventional relationship beliefs of the young adult. The final portion of the present theoretical model involves the path between Cohabitation versus Marriage as a First Union from 1995-1999 and Relationship Success in 1999. Previous work relevant to this path will now be discussed.

Cohabitation and Relationship Success

Over 50% of cohabiters see cohabitation as a way to test compatibility with their partners (Bumpass et al., 1991). Common sense would indicate that the experience of cohabitation should provide couples with a chance to learn about each other and increase their odds for a successful marriage (Smock, 2000). However, most research does not support this common sense notion.
Previous research suggests that couples who live together before marriage have marriages that are less stable and less satisfactory than couples who marry without living together first (Bennett et al., 1988; Booth & Johnson, 1988; Bumpass & Sweet, 1989; DeMaris & Rao, 1992; Thomson & Colella, 1992). There is an impressive degree of consensus with regard to this finding (Smock, 2000). For example, Booth and Johnson (1988) found that cohabitation is negatively related to marital interaction. Marital interaction was measured as joint participation in a variety of activities such as eating together, visiting friends, and shopping. They also found cohabitation to be positively related to marital disagreement and the probability of divorce.

There are two main explanations regarding the association between cohabitation and reduced relationship satisfaction. The primary argument is known as the selection argument and was discussed earlier in this document in relation to unconventional beliefs. In general, it is believed that the characteristics that lead people to select cohabitation are the same characteristics that lead them to report lower levels of relationship satisfaction and stability. The construct, unconventional beliefs about relationships, is one of these characteristics.

The second explanation asserts that something about the experience of cohabitation leads people to report lower levels of relationship satisfaction and stability. This explanation has not received as much attention as the selection explanation. However,
Axinn and Thornton (1992) found that cohabitation does tend to change people's attitudes in ways that make them more accepting of divorce. Controlling for attitudes toward divorce assessed five years earlier, they found that the experience of cohabitation increases attitudes of acceptance toward divorce. Likewise, they found that marriage without first cohabiting decreases approval of divorce.

Smock (2000) pointed out that the two explanations are not mutually exclusive. People with certain characteristics may select cohabitation, and then the experience of cohabitation alters those characteristics to make the people more likely to report lower levels of satisfaction and stability.

In the present study, as found in the previously mentioned studies, it is expected that people who selected cohabitation rather than marriage will be likely to report lower levels of satisfaction with their current relationship. This proposed association is related to the third research question in the present study, and is represented by the path from Cohabitation versus Marriage as a First Union in 1995-1999 to Relationship Success in 1999. The portion of the theoretical model related to this association is displayed in Figure 4.

The selection argument suggests that the association between cohabitation and poor relationship success will be reduced when the variable representing unconventional beliefs about relationships is included in the analysis. For purely exploratory purposes,
Figure 4. The third research question.

variables representing family of origin and peer experiences will be included in the analysis between cohabitation versus marriage as a first union and relationship success.

The DEARR model proposes a direct association between attributes of the young adult couple relationship and relationship success. The DEARR model also suggests that family and peer influences may indirectly influence relationship success through attributes of the young adult couple relationship. Family and peer influences are not directly linked to relationship success. However, including family and peer variables as control variables in the present study will provide preliminary information regarding whether the relationship between cohabitation and relationship success found in previous studies still exists when we include information about family and peer experiences in the equation.
CHAPTER 3.

METHOD

Sample

The data for the present analyses came from a larger study of families taking part in the longitudinal, prospective studies -- Iowa Youth and Families Project (IYFP) and the Iowa Single Parent Project (ISPP). In essence, both of these projects involved community samples from the same rural areas and included families with similar socioeconomic characteristics (Lorenz, Simons, Conger, Elder, Johnson, & Chao, 1997).

The IYFP started in 1989, at which time all of the participating families had a child in the seventh grade that will be referred to as the "target" child (or "target" young adult) in the present study. Each of the target children had a sibling within four years of the target's age. Names and addresses were obtained from the families of seventh graders in 34 public and private schools. Each family received a letter in the mail explaining the study, and later received a phone call asking them to participate. If the family did not have a telephone, they were contacted in person. Just under half of the seventh graders had families that met the criteria to participate in the study. Each family member was paid approximately $10 per hour for participating in the study.

Just under four-fifths of eligible families agreed to participate in the IYFP. All families were white and lived in eight neighboring counties in a midwestern state that is heavily
dependent upon agriculture. Participating families averaged 4.95 members. The median ages for the mothers and the fathers at the beginning of the study were thirty-eight and thirty-nine, respectively. Families lived in towns or small cities (54%), farms (34%), or non-farm rural areas (12%). Nearly all of the husbands and over three-fourths of the wives were employed. Yearly family incomes ranged from a net loss to over $100,000, with a median income of $33,868. The median difference in age between the siblings participating in the study was two years.

Data were collected for the ISPP in 1991, 1992, and 1993, although only the data from 1991 (the measure of targets' neuroticism) and 1992 (family of origin and peer measures) will be used in the current study. ISPP involved an initial sample of 207 single-parent families. These families were selected because they had a child (the target child) about the same age as the children participating in IYFP. This procedure was followed to allow for combination of the IYFP and ISPP samples, as done in previous studies (Lorenz et al., 1997). Families participating in ISPP had another child within three years of the target child's age. Parental divorce or separation had occurred in all of these families within the two years before the study began.

Beginning in 1994, targets from the IYFP and ISPP projects were brought together into the Critical Transitions project. The focus of this project shifted from the families of origin to the young adult targets. Data used in the present study were obtained
from household interviews conducted with the targets and their romantic partners in 1995, 1997, and 1999.

Procedure

Families were interviewed in their homes twice each year. During the first visit, family members completed a set of questionnaires on a variety of economic, parenting, health, friendship, marital, interactional, and demographic issues. The questionnaires took about two hours to complete. It is from these questionnaires that information regarding targets' association with deviant peers, parental religious beliefs and values, and parents' warmth and hostility toward each other were obtained. The second visit usually took place within two weeks of the first, during which time families answered additional questionnaire items and were videotaped in a series of structured discussion tasks.

In 1992, the families of origin completed a videotaped family interaction task and a family problem-solving task. The family interaction task was twenty-five minutes in length, and the family problem-solving task was fifteen minutes in length. It is from these tasks that information on nurturant and involved parenting was obtained. For each of these videotaped tasks, the families were presented with a set of cards with questions on them. Topics to be discussed were selected based upon questionnaires completed by each family member before the interaction tasks began, and included children's accomplishments, recent family activities, household chores, problems in school, and other parent-child
issues. Families were instructed to read the questions and discuss them. The interviewer started the videotape and then left the room so that he or she was not able to hear the discussion, returning after the allotted time for the task had passed. The purpose of the videotaped interactions was to provide information on the social skills and emotional affect among members of the families.

Trained observers (coders) rated several behavioral and affective dimensions of the videotaped interactions. These coders were required to undergo approximately 200 hours of training and pass written and visual exams before coding tapes. They coded the videotapes using a global rating system that assesses behavioral interactions on a 9-point scale ranging from 1, the behavior is not at all characteristic of the person being rated, to 9, the behavior is mainly characteristic of the person being rated. The rating scales were designed to assess verbal and nonverbal behavior, as well as affect (Lorenz & Melby, 1994; Melby & Conger, 2001).

In 1995, 1997, and 1999, the young adult targets were recruited by telephone or personal contact to take part in interviews about their lives and relationships. Information on unconventional beliefs about relationships, cohabitation versus marriage as a first union, and relationship success were obtained from these questionnaires. These questionnaires were administered using a procedure similar to the procedure described earlier for administering questionnaires to the family of origin. However,
parents of the target were not administered questionnaires in 1995, 1997, or 1999.

To be included in the sample for the present study, the target must have been involved in a cohabiting or marital relationship between 1995 and 1999. Those participating in the larger study who were only in noncohabiting dating relationships or who were not dating at all between 1995 and 1999 were not included in the present study. The resulting available sample size was 268 (113 male targets and 155 female targets), although the sample size is reduced due to listwise deletion in specific analyses. Targets included in the study did not differ substantially from the targets excluded from the study regarding whether or not they were enrolled in school in 1995 or whether or not they worked for pay in 1995. Approximately 84% of the sample for this study originated from the IYFP project, and the remaining 16% originated from the ISPP.

Measures

The target children were asked to report on the deviant behaviors of their close friends. Behaviors included running away from home, skipping school without an excuse, stealing, using alcohol or drugs, and attacking someone. A complete list of items along with results from a factor analysis appear in Table 1. Targets were asked how many of their close friends engaged in such behaviors in the past twelve months. Responses ranged from 1, none of them, to 5, all of them. The mean of these items was computed to obtain a
Table 1

Results of Factor Analysis for Association with Deviant Peers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questionnaire Item</th>
<th>Factor Loading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Used tobacco</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gotten high using drugs of some kind</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hit someone with the idea of hurting them</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stolen something worth less than $25</td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gotten drunk using alcohol of some kind</td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used alcohol</td>
<td>.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skipped School Without an Excuse</td>
<td>.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stolen something worth more than $25</td>
<td>.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used prescription drugs for fun or to &quot;get high&quot;</td>
<td>.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Run Away from Home</td>
<td>.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purposefully damaged or destroyed property that did not belong to them</td>
<td>.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gone joyriding, that is, taken a motor vehicle such as a car or motorcycle, for a ride or drive without the owner’s permission</td>
<td>.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attacked someone with a weapon or with the idea of seriously hurting them</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used a weapon, force, or strong-arm methods to get money or other things from people</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used illegal drugs like marijuana, hashish, LSD, cocaine, downers, crack, etc.</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used inhalants such as solvents, gasoline, rush, or glue</td>
<td>.49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
measure of targets' association with deviant peers; a higher number reflects greater association. The internal consistency coefficient for these items was .86.

Parents' Self-Reported Religious Beliefs and Values in 1992. Parents responded to two items regarding their religious beliefs and values. One item asked about the importance of spirituality and was rated on a four-point scale from 1, very important to 4, not at all important. The other item asked about frequency of church attendance and was rated on a five-point scale from 1, more than once a week to 5, never. Because the items were on different scales, the items were standardized before the mean was obtained for fathers and for mothers. The items were reverse coded after standardization so that a higher score reflects greater religiosity. The correlation between the two items was .58 for mothers and for fathers. Because fathers' and mothers' religiosity scores were highly correlated (r=.63), the two scores were averaged together. If only the father or the mother completed the questionnaire, the score for that parent was used to represent parents' religious beliefs and values for that family.

Observed Nurturant and Involved Parenting in 1992. Parents were videotaped interacting with their children in 1992. Trained observers coded the videotaped data in the Family Interaction and Family Problem Solving tasks, providing information on the affective, monitoring, and discipline behaviors of the parents (Melby et al., 1998). Nine-point coding scales were used in which
a higher score reflected greater evidence of that particular behavior. All items were recoded such that a higher score reflects greater nurturant and involved parenting. The items described here are the same as those used by Conger, et al. (2000) to study the influence of nurturant and involved parenting on warmth and hostility exhibited in young adult romantic relationships. An outline of the structure of this construct is presented in Appendix A.

The affective environment was assessed by measuring behavioral interactions indicative of both high warmth and low hostility. High warmth directed by parents toward the targets was a composite of five scales that rated (a) warmth and support, (b) listener responsiveness, (c) communication, (d) prosocial behavior, and (e) assertiveness. The warmth and support scale measures the extent of appreciation, praise, care, and concern expressed by the parents to their children. Listener responsiveness refers to the extent to which the parents attend to, show an interest in, and acknowledge the things said by target children during the task. The communication scale measures the extent to which parents clearly express their needs, wants, rules, regulations, information, and ideas to the children, while soliciting and considering the children’s points of view. Prosocial behavior involves cooperation, sensitivity, and helpfulness. Assertiveness refers to the extent to which the parents display confidence, patience, and persistence with the children.
Low hostility directed by parents toward the targets was created with a composite of three scales that measured low hostility, low antisocial behavior, and low angry coercion. The hostility scale measures the parents' hostile, angry, critical, or rejecting behavior toward the children. Antisocial behavior includes noncompliant, insensitive, obnoxious, uncooperative, and unsociable behavior of the parents to their children. Angry coercion involves stubborn, resistant, and demanding behavior. These three scales were reverse coded so that a high score reflects a lower level of the behavior displayed.

*Discipline* was assessed by measuring parents' behaviors indicative of harsh and inconsistent discipline, indulgent / permissive behavior, and encouragement of independence. The harsh discipline scale measures parents' use of punishment when children violate established rules. Such methods of punishment included yelling, threatening, and hitting. Inconsistent discipline involves failure to follow through on an expected consequence or punishment, or failure to stick to the rules set for the child. Indulgent / permissive behavior is exhibited by parents when they are excessively lenient and tolerant of their children's misbehavior, as well as when they give an unsuitable amount of freedom to the children to regulate their own behavior. The aforementioned items were reverse coded. Encouraging independence occurs when parents promote the independent thoughts and actions of
their children. They provide information and guidance, yet show trust in their children's capabilities.

Monitoring was composed of six observed scales: (a) parental influence, (b) child monitoring, (c) inductive reasoning, (d) quality time, (e) consistent discipline, and (f) positive reinforcement. Parental influence refers to attempts by parents to socialize their children, such as setting guidelines as well as developing and monitoring daily routines. The child monitoring scale assesses the extent to which parents know what their children are doing; parents know where their children are; and parents are aware of their children's daily routines, interests, activities, and friends. Inductive reasoning assesses the extent to which parents attempt to guide their children's behavior by exchanging information with the children. Parents attempt to receive voluntary compliance and avoid direct conflict. Quality time refers to occasions for conversation, involvement, companionship, and mutual enjoyment. The consistent discipline scale refers to the extent to which parents stick to the rules and consequences established for children's behavior. Positive reinforcement refers to parents' conditional responses to their children that include praise, approval, rewards, or smiles.

The three dimensions (affective environment, discipline, and monitoring) for mothers and the same dimensions for fathers (six variables total) loaded on a single factor with loadings between .7 and .8. This provides justification for combining the measures
into a single construct. Therefore, the dimensions for mothers and the dimensions for fathers were averaged into a single construct of nurturant and involved parenting. The alpha reliability coefficient for this construct was .85. One target with a suspiciously low value on this combined variable was removed.

Parents’ Spouse-Reported High Warmth and Low Hostility Toward Each Other in 1992. Questions relating to the parents’ warmth and hostility directed toward each other involved items such as getting angry, shouting or yelling, criticizing, listening carefully, acting loving and affectionate, and acting supportive during the last few times the spouses were together. A full list of items is included in Appendix B. These items were rated on a seven-point Likert scale in which a low score means the behavior always occurred and a high score means it never occurred. The warmth items were recoded and the resulting mean was averaged with the mean of the hostility items for both mothers and fathers. The means for the warmth and low hostility constructs were computed first and then averaged together because fifteen items represented low hostility and nine items represented warmth. This procedure gave equal weight to warmth and to low hostility.

The reliability coefficients for fathers’ and mothers’ items were .96 and .95, respectively. Again, the mother items were highly correlated with the father items ($r=.57$), so the mother and father items were averaged together to create a parental warmth and hostility measure. However, if only one spouse responded to the
Items, the responses for that spouse were used for this measure.

Unconventional Relationship Beliefs of the Target in 1995.

Items assessing the targets’ beliefs regarding marriage, divorce, and sexual permissiveness were administered three years after the aforementioned parental measures were obtained. Respondents were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each item on a five-point Likert scale (1, strongly agree to 5, strongly disagree). Responses were recoded such that a higher score indicated more unconventional beliefs. The marital beliefs scale (Greenberg & Nay, 1982; Wallin, 1954) was composed of five items including: “marriage leads to a fuller life”, “if I were not married someday, my life would be incomplete” and “being married or getting married is the most important part of my life”. The beliefs about divorce scale (Ganong, Coleman, & Brown, 1981; Hardy, 1957) was made up of six items, including: “when a husband and wife divorce, it reflects badly on them as people”, “when couples are having marital troubles, divorce may be an acceptable solution to their troubles”, and “even when they have troubles, couples with children should stay together for the sake of their children”. The sexual permissiveness scale (Reiss, 1964) was composed of eight items asking the extent to which the respondent agreed with statements such as: “I believe that heavy petting is acceptable on the first date” and “I believe that heavy petting is acceptable for people who are engaged to be married”.
A factor analysis was conducted with oblique rotation and the extraction criteria of a minimum eigenvalue of one. Factor analysis results for these items are displayed in Table 2. The first and third factors were made up of items related to sexual permissiveness, with the first factor assessing behaviors acceptable for serious daters or for engaged or married couples and the third factor assessing behaviors acceptable for casual daters or couples on a first date. The items in these two factors were combined into a single measure of sexual permissiveness as suggested by Reiss (1964). The second factor was composed of items representing beliefs about marriage and the fourth factor represented beliefs about divorce. Alpha reliability coefficients were .77 for beliefs about marriage, .79 for beliefs about divorce, and .87 for sexual permissiveness.

After constructing these three scales by taking the mean of the items representing each scale, the three resulting scales were entered into another factor analysis. Results revealed that these three scales compose one single underlying factor. This factor will be called unconventional beliefs about relationships. Factor loadings were .67 for sexual permissiveness, .61 for beliefs about marriage, and .83 for beliefs about divorce. One target with a suspiciously high value on this combined variable was removed.

Cohabitation versus Marriage as a First Union in 1995-1999. Questionnaires were administered in 1995, 1997, and 1999 asking the target young adults whether they were married or living with
Table 2

Results of Factor Analyses for Targets' Unconventional Beliefs About Relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questionnaire Item</th>
<th>Factor 1</th>
<th>Factor 2</th>
<th>Factor 3</th>
<th>Factor 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I believe that heavy petting is acceptable for people who are seriously dating.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.91</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that heavy petting is acceptable for people who are engaged to be married.</td>
<td></td>
<td>.90</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that sexual intercourse is acceptable for people who are engaged to be married.</td>
<td></td>
<td>.76</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that sexual intercourse is acceptable for people who are seriously dating.</td>
<td></td>
<td>.69</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage leads to a happier life.</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage leads to a fuller life.</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I were not married someday, my life would be incomplete.</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage helps a person settle down.</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being married or getting married is the most important part of my life.</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that heavy petting is acceptable on the first date.</td>
<td></td>
<td>.89</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that sexual intercourse is acceptable for people who are casually dating.</td>
<td></td>
<td>.83</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that sexual intercourse is acceptable on the first date.</td>
<td></td>
<td>.81</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(table continues)
Table 2 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questionnaire Item</th>
<th>Factor 1</th>
<th>Factor 2</th>
<th>Factor 3</th>
<th>Factor 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I believe that heavy petting is acceptable for people who are casually dating.</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My religious beliefs would keep me from getting divorced.</td>
<td></td>
<td>.76</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My family has strong feelings against divorce.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.73</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will marry someone with strong feelings against divorce.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When a husband and wife divorce, it reflects badly on them as people.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When couples are having marital troubles, divorce may be an acceptable solution to</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>their troubles.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Even when they have troubles, couples with children should stay together for the sake of the children.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Factor loadings less than .4 are suppressed.

someone in a steady, marriage-like relationship (in other words, cohabiting). Most of the targets (or young adults) were in their first year out of high school in 1995. If the young adults indicated living with their partners in any of these years and did not report being married in a previous year, they were coded as selecting cohabitation as a first union. Likewise, if the young adults indicated that they were married in any of these years and
did not report cohabiting in a previous year, they were coded as selecting marriage as a first union. The resulting variable is coded such that 1 represents cohabitation as a first union (n=128, or 48% of the sample for this study) and 0 represents marriage as a first union (n=140, or 52% of the sample for this study). These percentages are similar to those reported in previous studies (Bachrach et al., 2000; Brown & Booth, 1996).

Relationship Success in 1999. Items assessing targets’ current relationship satisfaction, stability, and commitment were asked in 1999. These were the same constructs and items used to assess relationship success in a previous study (Bryant, Conger, & Meehan, in press).

Targets responded to two items assessing relationship satisfaction. One item asked “How happy are you, all things considered, with your relationship?” Responses ranged from 0, extremely unhappy, to 5, extremely happy. The other item asked “All in all, how satisfied are you with your relationship?” Responses ranged from 1, completely satisfied, to 5, not at all satisfied. As done in previous studies (Bryant et al., in press; Conger et al., 2000), the first item was recoded so that a response of zero equaled a response of one and the second item was reverse coded so that a higher score reflected greater satisfaction. The bivariate correlation between these two items for the current sample was .60, and the alpha reliability coefficient was .71. The mean of these two items was obtained as a measure of relationship
satisfaction. The use of just two items follows the suggestion of Fincham and Bradbury (1987) that qualitative judgments of relationship satisfaction may be confounded with behavioral dimensions when using a greater number of items.

Targets responded to five items assessing the stability of their relationship as suggested by Booth, Johnson, and Edwards (1983). Items included “Have you or your partner seriously suggested the idea of ending your relationship or getting a divorce?” and “Have you discussed separation or divorce from your partner with a close friend?” Responses ranged from 1, yes, within the last year, to 4, not within the last year. The alpha reliability for these items was .84.

Factor analysis results for relationship stability are shown in Table 3. One factor was extracted with the criterion of a minimum eigenvalue of one. Factor analysis results indicated a low factor loading for the item asking, “Have you and your partner talked about consulting an attorney about a possible separation or divorce?” This is likely due to the low variance of responses to this question. The majority of respondents indicated that they had not done this in the past year. However, because this is a standard scale developed by Booth et al. (1983), the item was retained. In addition, the question serves to differentiate the most severely unstable couples. The mean of these items was obtained as a measure of relationship stability.
Table 3

Results of Factor Analysis for Relationship Stability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questionnaire Item</th>
<th>Factor Loading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Has the thought of separating or getting a divorce crossed your mind?</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you or your partner seriously suggested the idea of ending your relationship or getting a divorce?</td>
<td>.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Even people who get along quite well with their partner sometimes wonder whether their relationship is working out. Have you thought your relationship might be in trouble?</td>
<td>.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you discussed separation or divorce from your partner with a close friend?</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you and your partner talked about consulting an attorney about a possible separation or divorce?</td>
<td>.36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Targets responded to two items assessing commitment to their romantic relationship. One item asked, "How hard are you willing to work to make your relationship a success?" Responses ranged from 1, I would go to any length to see that it succeeds, to 5, I have given up trying to make it succeed. The other item asked, "How much do you want your relationship with your partner to continue and be a success?" Responses ranged from 1, I want desperately for our relationship to succeed, to 5, I don't want our relationship to succeed. Both of these items were reverse-coded so that a higher score reflects greater commitment. The bivariate correlation between these items was .61, and the alpha reliability
coefficient was .75. The mean of the two items was obtained as a measure of relationship commitment.

A factor analysis on the three composite items revealed a single factor based upon the extraction criteria of a minimum eigenvalue of one. Factor loadings were .81 for satisfaction, .78 for stability, and .76 for commitment. The measures of commitment and satisfaction were on five-point scales and the measure of stability was on a four-point scale. Therefore, these composite measures were standardized before the mean was obtained for an overall measure of relationship success.

**Control Variables.** Control variables for this study will include measures of targets' neuroticism, targets' gender, and parents' income. Previous research suggests that personality is associated with cohabitation (Newcomb, 1986). Booth and Johnson (1988) found that individuals with personality problems (such as being moody) were more likely to cohabit. Neuroticism was noted as the most important domain of personality to evaluate in relation to marital assessment (Bradbury, 1995), and is most closely associated with longitudinal deterioration in marriage (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Therefore, neuroticism of the targets will be used as a control variable in the present study.

Targets' neuroticism was assessed using eight items asked in 1991. These items included: “I feel I am capable of coping with most of my problems”, “I often feel helpless and want someone else to solve my problems”, and “I can handle myself pretty well in a
crisis" (Costa & McCrae, 1985). Targets responded on a five-point scale (1, strongly agree to 5, strongly disagree). Factor analysis results are displayed in Table 4. Displayed results were constrained to a single factor. Two factors were initially obtained using the minimum eigenvalue criterion of one with oblique rotation. However, the two factors extracted had no meaningful qualitative differences. In the analysis that was constrained to a single factor, all eight variables had acceptable factor loadings. The mean of the eight items was computed to obtain a single measure

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questionnaire Item</th>
<th>Factor Loading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I'm pretty stable emotionally (in control of my feelings).</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can handle myself pretty well in a crisis (a very stressful event).</td>
<td>.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When everything seems to be going wrong, I can still make good decisions.</td>
<td>.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel I am capable of coping with most of my problems.</td>
<td>.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I keep a cool head in emergencies.</td>
<td>.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It's often hard for me to make up my mind.</td>
<td>.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I often feel helpless and want someone else to solve my problems.</td>
<td>.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I'm under a great deal of stress, sometimes I feel like I'm going to pieces.</td>
<td>.49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
of neuroticism. Items were coded such that a higher score reflects greater neuroticism. The internal consistency coefficient was .76.

It would be interesting to explore gender differences in the influence of the family of origin experiences on cohabitation versus marriage as a first union. However, concerns about statistical power arise if the current sample were to be divided along gender lines for the purpose of separate analyses. Therefore, all analyses will be performed using the total sample and gender will be used as a control variable in all of the regression equations. This procedure will not allow for an understanding of differences in gender, but will allow for the control of variation due to gender.

For exploratory purposes, gender by variable interactions will be assessed separately for family and peer variables as well as targets' unconventional relationship beliefs to learn whether each individual variable has a different association with first union decisions for men versus women. The results of these analyses will be discussed with the results for the second research question. Gender is coded such that 1 represents men and 2 represents women.

Teachman and Polonko (1990) found that there were no differences in marital disruption between cohabiters and non-cohabiters after controlling for the total length of the union. Therefore, it would be useful to control for relationship length when predicting relationship success. However, it will not be possible to do so in the present study because the targets' may not
be with the same partners when reporting relationship success as when they initiated their first union experiences.

In addition, we know that economic instability is associated with increased probability of cohabitation rather than marriage (Clarkberg, 1999). Parents' income in 1992 will serve as a control variable in the study.
CHAPTER 4.

RESULTS

Analyses

Bivariate correlations were run to determine preliminary associations among the variables. The theoretical model in Figure 1 appears as a path model. However, the endogenous variable of cohabitation versus marriage as a first union is binary in nature and cannot be predicted with a linear regression as is generally used in path models. Therefore, logistic regression analyses were used to assess the influence of parenting variables, deviant peer influence, and young adults' relationship beliefs on young adults' first union decisions. These analyses were done to provide information related to the first research question, which asks about (a) the influence of parental religious beliefs, (b) nurturant and involved parenting, (c) the warmth and hostility present in the parental marital relationship, and (d) association with deviant peers in relation to the decision of young adults to select cohabitation versus marriage as their first union.

Logistic regression analyses both with and without the variable representing targets' unconventional beliefs about relationships were conducted to tentatively assess the mediating effects of unconventional relationship beliefs. Multiple linear regression analyses were conducted to assess the influence of parenting variables on young adults' beliefs about romantic relationships. These analyses were conducted to provide
information regarding the second research question, concerning the influence of family of origin and peer factors on the unconventional relationship beliefs of the youth, and the resulting effect of these beliefs on the occurrence of cohabitation.

The path between cohabitation versus marriage as a first union and relationship success was assessed simply with a bivariate correlation. For exploratory purposes, a multiple linear regression was run with relationship success as the dependent variable and cohabitation versus marriage as a first union as an independent variable; family, peer, relationship beliefs, and the original control variables of targets' neuroticism, targets' gender, and parents' income were included in this model. These analyses were conducted to provide information related to the third research question. Once again, the third research question addresses the association between selecting premarital cohabitation over marriage as a first union and current relationship success. For exploratory purposes, this association was also assessed while controlling for earlier experiences with the family of origin and peers, as well as unconventional relationship beliefs.

The sample size differed for each of the regression analyses due to listwise deletion. Unlike using software programs for structural equation modeling, employing a series of regressions allowed for the maximum sample size to be used while examining each portion of the model. Pairwise deletion was used for the bivariate
correlations to maximize the sample size for each correlation reported.

**Bivariate Correlational Analyses**

Correlations were run among the study constructs to assess bivariate associations. Results are shown in Table 5. Results of the correlations were consistent with predictions for the first research question in this study. Specifically, results indicated that parents' religious beliefs, parents' warmth and hostility toward each other, and nurturant and involved parenting (all assessed in 1992) were negatively associated with targets' decision to select cohabitation rather than marriage as a first union between 1995 and 1999 ($p<.01$ for each of these associations). In addition, targets' association with deviant peers in 1992 had a statistically significant positive association with their decision to select cohabitation over marriage as a first union between 1995 and 1999 ($r=.23$). Correlations were low and not statistically significant between the decision to cohabit as a first union and the control variables - targets' gender, targets' neuroticism, and parents' income.

Correlations among the family and peer variables were as high as .31 (the correlation between nurturant and involved parenting and parents' warmth and hostility toward one another). These correlations were not high enough to raise concerns about multicollinearity. However, the shared variance among these independent variables underscores the importance of including them
Table 5

Correlations among study variables

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<td>(1995)</td>
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<td>-.34**</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Cohabitation versus Marriage as a First Union (1995-1999)&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.23**</td>
<td>-.21**</td>
<td>-.21**</td>
<td>-.28**</td>
<td>.31**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
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<td>7. Relationship Success (1999)</td>
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<td>-.07</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>-.21**</td>
<td>-.14*</td>
<td>-.27**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
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<td>.01</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-.15*</td>
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<td>.08</td>
<td>-.24**</td>
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<td>9. Targets' Gender&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>.01</td>
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<td>.08</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.23**</td>
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<td>10. Parents' Income (1992)</td>
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<td>.02</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.14*</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *p<.05. **p<.01. <sup>a</sup>Coded (0=marriage, 1=cohabitation). <sup>b</sup>Coded (1=male, 2=female).
in a multivariate logistic regression in an attempt to explain the decision to cohabit rather than marry as a first union. Doing so allows us to determine the extent to which each of these independent variables is related to cohabitation as a first union, controlling for the influence of all of the other independent variables.

The second research question in this study involves the influence of parental and social (peer) influences on targets' unconventional beliefs about romantic relationships. Results of the bivariate analyses indicated that parents' religious beliefs and values and parents' warmth and hostility toward one another had a statistically significant negative association with targets' unconventional beliefs about romantic relationships. The correlations were -.34 and -.16, respectively. Targets' association with deviant peers in 1992 had a statistically significant positive correlation with unconventional beliefs about relationships in 1995 ($r=.27$). Targets' unconventional beliefs about relationships also had a significant positive correlation with targets' decision to cohabit or marry as a first union. Again, the correlations were low and not statistically significant between targets' unconventional beliefs about relationships and the control variables -- targets' neuroticism in 1991, targets' gender, and parents' income.

The third and final research question in this study involves the association between young adults' decision to cohabit versus
marry as a first romantic union and relationship success. Previous studies found that those who chose cohabitation as a first union reported less successful relationships than did those who chose to go directly into marriage (Bennett, Blanc, & Bloom, 1988; Booth & Johnson, 1988; Bumpass & Sweet, 1989; DeMaris & Rao, 1992; Thomson & Colella, 1992). Similarly, the bivariate correlation between cohabitation versus marriage as a first union and relationship success ($r=-.27$) in the present study was negative and statistically significant. However, the constructs of association with deviant peers, nurturant and involved parenting, unconventional relationship beliefs, and targets' neuroticism also had statistically significant bivariate relationships with relationship success.

Results for the First Research Question: The Influence of Parents and Peers on the Decision to Cohabit

To analyze the data related to the primary research question, logistic regression analyses were performed to assess the influence of family and peer experiences on the targets' decision to cohabit or marry as a first union. The variable representing targets' unconventional beliefs about relationships was not included in the regression analyses related to the primary research question in this study, but was included in subsequent regression analyses related to the secondary research question to assess the possibility of a mediating effect. Results will be discussed for analyses both including and excluding the control variables.
Results of the analysis including family and peer experiences, but not the unconventional beliefs of the target are shown in Table 6. This analysis was performed without the control variables. The model chi-square of 40.95 with four degrees of freedom was statistically significant (p<.01). The interpretation of this statistic is similar to that of the F-value in linear regression analysis. All of the four independent variables related to family and peer experiences were statistically significant in the logistic regression model. The control variables were not statistically significant additions, and did not alter the pattern of the coefficients in the model.

The exp(b) coefficient can be interpreted as a multiplier in relation to the odds of targets’ selecting cohabitation rather than marriage as a first union. Ninety-five percent confidence intervals (CI) were computed for each of the exp(b) coefficients. If a given confidence interval includes the value of one, that independent variable may not have any influence on the odds of the occurrence of the dependent variable as a value multiplied by one does not change. Therefore, a variable with a 95% confidence interval that includes the value of one will not be statistically significant at the .05 level.

We can be 95% confident that, controlling for the influence of the other variables in the equation, for each additional point on the scale reflecting parents’ religious beliefs and values, the odds of selecting cohabitation rather than marriage as a first
Table 6

Results of Logistic Regression Predicting Cohabitation versus Marriage as a First Union (N=236)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Exp(B)</th>
<th>Lower CI</th>
<th>Upper CI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>Nurturant and Involved Parenting (1992)</td>
<td>-.44</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.64*</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents' Religious Beliefs and Values (1992)</td>
<td>-.48</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.62**</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents' Warmth and Hostility Toward Each Other (1992)</td>
<td>-.31</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.73*</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Association with Deviant Peers (1992)</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>.41</td>
<td>3.05**</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>6.81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *p<.05. **p<.01.

union is multiplied by as little as .43 and as much as .89. This indicates that the odds of targets selecting cohabitation rather than marriage as a first union in the population decreases with each additional point held by their parents on the religious beliefs and values scale. The confidence intervals for the other variables can be interpreted in a similar manner. Like confidence intervals around other parameters, this confidence interval was computed by taking the critical z-value times the standard error, and then adding and subtracting the result from the beta. This provided the upper and lower bounds for beta, which were then converted to the upper and lower bounds for exp(b).
Results for the Second Research Question: Unconventional Relationship Beliefs

The second research question in the present study deals with the influence of family of origin and peer experiences on the unconventional beliefs of the targets. The DEARR model proposes that individual beliefs may mediate the relationship between early experiences and attributes of the young adult couple relationship. With the present data set, we are unable to conclusively determine whether the targets' unconventional beliefs about relationships mediate the association between the targets' experiences with their family members and peers and their later decision to select cohabitation over marriage as a first union. This is because there may be a reciprocal relationship between the targets' unconventional beliefs and their parents' beliefs and behaviors.

For example, targets' beliefs could influence the extent to which parents engage in nurturant and involved parenting, and parenting could, in turn, influence the targets' beliefs. With the current data set, we are only able to make tentative conclusions regarding the direction of these effects based upon time ordering because information on targets' unconventional relationship beliefs was not obtained in the year 1992 or earlier. The reader should keep this in mind as the following analyses are discussed. Slightly different results were obtained in relation with the first research question when the variable representing targets' unconventional beliefs about relationships was entered into the
equation. Results without the control variables are presented in Table 7. The model chi-square of 46.93 with five degrees of freedom was statistically significant ($p<.01$). Targets' unconventional beliefs about relationships was a statistically significant variable in the model ($p<.01$). We can be 95% confident that for each additional point on the unconventional beliefs scale, we can expect the odds of targets' selecting cohabitation rather than marriage as a first union to be multiplied by as little as 1.49 and as much as 5.53, controlling for the other variables in the equation. However, the variables representing parents' religious beliefs and values and parents' warmth and hostility toward each other were no longer statistically significant in the equation that includes targets' unconventional beliefs about relationships. This suggests the possibility of a mediating effect of targets' unconventional beliefs, which will be discussed in the next section.

The variables representing nurturant and involved parenting and targets' association with deviant peers retained statistical significance ($p<.05$ for each) with targets' unconventional beliefs about relationships in the equation. Again, the addition of the control variables did not alter the pattern of the coefficients in the model.

Therefore, the logistic regression analysis results indicated that the variable representing targets' beliefs about relationships in 1995 was significantly associated with their decisions to select
Table 7

Results of Logistic Regression Predicting Cohabitation versus Marriage as a First Union, Including Unconventional Beliefs About Relationships (N=230)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
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<td>Parents' Religious Beliefs and Values (1992)</td>
<td>-.26</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.77</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parents' Warmth and Hostility Toward Each Other (1992)</td>
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<td>.14</td>
<td>.78</td>
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<td>Association with Deviant Peers (1992)</td>
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<td>.43</td>
<td>2.35*</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>5.46</td>
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<td>Targets' Unconventional Beliefs About Relationships (1995)</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>2.87**</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>5.53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *p<.05. **p<.01.

cohabitation versus marriage as a first union between 1995 and 1999. A linear regression analysis was performed to assess the influence of family and peer experiences on targets' beliefs about relationships. Results of the analyses without the control variables are displayed in Table 8.

The independent variables explained 18% of the variance in targets' unconventional beliefs about relationships. The F-value of 13.16 was statistically significant (p<.01). Three of the four
Table 8

Results of Linear Regression Predicting Unconventional Beliefs about Relationships, Without Controls (N=227)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>Lower CI</th>
<th>Upper CI</th>
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<td>.05</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.10</td>
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<td>Parents' Religious Beliefs and Values (1992)</td>
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<td>.04</td>
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<td>.03</td>
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<td>.30</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.23**</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.47</td>
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</table>

Note. $R^2_{adj}=.18$. **p<.01.

Family and peer influence variables were statistically significant: parents' religious beliefs and values, parents' warmth and hostility toward each other, and targets' association with deviant peers (p<.01 for each of the three variables). However, nurturant and involved parenting did not have a significant influence on targets' unconventional beliefs about relationships. Once again, the same variables were statistically significant when the control variables were added to the model.

These results suggest targets' association with deviant peers may have both a direct effect on the decision to cohabit and an indirect effect on that decision through targets' unconventional
beliefs about relationships. It may also be possible that the influence of parents' religious beliefs and values on the decision to cohabit as a first union, as found in previous studies, may be mediated by the targets' unconventional beliefs about relationships. In addition, the influence of parents' warmth and hostility toward each other on the decision of a young adult to cohabit or marry as a first union may be mediated by their unconventional beliefs about relationships. The type of data and research design necessary to make stronger claims regarding a mediating effect will be covered in the discussion section of this paper.

Since it was not possible to run separate analyses by gender or to include all possible interaction terms in a single regression equation because of the sample size, five separate logistic regression equations were run with cohabitation versus marriage as a first union as the dependent variable. The three independent variables in each equation included (a) gender, (b) one of the five variables of interest in the second research question (association with deviant peers, parents' religious beliefs and values, parents' warmth and hostility toward each other, nurturant and involved parenting, and targets' unconventional relationship beliefs), and (c) the interaction term of gender by the given study variable. None of the interaction terms in these equations were statistically significant. These results indicate that the individual influence
of each variable on cohabitation as a first union is not significantly different for women versus men.

Results for the Third Research Question: Cohabitation and Relationship Success

As mentioned earlier in the context of the bivariate correlation results, targets that selected cohabitation rather than marriage as a first union between 1995 and 1999 were likely to report lower levels of relationship success in 1999 ($r = -.27$). This is similar to results found in previous studies (Bennett, Blanc, & Bloom, 1988; Booth & Johnson, 1988; Bumpass & Sweet, 1989; DeMaris & Rao, 1992; Thomson & Colella, 1992).

This association remained even after controlling for family of origin and peer variables, unconventional beliefs about relationships, and the original control variables of targets' neuroticism, and targets' gender, and parents' income. Results of this analysis appear in Table 9. The independent variables were able to explain 21% of the variance in relationship success. The F-value of 7.73 was statistically significant ($p < .01$).

In addition to first union decisions, parents' religious beliefs and values and association with deviant peers were negatively associated with targets' relationship success. In other words, greater relationship success in 1999 was associated with not selecting cohabitation over marriage as a first union between 1995 and 1999, having less religious parents in 1992, and associating with fewer deviant peers in 1992.
Table 9

Results of Linear Regression Predicting Relationship Quality in 1999; With Family, Peer, Unconventional Beliefs, and Control Variables (N=203)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>Lower CI</th>
<th>Upper CI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cohabitation versus marriage as a first Union (1995-1999)</td>
<td>-.29</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>-.19**</td>
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<td>-.07</td>
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<td>.06</td>
<td>.09</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.07</td>
<td>-.21**</td>
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<td>-.06</td>
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<td>.15</td>
<td>-.29**</td>
<td>-.87</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Parents’ Income (1992)</td>
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Note. $R^2_{adj} = .19$. *p < .05. **p < .01.
CHAPTER 5.
DISCUSSION

The number of cohabiting couples of all ages has risen substantially in past years (Casper & Cohen, 2000). These numbers are expected to continue to rise since young adults are more likely than older adults to believe that it is acceptable for an unmarried couple with no marriage plans to live together (Oropesa, 1996). Recent trends show that each new generation is more likely to make the decision to cohabit than previous generations (Chevan, 1996).

Researchers increasingly illustrate the importance of family of origin and peer experiences on the development of young adult romantic relationships (Bryant & Conger, in press; Conger et al., 2000; Thornton, 1991). Until now, prospectively assessed family and peer behavioral influences had not been studied in relation to young adults' decisions to cohabit or marry as a first union. This study applied a developmental approach to the study of cohabitation.

The results of the present study are summarized in Figure 5. Figure 5 involves the same theoretical model as presented in Figure 1, except that different types of lines are used for different paths to represent the study results. The key distinguishes the types of lines used for the different paths. The findings relevant to each of the three research questions will now be discussed.
Figure 5. Summary of paths in the model.
The first purpose of the present study was to determine the direct influence of family and peer experiences on young adults' decisions to cohabit or marry as a first union. A variety of structural and demographic characteristics were examined in previous studies in relation to the decision to cohabit as a first union, such as the mother's age at marriage and her experiences with marital disruption and remarriage (Thornton, 1991). Specific behaviors and interactions present in the family of origin were not previously addressed. The current study went beyond the demographic characteristics of the family of origin in relation to young adult cohabitation as presented by Thornton (1991) by including specific prospectively assessed behaviors and beliefs. Results supported proposed expectations. Results indicated that (a) the greater the targets' association with deviant peers, (b) the lower the parental religious beliefs and values, (c) the lower the parents' high warmth and low hostility toward each other, and (d) the lower the observed nurturant and involved parenting, then the greater the odds that the young adults would choose to cohabit rather than marry as a first union. Each of these direct associations was statistically significant. These results were essentially the same both including and excluding targets' gender and neuroticism.

The second research question involved the possibility of a mediating effect of targets' unconventional beliefs about relationships. In his study linking parental divorce and the
cohabitation decisions of offspring, Thornton (1991) suggested possible intervening factors, including children's attitudes toward marriage and nonmarital sex. These concepts were not included as variables in the models tested, but were theoretically inferred based upon tested relationships between family demographic characteristics and adult children's cohabitational and marital experiences. Indirect theoretical analyses suggested that attitudes toward marriage, nonmarital sex, and cohabitation may account for the relationships between family demographic characteristics and cohabitation as a first union. Beyond the work of Thornton (1991), the intervening mechanism of unconventional beliefs about relationships was directly assessed in the present study rather than just theoretically inferred.

Analyses were conducted in the present study to provide information about the influence of family of origin and peers on the unconventional relationship beliefs of the youth, and the resulting effect of these beliefs on the occurrence of cohabitation. Results from the linear regression analyses revealed that (a) the lower the parents' high warmth and low hostility toward each other, (b) the weaker the parents' religious beliefs and values, and (c) the greater the targets' association with deviant peers, then the greater the targets' unconventional beliefs about relationships. Nurturant and involved parenting did not have a statistically significant association with targets' unconventional relationship beliefs in this equation. Again, these
results were essentially the same both including and excluding targets' gender and neuroticism.

As found in previous studies (Axinn & Thornton, 1992; Booth & Johnson, 1988; Tanfer, 1987; Thomson & Colella, 1992; Treas & Giesen, 2000), young adults with more unconventional beliefs about relationships were more likely to select cohabitation as a first union. This was found in the present study even when controlling for earlier family and peer experiences. When the variable representing targets' unconventional beliefs about relationships was added to the model used to answer the first research question, parents' religious beliefs and values and parents' warmth and hostility toward each other were no longer statistically significant, yet targets' association with deviant peers and nurturant and involved parenting retained their statistical significance. This suggests that targets' association with deviant peers may have a direct effect on first union decisions, as well as an indirect effect through targets' unconventional beliefs about relationships. In addition, this suggests that targets' unconventional beliefs about relationships may mediate the association between (a) parents' warmth and hostility toward each other and (b) parents' religious beliefs and values and the resulting likelihood that targets' will choose cohabitation as a first union.

In order to make definitive statements regarding the order of events and a mediating effect, information about the family of
origin (parents' religious beliefs and values as well as parents' warmth and hostility toward each other) and targets' unconventional beliefs about relationships would be needed from different years of data collection during which questions representing both family of origin and individual beliefs were asked. For example, data from questions asked about the family of origin and individual beliefs in alternating years would be especially useful. A cross-lagged model could then be used to analyze such information to determine the proper ordering of events. An example of this model using parents' religious beliefs and values is shown in Figure 6. The same type of model could be used to assess the temporal ordering for parents' warmth and hostility toward each other and targets' unconventional beliefs about relationships or other relevant variables.

Figure 6. Cross-lagged model.
However, the data set used in the current study did not include questions about either the constructs representing parents' religious beliefs and values or parents' warmth and hostility toward each other and questions about targets' unconventional relationship beliefs during the same year or for alternating years during different waves of data collection. The last wave of data collection during which parents were asked about their religious beliefs and values and the first wave of data collection during which targets were asked about their beliefs regarding marriage and divorce was in 1994. It would be necessary to have an assessment of targets' beliefs about relationships at some point before an assessment of parents' religious beliefs and values in order to apply the cross-lagged model and make more definitive statements regarding the direction of the association.

Although the findings suggesting a possible mediating effect in the present study are not causal in nature, they do provide information beyond that of previous studies. Previous studies found that parents' religious beliefs and values were related to young adult cohabitation (Tanfer, 1987; Thornton et al., 1992), but no attempt was made to test for possible intervening mechanisms. Thornton (1991) theoretically inferred the mediating effect of unconventional relationship beliefs, but did not directly test it, as done in the present study. In addition, previous studies did not control for other family and peer influences on young adults' cohabitation decisions when assessing the association between
parents' religious beliefs and behaviors and young adults' first union decisions. Future research may help answer the questions raised in the present study regarding the ordering of parents' and children's influences on each other.

The third purpose of this study was to assess the association between selecting premarital cohabitation versus marriage as a first union and relationship success. In the present study, as in previous studies (Bennett et al., 1988; Booth & Johnson, 1988; Bumpass & Sweet, 1989; DeMaris & Rao, 1992; Thomson & Colella, 1992), cohabitation was found to be negatively associated with relationship success. Beyond work done in previous studies, this association was also assessed while controlling for previous family and peer experiences, unconventional relationship beliefs, gender, neuroticism, and parents' income. This procedure allowed us to assess the association between first union decisions and relationship success as if all respondents had the same family and peer experiences, relationship beliefs, gender, and neuroticism. The negative association between cohabitation and relationship success remained even after controlling for these variables.

It has been proposed that people who choose to live with their partner before marriage are more accepting of divorce and less committed to marriage (or more unconventional in their beliefs) even before the cohabitation occurs. This is known as the selection effect (Bennett et al., 1988), and was advanced as a possible explanation for the negative relationship between
cohabitation and relationship success. In the present study, the variable representing targets' unconventional beliefs about relationships in 1995 did not have a statistically significant association with relationship success in 1999 when used as a control variable in this equation. Advocates of the selection argument (Bennett et al., 1988; Booth & Johnson, 1988) would argue that the negative association between cohabitation and relationship success should disappear or be significantly reduced when controlling for unconventional relationship beliefs. The results of these analyses did not provide support for the selection argument. In the present study, individuals with more unconventional relationship beliefs were more likely to cohabit as a first union. However, cohabitation as a first union still had a negative association with relationship success even when controlling for unconventional relationship beliefs. In addition, controlling for the background experiences, including unconventional relationship beliefs, did not substantially reduce the degree of negative association between cohabitation as a first union and relationship success (p<.01 for cohabitation as a first union in each equation).

Future research may include an examination of other possible reasons for the negative association that exists between cohabitation and relationship success to help answer whether a casual relationship exists. For example, people decide to cohabit as a first union for many different reasons. It is possible that
differences in these reasons may account for the link between cohabitation and poor relationship success. Future research may explore this possibility.

It makes sense that individuals who selected cohabitation as a first union would report less stability and commitment in their relationships, especially if the cohabitation began a short time before commitment and stability were assessed. Cohabitation is a type of relationship that inherently requires less commitment and stability than marriage. In the present study, the young adults’ first union occurred between 1995 and 1999 and their relationship success was assessed in 1999. With a greater time span between assessments, it would be possible to identify cohabitors who eventually marry and determine whether they report different levels of relationship success than do individuals who decided to marry as a first union. This information would allow us to make more definitive statements regarding the influence of cohabitation on later relationship success than can be done with the current data. This question can be answered in years to come as investigators continue to follow the young adults who are participating in the larger study.

As mentioned earlier, it is possible that the association between family and peer experiences and first union decisions are different for boys and girls. Because of the current sample size, it was not possible to do analyses for girls and boys separately. Therefore, gender was used as a control variable. Future research
using a larger sample may investigate possible gender differences or interactions between gender and family of origin or peer influences.

Although this study addresses some critical questions regarding cohabitation, it is not without limitations. Although the sample was recruited from the community at large, it was a white sample from the rural United States. Results may not be applicable to non-whites, to children without siblings, to those living in non-rural areas, or to people outside of the United States. Future research is needed involving more diverse participants to determine the generalizability of these findings to other populations.

The study focuses on early cohabitation and marriage. With continued data collection in the future, it may be possible to utilize the current sample to determine differences among cohabitors who eventually marry, cohabitors who continue to cohabit without marriage plans, and cohabitors who dissolve their relationships. It is possible that these different types of cohabitors had different family of origin and peer experiences as adolescents. For example, cohabitors who eventually marry may not differ substantially in terms of family and peer experiences from individuals who select marriage as a first union.

Future research may examine other family, peer, and individual experiences and characteristics that could be related to cohabitation, beyond those examined in the current study. It is
possible that sibling experiences and beliefs have an influence on targets' first union. In particular, older siblings involved in romantic relationships may have an influence on the beliefs and behaviors related to the targets' romantic relationship development. If an older sibling decides to cohabit as a first union, the target child may be more likely to follow suit. Of course, both the target and the sibling were both influenced by similar parental experiences in the family of origin, making the results of the present study useful in studying sibling effects as well.

Most studies on cohabitation focus on young adults, including the present study. Generalizations made from these studies do not necessarily apply to elderly cohabiters (Chevan, 1996). Although less than a third of people over age fifty-five date, they favor cohabitation as much as marriage (Bulcroft & Bulcroft, 1991). For elderly, there is a strong economic motivation to cohabit outside of marriage. Elderly people who have been divorced or separated are likely to cohabit, and elderly cohabitation is most prevalent in the Sunbelt states (Chevan, 1996). Examining family influences from relatives of all ages on elderly cohabitation would provide an interesting direction for future research.

Although this study was theoretical in nature, the results could be used by professionals in applied settings. For instance, programs that help improve parenting skills -- particularly their ability to be nurturant and involved -- may have an influence on
first union decisions, which may ultimately be associated with romantic relationship success.

The results of this study extend our knowledge of cohabitation by prospectively (a) considering specific behaviors and beliefs experienced with both the family of origin and with peers rather than merely exploring demographic characteristics of the family of origin, as done in most previous work; (b) examining characteristics of the family of origin and peers that may lead to unconventional relationship beliefs, which may then lead to cohabitation as a first union; and (c) providing information about the association between relationship success and first union cohabitation, controlling for family of origin and peer influences as well as unconventional beliefs about relationships. Overall, the results of the present study provide support for the usefulness of a developmental approach, as outlined in the DEARR model, for studying cohabitation and first union decisions. Results suggest that experiences with parents and peers do have an influence on the first union decisions of young adults, and the first union decisions are associated with romantic relationship success.
STRUCTURE OF THE NURTURANT AND INVOLVED PARENTING CONSTRUCT

1. Affective Environment
   a. High Warmth of Parent to Target
      i. Warmth and Support
      ii. Listener Responsiveness
      iii. Communication
      iv. Prosocial Behavior
      v. Assertiveness
   b. Low Hostility of Parent to Target
      i. Low Hostility
      ii. Low Antisocial Behavior
      iii. Low Angry Coercion

2. Discipline
   a. Harsh Discipline
   b. Inconsistent Discipline
   c. Indulgent/Permissive Behavior
   d. Encouragement of Independence

3. Monitoring
   a. Parental Influence
   b. Child Monitoring
   c. Inductive Reasoning
   d. Quality Time
   e. Consistent Discipline
   f. Positive Reinforcement
APPENDIX B.

ITEMS INCLUDED IN PARENTS’ WARMTH AND HOSTILITY TOWARD EACH OTHER

During the past month when you and your (former) spouse have spent time talking or doing things together, how often did your (former) spouse ... 

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<tr>
<td>1. Always</td>
<td>5. Not too often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Almost always</td>
<td>6. Almost never</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Fairly often</td>
<td>7. Never</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. About half the time</td>
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Warmth Items:
- Ask you for your opinion about an important matter.
- Listen carefully to your point of view.
- Let you know s/he really cares about you.
- Act loving and affectionate toward you.
- Let you know that s/he appreciates you, your ideas or the things you do.
- Help you do something that was important to you.
- Have a good laugh with you about something that was funny.
- Act supportive and understanding toward you.
- Tell you s/he loves you.

Hostility Items (Reverse-coded to reflect low hostility):
- Get angry at you.
- Criticize you or your ideas.
- Shout or yell at you because s/he was mad at you.
- Ignore you when you tried to talk to her/him.
- Threaten to do something that would upset you if you didn’t do what s/he wanted.
- Try to make you feel guilty.
- Say you made her/him unhappy.
- Get into a fight or argument with you.
- Hit, push, grab, or shove you.
- Argue with you whenever you disagreed about something.
- Cry, whine, or nag to get her/his way.
- Not do things you asked her/him to do.
- Act supportive and understanding toward you.
- Insult or swear at you.
- Call you bad names
- Threaten to hurt you by hitting you with her/his fist, an object, or something else.
REFERENCES


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